John Castillo’s ‘Awd Isaac’

by

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John Castillo (1792–1845) is remarkable as the author of the poem ‘Awd Isaac’, written around 1823 for circulation among friends in his Cleveland dialect community. Previously their appetite for verse in a familiar tongue had to be satisfied by the few individual items frequently republished in pamphlets as Specimens of the Yorkshire Dialect. Demand was apparently sufficient to stimulate many editions of ‘Awd Isaac’, usually unattributed, after the first pirated edition in 1832. Castillo was not particularly early among the poets from the labouring class, but he was unusual in continuing to rely for his livelihood on his trade as a journeyman stonemason. Perhaps uniquely for a poet in his own native dialect he remained inside his class and community.1 His poems in dialect were not the majority of his poems, but they secured his reputation with, and limited his appeal to, readers and publishers in Yorkshire.

Castillo: a brief biography

Cleveland was formerly the north eastern corner of Yorkshire, bounded by the southern watershed of the River Esk. Castillo’s mother Hannah was from Lealholm in the Esk valley, and his father Patrick worked there as a papermaker. Although there is no official record of John’s birth, there are no grounds to doubt his belief that ‘I was born at … Rathfarnum … about

1 One comprehensive source for the history of labouring class poets is John Goodridge, Eighteenth Century English Labouring Class Poets (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003). Without seeking here to draw any inference, it can be observed that Castillo had neither sponsors nor income from his compositions to tempt him away from his trade. In that, he can be distinguished from his predecessors Stephen Duck and Bloomfield, for example. F. W. Moorman, Yorkshire Dialect Poems, 1673–1915, and Traditional Poems, compiled with an Historical Introduction (London: Sigwic and Jackson, 1916), writes that up to the end of the eighteenth century Yorkshire dialect poets had been either educated men or professional writers, but his samples are few. The authors of the dialect songs and ballads he lists are mainly unknown, but a similar bias to authors of non-labouring classes is noticeable among the ballads from Tyneside and Durham (John Bell, Rhymes of the Northern Bards (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bell, 1812)). For example, Thomas Thompson, the Geordie songwriter, was the educated son of an officer; John Shield, a gentleman grocer; and Henry Robson was a printer. At the turn of the century the two most frequently published Yorkshire dialect poets were the Rev. Thomas Browne and David Lewis. Browne was the son of the vicar of Lastingham just south of Cleveland, and became a teacher and cleric. Lewis, although self-taught and starting life as a gardener, later became a schoolmaster. Neither, in contrast to Castillo, both began and remained dialect poet insiders.

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the year 1792. Castillo spent his childhood years in Lealholm and the Esk valley, returning frequently as an adult especially when frozen out of his trade. The area was the setting and material for many of his poems, and the source of his epithet ‘The Bard of the Dales’.

His family name appears in church registers as variations of ‘Costellow’, always with the first ‘o’. The name ‘Castillo’ in print first appears in Nelson’s 1832 anthology, and shortly afterwards as ‘John Castillo’ in a review of his poems in a local Whitby journal article of 1833. The poet’s surname has no Irish connotation; ‘Costello’ is in Matheson’s list of Irish surnames, but not ‘Castillo’, and O’Donoghue’s 1912 catalogue of Irish poets includes only this Castillo, but several surname variants of ‘Costello’.

When Patrick disappeared around 1805, Castillo was ‘taken from school, and turned out into the world’. He was in service until May 1814, the last two years in Lincolnshire, and then indentured himself as a mason’s apprentice. Dating on manuscript poems shows he worked as a journeyman mason in Leeds, Liverpool, and Bishop Auckland for significant periods, and other poems show he was ‘on the tramp’ in Penrith, London, and Hull. After 1834 he seems to have settled in and around Lealholm, living by his craft whilst preaching as an itinerant Wesleyan, formally joining the Pickering circuit in 1838. His working life was marked by ill-health, probably the asthma that is recorded as the cause of his death on 16 April 1845.

By some accounts Castillo was illiterate for much of his life. Sometime around 1838 the poet dictated ‘Awd Isaac’ to a literate youth in the farmhouse where he was working. The inference that he couldn’t write was first documented sixty years after the event by Smith, then repeated uncritically by Quinlan, among others.

