Tay

Written by Fiona McDonald

A cudnae dae wioot ma tay,
Tae stairt me aff maist ivery day,
“A wee drap in yer haun”, the’ say,
Wairm, wat an strang,
Tha thang tae keep tha drouth at bay
Tha hale day lang.

Ma mammie larned me fae a wean
Tae wairm tha pot an no pit tay in,
Tae tha watter’s fairly plumpin, an
Then ye dae it.
“Ye teem tha watter owre tha tay, an
There ye hae it.”

“Them tay-bags irnae guid fur ocht”, ir
“It’s aye tha loose tay we hae bocht”, ir
“Yin spoon fur ivery boadie, dochter,
An yin fur tha pot.
An pit it doon fornent tha fire
Tae keep it hot”.

Noo maist fowk cannae be annoyed.
The’r no parteeclar hoo it’s made
The’ hinnae larned tae tak a pride
In ocht daen richt.
Och, it’s mair nor tay’s haes me dis-
mayed —
(A waesome sicht.)

But nooadays, iz A wus sayin,
A cannae thole tha wye it’s daen.
Yir gien an empie bicker an,
Ye mak yer brew,
Wi pumpie flesk, taybag an spoon,
T’wud gar ye grue.

Tha hale thing is jist quare an reuch,
Thon watter’s niver hot eneuch,
Luks lik it cum strecht fae a sheugh,
Tha brew’s aa gray.
Gin thon’s “gan forrits”! A say ‘Yugh!”
Fur thon’s no tay.

NORTHERN IRELAND SCREEN
Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund

Twarthy poems

Vocabulary

tay – tea
ivery boadie – everybody
cudnae dae wioot – could not do without
wee drap in yer haun – a cup of tea served informally
drouth – thirst
wean – child
watter – water
plumpin – boiling
ower – over
ocht – anything
bocht – bought
dochter – daughter
fornent – in front of
parteeclar – particular
hinnae – have not
daen – done
richt – right
bicker – cup
cannae – cannot
gar ye grue – make you shudder
quare an – very
reuch – rough
strecht – straight
sheugh – drainage channel

Poem Analysis

This poem, by a living Ulster-Scots poet, is written in a metre called ‘Standard Habbie’, a form of verse attributed to Burns but also used by the older Scots poets Fergusson and Ramsay and by many minor poets since. It is called after Habbie Simpson (‘The Piper of Kilbarchan’) who lived from 1550 to 1620 and was the subject of a mock elegy written in 1640. It is a relatively easy metre for the poet and gives an impression of pace.

The title *Tay* is an old form of the word ‘tea’ which is still in daily use among native speakers of both Ulster-Scots and Ulster English, while it has largely died out in Great Britain. An example of its earlier use in English literature is found in Alexander Pope’s ‘The Rape of the Lock’ (Canto III, line 7), which was written in 1712 and reads: “Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, Dost sometimes counsel take – and sometimes tea”.

Although the word is written in the modern form, ‘tea’, it is clear that to rhyme with ‘obey’ it must instead be pronounced ‘tay’.

Spellings of Ulster-Scots words can sometimes be described as ‘eye-dialect’, which really means the words are written to indicate how they are said. An interesting example here is *thang*, the Ards Peninsula form of ‘thing’. It indicates a nasal pronunciation of short ‘i’ that is somewhere between an ‘i’ and an ‘a’.

Poet Bio

Fiona McDonald

Fiona was born and raised in Newtownards, where her father's family have lived since at least the 1700s, and grew up hearing and using much of the language and speech patterns now recognised as Ulster-Scots.

She first discovered written Ulster-Scots when she borrowed a copy of WG Lyttle's novel Betsy Grey from the library at Regent House School. Some years later, after hearing about Ulster-Scots through her work as a civil servant at the Department of Education, she was curious enough to register for Philip Robinson's Ulster-Scots Language classes at "Ards Tech" and later at Ballyboley. It was through these classes that Fiona was encouraged to attempt some poetry and prose in Ulster-Scots, and her book Cowie's Craig is a compilation of items produced for the class and for the Ulster-Scots Language Society's publication Ullans.

Fiona is a former committee member of the Ulster-Scots Language Society and the Ulster-Scots Academy Implementation Group, and a former Director of the Ulster-Scots Community Network.

Other interests include genealogy, history and geography and music, plus various outdoor pursuits including running, hillwalking, swimming, horse-riding and stand up paddleboarding.

