

Preprint

Folk Poetry and Working Class Identity in Ulster: An Analysis of James Orr's 'The Penitent.'

Jane Gray

Department of Sociology and National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis

National University of Ireland, Maynooth

County Kildare, Ireland

Phone: +353-1-708 3596

Email: [jane.gray@nuim.ie](mailto:jane.gray@nuim.ie)

Preprint of article published in the Journal of Historical Sociology 6, 3 (September 1993):

249-275.

## **Introduction**

This paper explores changing patterns of collective identity amongst rural industrial producers in the North of Ireland through an extended analysis of a single poem, 'The Penitent,' (see Appendix) written by the weaver-poet James Orr in 1800.<sup>1</sup> The poem was written at the culmination of a time of great social and political upheaval in Ireland, particularly in the north-east. The growth of rural domestic linen production in the eighteenth century had been accompanied by rapid population growth, land subdivision and (by the end of the century) the emergence in some districts of petty entrepreneurs who employed poorer weaving households to manufacture cloth by the piece.

In the 1780s sectarian violence had erupted in County Armagh between Protestant 'Peep-of-Day Boys' and Catholic 'Defenders' and in 1795, the 'Orange Order' was founded - an organization which later became a significant force behind Ulster Unionism. Around the same time, however, the 'United Irishmen', inspired by the ideals of the American and French Revolutions, mobilized both Catholics and Protestants in some parts of the north-east in an ill-fated rebellion in 1798. Under the 1800 'Act of Union,' Ireland was to be governed directly from Westminster for the next 120 years.

These tangled events were the background to the processes explored in this paper, namely, the changes which occurred in patterns of collective identity amongst rural industrial producers in the early nineteenth century. I analyse these changes under the rubric of "working-class formation," but my central argument is that the emergence of working-class identity in the North of Ireland was founded as much on the establishment of difference as it was on the perception of sameness. I argue that rural industrial producers responded to the social and economic upheavals of the time by emphasizing the cultural values of sobriety, respectability and dignity. In doing so they sought to establish a social space which would differentiate them from those whose independence

and well-being was eroding.

'The Penitent' tells the story of a weaver whose conversion to Methodism saved him and his family from the ruin he had brought on his household by drunkenness, gambling, fighting and idleness. Superficially, the poem follows the conventional structure of the 'conversion tracts' described by E.P. Thompson:<sup>2</sup>

First, there are descriptions of a sinful youth: swearing, gaming, drunkenness, idleness, sexual looseness or merely 'desire of the flesh.' There follows either some dramatic experience which makes the sinner mindful of death (miraculous cure in mortal illness, shipwreck or death of wife or children); or some chance-hap encounter with God's work, where the sinner comes to jeer but remains to learn the way of salvation.

In his 'Making of the English Working Class,' Thompson argued that Methodism, through its celebration of a 'methodical discipline in every aspect of life,' and of labour as a 'pure act of virtue,' was crucial in instilling disciplined working-habits in those experiencing the transition to factory production: 'The factory system demands a transformation of human nature, the "working paroxysms" of the artisan or outworker must be methodised until the man is adapted to the discipline of the machine.' Methodism as a system of ideas helped to instil the cultural values of time-discipline and orderliness in working people whose autonomous 'plebian' culture had been characterized by irregular work rhythms and publicly reproduced in disorderly festivals and holidays. The imposition of regularity was an important component of working-class formation since ultimately it laid the foundation for more organized political resistance.<sup>3</sup>

While Orr's poem lends itself to Thompson's analysis, 'The Penitent' is more than just a 'lurid figurative expression' of the 'psychic ordeal' experienced by individual

workers in the industrial transition. It is a complex account of the changes experienced in the social and economic organization of a linen-weaving household and of the way its members identified themselves vis-a-vis the wider community in the political climate succeeding the 1798 rebellion. Whereas Thompson emphasized the extent to which orderliness was imposed on plebian producers by the development of centralized manufactures and the factory, I argue that in north-east Ireland it represented a strategy on the part of some rural industrial producers to differentiate themselves from those already associated with dependence and impoverishment. The experience - and creation - of difference was thus a key factor in the adoption of a way of life which later became central to political developments in Northern Ireland.

Joan Scott has argued that in his 'Making of the English Working Class,' Thompson necessarily excluded diversity from his account of working-class formation because of a 'sociological' insistence that consciousness was immanent in social structure. Insisting on a unitary, 'masculine' understanding of class politics, he denied the revolutionary potential of apocalyptic forms of Methodism because of their anti-rationalist, 'feminine' aspects. Scott proposes an alternative analysis of working-class formation as 'a story of the creation of political identity through representations of sexual difference.' The construction of meaning, she argues, must be understood as 'a set of events in itself.'<sup>4</sup>

Scott focuses primarily on the obfuscation of gender difference in Thompson's work, but she raises issues which are pertinent to two areas of concern in this paper. The first is that of working-class differentiation along other dimensions, such as those of locality and religion. The second concerns the relationship between 'rationalist' and 'anti-rationalist' modes of political expression. Like Scott I seek to problematize 'biographical' accounts of working-class formation in this paper, but I adopt somewhat different strategies in doing so.

First, I suggest that Thompson's emphasis on a unified working-class was rooted less in his understanding of the relationship between consciousness and social structure, than in his assumptions about the form taken by changes in social relations during the transition to industrial capitalism. Eric Wolf and William Roseberry have argued that world capitalist development resulted in the emergence of working classes, rather than of a working class. According to Roseberry, 'Uneven development has one of its most important effects within the capitalist mode of production in a process that can be called uneven proletarianization.' Once we accept that capitalist development was itself neither unified nor homogeneous, we can analyse the construction of fractured working-class identities through a dialogue between changes in material relations, and changes in systems of representation.<sup>5</sup>

Second, rather than seeing evangelical religious movements as evidence of a 'pre-modern' political outlook, or as a reactionary 'Chiliasm of despair,' I argue, following James Scott, that millenarianism should be understood as the 'infrapolitical' equivalent of revolutionary activity. 'Infrapolitics,' according to Scott, 'is essentially the strategic form that the resistance of subjects must assume under conditions of great peril.' Because such forms of political expression are strategic, however, they should not be taken to be false. Humble Irish revolutionaries took seriously the apocalyptic visions of evangelical preachers, even as they read Tom Paine. Furthermore, I suggest that 'infrapolitics' can be strategic under fearful or threatening conditions which are yet less perilous than those circumstances of extreme domination with which Scott is concerned. In the post-revolutionary climate of north-east Ireland, millenarianism (adapted and transformed) again served as a strategic form of resistance for some segments of the rural industrial community.<sup>6</sup>

The Irish linen industry expanded on the basis of a series of uneven relationships - between women and men, between areas specializing in the production of yarn and those

specializing in the production of cloth, between areas specializing in the production of different *kinds* of cloth, and between farmer-manufacturers and their journeyman cottiers. In developing working-class identities on the basis of difference, rural industrial producers drew on the experience of contradictory social relations predating the factory system. They also drew on the ideas of upper-class reformers and evangelical preachers, adapting and transforming them to their own ends. Changing forms of collective identity must not be seen simply as reflections of a changing social structure, I will argue, but the two must be analysed in relationship to one another.