Castillo the poet

Castillo’s earliest surviving poem, dated 1819, records his traumatic separation from the Roman Catholic faith and community. That competent,
workmanlike, but emotionally descriptive poem ‘Address to my Roman Brethren’ seems to be the product of a practised author, but no earlier work survives.9 The creative period to 1833 was markedly less moralistic than his later poems were to become, often humorous and experimental in form and theme. After the printing in 1832 and 1833 of pirated versions of his poems, an article and critique in a Whitby journal in 1833 established his identity as a poet, and author of ‘Awd Isaac’. Despite its popularity it is the only poem in dialect that can be dated to this period.

The period 1834 to 1837 is notable for the number of Castillo’s nature poems, often based on specific localities around his home, usually with some religious content but with a lighter touch. After a significant health crisis in the winter of 1837–1838, Castillo’s output became deeply religious and proselytizing. He adopts a rigid stance on the contemporary political issues, Russell’s education reforms and the Pusey controversy featuring in several poems. His ‘Life’ seems to have been started in this period, but there is a marked false ending at 1838, before it continues in a more hurried and abbreviated style up to 1843.10 Tweddell and Quinlan perceived in it symptoms of mental anguish and illness, but the spiritual conflicts, the visions and nightmares are Bunyanesque, more apocryphal than real.11

Anthologies of Castillo’s prose and poems first appeared in similar editions in 1843 and 1850. Two further editions in 1858 and 1902 added many more items. The first three were printed in Yorkshire, where the publisher and printer of the 1902 edition originated before relocating to Windermere. Several unpublished works survive in the poet’s one surviving copybook, and as individual manuscripts; a few more items have been referred to by earlier researchers and are now known only by title. In total, 167 individual works have been identified, nine in prose, including the 9,000 words of Castillo’s ‘Life’. Only eleven are in dialect, but their length increases the percentage of dialect from seven percent of items to seventeen percent of pages in the 1858 anthology. Despite that, Castillo has been regarded as a dialect poet by dint of his poems’ place in the dialect literature.12 That classification as both ‘dialect’, and ‘Yorkshire’ perhaps explains his limited appeal to publishers; the 1850 anthology and four

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9 This is the title of the poem in Castillo’s ‘Life’ from the 1858 edition, but a manuscript copy dated 21 March 1819 survives among the Humble manuscripts in the archives of the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society, titled ‘Church of Rome’.
10 ‘A Few Links in the Chain of the Life of John Castillo’. Internal evidence supports its first composition in late 1837 or early 1838.
12 Walter W. Skeat and J. H. Nodal, eds., A Bibliographical List of the Works that have been published or are known to exist in MS, illustrative of the various dialects of English (London: Trubner, 1877) on ‘Jacob’s Ladder’: ‘The author … used Dialect at all times’.
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pamphlet editions are the only ones to bear a joint imprint of a London publisher.

Beyond that localized, dialect, community Castillo continues to receive academic attention. Mary Ashraf groups him with Clare in the last flourish of ‘old rural poets’ who ‘communicated or participated in the “song” in nature’. Unfortunately the evidence is that he was neither a peasant nor a pastoral poet by employment or theme, and it is hard to discern the song she heard. It is much easier to agree when Ashraf excludes Castillo from her anthology *Political Verse and Song* (1975), but includes Clare; despite his years ‘on the tramp’ Castillo seems politically unengaged.

By employment and origin Castillo might be classified as a working-class poet, but that term has a broad compass and is heavy with connotations. Ashraf excludes such skilled craftsmen: ‘No proletarians these … a special kind of ancient labour aristocracy monopolizing an all-important art’. Vicinus in *The Industrial Muse* of 1974 uses a very specific factory system categorization from which Castillo is excluded as a journeyman. Only Goodridge and his group create a category of ‘labouring class poets’, broad enough to embrace Castillo.

Castillo’s account of his motivations was written late in life, in his 1843 ‘Preface’ and his 1858 ‘Life’. As a youth he was ‘very fond of songs … making new ones on the various occurrences in the neighbourhood’. Subsequently his verse contained a moral and a spiritual thought: to ‘exhibit the workings of grace in the heart, its effects on the life, and the glorious futurity to which it conducts its possessor’. It is those religious themes which have caused his poems to be praised for the ‘excellent moral which they invariably contain’, but also condemned as contentious, moralistic and proselytizing.