Address to Lettergull

Written by Sarah Leech

O Lettergull, weel may you fare,
And usual broils ne'er vex you mair,
That Providence may aye shew care,
For ane and a',
Shall ever be my earnest prayer,
Tho' far awa'.

May barley on your braes still grow,
And rough heads on your Craigen knowe,
Wi' which to mak' a rantin lowe,
When North winds blaw,
And gear in plenty on you row,
Tho' I'm awa.

May ruthless bailiffs ne'er be sent,
To drive you for a back-gaun rent,
But may your time in joy be spent,
Without alarm,
While rosy health and sweet content
Smile on ilk farm.

O that your kye or nowtes may ne'er
Be taught Phil's cauld poun' wa's to fear,
But may you have guid country cheer,
Wi' beef and meal,
That shall continue thro' the year,
And never fail.

May nae curst carlin or fell sprite,
Wha ride on broom-stick nags by night,
By cantrips carry off your right,
At morn or e'en,
And elf-shot stanes your kye ne'er blight,
By wounds unseen.

But tak' a kind advice frae me –
O, tipple not the strong maut bree,
Lest late in Mary's glen you see
Some goblin sprite,
Or hear the wailing sad banshee
Howl through the night:

For Joyce and Simpson baith can tell,
How they heard there a ghaistly yell;
But what thro' fear those loons befel,
Let them declare,
And how they scamper'd off pell-mell –
O, what a pair!

Poor silly gowks, they thought the cry
Of Sawney, who lay hid hard by,
Their boasted courage thus to try,
Was that of Clootie,
That darklins came their haste to spy,
When sent on duty.

But fare ye weel – may you ha'e claes,
Wi' health to roam about the braes,
And Guid preserve you a' your days,
Frae Satan's reach,
Is what the muse sincerely prays –
Your's – Sarah Leech

NORTHERN IRELAND SCREEN
Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund

Twarthy poems

Vocabulary

weel – well
mair – more
aye – always
ane – one
a' – all
row – roll
blaw – blow
awa – away
knowe – knoll, hillock
mair – more
ilk – each, every
kye – cows
nowtes – cattle, usually cattle for fattening
cauld – cold
carlin – witch
stanes – stones
maut bree – 'malt broth' i.e. whisky
ghaistly – ghostly
gowks – fools (literally 'cuckoos')
Clootie – Devil
braes – hills
claes – clothes

Poem Analysis

Here again the metre is 'Standard Habbie' (see 'Tay'). Although an older poem, it is less consistently Ulster-Scots than its modern counterpart. For instance, in order to find a rhyme for 'sprite', the poet is forced into using the English 'night', 'right' and 'blight' rather than the Ulster-Scots *nicht* or *richt*, which display a language feature called the 'voiceless velar fricative' (which is the 'ch' sound made at the end of the words 'bricht' and 'nicht' in 'it's a braw, bricht, muinlicht nicht' – a supposed test of Scottishness). On the other hand, many Ulster-Scots poets find it expands their range of choice to be able to change between Ulster-Scots and English.

The second verse shows another interesting feature of pronunciation. The *grow, knowe* (meaning 'knoll' – a small hill), *lowe* (meaning 'fire') and *row* should all be pronounced to rhyme with English 'how', not 'go'. Television and radio broadcasts that warn of traffic jams often mention 'Sandy Knowes' roundabout, and when the presenter mistakenly calls it 'Sandy Nose', you will know better!

Another point to note is the references to *cantrips* (magic) and *elf-shot stanes* in the fifth verse. A knowledge of superstitious beliefs in the fairy world – if not the beliefs themselves – survived in the writings of a number of the Ulster-Scots poets. At a time when the care of livestock was not supported by professional vets, farmers often believed that sickness in their cattle *(kye)* had been caused by *elf-shot stanes* (which were actually prehistoric flint arrowheads that were still to be found in grazing land at the time). Later in the poem, *Clootie* makes an appearance: this is the Devil, in reference to his cloven hooves. In this case, however, Sarah Leech advises that to avoid seeing such appearances the reader should stay away from strong *bree. Bree* is 'broth', which the poet uses figuratively: *barley bree* is whisky.

Poet Bio

Sarah Leech

Sarah Leech was born in 1809 in a village called Ballylennan, near Raphoe in County Donegal. Her father died when she was only three, leaving her mother to bring up six children on her own. The family was very poor, but Sarah's older sister had been taught to read and tried to give Sarah a start with her alphabet and spelling. At age six, Sarah was sent to school in a neighbouring village; however, she was terrified of the schoolmaster and didn't seem to be making much progress. Then when she had only been attending less than three months, the school was closed down, to her great joy.