### **'Sons o' sang': Ulster's Rhyming Weavers**

James Orr was one of a number of 'rhyming weavers' who published little books of poetry by subscription in the early nineteenth century. According to Hewitt, friends, acquaintances and prestigious persons were '..solicited to take one or more copies of the book when printed, at a stated figure, usually half a crown.' While some of the little books were published at the instigation of upper-class patrons, most of the poems and songs were originally written for a local audience. Akenson and Crawford point out that informal titles like Orr's the 'Bard of Ballycarry' reveal community support for the rhyming weavers. Moreover, the poems are directly linked to a longer oral tradition: Hewitt notes that the rhymes are characteristically 'approximate, vowel-rhymes or assonances', more pleasing to the ear than to the eye.<sup>7</sup>

Orr reputedly discovered his talent for poetry at the local 'singing class' where youngsters practiced Psalm tunes. The words of the Psalms were considered too sacred to be used except at worship, so choir members were encouraged to supply their own compositions for practice. Like the verses sung at collective work gatherings, the words were often composed in a bantering fashion, on the spot. Also like collective work

gatherings, the singing-class was an occasion for courtship and fun. Stevenson cites an elderly informant who told him in the early 1900 s that 'The custom...was to meet for the practice in barns, the owners of which supplied tea or other refreshment. After the psalm-tune practice the gathering became one for amusement, with songs, recitations, kissing games, etc. etc.' Rooted in such practices, the published poems of the 'rhyming weavers' retained the characteristics of verse made up in the head before being written down.<sup>8</sup>

These little books of poetry thus provide unique insights on how ordinary people in Ulster made sense of and responded to the structural changes surrounding the transition to centralized production. There are a number of limitations, however. First, the analysis is confined to the descendants of Scots settlers who were relatively privileged in comparison to native Irish inhabitants, and who had higher levels of literacy. A second potential problem concerns whether individual poets were representative of their communities. As Akenson and Crawford have shown, a strong case can be made that the weaver poets - and Orr in particular - were representative in the conventional sociological sense. Ultimately, however, the value of folk poetry lies less in the 'representativeness' of individual rhymers than in the extent to which, as popular literature, it articulated the cultural values and ideals of ordinary people of its time. More than a personal statement, Orr's poem should be read as a text embedded in a broader popular discourse. Equally importantly, the poem should not be treated simply as a quaint illustration of a sociological point. The songs of the rhyming weavers challenge us to think about identity formation in the language of everyday life, and in turn to evaluate and revise our explanations in terms of their meaningfulness to those whose lives are being described.

The paper is organized in two sections. In Part 1 I give a brief account first, of the development of the Irish linen industry and second, of changes in patterns of work and leisure in rural industrial communities, looking backwards and forwards from 1800, the

year in which 'The Penitent' was composed. In Part 2, I explore the same processes through the lens of the poem itself, which similarly looks backwards at the disintegration of an old way of life, and forwards to a wished-for future. The paper thus seeks to understand social change in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Ireland through a dialogue between three sets of categories - those of the social scientist, those of upper-class observers, and those of the people whose lives were most profoundly affected

## PART 1

### **The Bard of Ballycarry and the Irish Linen Industry, 1770-1800**

James Orr was born the only son of a farmer-weaver in 1770. He lived in Ballycarry, a village in the parish of Broadisland, County Antrim, and received a limited education while learning the weaving trade from his father at home. The inhabitants of Broadisland were predominantly Presbyterian descendants of Scots settlers who migrated to Ulster in significant numbers in the late seventeenth century. These immigrants brought commercial skills which they applied to the manufacture of linen cloth for the export market. The linen industry developed in conjunction with farming, and in its early stages all parts of the production process, from cultivation of the flax to sale of the finished cloth, were completed within individual households. By 1800, weaving households in Broadisland would no longer have bleached their own cloth, but instead would have sold it brown to drapers or bleacher-merchants in the linen market of Larne, or to jobbers at Ballycarry fair. Spinning and weaving continued to be closely tied to the agricultural economy of the parish, however. Many weavers were cottiers who were employed in weaving when their labour was not required on the land. John Dubourdieu wrote that in County Antrim :

Many weavers have small farms, and only employ themselves in this way during the intervals of their farming occupations. Many of them are the sons of farmers, who assist in the work of the land, and then return to the loom; and most of those, who follow this trade, and live in the country, have gardens and ground allowed for setting potatoes; so that few are without some addition to their ostensible calling.

Spinners similarly worked during the harvest season in return for having small plots of land sown with flax on their behalf.<sup>9</sup>

The linen industry developed along different trajectories in other parts of Ulster. Because a weaving family's prosperity depended on its labour input, rather than its property, rural industrialization has often been associated with rapid population growth and land subdivision. In Broadisland this process was mitigated by the continued importance of farming, and by the parish's distance from major linen markets. Indeed Dubourdieu's comment suggests that weaving formed part of a strategy to resist subdivision in County Antrim, whereby some sons were set up as cottier-weavers as an alternative to giving them land. By contrast, in the district known as the linen triangle, weavers' proximity to primary markets, together with the high prices they received for the fine cloth woven in this area, enabled them to outbid farmers for their holdings. The result was very high population density in this district by 1800, as weaving became a full-time, rather than a seasonal occupation.<sup>10</sup>

The intensification of weaving in north-east Ireland was made possible in part by changes in the technology of bleaching, a process which had become relatively highly capitalized by the end of the eighteenth century. It also depended crucially on a supply of cheap yarn imported from the south and west of Ulster, and from Connaught and north Leinster. Because at least four spinners were required to supply a full-time weaver with

yarn, local women could not meet the growing demand in east Ulster. Thus from the middle of the eighteenth century the sexual division of labour in the Irish linen industry came to coincide with a regional division of labour, whereby the weaving districts were supplied with yarn spun by women in remote, subsistence households.<sup>11</sup>

The emergence of regional specialization in the production of yarn and cloth, and the increasing centralization of the bleaching industry, were accompanied to some extent by class differentiation amongst weaving households. As early as 1776 Arthur Young remarked that, in County Armagh, poorer weavers often worked for hire 'for those who advance them the yarn,' and in 1804 Charles Coote found that in the same county:

Many of these farmers are master weavers, and are styled manufacturers; though they do not work at the loom they employ many weavers: their time is occupied at market chiefly in procuring yarn and disposing of their webs. Where a man of this description settles, and is so fortunate as to get a few acres, he soon establishes a manufacturing village around him, with those to whom he gives employment.

By 1825, 386 manufacturers in Antrim, Armagh and Down held their own seals from the Linen Board for establishing the quality and length of their cloth. While such men were considered to be of 'a respectable station in life, and of as much worldly substance, as many to whom they sell their linens,' most of them operated on a relatively small scale, employing from as little as five looms in the fine weaving districts to twenty or more in the coarser weaving districts. By contrast, outputting prevailed in the cotton industry which flourished in north-east Ireland between 1780 and 1820. Cotton mills were first established in Belfast during the 1770s, and high wages induced many linen weavers in the Lagan valley to weave cotton put out by the mill owners. After 1800, however, the earnings of cotton weavers declined precipitously, and the industry itself failed to grow

after 1820.<sup>12</sup>

Outputters clearly had made significant inroads in the weaving districts by the early decades of the nineteenth century. Crawford rightly points out, however, that in the linen industry, categories like 'manufacturer' or 'master-weaver,' 'obscure many categories of dependence, notably sons working for their fathers, or weavers taking yarn from jobbers either in hard times or until their own flax crop was harvested, scutched and spun.' In the coarse-weaving districts to the south and west of the linen triangle it was common for farmers to employ their cottiers as journeymen rather than as agricultural labourers. Moreover, class differentiation was neither universal nor unilinear. In 1816 Besnard noted that in County Longford manufacturers were being displaced by 'independent' weavers. Otway reported in 1840 (when mill spinning was firmly established) that around Lurgan weavers of fine linen continued to carry on their trade in the 'old way,' occupying their own land, raising and spinning their own flax, and selling the woven cloth in the town market.<sup>13</sup>