His claim that some poems ‘are of an experimental cast’ might refer to experiments in religious thought rather than to experiments with form and theme, which are certainly now easier to identify. His range is local, natural, and topical; his form comprises narrative and dialogue prose as well as verse; his models include Bunyan, Tannahill, and Edward Young. Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* (1770) may have stimulated Castillo’s ‘Lealholm Bridge’, as it did Clare’s *Helpstone* (written between 1809 and

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Robert Bridge 437

1813, and first published in 1820). In Castillo’s ‘Last job of an old tramp’ there is an analogy of theme and form with Robert Bloomfield’s The Widow, to her Hour-Glass (1803). ‘Awd Isaac’ has been considered to be based on Burns’s ‘Holy Willie’s Prayer’, but Castillo’s sympathy for his character replaces Burns’s satire.

Some poems he describes as being the result of a challenge: in Penrith in May 1826, ‘The Two Hours Challenge set by my shop-mates’, and in London in December that year, ‘The Stone: composed to gratify a Scottish Rhymer, and brother mason’. One particularly emphasizes both his humour and innovative talent: ‘Random Speculation on the Railway System’, a satirical poem on the railway mania written in October 1833, is among the earliest examples of its genre.

Awd Isaac, a biography

The first reference to a real existence—‘Old Isaac Hobb, who used to live near Glaisdale Chapel, is supposed to have been the lay figure’—is found in Tweddel’s edition of 1878. He gives no source of his information, but he is known to have visited Lealholm occasionally, and may recount reasonably accurate information. Castillo resists attempts at identification in the closing stanzas of the poem: despite being accused of creating a fictional character he retorts his readers would benefit from hearing the ‘sum an’ substance ov his creed … Bud whoor he liv’d, or whoor he deed, Tis left te guess’.

Church registers show an Isaac Hobb baptized in Glaisdale on 3 May 1748, and buried in Whitby on 30 June 1824, aged seventy-six. Nothing more can be gleaned from Castillo or the historical record, but this stanza from the poem has been interpreted as a clue that Isaac was a coal getter:

It's noo neen yeear, an’ gaain i'ten,
Sin' Ah at t'bark wood joined sum men,
'Twur theer Ah fell an' leam'd me-sen,
I' spite o' care;
Ah wur foorc'd te gie up theer an' then
An' woark ne mare.

17 In Castillo’s copybook ‘Lealholm Bridge’ is dated 1820 when he was bound as an apprentice in rural Cleveland. If the date is accurate it seems unlikely that Helpstone was his model, rather than Goldsmith, but Castillo was in service somewhere in Lincolnshire between 1811 and 1813, and the possibility that he heard Clare’s poem is slight but intriguing.

18 See Willi Klein, Der Dialekt Von Stokesley In Yorkshire, North Riding, etc. (Berlin: Meyer & Muller, 1912).

19 Unpublished manuscript in the copybook, and as a single loose manuscript item, among the Humble manuscripts in the Archives of the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society. In a personal email communication, the National Railway Museum confirm they have no earlier work of a similar nature.

Gill reviews coal-getting activity in the area around the turn of the nineteenth century, and Young has a more specific date: ‘A new coal work ... was lately wrought at the upper part of Glazedale’. Old maps show coal pits at nearby Birk Wath, probably the ‘bark wood’ of the poem. Young’s ‘lately wrought’ and Isaac’s injury ‘neen yeear, an’ gaain i’ten’ years ago suggest Isaac’s encounter with the poet took place around 1823.

‘Awd Isaac’: date, dialect, attribution, publishers, reception

The poem’s first part is a narrative account of Isaac’s life, as told to the poet in an encounter as he returned home from work, and ending as they parted that evening:

‘Ah beean i’ t’ way noo seeaven yeear,’
An’ az he spak, a briny teear
Ran doon his cheeks az crystal cleear,
Fra’ owther ee;
‘Thenk God, Ah feeal whahl Ah sit heer,
’Tis weel wi’ me.

Bud neet is cummin on ameean,
An’t leaks az if ’twur boon te reean,
Or else mah stoory’s nut hawf deean,
’At Ah’v te tell;
Bud mebby we may meeat ageean,
Till then, farewell!’

Its composition date is unlikely to have been before 1819, the date on Castillo’s first surviving poem. A subheading ‘For 1826’ on the 1833 Rodgers edition suggests the latest date. As Isaac Hobb’s biography implies a date around 1823, that is probably a secure date for the composition. The Nelson anthology of 1832, and pamphlet and chapbook editions from 1833 to 1890, featured only this first part, and it is likely that the poem’s survival in the oral tradition recounted by Moorman in 1916 refers to this, and not the full poem.