To everyone's surprise, Sarah had improved so much that she was able to read a chapter in the Bible, and this encouraged her to keep reading. When she reached the age of twelve, she was taught a bit more about how to write, but the family's need to bring in money meant she had to leave school and take up work as a spinner. At about this time, she discovered poetry, and could memorise the poems she liked.

In 1822 the family moved half a mile away, to Lettergull, and it was there that Sarah started to write poetry for her own amusement. One of her poems, *Elegy on a Loquacious Old Woman*, so impressed a local man that he persuaded her to let him write down some of her poems, and she was really embarrassed when they appeared in the *Londonderry Journal.*

Sarah suffered some kind of eye infection in 1826, and for a while it was feared that she would lose her sight. Then a serious and long-lasting attack of rheumatism confined her to home and stopped her being able to walk, except with a crutch. Although she had become a school teacher with a small number of pupils, these health problems forced her to give up teaching and she had to fall back on her spinning to make a living. Her only known book of poetry, called *Poems, on Various Subjects*, was published in Dublin in 1828. Sarah passed away from ill health in 1830.

The Auld Airds Tramp

Written by George Francis Savage-Armstrong

Fierce blaws the bitter whustlin' blast
Roon' Cloghy's wreckfu' bay,
But A maun tramp the watthery road
An' beg my lanesome way.
Och, grim auld Keep o' Kirkistone,
Ye've stud there years on years,
But nivver a storm sae lood an' cau'd
Cam' peltin' roon' yer ears!

Och, Mickie Keown, ye 're lame an' crook'd,
Yer chin's a' raspy-white,
Yer taes gang ramblin' through yer shoon,
Yer breeks let in the light;
Atween yer greezly pow an' heaven
The shelters' thin an' sma';
The win' nigh lifts ye aff yer fit,
An' slings ye 'gen' the wa'!

Och, trampin' on a night like thon
For yin sae wake an' puir
Is bitter coomfurt! On an' on
A gang by fiel' an' muir.
What help ir sich auld brogues an' rags
Whun roads ir jist yin sea?
It's wather high, an' wather low
A' 's wather,—och-a-nee

Time wuz whun A cud jimp an' dance,
An' trot frae toon tae toon,
An' whun the day's lang trudge wuz din
Wud sleep furnenst the moon,
An' cared nae whaur A laid my heed,
By rick or ditch or hedge;
But life's last cliff A've climb'd, an' noo
A'm tremblin' on the edge...

My! thon's a gust! ... A'll totter on
Ower Bellagelget's height,
An' beg a bite at Dinver's daur,
An' shelther fur the night.
Ay, snug's auld Davy Dinver's barn ;
Jist there adoon A'll lay,
An', slumberin' 'mang the trusses, drame
Uv meadda-lan's in May.

NORTHERN IRELAND SCREEN
Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund

Vocabulary

blaws – blows
whustlin – whistling
roon – round
maun – must
watthery – watery
cau'd – cold
roon – round
taes – toes
gang – going
shoon – shoes
breeks – trousers
pow – head
wa' – wall
thon – that
fiel – field
auld – old
yin – one
toon – town
furnenst – facing
heed – head
daur – door
adoon – down
meadda-lans – meadow lands

Poem Analysis

Like ‘Donegore Hill’, this poem is set in a recognisable location, in this case ‘The Ards’ in County Down. Savage-Armstrong spent some years away from the Ards area, which might explain a few non-standard variant forms in the poem. For instance, the unusual form *‘cau’d’* (for ‘cold’) does not appear in other Ulster-Scots literature: the ‘l’ is sounded rather than the ‘d’, giving *cauld* or *caul*. In recent years, the Ulster English form coul has become more frequent in Ulster-Scots speech. This is a result of close contact between the different language forms, when ‘borrowings’ take place. Other examples are the distinctive Ulster-Scots words *crack* and *sheugh* which have been borrowed into Irish Gaelic as *craic* and *seoch*.

For those not used to reading Ulster-Scots, there is also the difficulty of distinguishing in the poem between *A* (I), *a’* (all) and a the indefinite article (as in English). Ulster-Scots and Ulster English have a pronunciation of the letters ‘t’ and ‘d’ that linguists call ‘interdental’ – which just means that in forming these letters the tongue comes up against the back of the upper front teeth, producing a sound more like ‘th’ or ‘dh’. This is realised in this poem as *watthery* in verse one but reverts to *wather* in the third verse.