As the weaving industry intensified in the north-east, it became the principal source of income for both Catholics and Protestants alike. Capital accumulation appears to have been largely concentrated in Protestant households, however. In 1795, Robert Severson remarked, with some surprise, that bleaching was 'almost every shilling in the hands of Protestants.' Smyth has pointed out that this religious difference is not so extraordinary if we consider that, until 1778, Catholics could not hold a lease on land for longer than thirty-one years. In addition to being conspicuously absent from the most capital-intensive end of the production process, Catholics were more likely to be concentrated in those areas which specialized in coarse weaving or in the production of yarn. In the weaving districts of County Armagh, however, religious affiliation was more evenly distributed, contributing, it has been argued, to outbreaks of sectarian violence there in the 1780s and '90s.<sup>14</sup>

When Orr wrote 'The Penitent,' then, the Irish linen industry took the form of a series of uneven relationships, both across space and between social groups. First, the sexual division of labour ensured that women were confined to the most labour-intensive and poorly remunerated end of the production process. From the middle of the eighteenth century this division of labour by sex came to coincide with a regional division of labour between those areas specializing in the production of yarn, and those areas specializing in the production of cloth. Within the weaving districts, some households had become dependent on entrepreneurial farmers and drapers. In the vicinity of Belfast many rural households had turned to weaving cotton put out by mill spinners. Finally, in areas like Broadisland in east Antrim and in much of County Down, spinning and weaving continued as part-time activities alongside and in conjunction with farming. Religious difference cross-cut these relationships in complex ways, with Catholics likely to be concentrated at the lowest ends of the production line.

### **Urban Industrialization; Rural Deindustrialization: 1800-1840**

As late as 1806, Orr could write that 'The loom and wheel, both plied with zeal,/Raise rent, tax, tithe, in Ballycarry.'<sup>15</sup> But by the 1820s competition from British cotton in the market for 'decent cloth' was forcing down prices in the Irish linen industry. When Belfast cotton manufacturers transferred their steam-driven mills to flax spinning in the 1830s, the linen industry was transformed. Hand-spinning rapidly became obsolete, depriving many households of their sole source of income. Weavers in areas distant from the mills could not compete with the households of the core weaving district, who survived by weaving mill-spun yarn under increasingly impoverished conditions, until the introduction of power-looms in the 1860s. For many of the poorest members of the rural industrial population, emigration was the only alternative to destitution.

We gain some idea of the different outcomes of regional patterns of rural industrialization by comparing census data for 1821 and 1841 from four parishes in north-east Ireland, including Broadisland (Table 1).

<Table 1 about here>

Carnmoney, also in County Antrim, was the site of mechanized industry since 1786, when a cotton mill was established in the village of Whitehouse Upper. Its owners, the Grimshaw family, subscribed to James Orr's first collection of poetry in 1804. The mill was converted to flax spinning in 1832, and two other linen mills were established nearby in the early 1830s. Thus while Carnmoney experienced the greatest population increase of the four parishes between the two censuses, all of that increase is accounted for by urbanization - the surrounding rural districts actually lost population.<sup>17</sup>

Seagoe, in north County Armagh, followed a different path of industrial development. This parish was at the heart of Ulster's fine weaving district, and rural industrial households here, because of their high earnings and proximity to the market of Lurgan, were able to continue the strategy of early household formation and land subdivision. In consequence population continued to grow, despite a level of population density which was already extraordinarily high.<sup>18</sup>

The relatively marginal parish of Creggan in south County Armagh participated in the linen industry primarily through spinning and coarse weaving. By 1841, then, it was experiencing significant deindustrialization. The poor quality of the land and persistence of communal landholding practices made commercial agricultural production an unviable alternative for rural industrial households. Instead they tried to close the gap by working harder, by seasonal migration to harvest in Scotland and England, and by finding other sources of income. In 1843 the parish priest of Creggan reported that:

It is not by farming the people live, but by dealing; they look upon their holdings,

or little farms, as rather a lodging and resting place; and they pay the rent chiefly by dealing. They go to England to labour; and many of them purchase various articles, and go through the country with them, such as oranges and lemons, etc.

Under these circumstances there was little incentive to resist early household formation and land subdivision, and population continued to increase.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to each of the three parishes discussed above, Broadisland underwent little upheaval in the first half of the century. Population grew modestly and population density remained much lower than in other parts of rural industrial Ulster. Cottier-weavers were undoubtedly affected by deindustrialization, but the consequences of that process were much less severe here, where land subdivision and population increase had been restrained in the 'proto-industrial' period.

The pre-famine censuses thus illustrate the significance of local differences in the transition to industrial capitalism. The important point is that these diverse patterns of industrialization and deindustrialization had their origins in uneven patterns of rural industrialization which were already in place in 1800.

### **'Wars they meant na to partake in': Rebellion in 1798**

James Orr, like many of his co-parishioners, supported the cause of the United Irishmen in 1798, when a small party of rebels from Broadisland, the neighbouring parish of Islandmagee, and the nearby town of Larne, marched towards Donegore Hill on June 7th. They intended to rendezvous for an attack on Antrim town, but after many desertions en route, they arrived to find the uprising already put down, and the rebels fleeing from government troops. The military authorities later pardoned all those who surrendered their arms, except their leaders, for whom rewards of fifty guineas were offered<sup>20</sup>

McDowell wrote in 1817 that Orr 'will long be remembered in having been actively employed in preventing his companions committing acts of cruelty.'<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, he found his name on the list of 'fifty-pounders' and was obliged to flee to America. After a few months he returned to Ireland under a general amnesty, resumed his trade as a farmer-weaver in Ballycarry, and became a respected and well-liked member of the community. Orr even offered to join the Ballycarry Yeomanry - a loyalist civilian corps which had been established in opposition to the radicalized 'Volunteers' - but his membership was vetoed by a member of the local gentry.

Why did humble Presbyterians risk their lives in support of middle-class radicals whose aims were parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation, and who often displayed ambivalence, at best, towards the ordinary people they hoped to lead? Historians have puzzled over the events of '98 - as indeed many contemporary observers did. According to Marianne Elliott, 'It is important to recognize that...(t)he rebellion was not a United Irish one...but a protective popular uprising which a spent United Irish leadership failed to harness.' Presbyterians' immediate grievances were taxes and the tithes they were obliged to pay to the established Church of Ireland. These are the motives James Orr himself gives in his poem, 'Donegore Hill.'

Whan chiels wha grudg'd to be sae tax'd

An tyth'd by rack-rent blauthry,

Turn'd out en masse, as soon as ax'd-

An unco throuither squathry

Were we that day.

There was also a more subtle sense of indignation at the subjection of Presbyterians to the (largely unenforced) penal laws. This was reflected in the perception that taking up

arms represented an assertion of citizenship.<sup>22</sup>

Nancy Curtin has argued that in their efforts to enlist popular support, the United Irishmen 'calculated on appealing to specific interests rather than on educating their followers in sound republican and non-sectarian doctrines.' The result was an exacerbation of sectarian tension throughout Ireland in the wake of the rising. Yet ordinary people clearly had adopted and transformed many of the ideas and symbols of the French revolution to their own ends. Moreover, because of the links forged by emigration, Ulster Presbyterians were well-informed about, and fascinated by, events in America. In 'Donegore Hill,' Orr drily remarks on 'repentant Painites at their prayers,' and describes the cropped hair and green cockades of his fellow rebels.<sup>23</sup>

The leaders of the United Irishmen encouraged the use of such colourful symbols, believing that they would both reinforce solidarity and intimidate the authorities. Ordinary people adopted them in order to assert a new political identity, while working them into the existing cultural fabric of their daily lives, especially to the all-important business of household-formation. For the young, who were most active in the movement, the symbols of 'patriotism' featured prominently in courtship. Young men sought to impress young women by their bravery, while the latter presented green emblems as tokens of their affection. In Orr's words, 'lasses made cockades o' green / for chaps wha us'd to flatter / Their pride ilk day.' His poem also reveals that married women, whose households were threatened by the prospect of their husbands' imprisonment or death, were far less enthusiastic.<sup>24</sup>

As Miller has noted, the romantic interpretation of '98 has been that 'the co-operation of 'the Presbyterians' with Catholics in the United Irishmen..offered hope for a non-sectarian politics which was somehow thwarted in later years when the Presbyterians cast their lot with the Anglican establishment.' More recent scholarship has emphasized that the leadership of the United Irishmen were less committed to social reform, and their

rank and file members less committed to religious tolerance, than nationalist mythology has suggested. According to Akenson and Crawford, the apparent conversion of the Antrim Scots from republicanism to loyalism after the rebellion was 'not a line of principle but of time.' They continued to be motivated by democratic political inclinations and by a concern to protect their economic interests - both of which now seemed more threatened by mass mobilization than by upper-class exploitation.<sup>25</sup>

In his 'Epistle to S. Thomson of Carngranny,' James Orr gives an intimate account of his own state of mind shortly after his return to Ireland:

For me, wi' a' that's come an' past,

I'm at my ain fire-side at last,

Fu' blythe, tho' fash't awee,

When geckt at by the purse-proud drove;-

But deel-ma-care, sin' little love

Is lost 'tween them an' me.