In its last published form (in 1858 and 1902), ‘Awd Isaac’ is a poem of 120 stanzas, with the second and third parts only appearing in the anthologies. Part two starts with a reference to Isaac’s death, including this stanza later chosen for Castillo’s gravestone:

Bud noo his een’s geean dim I’ death,
Neea mare a pilgrim here on eearth,

21 Mike C. Gill, ‘The North Yorkshire Moors Coalfields (Yorkshire’s Other Forgotten Coalfields)’, Mining History: The Bulletin of the Peak District Mines Historical Society, 17 (2010), published online at www.pdmhs.com; George Young, A History of Whitby and Streoneshalh Abbey, with a statistical survey of the vicinity to the distance of twenty-five miles, 2 vols (Whitby: Clark and Medd, 1817), p. 818.

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His sowl flits fra’ her shell beneeath,
    Te reeals o’ day;
Whoor carpin care, an’ pain, an’ deeth,
    Are deean away.

The poet has Isaac referring to the publication of the first part: ‘Ah varry leeatly gat a hint, They’d put oor stoory into prent’, and so dates it to a period after 1832 or early 1833. Other references in the poem place the composition rather later. ‘Like Evan’s Pills, or Rowland’s Lotion Saain’d by t’King…’ is obviously before Victoria’s accession in 1837. There are advertisements for Evan’s Pills in local papers in 1833 and 1834. ‘Rowlands’ seems to be a mistake for ‘Gowlands’, whose lotion appears to have been marketed throughout Castillo’s later life. The references to turmoil in Parliament might reflect events leading up to the January 1835 general election, and suggest a date between then and 1837.

There is an entirely different tone to the last part of the poem, ‘His Dying Advice’. It reads as a sermon on sin and redemption, typical of Castillo’s later output. Because of this different, serious character, less personal to the subject and his story, this part is stylistically from Castillo’s later itinerant preaching period, and probably 1841–1843.

The history of English dialect literature has been extensively reviewed by Burton, but can be summarized here briefly. Dialect speech has long been considered as barbaric and uncouth, the product of, and supportive of, class distinctions. Dialect rhymes carried that connotation, considered and demeaned as mere vehicles for unfamiliar, perhaps obsolete, words and sayings. Dialect poets were dismissed as incapable of writing in standard English, their reputation relying only on the strangeness of their idiom. An emerging contrary view valued dialect poems as a ‘freeze-frame’ picture of a living community, its vocabulary and idiom having intrinsic poetic worth. Burton highlights that this perception of works in English dialects did not apply to those in a Scottish vernacular, which were seen as attractively foreign, written in a language, rather than a debased dialect.

Castillo must have been aware of the controversy because he ‘deems it necessary to say a few words’ in his preface in the 1843 anthology. The ‘peculiarities of expression and pronunciation … the native language of the common inhabitants [have] a point and power in them, which … convey to a particular class of persons some important truths’; although the dialect may appear rude and barbaric, ‘what is wanting in polish, will … be more...
than compensated by force and vigour. Truth is truth—however humble the habiliments in which it is dressed’.

Among the few published works in dialect English before ‘Awd Isaac’, Burton lists eight published poets, and notes a concentration of glosses, in the northern counties before 1820. Although several editions of *Specimens of the Yorkshire Dialect* were issued after 1808, they contained the same few items by J. Reed, the Rev. T. Browne, David Lewis, and others; and many of those were in the dialect of Cleveland. None contained George Meriton’s 1697 Dialogues, but Reed’s character Margery Moorput came from Great Ayton in Cleveland, only a few miles from Meriton’s birthplace. Browne’s childhood home adjoined Cleveland, and the horse he characterized in ‘Awd Daisy’ carried coal from the moor on which Isaac Hobb dug his pit. Given the scarcity of items published in any of the Yorkshire dialects, it is probable that only the *Specimens* circulated in Castillo’s within his remote rural Cleveland community. They provided Castillo’s dialect models, their scarcity created a demand, and they formed the literary context into which ‘Awd Isaac’ was received.