In that same third verse, the final line contains the term *och-a-nee* (an expression of sorrow, grief or weariness) which, unusually for Ulster-Scots, derives from Scots Gaelic. Brendan Adams, first Curator of Language at the then Ulster Folk Museum, maintained that, at the time of the Plantation, Galloway still had a small number of Scots Gaelic speakers and that part of Scotland supplied a proportion of the settlers who made their way to Ulster.

It is important to note that, until recently, recommended spellings for writing in Ulster-Scots did not exist; and also, Savage-Armstrong does not appear to have had the advantage of interaction with other Ulster-Scots poets that was the norm among the ‘Bards’ of the time, by which a measure of consensus on variant forms might have emerged.

Nonetheless, the poem is full of character: in verse two, the lines *Yer taes gang ramblin’ through yer shoon, / Yer breeks let in the light* (‘Your toes go wandering through your shoes, / Your trousers are see-through’) is hard to beat as a picture of the poor tramp’s condition. Also, the fact that the poem can be firmly located in the scenes of the Ards *(Cloghy, grim auld Keep o’ Kirkistone, Bellagelget)* adds to its charm. *Bellagelget* is of course ‘Ballygalget’, a townland to the south-east of Newtownards.

Poet Bio

George Francis Savage-Armstrong

George Savage-Armstrong was born in Dublin on 5th May 1845, at a time when the whole island of Ireland was part of the United Kingdom. His father's family were Armstrongs whose forebears had been Border Reivers, bands of men who roamed the border area between Scotland and England rustling livestock in lawless times from the late 13th to early 17th century. The main Ulster-Scots influence on George, however, was his mother Jane, daughter of the Church of Ireland rector of Ardkeen on the Ards Peninsula. She grew up in Glastry House, near Ballyhalbert, and was very familiar with the Ulster-Scots speech and legends of the Ards.

Jane seems to have had a huge influence on George and his writings. He graduated from Trinity College Dublin in 1869 and the following year became Professor of History and English Literature at Queen's College, Cork. Over the next thirty years, he wrote extensively on a wide range of subjects, such as travel and religion, and he appears to have been fond of the poetry of Robert Burns.

Only a few months after George's marriage in 1879, his mother died, and her loss seems to have prompted an impulse in him to research and write down many of the stories of the Ards she had passed on. In 1884, George visited the old church at Ardkeen, where his grandfather had been rector, only to find it in ruins. Together with a neighbouring minister, George set about a major overhaul of the old church ruins, graveyard and grounds.

The first result of George's examination of the origins of the Savage family was a 400-page book entitled The Ancient and Noble Family of the Savages of the Ards, published in 1888. It is the outcome of painstaking research into genealogy, local history and family tales, helped by some of the most important historians of the time, such as Sir Samuel Ferguson. As the undisputed Savage family historian, in 1890 George Armstrong added 'Savage' to his surname and became George Francis Savage-Armstrong.

From 1892 to 1899, George used many of the old tales of County Down as material for a book of poems, many in the Ulster-Scots speech of the Ards. In 1901 he published *Ballads of Down*, a collection of 92 songs and poems dedicated *'to the memory of my mother'.*

Savage-Armstrong had some very definite opinions about language. He rejected any idea that he was using an "Irish brogue" and explained: *"The Downshire dialect, with its variants, is an Ulster development of Lowland-Scottish – principally Ayrshire – brought over by Scottish settlers in the reign of James I…".* He also pointed out that the speech of many of the ordinary people of County Down was in such dense Ulster-Scots that it was *"hardly intelligible to the stranger…".*

George lived in County Wicklow until 1905, before moving to Strangford House, an imposing house on a hill overlooking 'The Narrows' towards Portaferry. He died the following year, aged 61, just after completing an amplified version of *The Savage Family in Ulster*, and was buried at the old Ardkeen Church. He was survived by his wife Marie and two of their three children, his son Francis having been killed in the First World War.

Donegore Hill

Written by James Orr

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' scamper'd aff.
Psalm 78, v. 9

The dew-draps wat the fiels o' braird,
That soon the war-horse thortur'd;
An falds were op'd by monie a herd
Wha lang ere night lay tortur'd;
Whan chiels wha grudg'd to be sae tax'd
An tyth'd by rack-rent blauth'ry,
Turn'd out *en masse*, as soon as ax'd —
And unco throuither squath'ry
Were we, that day.