In the following section I will explore this weary return to their 'ain fire-sides' on the part of a segment of the Irish rural industrial community from a different perspective - that of everyday life. This retreat from radical politics in favour of moral reform, I will argue, can be understood as an effort to distance themselves from the poor and dependent, as well as from the 'purse-proud drove.'<sup>26</sup>

### **'Enjoy the mite we hae': Changes in Everyday Life**

Despite the sentiments expressed in his poems, James Orr continued to have a weakness for alcohol in the course of his life after 1798. Madden wrote that 'He neglected his industrious habits - frequented public-houses, and fell into habits of intoxication.' This was in contrast to other inhabitants of County Antrim, amongst whom, according to

Dubourdieu, drunkenness was 'a vice...daily losing ground.' The Ordnance Survey Memoir for Templecorran still found 'a proneness to tipping among both sexes' in the late 1830s, but noted that the number of public houses was half that of fifty years earlier. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, upper-class observers in north-east Ireland noted a remarkable cultural transition from the disorderly, task-oriented patterns of work and leisure typical of rural industrial communities to a new regularity and sobriety in everyday life.<sup>27</sup>

When Arthur Young toured the weaving districts during the late 1770s, he had observed patterns of work and leisure which were almost prototypical of the 'plebian culture' described by Thompson. Weavers were 'licentious and disorderly,' he wrote, and worked only for subsistence, choosing leisure over work whenever possible. 'The men do not work more than half what they might do,' in Warrenstown, Co. Down, 'owing to the cheapness of provisions making them idle, as they think of nothing more than the present necessity.' Their leisure activities were public and crowded, and they included the classic plebian activities of cock-fighting and bull-baiting. In Maghan, Co. Armagh, Young witnessed a sight which amazed him, but which demonstrates the absence of the kind of time-discipline which factory industry required:

They take exercise of a different sort, keeping packs of hounds, every man one, and joining, they hunt hares; a pack of hounds is never heard, but all the weavers leave their looms and away they go after them by hundreds.<sup>28</sup>

By the early 1800's, however, the Dublin Society's 'Statistical Surveys' and Mason's 'Parochial Survey' were remarkably unanimous that weaving households had abandoned such disorderly work and leisure habits in favour of time-disciplined labour and 'respectability.' Thus the Mason report for Seagoe, County Armagh, found that

weavers still abandoned their looms when they heard the hounds' cry, but added that 'they rarely fail to make up by redoubled exertions for any time lost on an indulgence of this nature.' Similarly, Coote compared the inhabitants of County Armagh with those of 'the poorer counties' in terms of their greater time-discipline:

Perhaps in the poorer counties they are a more hard working people, employed earlier and later than in Armagh, but they are not regularly so; they are only industrious when pinched by poverty, when their wages have been squandered, and when they are overwhelmed with debt. In this county, a steady industry affords a sufficiency for the moderate comforts of life, and will admit of a redundancy for other purposes, without exhausting nature by extraordinary labour at such a sedentary business as the loom.

By the 1830's the Ordnance Survey memorialists were, in general, happy to report that once-popular pastimes like cock-fighting, bull-baiting and card-playing belonged to the past.<sup>29</sup>

Alongside this transformation in patterns of work and leisure there was a growth in evangelicalism in Northern Ireland, that is (in Miller's words) in 'the style of popular religion associated with John Wesley's ministry in the eighteenth century, which had been manifested not only in the growth of Methodism but in the transformation of the old Dissenting sects and the emergence of an "evangelical" party in the Church of England.' This style included mass gatherings at the sermons of itinerant preachers and, at the turn of the century, millenarianism - the belief that the kingdom of God was imminent with a corresponding emphasis on prophecy. David Hempton has shown that Methodism expanded in the linen triangle between 1780 and 1830. It suffered serious losses in the rebellion year of 1798 followed by remarkable growth between 1800 and 1802. A

number of Presbyterian splinter groups also achieved success during this period.<sup>30</sup>

How do we account for this growth in evangelicalism? Thompson, as I have already mentioned, saw British Methodism as the 'Chiliasm of the defeated and the hopeless.' It represented resignation both to the failure of the French Revolution and to the discipline of the factory. According to Miller, however, evangelicalism in the North of Ireland was a 'superstitious,' pre-modern response to the political environment of the time. Urban middle-class radicals were able to mobilize some segments of the rural industrial community in the rebellion of 1798 on the basis of the millenarianism of Presbyterian and Catholic revivals. For Miller, therefore, evangelicalism in the north-east must be seen as 'a symptom of a more general capacity, shared by Catholics as well as those Presbyterians who had not yet felt the full impact of modernization, to view human affairs as subject to supernatural intervention.' In the linen triangle, by contrast, where the effects of 'modernization' were more fully experienced, poorer Protestants' frustration at their continued exclusion from 'the polity' resulted in sectarian violence against Catholics.<sup>31</sup>

Both Thompson's and Miller's analyses are overly linear and deterministic, at least in the context of north-east Ireland. The popularity of evangelicalism and the transition to orderliness cannot be understood as responses to the imposition of the factory system since, as we have seen, these trends were occurring decades before the establishment of centralized, mechanized production. Manufacturing employers operated on a very small scale and, moreover, the outputting system was not incompatible with plebian culture: when the yarn was advanced to him the weaver had a limited amount of time in which to finish the web, but within that period he could still organize his time as he wished and he could choose to take on less work when the cost of provisions was low. Miller's distinction between two types of rural industrial community fails to recognize that both were produced by the uneven development of the linen industry and were thus

equally 'modern.' For example the respective political movements in each area mobilized on the basis of symbols, rituals and gestures which were similar in form, even when the intended meaning was quite different.

In order to understand the cultural transformation which was taking place in the weaving districts we have to adopt a less unitary and unilinear understanding of social change, and a less deterministic understanding of the relationship between social structure and systems of ideas. The development of the Irish linen industry in the second half of the eighteenth century led, as we have seen, to complex interrelationships within and between rural industrial households. Changes in the ideas and behaviour of linen producers must be seen as creative responses to the process of differentiation, and also as an attempt to resist this process by differentiating themselves from those whom they associated with its worst consequences. The 'collective consciousness' of Orr's community (for example) was far more than a reflection of immediate circumstances - it represented an interpretation of and response to complex political and socio-economic changes far beyond the boundaries of their parish.