In September 1833 the *Whitby Repository and Monthly Miscellany* printed the first in a series of monthly articles on Castillo and his poems. It refers to ‘Oad Isaac’ as ‘the only one ... (of his poems) ... in print’. That form of title is not used by Nelson in the 1832 edition, and that also contains Castillo’s ‘Old Sam’. The *Whitby Repository and Monthly Miscellany* quotation therefore suggests that the writer was unaware of the Nelson edition, and that the Rodgers 1833 edition had already appeared. Only twenty-one stanzas from the poem were printed, but the article provided the unequivocal attribution that Castillo was denied by Rodgers. Despite that accreditation, Castillo was not acknowledged as the creator of ‘Awd Isaac’ in subsequent pamphlet and chapbook editions throughout the nineteenth century. Some library catalogues perpetuate this lack of attribution, perhaps being misled by the various forms of title: ‘Isaac Telltruth’; ‘Oad’, ‘Awd’, and ‘Aud Isaac’.

Twenty-three editions of the poem have so far been identified, including one that has been described by an earlier researcher, but has not been located. The 1858, 1878, and 1902 versions are the only ones to contain seventy-seven stanzas in part one; others contain sixty-seven, seventy-four, or seventy-five. No two editions are identical, but they can be grouped by similarities of wording and dialect orthography, and by demonstrable relationships between publishers and printers.

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27 In ‘Awd Daisy’ the line ‘Ne Mair thoo’ll bring me cooals fra’ Blakay Brow’ refers to pits at Blakey Head, near the pits at Birk Wath.
28 See 1833.9 in the Bibliography.
Editors make different choices of wording and dialect spellings, such as those that occur in the heading and the first few stanzas:

- the title either uses ‘Isaac Telltruth’ or ‘Old Isaac’ where old might be spelt ‘oad’, ‘aud’, or ‘awd’;
- ‘home’ is given in two main dialect variants, ‘yam’ and ‘heim’;

Another significant editorial choice is in the treatment of the definite article reduction, where ‘the’ is reduced in speech to ‘t’ or ‘th’. In print the missing vowel is usually represented by an apostrophe, appearing before or after the ‘t’ or ‘th’, sometimes separated from the following noun by a space. For example, ‘the farm’ can be ‘t’farm’, ‘t’ farm’, ‘tfarm’, or ‘thfarm’.

Analysis reveals that editions can be grouped as follows by the similarity of the choices made:

- 1832, 1837, 1844, 1890 use ‘yam’ for ‘home’, and ‘it mud’ for ‘in the mud’;
- 1833.6, 1833.9, 1834, 1840.1, 1846 (sometimes with 1852) share a misspelling;
- 1843, 1850, 1878 use ‘awd’;
- 1855.1, 1855.2, 1860.1, 1860.2, 1880, 1885 use ‘aud’;
- 1876, 1876, 1902 share a unique subtitle.

(The dates are the short reference for each edition given in the Bibliography, and sample distinguishing characteristics are shown for illustration.) There are surprises in this analysis: the Lumley family’s two editions printed in Kirby Moorside in 1837 and 1850 are dissimilar, as are the 1846 and 1852 Gill editions printed in Easingwold.

Whitby in 1830 had at least three publishing houses, two of them producing monthly journals. After Rodgers printed an unauthorized edition in 1833, Castillo perhaps turned to a competing publisher to prove his authorship of ‘Awd Isaac’. Kirby printed several of his poems and a critical review in his journal, the Whitby Repository and Monthly Miscellany. Subsequently, Horne and Richardson published Castillo’s anthology in 1843, and Castillo’s niece was later to recall that ‘old Mr Horne was a great friend to my mother in the way of selling her brother’s books’.29

In Stokesley William Fenwick Pratt, the last of his ilk in a business started before 1811, published the 1858 edition. His business was acquired after 1871 by Johnson and Scotson, but their partnership was dissolved in 1876, at the same time as the partially completed 1876 (Johnson) edition appeared. Scotson continued the business in the town, and Anthony Wardle Johnson

29 Letter to Whitby Gazette, 6 November 1903.
set up in Windermere, where he published the successor to 1858 and 1876 in 1902. These 1858, 1876, and 1902 editions are orthographically similar. Tweddell trained as a printer in Stokesley before setting up on his own around 1843, later producing his 1872 and 1878 volumes. William Burnett was born in the town in 1840, and had an association with the Pratt printing family. By 1862 he was a compositor and reporter, and in 1871 a newspaper editor and printer in Middlesbrough, where he published ‘Awd Isaac’ in his 1885 edition.