While close-leagu'd crappies rais'd the hoards
O' pikes, pike-shafts, forks, firelocks,
Some melted lead - some saw'd deal-boards —
Some hade, like hens in byre-neuks:
Wives baket bonnocks for their men,
Wi' tears instead o' water;
An' lasses made cockades o' green
For chaps wha us'd to flatter
Their pride ilk day.

A brave man firmly leain' hame
I ay was proud to think on;
The wife-obeyin' son o' shame
Wi' kindlin' e'e I blink on:
"Peace, peace be wi' ye! — ah! return
Ere lang and lea the daft anes" —
"Please guid," quo he, "before the morn
In spite o' a' our chieftains,
An' guards, this day."

But when the pokes o' provender
Were slung on ilka shou'der,
Hags, wha to henpeck didna spare,
Loot out the yells the louder. —
Had they, whan blood about their heart
Cauld fear made cake, an' crudle,
Ta'en twa rash gills frae Herdman's quart,
'Twad rous'd the calm, slow puddle
I' their veins that day.

Now *Leaders*, laith to lea the rigs
Whase leash they fear'd was broken,
An' *Privates*, cursin' purse-proud prigs,
Wha brought 'em balls to sloken;
Repentant Painites at their pray'rs,
An' dastards crousely craikin',
Move on, heroic, to the wars
They meant na to partake in,
By night, or day.

NORTHERN IRELAND SCREEN
Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund

Twarthy poems

Some fastin' yet, now strave to eat
The piece, that butter yellow'd;
An' some, in flocks, drank out cream
crocks,
That wives but little valu'd:
Some lettin' on their burn to mak',
The rear-guard, goadin', hasten'd;
Some hunk'rin' at a lee dyke back,
Boost houghel on, ere fastened
Their breeks, that day.

The truly brave, as journeyin' on
They pass by *weans* an' *mithers*,
Think on red fiel's, whare soon may
groan,
The *husbands*, an' the *fathers*:
They think how soon thae bonie things
May lose the youths they're true to;
An' see the rabble, strife ay brings,
Ravage their mansions, new to
Sic scenes, that day.

When to the tap o' Donegore
Braid-islan' corps cam' postin',
The red-wud, warpin, wild uproar,
Was like a bee scap castin';
For ******* ***** took ragweed farms,
(Fears e'e has ay the jaundice)
For *Nugent's* red-coats, bright in arms,
An' rush! the pale-fac'd randies
Took leg, that day.

The *camp's* brak up. Owre braes, an' bogs,
The *patriots* seek their *sections*;
Arms, ammunition, bread-bags, brogues,
Lye skail'd in a' directions:
Ane half, alas! wad fear'd to face
Auld Fogies, faps, or women;
Tho' strong, untried, they swore in pride,
"Moilie wad dunch the yeomen,"
Some wiss'd-for day.

Come back, ye dastards! — Can ye ought
Expect at your returnin',
But wives an' weans stript, cattle hought,
An' cots, an' claughin's burnin'?
Na, haste ye hame; ye ken ye'll 'scape,
'Cause *martial* worth ye're clear o';
The nine-tail'd cat, or choakin' rape,
Is maistly for some hero,
On sic a day.

Saunt Paul (auld Knacksie!) counsels weel —
Pope, somewhere, does the samen,
That, "first o' a', folk sud themsel's
Impartially examine;"
Gif that's na done, whate'er ilk loun
May swear to, never swith'rin',
In ev'ry pinch, he'll basely flinch —
"Guidbye to ye, my brethren."
He'll cry, that day.

The leuks o' wheens wha stay'd behin',
Were mark'd by monie a passion;
By dread to staun, by shame to rin,
By scorn an' consternation:
Wi' spite they curse, wi' grief they pray,
Now move, now pause a bit ay;
"'Tis mad to gang, 'tis death to stay,"
An unco dolefu' ditty,
On sic a day.

What joy at hame our entrance gave!
"Guid God! is't you? fair fa' ye! —
'Twas wise, tho' fools may ca't no' brave,
To rin or e'er they saw ye." —
"Aye wife, that's true without dispute,
But lest saunts fail in Zion,
I'll hae to swear *** forc'd me out;
Better he swing than I, on
Some hangin' day."

My story's done, an' to be free,
Owre sair, I doubt, they smarted,
Wha wad hae bell'd the cat awee,
Had they no been deserted:
Thae warks pat skill, tho' in my min'
That ne'er was in't before, mon,
In tryin' times, maist folk, you'll fin',
Will act like Donegore men
On onie day.