## PART 2

In his 'History of Methodism in Ireland,' Crookshank reports that in 1800 a revival occurred at Larne and a class was established at Islandmagee 'notwithstanding much prejudice and hostility in this stronghold of Calvinism.' The man who led this revival was Lorenzo Dow, a flamboyant American frontier preacher of unkempt appearance. Crookshank describes him in colourful detail:

Pale, thin, and somewhat consumptive looking, dressed in the plainest attire, often threadbare, his feet covered with what seemed sandals rather than shoes, and in

later years wearing a long beard, and hair loosely hanging about his shoulders, his whole appearance was such as to excite the greatest interest and curiosity. Then the suddenness and promptitude of his advent in a town or village, at the very hour and minute he had appointed; the boldness with which he would attack the ruling vices of the place, which he seemed to know almost intuitively; together with the biting sarcasm and strong mother wit that pervaded his addresses, all served to invest his appearance in any vicinity, with an air of singular and romantic interest.

Dow's sudden and prompt appearance in the year immediately following the '98 rebellion was itself no coincidence. He held republican (and otherwise eccentric) views which landed him briefly in a Belfast prison, and which alienated him from Methodist leaders in Dublin. Such a character seems designed to have piqued the interest of a man like James Orr, and it is likely that his preaching inspired the poem which is discussed below.<sup>32</sup>

In the opening lines of 'The Penitent' Orr quickly emphasizes that his theme is moral improvement rather than religious conversion. The poem is inscribed to the Reverend J. Bankhead, the Presbyterian minister for Broadisland who had intervened with the authorities on his parishioners' behalf following the rout on Donegore Hill in 1798. (The inscription thus also suggests an oblique, personal statement of repentance on Orr's part.) The imaginary source of the Penitent's tale - 'Brice, the auld herd on the moor' - is possibly a reference to Edward Brice, the Ballycarry minister who first established Presbyterianism in Ulster in the early seventeenth century. Given his lifelong distaste for 'supersition,' Orr would certainly have found Dow's emphasis on the supernatural uncongenial; Methodism appealed to him in its social mission, rather than as an alternative religious affiliation.

The poem's narrative begins with the desolate picture of a war-torn world, and it seems as if the Penitent himself, and his entire family and community, have been wiped

out by its 'triple scourge' of violence, pestilence and famine - conditions which existed in many parts of Ireland in 1800.<sup>33</sup> Christy Blair's house is now deserted and ruined, but in the third stanza we are introduced to the household economy which existed there 'in years o' yore,' with its well-ordered division of labour between husband, wife, children and journeymen. The latter appear to be cottagers, maintained by the yarn supplied by Christy's household. Within this production unit there is work for all members of the family, but also time for the children to 'scamper wi' the houn's frae hill to hill' or to study the catechism (and, no doubt, practice their singing) 'in nyb'ring barn.' The rhythm of labour is task-oriented; Christy drinks a gill or two while weaving, but has a 'hearty fill' when the piece is finished.

The poem moves then to a discussion of Christy's leisure time, which is spent in cockfighting and brawling (Stanza 4). These activities lead him to foolish interactions with those both above and below him in the social scale. He lends his money to 'poor sots' who will not repay him, while at cockfighting he gambles alongside 'rich rakes.' However, he is skilled at handling 'a guid game bird' and crafty enough to cheat on the odds. Christy's kindness in lifting his opponents' children to safety during a brawl wins tolerance from his neighbours. In an earlier poem, 'Ballycarry Fair,' Orr had celebrated such 'plebian' leisure pursuits as amusing and harmless, but he later wrote to Sam Thomson that, 'I wish B'carry fair in particular never had been written.'<sup>34</sup>

In 'The Penitent' these once harmless activities become a source of destruction to the weaving household. Vice, Orr tells us, inevitably grows out of control (Stanza 5). Soon Christy fails to bring home any of the money he received from the sale of his cloth. As the household falls into debt he is forced to sell his cows and the once harmonious, hierarchical relationships between family members become inappropriately egalitarian and conflictual (Stanzas 6 and 7). The collapse of the household economy is particularly associated with conflict and distrust between husband and wife. Christy encourages his

sons to curse their mother and tells his friends that her drinking is the source of his problems.

The conflict between husband and wife reflects a fundamental breakdown in the division of labour which structured the household production unit described in Stanza 3. Mary and her daughters' work formerly represented an input to the small enterprise, which intersected with the money economy only when Christy's web was ready for market. Due to Christy's failure as the household head, Mary must now confront that outside world directly, exchanging the 'pence', food and seeds which should have gone to the reproduction of the household for her husband's drink, and for the colonial products (tea and snuff) which she craved herself. The household is barely rescued by her dowry when Christy enlists as a soldier to fight in a foreign land.

Christy first tries to reform within the framework of the 'plebian' system; rather than give up drink entirely he swears he will put off drinking until 'hallon-tide'(Stanza 9). Such a strategy was doomed to failure since he would inevitably backslide. The solution came when at 'the frightfu' edge/ O' dreary ruin' he listens to 'Smyth, the methodie' preaching in a neighbouring barn (Stanza 10).

Methodist societies depended on itinerant preachers in the eighteenth century. Their members hosted the preachers in their homes and contributed a penny a week towards their upkeep. According to Hempton, '(I)n their pioneering phase, Methodist missionaries and itinerant preachers, disparagingly called Black Caps, Swaddlers and cavalry preachers, spoke wherever they could attract a crowd - at markets, fairs, wakes, pilgrimages, public executions, Volunteer meetings and Orange gatherings.' The crowds attracted by such proseletyzers proved fertile recruiting ground for the United Irishmen in the 1790's. Indeed thirty-two Methodist leaders were expelled by the Irish Conference in 1798 on the grounds that they were influenced by 'the spirit of insubordination and lawlessness so prevalent.' Itinerant Presbyterian preachers - and even

United Irish recruiters masquerading as preachers - also propounded 'sedition and the word' in the years leading up to '98. The barn to which Christy resorted in his despair thus represented a culturally continuous space from pre-rebellion days. Hidden from the eyes of the authorities, people gathered in the barn to reproduce their cultural world, to forge a sense of collective identity and to resist the social forces by which they felt oppressed.<sup>35</sup>

In 1800, however, Christy Blair determines to change his lifestyle, rather than to revolt. His first success comes when he stays home from a bull-baiting. Christy is not saved by a change of heart alone, however; he has work put out to him by a 'serious nyber.'

According to Orr, 'Somebody ay will help the poor an' weel-behav'd.' (Stanza 11) Despite some relapses, Christy perseveres in his new lifestyle and makes remarkable progress, gaining a little prosperity and a good deal of respect (Stanza 13). He recovers his cows and grows enough corn to sell some surplus meal. His family returns to a sense of harmony but is now more inward-looking. Instead of playing or studying with other youngsters, his children now work, sing hymns, and learn to defend their beliefs against 'the Calvinists,' namely, of course, the rest of the community. The family develops 'improv'd' and educated literary tastes, reading Milton, Gray and Shakespeare, in addition to the Bible. Orr's methodists are not as pitiless and dour as Thompson found their leaders; the new Christy is 'far owre wise to jibe; but no owre wise to joke.' (Stanzas 15 through 17)

In a dramatic development, the family achieves worldly success in their search for heavenly grace. Once dependent on work put out to him by a neighbour, Christy now supplies warps for thirty looms and has invested in some grazing cattle. It is interesting to contrast the household economy described in Stanza 3 to that described in Stanza 18. Whereas formerly each family member had an integral part in the production process, they are now primarily entrepreneurs and the women, in particular, seem to play

a smaller economic part. The sons spend much of their time at market, while Christy 'did little, but directed a'. For the daughters spinning has been relegated to third on their list of priorities. Earlier we were told that Mary had become a 'douse an' dainty dame.' Orr thus presents a provocative image of a once task-oriented weaving household which has become an entrepreneurial production unit through a transformation in the work and leisure habits of its members. The family's own dependence on the 'serious nyber' who gave out weaving is temporary because Christy's new-found industriousness and sobriety win's them independence and the opportunity to similarly benefit others. In this new way of life it is even possible for Christy to set his children up in households of their own, without concern for the problems associated with land subdivision. The cruelty of parents who 'crossed' their children's loves for economic reasons was a persistent theme in Orr's poetry - he was himself disappointed in 'his unrequited affection for a lady "too far removed by social position from the sphere of life he enjoyed".<sup>35</sup>