Yorkshire J S Publishing (or ‘Joint Stock’) are most famous for their series of chapbooks for children, many in association with Webb, Millington (‘WM’), for example their Penny Pictorial Library. Otley as a printing and publishing location links several versions that also use similar forms of ‘Awd Isaac’ and the phrase ‘facts and similitudes’. This phrase occurs in Gill (1846 and 1852), who had a business relationship with WM: they were joint publishers of Lucy Gray’s Life and Adventures of Poor Puss (c. 1840–1850). Despite that business relationship, the Gill and WM editions are orthographically different. Empson printed WM’s 1855 edition in Beverley where Kemp had printed the 1844 pamphlet. No business connection between Kemp and Empson has been traced, and their editions are not orthographically related. In addition to these five connected editions, a sixth printed in York (1855, Theobald), is almost identical to 1855 (WM), but no business relationship has been traced between the publishers or the printers. Despite these confirmed business relationships, their impact on published editions appears peripheral; on the whole, no grouping factor derived from them is as clear and powerful as that based on textual difference.

Nelson (in the preface to the 1832 edition) claims to have heard Castillo recite his poem in a farm where the family ‘master, mistress, offspring, and dependants amounting to about half a score, surrounded the same kitchen fire-side’. The following morning he ‘secured the whole by noon’. This account is, first, evidence that Castillo originally wrote to entertain by recitation, in domestic settings such as the one he vividly illustrates in ‘Lucky Dream’. Secondly, it suggests that Nelson had borrowed a written copy, as it seems unlikely that he could recall sixty-seven stanzas on first hearing, and with demonstrable accuracy. This suggests the manner in which Castillo’s poems were originally circulated, supporting his claim in the preface to the 1843 edition that his poems ‘were frequently perused by his friends long before he had thoughts of publishing them’. Nelson’s preface says he printed the poem to rescue it from the ‘grave of oblivion’, having noted its positive effects on the soul, and had met several requests for manuscript copies.

\[30\] John Castillo, Awd Isaac, The Steeple Chase, and other Poems with a glossary of the Yorkshire Dialect (Whitby: Horne & Richardson, 1843), p.44.
The article in the *Whitby Repository and Monthly Miscellany* starts with a commentary on contemporary attitudes to untutored poets, before turning to a critique of Castillo. The poet lacks learning, but has preserved an unsophisticated, enlivening, spirit from the harmful effects of hard labour; his genius is in preventing ‘the iron which enters the soul from rusting it’. ‘Oad Isaac’ is engaging, pious and homely, and ‘entitles its author to the designation of the Yorkshire Burns’. Its poetry is in the language of natural emotion; simple passages that would be laughable if not for their beauty; verses of great power and some sublime lines. However, the poem’s defect is that ‘it becomes tedious from its prolixity, the old man too garrulous’. Castillo, it seems, resented the comments on his lack of education. In an unpublished poem ‘The Apology’, dated 1836, he said that although ‘[t]he learned may sing of high life’s fluctuations’, for him ‘[t]he stint of the hours between sleeping and toiling, / To narrower limits my circuit confine’.

‘Awd Isaac’ was printed nine times before Newsam and Holland’s compendium *The Poets of Yorkshire* (1845), and Holland reviewed the 1843 anthology in that work, dismissing it as ‘a rough, home-spun affair’. Over 180 poets are included, but Castillo is the only one identified as ‘one of those uneducated men whom the fame of Burns, Bloomfield, Clare, and Tannahill has called into the field of poetry’. Five more editions appeared before a contributor to the *Yorkshire Gazette* in 1855 described Castillo as ‘[t]he third of East Yorkshire bards, if bard he may be called’. Despite ‘the critic of taste’ finding ‘little to admire’, thousands of copies have ‘circulated among the rural population, whom he doubtless most wished to please’.

The Rev. Gideon Smales offered a critique from a religious perspective. The dialect poems of Castillo, ‘The Bard of the Dales, or the Yorkshire Burns’, whose style ‘Awd Isaac’ resembles, are popular and widely read. Printed on handbills, they are extensively sold at the markets and fairs. ‘The excellent moral which they invariably contain, cannot fail to leave some good result on the minds and conduct of the rural population’. In the context of this comment on the distribution of ‘handbills’ it is noticeable that editions of *Specimens* containing ‘Awd Isaac’ invariably quote that name on the cover, presumably as a marketing device.