Vocabulary

fiels – fields
monie – many
lang – long
chiels – men
ax'd – asked
unco – strange
throuither – agitated
squathry – a disorderly confused crowd
byre-neuks – corners of barns
lasses – girls
wha – who
ilk – each, every
hame – home
e'e – eye
lang – long
daft – foolish
quo – said (in reported speech)
poke – bag
shou'der – shoulder
cauld – cold
twad – it would
wheens – numbers
staun – stand
rin – run
saunts – saints
ay – continually
gang – go
fair fa' ye! – welcome!
owre sair – too sorely / grievously
maist – most
onie – any

Poem Analysis

This poem, by James Orr ('The Bard of Ballycarry'), considered to be the best of the Weaver Poets, focuses on a particularly sad period that deeply affected the Ulster-Scots community – the 1798 Rebellion. Although the main hostilities lasted only three months, thousands lost their lives, and many others had to emigrate to America, including Orr himself. Among those hanged for his part in the rebellion was Rev. James Porter, Presbyterian minister of Greyabbey, in County Down.

James Orr's poem tells us that the chiels (young men) who *turn'd out* were rebelling against being *tax'd an tyth'd by rack-rent blauth'ry*. At the time, *tythes* (tithes – theoretically a tenth of one's income, in money or produce) were collected by government to support the established church (the Church of Ireland), no matter the religious denomination of those paying them. *Rack-rent* refers to the demand for excessive rent (usually from tenant farmers), charges which those who relied on what was basically subsistence farming found it hard to pay. *Blauth'ry* means 'riff-raff'. Orr gives us an insight into how poorly equipped the rebels were, with what were basically farm implements that had been hidden in the corners of cowsheds *(byre-neuks)*. And they were *throuither* (disorganised), a word much used by Ulster-Scots speakers today.

Orr's tone is cynical, and he is scathing about the lack of resolve on the part of many of the participants. The penultimate verse envisages the return home to his wife of one of those who ran. She cries, *'Fair fa' ye!'* ('Welcome!'), and says he was wise to *rin or e'er they saw ye* ('run before they saw you'). Orr concludes that the outcome might have been very different if they had stayed and fought as one body. The final verse contains an interesting point:
I doubt (usually 'A doot' in Ulster-Scots) should not be confused with the way 'I doubt' is used in English. In Ulster-Scots, it means 'I believe, I think', whereas in English it is an expression of scepticism about whether something will happen. The poem ends on a note of resignation, particularly poignant given Orr's long-standing personal commitment to the cause of the rebellion.

Poet Bio

James Orr

Born in 1770, Orr's father owned a few acres of land near the village of Ballycarry and made a living as a weaver, an occupation that was later followed by the poet.

Perhaps because he was an only child, his parents were very fussy about his education and taught him at home. His father was well educated for a humble weaver. The family actively discouraged the young James from mixing with other children in case he would be led into bad conduct.

Although not much is known about his early years, it does seem that his first efforts at verse took place in a singing-school. In the Presbyterian church, it was then forbidden to sing the words of the Psalms when they were only practising, so they made up other words which they sang to the Psalm tunes. James turned out to be particularly good at this.

The first poems he had published appeared in the *Northern Star*, which was a Belfast newspaper linked to the movement that later became involved in the 1798 Rebellion (or "The Turn-Out"), and he continued to write for the paper. He was one of those who was present at the Battle of Antrim on the 7th June 1798, of which his poem *"Donegore Hill"* is an account. At this, the first battle of the Rebellion, the rebels were soundly defeated and many of their ill-equipped number scattered throughout the countryside. Orr was scathing about their lack of courage; but he felt his own position to be insecure and emigrated to America.

While there, James Orr continued to write, having his poems published in an American newspaper. However, he returned home after only a few months. His first book of poetry was financed by subscription, which meant that those who liked his work paid in advance to help him afford the printing and binding of the book, and a list of their names was placed in the foreword.

James Orr never married, and he had no brothers or sisters. He had become acquainted with his circle of friends through the Masonic Order, and with them he tended to spend too much time at the local inn.

However, James Orr, or "The Bard of Ballycarry" as he became known, is generally thought to be the best of "The Weaver Poets". Shortly before he died on 24th April 1816, he asked two of his friends to take on the job of preparing for the press those poems of his that would be left unpublished, and it was his wish that, after the expenses of publication were deducted, the profits from the sale of this last book would go to help the poor of the parish in which he was born.