The poem's final stanza reveals that what has been presented as nostalgia for a time which only 'auld Brice' can remember, is really intended as a utopian vision for the future. Orr wants to establish continuity between the golden past of rural industrial production and the present, and to close the rift created by rebellion. But the rural industrial system has reached a turning point, especially in the linen triangle, as once self-sufficient weaving households become increasingly dependent on the market for yarn and provisions, or on outputters. Orr dreams of a reconciliation between the challenges of the present and the ideals of the past, so that, for example, entrepreneurship might be compatible with providing 'mailins, an' gear, to ev'ry lad an' lass.' There is continuity in the millenarian resonance of Orr's theme. A number of Orr's poems suggest the idea that the Messiah's coming would be preceded by a period of 'universal virtue.'<sup>37</sup> Orr concludes the narrative part of his poem with the statement that Christy died 'what they ca' the leader o' a class.' He is referring to the Methodist system of Bible study

groups, but also, I would suggest, to a shared sense of collective identity. This is not to say that Orr's concept corresponded to contemporary sociological definitions of the term 'working class,' (although Corfield reports that the appellation became increasingly used after 1790), but that for him, the turn away from radical politics towards a strategy of moral improvement involved the consolidation of a group identity separate from 'rich rakes' and 'poor sots.'<sup>38</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In 'The Penitent' James Orr associates Methodism, and the transition to 'orderliness' noted by upper-class observers, with changes in the organization of production in the weaving industry. The independent household production unit which had been brought low by 'plebian' work and leisure habits is transformed into an entrepreneurial, manufacturing household by the adoption of new habits, and by the availability of work put out by a neighbour. It seems quite clear that Orr, disillusioned by his experience of revolution, hoped in later life that education and a more orderly lifestyle might succeed in improving the poor man's lot within the existing system. The final stanza of 'The Penitent' expresses the hope that his 'brethren' would achieve the goals they thought they had been fighting for in '98 by following 'wisdom's path'.

Yet it must be remembered that the poem refers to social and economic processes which were not taking place in Orr's home parish to the degree that they were elsewhere. The inhabitants of Broadisland were not plagued with 'want and dearth,' nor with 'religious wrath.' According to Akenson, the neighbouring parish of Islandmagee was so prosperous that the Great Famine, which devastated much of Ireland in 1845 and 1846, in effect did not happen there. As we have seen, moreover, while farmers sometimes employed their cottiers to weave in south-east Antrim, petty manufacturers

were more typical of the intensive weaving districts in the linen triangle.<sup>39</sup>

Orr's reflection on these processes reminds us that the cultural changes often associated with class-formation were not transparent responses to immediate social-structural conditions. The image of a Methodist household withdrawing from the outside world, and that of the plague which Orr invokes in both the first and last stanza's of the poem provide metaphors for at least part of the process of collective identity-formation in north-east Ireland. By emphasizing their own sobriety and respectability, some weaving households sought to establish a safe, cultural space which would differentiate them from those who had become impoverished, indebted or dependent on others under the rural industrial system. Their rejection of plebian culture and adoption of a new, industrious lifestyle represented a creative response to processes which, like fever, they had thus far avoided, but inly dreaded.

*Appendix*

**The Penitent**

EARTH feels the triple scourge wild warfare spreads,  
Emaciate famine gnaws the husks and pines,  
And ev'ry friend, forsaking, inly dreads  
The fated wretch, whom pestilence confines:-  
Say, will BANKHEAD, who piously declines  
Man's ev'ry vice, and mourns his woes severe;  
Will he, the guide, who feels what he enjoins,  
The fervent love of ev'ry faith and sphere,  
The Penitent's memoirs, tho' mean, be pleas'd to hear?

His name, if I min't right, was Christy Blair:  
Fu' aft I've pass'd the wa'stead whare he leev'd;  
An' auld ash three stan's branchless now an' bare,  
Aboon the spring, unnotic'd an' unpreev'd:  
The side wa' co'ers the causey that he pav'd,  
The beasts rub doon the cheeks o' ilka door;  
Rank nettles hide the hearth on which he shav'd  
The nybers ance a week in years o' yore -  
I learn'd his life frae Brice, the auld herd on the moor.

He weav'd himsel', an' keepet twathree gaun,  
Wha prais'd him ay for hale weel-handled yarn;  
His thrifty wife an' wise wee lasses span,  
While warps and queels employ'd anither bairn;  
Some stript ilk morn an' thresh'd, the time to earn  
To scamper wi' the houn's frae hill to hill;  
Some learn'd the question-beuk in nyb'ring barn -  
Christy wrought unco close, whyles took a gill,  
But when his wab was out had ay a hearty fill.

An' nae mean sponge was he; but was hae lent  
Sums to poor sots, wha basely brak their word  
Rich rakes admir'd his sprie, sae weel he kent  
The way to heel, an' han', a guid game bird:  
An' in the pit he wadna twice be dar'd,  
The odds were shamefu' when he cried "fair play";  
His nieve, that nail'd the messons to the sward,  
Wad stapt to lift their weanies frae his way:  
He harm'd himsel' at times was a' that folk cud say.

But och! if vice the least indulgence claim  
'Twill wax, an' strengthen, like a wean at nurse;  
Belyve he staid hale days an' nights frae hame  
Tho' ae night's absence, ance he deem'd a curse;  
An' aft brought hame nought but an empty purse,  
O' a' the hale wabs price he took to sell;  
Then, sick niest day, poor Mary boost disburse  
Her pence, to get a glass his qualms to quell:  
She grudg'd - he storm'd - the weans grat - hame grew hell.

At length he turn'd a doonright ne'er-do-weel,  
For ilka draught, he swore, but made him dryer;  
The kye gaed baith for debt. A sorry chiel'  
Was he to cleave their stakes to men' the fire:  
Mary ne'er min't the house - mair like a byre,  
But clash'd wi' nyber wives. Unkent to him  
For tea, an' snuff, the troubled dames desire,  
She'd smuggled meal an' seeds; tho' hunger grim  
Devour'd the duddy weans, now in a wretched trim.

Gif ye had pass'd his door, ye'd either heard  
Him we his comrades madly makin' noise,  
Or squabblin' wi' the wife. He seldom car'd  
To wake the loom's mair profitable voice:  
The weans were wicked mair thro' chance than choice,  
How marvellous wad been their mense an' grace!  
He learn'd the lasses smut, an' gart the boys  
Drink dreadfu' toasts, an' box for pence or praise;  
They'd ca' their mother le'er, an' curse her till her face.

Whyles wi' his auld colleagues he blam'd his wife;  
He kent that she was slack, an' they were fause:  
She sometimes took a drap, an' by the life  
A drinkin' wife's ay deem'd for greater flaws:  
Ance when they differ'd, like a thoughtless ass,  
He listed wi' the sogers on the street,  
Yet when he ru'd, wrang'd Mary pledg'd her brows  
To raise the smart money. To see her greet  
Wad thow'd the hardest heart in army or in fleet.

Yet shame owrecam' him whyles, an' when advice  
Was properly applied it rous'd his pride,  
He'd kiss the beuk, an' swear by a' the skies,  
He'd in nae change house drink till hallon-tide;

Then, then he thrave; but och! he cudna bide  
Frae worthless spen'thrifts, nor cud they frae him;  
At first he'd drink his glass in some backside,  
But at the table when his brains 'gan swim;  
When tald o' a' niest morn he'd tremble ev'ry limb.