Skeat and Nodal list the following editions of ‘Awd Isaac’ in their bibliography: 1832 (shown incorrectly as 1831), 1844, 1846, 1850, 1855.1 (shown as undated), 1855.2, and 1858. *The English Dialect Dictionary* later added the 1878 and 1885 editions to this list.

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32 Anonymous review in the *Yorkshire Gazette* for 3 November 1855 of F. K. Robinson’s *Glossary of Yorkshire Words and Phrases* (1855).
33 Smales, *Whitby Authors*, p. 93.
An anonymous contributor to *Berrow’s Worcester Journal* reviewed Tweddell’s 1878 edition. According to the reviewer, Castillo’s works would have no value beyond his friends and neighbours were it not for dialectologists such as Buonaparte and Ellis. The poems have ‘much rugged earnestness’, but are only likely to be preserved by the philological student. Burnett illustrates that contrast of appeal when he confesses to reprinting ‘Awd Isaac’ for entirely mercenary reasons and not because of Castillo’s ‘literary achievements’. Hedamns Castillo for lack of restraint in moralizing, a mind barren of faculty, deluded by a morose creed, and unadorned by power or vivacity; ridiculously styled by some as the Cleveland Burns, whose style he matched only in form; the people of the Dales were ‘densely ignorant and superstitious’, and regarded as prodigy and oracle anyone who might ‘jingle rhymes together in their own uncouth tongue’. Burnett also damns Castillo for naming local places and people ‘in all the uncouthness of the local tongue’ in order to increase sales; his constant moral and theme, all ‘tracks trend to the same isolated point … on a solitary and barren moor’.

Brierley in 1912 claimed Castillo as ‘A Bard of Higher Eskdale’, who although engaged in arduous physical labour, wrote poems that show wonderful power, a close observation, and true poetic feeling. Moorman in 1916 acknowledged that a comparison with Burns or Barnes failed because Castillo was known only ‘among the peasants of the Cleveland dales’; but among them ‘many a farmer and farm-labourer still living knows much of the poem by heart’. That knowledge of Castillo and ‘Awd Isaac’ appears to have survived to 1963 when Cowley thought ‘For many of the older generation John Castillo’s is still a name of importance’. For those students of the Yorkshire dialects like Cowley, Castillo’s poems will probably always provide material for study. Otherwise, Castillo is chiefly remembered in his home area where his carvings survive, and his dialect poems are valued as more than a literary curiosity.

**Castillo’s autograph**

Castillo’s autograph can be firmly established from a letter dated 11 January 1844, the original of which survives in the archives of the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society (Fig. 1). It can also be found in photocopy in various other libraries. The veracity of this dating is supported by another letter of the same date, containing much of the same information, sent to John Storr in Sinnington, and printed in the 1858 volume *Jacob’s Ladder, A Sermon*. In the copybook Castillo’s hand is variable, and in addition he

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employs a range of ornate lettering, perhaps symbolic of his trade as a mason. Figure 1 contains the ending of this letter, and a copybook page showing his usual style of signing his poems. The sample of the shorthand, which he seems to have been learning around 1838, is in Harding’s modifications to Taylor’s 1786 alphabet.38

**Bakewell**

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APPENDIX

A Bibliography of Editions

Each edition in the following list starts with the short reference used above in the remarks on orthography. Full bibliographic details are given including the publisher and printer, where known. Many of these items are scarce, known only as single copies, so details of location are also provided. Most are already catalogued (in COPAC, for example) but under headings dictated by the variable spellings of the poem’s title, and usually not attributed to Castillo. Both Skeat and Wright appended a bibliography of Castillo’s editions. Skeat has several of the unattributed pamphlet editions but omits the 1843 anthology; Wright has an edition in 1845 not mentioned anywhere else and not located. No attempt has been made here to insert the poet’s name as author where the edition does not already carry his name, but each of these unattributed items have been verified as being Castillo’s ‘Awd Isaac’.

1832

John Nelson, ed., A specimen of the Bilsdale dialect; or, two poems on Isaac Telltruth and Sammy Standfast (Northallerton, 1832)

Title page: ‘Printed at the office of J Metcalfe’
Colophon: ‘Metcalfe, Typ., Northallerton’
York Minster Library Hailstone Collection

This Nelson edition, here a rebound copy without the original cover, is often incorrectly referred to and catalogued as by Castillo, and also appears as 1831, even though its Preface is dated May 1832. Local directories show Metcalfe operating as booksellers and printers in 1829 and 1834, and a John Metcalfe, printer, was resident in the town in 1841.