At lang an' last, when to the frightfu' edge  
O' dreary ruin, by his courses brought,  
(For a' was gaen he had to sell or pledge  
The times were hard and nane would trust him ought)  
To pass a painfu' hour, the barn he sought  
Whare Smyth, the methodie, harangu'd the folk:  
They mourn'd, an' cried amen - he fleech'd and fought,  
Christy grew grave, an' thought he'd join the flock,  
An' imitate their lives wham ance he us'd to mock.

An' change his life he did; the bull-beat came,  
He wadna gang; but ca'd it savage vice:  
A serious nyber 'cause he stay'd at hame  
Gi'ed him a wab to weave, an' lent the price:  
Late, late did he sit up, an' early rise,  
An' eat the bread o' care to get it weav'd;  
Syn'e took it hame, gat meal, an' monie nice  
Auld claes, to thack the weans, we thanks receiv'd;  
Somebody ay will help the poor an' weel-behav'd.

Nature a while, tho' thought forbearance hard,  
An' Habit, like a bough by force held straight,  
Sprang till its ain auld thraw. When aff his guard,  
Twathree rash gills wad set him till't a' night;  
An' much he'd said an' done that was na right:-  
Ilk short relapse the clashes met to track o';  
But practice soon made irksome trials light;  
As ane, at first, wha trys the pipe for lack o'  
His health, halts, coughs, an' greus, yet learns to like  
tobacco.

While perseverin' in his heav'n-ward way,  
He lea's pale want behin', his cant an' zeal,  
Sae quite remarkable, mak' grave an' gay  
Laugh hearty at him, tho' they like him weel;  
Has he a band to fill? he soon fin's bail,  
Nae pross ere plagues him now, sloth leas his hame;  
He has baith kye an' corn, an' sells some meal,

His frien's outbye add mister till his name;  
An' alter'd Mary's now a douse an' dainty dame.

(Hail! good old WESLEY - this they owe to thee,  
The wise of all professions bless thy birth;  
Believing what you taught, without a fee,  
"A poor way-faring man," you ventur'd forth,  
Striving where'er you went to free the earth  
From sin, enslaver of the human mind:-  
As godlike HOWARD, friend of woe an' worth,  
In many a realm consol'd the cells where pin'd  
Poor persecuted slaves, kept there by kings unkind.)

Whase arm ance rash as Christy's? now tho' strong,  
Nae bangster tholes his nieve or sla-thorn black;  
Wha ance blasphem'd like Christy? now his tongue  
Without minc'd oaths the lee-lang day can crack:  
His nights ance spent with gamesters owre the pack  
Are pass't wi' deein' wights, or at his beuk:  
The lyin' cash he ance wad sent to wrack,  
Lent, int'rest-free, sets up new-married folk -  
He's far owre wise to jibe; but no owre grave to joke.

The weans and Mary kept the cottage neat;  
She was affectionate, an' fond were they;  
They work't an' sang their hymns, and crack't, an' gree't,  
Fine was their speech, an' affable their way.  
They werena stupes, wha fient na word can say  
For what they b'lieve; tho' first to rail an' rage  
At a' wha differ. 'Mang some bolefu's mae,  
Ane Fletcher's warks, a bra unbiass'd sage,  
Gart 'em wi' might an' mense the Calvinists engage.

An' searchin' for the Truth improv'd their taste:  
How nat'ral Joseph's Life was weel they kent;  
How Moses' muse her notes sublimely rais'd,  
An' Jeremiah's deeply did lament;  
The spen'thrift son's fine scene they weel cud paint,  
An guid Samaritan's - an' nearer han',  
How Young made night mair solemn wi' his plaint;  
How Milton's Eve was fair, his Adam fand;  
How Gray was sad an' grave, an' Shakespeare wildly grand.

They min't baith warls. In warps boil'd by their han'

Did thrice ten shuttles lose their entrails sma';  
 An' on a scoup o' cheap, but mountain lan',  
 They graz'd yell kye, an' drain'd, an' lim'd the shaw.  
 Beasts, yarn, an' claith, aft call'd the sons awa';  
 The daughters wash'd, an' sew'd, an' span wi' care:  
 Christy did little, but directed a';  
 An' cute was he when unco folk were there;  
 For at the very warst he had baith sense an' lear.

"The e'e that saw them bless'd them." Much they shar'd  
 Wi' frien's, wi' strangers, an' wi' a' in need;  
 Folk thought the fam'ly fey if e'er they err'd,  
 Bonnier an' better ne'er brak warls bread:  
 Christy ne'er strave to cross their loves: but gied  
 Mailin's, an' gear, to ev'ry lad an' lass,  
 He leev'd to train their weans, an' when he died,  
 Was what they ca'd the leader o' a class. -  
 Brice gied me this account, an' right weel pleas'd I was.

May my wild brethren turn to wisdom's path  
 An' grace poor Erin, plagu'd with want and dearth!  
 And banish from her shores religious wrath,  
 Desponding sloth, and dissipated mirth!  
 May sun-like Science from the poor man's hearth  
 Chase Ignorance, the owl that haunts the stys!  
 So patriots brave, when we lie low in earth,  
 "Harmless as doves, and yet as serpents wise,"  
 Shall follow Truth and Right, and guard the land they prize.

### *Glossary*

aboon:	above
bangster:	burly ruffian
band:	promise
bairn:	young child
braws:	fine things, wedding clothes
chiel:	fellow
crack:	converse

fleech'd:	entreated
gang:	go
gart:	caused to
gear:	goods
greet/grat:	weep/wept
greus:	shudders
ilka:	each
lear:	learning
mailin's:	farms
mense:	intelligence
messon:	dog, person (derogatory)
nieve:	fist
pross:	bragging
sward:	grass
thraw:	crooked shape
twathree:	two or three
unpreev'd:	unpruned
yell kye:	barren cows

## Endnotes

1. James Orr, *Poems on Various Subjects*, Belfast: Wm. Mullan and Son, 1935, pp.173-180. This volume is a reprint of two earlier volumes first published in 1804 and 1817.
2. Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, NY: Vintage Books, 1966, p.366.
3. Thompson, *Making*, p.362.
4. Joan Scott, "Women in The Making of the English Working Class" in *Gender and the Politics of History*, NY: Columbia UP, 1988, pp.68-90.
5. Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, Berkeley, C.A.: U California Press, 1982; William Roseberry, *Anthropologies and Histories: Essays in Culture, History and Political Economy*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1989, p.28.
6. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven, C.T.: Yale UP, 1990, p.199.
7. Jo35n Hewitt, *Rhyming Weavers, and other country poets of Antrim and Down*, Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1974, p.7; Donald H. Akenson and William H. Crawford, *Local Poets and Social History: James Orr, Bard of Ballycarry*, Belfast: Public Record Office of Norther Ireland, 1977, pp. 4-5.
8. A. McDowell, "Sketch of the Author's Life," in Orr, *Poems*, p.187. John Stevenson, *Two Centuries of Life in Down, 1600-1800*, Belfast: McCaw, Stevenson and Orr, 1920, p.200.
9. Details of Orr's life are drawn from Akenson and Crawford, *Local Poets*, except where otherwise stated. General accounts of the history of the Irish linen industry may be found in Conrad Gill, *The Rise of the Irish Linen Industry*, OUP, 1925; W.H. Crawford, *Domestic Industry in Ireland: the Experience of the Linen Industry*, Dublin:

Gill and Macmillan, 1972; Louis M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660*, L: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1972. See also Crawford's critique of Gill in 'The Evolution of the Linen Trade in Ulster before Industrialization,' *Irish Economic and Social History* XV, 1988, pp. 32-53. John Dubourdieu, *A Statistical Survey of the County of Antrim*, Dublin, 1812, p.394.

10. The most explicitly theoretical elaboration of the association between rural industry and demographic growth is to be found in Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick and Jurgen Schlumbohm, *Industrialization before Industrialization*, CUP, 1981. For applications of this "proto-industrialization" thesis to the Irish case see Marilyn Cohen, 'Peasant Differentiation and Proto-Industrialization in the Ulster Countryside: Tullylish 1690-1825,' *Journal of Peasant Studies* 3, 1990, pp.413-432; Leslie A. Clarkson, 'The environment and dynamic of pre-factory industry in Northern Ireland,' in Pat Hudson (ed.) *Regions and Industries: A perspective on the industrial revolution in Britain*, CUP, 1989, pp.252-270; Brenda Collins, 'Proto-industrialization and pre-Famine Emigration,' *Social History* 2, 1982, pp.127-146; Eric L. Almquist, 'Pre-Famine Ireland and the theory of European proto-industrialisation: evidence from the 1841 census,' *Journal of Economic History*, 3, 1979, pp.699-718.

11. On the sexual division of labour and regional specialization in spinning and weaving see Collins, 'Proto-industrialization.'

12. Arthur Young, *A Tour in Ireland*, I, London, 1892, p.130. Sir Charles Coote, *A Statistical Survey of the County of Armagh*, Dublin, 1804, p.138. On linen manufacturers see Crawford, 'Evolution of the Linen Trade.' On the cotton industry see Liam Kennedy, "The Rural Economy, 1820-1940," in Liam Kennedy and Phillip Ollerenshaw (eds.), *An Economic History of Ulster, 1820-1940*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985, pp.1-61.

13. Crawford, 'Evolution of the Linen Trade,' p.35. Peter Besnard, *Minutes of the*

*Trustees of the Linen Board, containing the Report of a Tour of Inspection through the Provinces of Leinster, Munster and Connaught*, Dublin, 1817, p.15. Caesar Otway, 'Hand-Loom Weavers II, Part III; Reports from Assistant Hand-Loom Weavers Commissioners (West Riding and Ireland),' *British Parliamentary Papers*, H.C. XXIII, 1840.

14. Robert Stevenson, 'View of County Armagh,' Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D562/1270. William J. Smyth, 'Locational Patterns and Trends in the Irish Linen Industry,' *Irish Geography* 8, 1975, p.107. On the relationship between religious conflict and the linen industry in County Armagh see Peter Gibbon, *The Origins of Ulster Unionism*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1975. See the critique of Gibbon's argument, however, in David W. Miller, 'The Armagh Troubles, 1784-95,' in S. Clark and J.S. Donnelly (eds.) *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914*, Madison, W.I.: U Wisconsin Press, 1983, pp.155-191.

15. From the poem 'Ballycarry' in Orr, *Poems*, pp.223-225. Akenson and Crawford date the poem from its first publication in the 'Belfast Commercial Chronicle.' See *Local Poets*, p.116.

16. Following Cormac O'Grada I have calculated the proportion of the population occupied in industry from the figures reported under the census headings of persons "chiefly engaged in manufacturing, trade, etc." (1821) and persons "ministering to clothing, lodging, etc." (1841). See Cormac O'Grada, "Industry and Communications," in W. E. Vaughan, ed. *A New History of Ireland, Vol 5, Ireland under the Union, I, 1801-70*, OUP, 1989, pp. 134-157, esp. 139. Population density is calculated simply as persons per square mile.

17. 'Parish of Carnmoney' in Angelique Day and Patrick McWilliams (eds.) *Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Parishes of County Antrim 1, 1838-9*, Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1990, pp. 34-105.

18. Otway, 'Hand-Loom Weavers.'
19. Evidence of the Reverend Michael Lennon in 'Report from Her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the state of the Law and Practice in Respect to the Occupation of Land in Ireland,' *British Parliamentary Papers*, H.C. XIX, 1845.
20. Donald Harmon Akenson, *Between Two Revolutions: Islandmagee, County Antrim 1798-1920*, Hamden, C.T.: Archon Books, 1979, pp.17-20. Thomas Pakenham, *The Year of Liberty*, L: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969, pp.217-223.
21. McDowell, 'Biographical Memoir,' p.188.
22. Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: the United Irishmen and France*, New Haven, C.T.: Yale UP, 1982, p.166. Orr, 'Donegore Hill,' in *Poems*, pp.33-37. On the significance of taking up arms see Nancy J. Curtin, 'The transformation of the Society of United Irishmen into a mass-based revolutionary organisation, 1794-6,' *Irish Historical Studies* xxiv, 96, 1985, pp.463-492.
23. Curtin, "Transformation," p.490.
24. See Nancy J. Curtin, 'Symbols and Rituals of United Irish Mobilisation,' in Hugh Gough and David Dickson, (eds.) *Ireland and the French Revolution*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990, pp.68-92. Orr, 'Donegore Hill.'
25. David W. Miller, 'Presbyterians and "Modernization" in Ulster,' in C.H.E. Philpin (ed.) *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland*, CUP, 1983, pp.80-109. Akenson, *Between Two Revolutions*, pp. 21-22. Akenson and Crawford, *Local Poets*, p.13.
26. Orr, *Poems*, pp.122-125.
27. Richard R. Madden, *Literary Remains of the United Irishmen*, Dublin, 1846, p.64. The Ordnance Survey Memoir is quoted in Akenson and Crawford, *Local Poets*, p.22.
28. Young, *Tour*, I, p.132 and p.127.

29. William Shaw Mason, *A Statistical Account or Parochial Survey of Ireland*, II, Dublin, 1814, p.528. Coote, *Survey of Armagh*, p.264. For a discussion of the evidence from the Ordnance Survey Memoirs see S.J. Connolly, 'Religion, Work-Discipline and Economic Attitudes: The Case of Ireland,' in T.M. Devine and David Dickson (eds.) *Ireland and Scotland, 1600-1850*, Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1983, pp.235-245.

30. Miller, 'Presbyterianism,' p. 80. David Hempton, 'Methodism in Irish Society, 1770-1830,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 36, 1986, pp.117-142. David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society, 1740-1890*, L: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1992, pp.3-44.

31. Miller, 'Presbyterianism,' p.99 and 'Armagh Troubles.'

32. C.H. Crookshank, *History of Methodism in Ireland*, II, London, 1886, p.190 and p.178.

33. See E. Margaret Crawford, 'William Wilde's Table of Irish Famines, 900-1850,' in E. Margaret Crawford (ed.) *Famine: the Irish Experience, 900-1900*, Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1989, pp.1-30.

34. Akenson and Crawford, *Local Poets*, p.70.

35. Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism*, p.11. See also Curtin, 'Transformation of the Society of United Irishmen.'

36. Quoted in Hewitt, *Rhyming Weavers*, p.61

37. See for example 'The Vision' in Orr, *Poems*, pp.107-110.

38. Penelope Corfield, 'Class by name and number in eighteenth-century Britain,' in Penelope Corfield (ed.) *Language, History and Class*, O: Basil Blackwell, 1991, pp. 101-130.

40. Akenson, *Between Two Revolutions*, pp. 75-77.

Table 1: Demographic Change in Three Rural Industrial Parishes, 1821-1841

	Population	Population Density	% Urban Dwellers	% Occupied in Industry
Broadisland (or Templecorran)				
1821	1,341	181	15.7	51.2
1841	1,428	193	16.5	37.6
Carnmoney				
1821	4,545	326	2.9	58.8
1841	6,128	439	28.2	48.3
Creggan, Lr.				
1821	10,747	315	3.6	50.1
1841	13,603	399	5.1	36.0
Seagoe				
1821	8,592	501	0.0	79.6
1841	11,094	647	1.6	73.9

Sources: 'Census of Ireland, 1821,' British Parliamentary Papers. H.C. 1824, XXII and 'Census of Ireland, 1841,' British Parliamentary Papers, H.C. 1843, XXIV.