It is an anthology of four items:

a. the first has a running title Bilsdale Dialect and subtitle A Tale related by Isaac Telltruth, an old Protestant, connected with a few particular remarks on some leading traits in the history of his eventful life. There is an attribution under the title ‘By Castillo’, and this is the first part of ‘Awd Isaac’ with only sixty-seven of the seventy-seven stanzas printed in 1858.

b. The second item, billed on the title page as Sammy Standfast, is titled Old Sammy; or, the effects of the Gospel, and is given the running title The Conversion of Old Sammy. Nelson nowhere credits the author, but Castillo’s manuscript copybook has this poem, dated January 1823, and Nelson’s version is almost the same. It is correctly attributed in 1833.

c. The Negro’s Complaint is an anti-slavery poem by William Cowper (1788).

d. The Three Warnings is by Mrs Hester Lynch Thrale (1766).

Nelson ascribed the dialect to Bilsdale to fit his assumption that Castillo was local to the place he first heard the poem recited. The circuits he served as an itinerant Methodist preacher from 1820 have been identified, and indicate that Bilsdale might have been visited by him sometime in 1831 or early in 1832. During that period

39 E.g. Skeat and Nodal, Bibliographical List; and Wright, English Dialect Dictionary.
Castillo may have been employed there as a mason, or visiting en route to and fro work elsewhere in England. The location of the fireplace beside which Nelson heard Castillo recite can be identified: Petty, detailing the missionary travels of the Primitive Methodist William Clowes, says he visited Weathercote in Bilsdale in 1820. That farm presumably became a preaching-house in the dale, and is therefore likely to have been the one Nelson later had reason to visit. It also lies close to one possible route from Lealholm to the west. The Preface has literary merits in its picture of an evening in the farmhouse, but Nelson only records Castillo’s appearance, ‘homely, his hand was hard and coarse’, and not his first name, trade, home, or circumstances.

1833.6
Oad Isaac; A Poem; composed of Facts and Similitudes For 1826 (Whitby, 1833)
Title page: ‘Printed by R Rodgers, Old Market Place.’
Colophon: ‘R. Rodgers, Printer, Whitby.’
Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society’s archives

There is no printed attribution, but this copy has ‘Written by John Castillo a stonemason’ in his handwriting on the title page. The edition is placed in this sequence to make sense of the reference in W (1833.9) to Oad Isaac as the only poem in print. The subhead ‘For 1826’ on the title page is important evidence in dating the poem, although not now thought to be the year of composition. Published as a pamphlet, this copy is bound with other pamphlets, and has lost its original covers. ‘Facts and Similitudes’ occurs here for the first time in the title. Two pencilled editorial marks within the poem are in the style of the edits in the manuscript copybook, and possibly by Castillo himself. In the first, a dialect equivalent is inserted for the phrase “The Church in Danger!” (quotation marks as in the text). The second is a mere spelling error. Oddly, the dialect reduction ruins the rhythm of the line; although most stanzas have a pair of short four-beat lines, here the matching line has five, and the standard English original appears to be what the poet intended.

1833.9
Title page: ‘Printed and published by R. Kirby, Bookseller, Bridge-Street.’
York Minster Library

This is a bound volume of reprints of editions of the monthly journal for 1833. The author of this article discusses the question whether classical knowledge ‘be advantageous or not to native literature’ in the context of two local poets—Richard Addison and John Castillo. ‘Oad Isaac’ is extensively quoted—‘the only one … (of his poems) … in print’. This article is the first public acknowledgement of Castillo as the author of ‘Awd Isaac’ and the first recognition and critical evaluation of Castillo as a poet. Because he probably contributed his works in manuscript, the

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printed versions here might be considered the ‘authorized versions’ rather than those appearing later in the 1843 anthology, where the title ‘Oad Isaac’ first becomes ‘Awd Isaac’.

The Author ‘W’ has not been traced, but is not any of the journal’s editors named at the time. One possibility is a regular contributor, John Watkins, who later became the biographer and son-in-law of Ebenezer Elliott, the ‘Corn Law Rhymers’. These monthly journals from September to December in the same volume print several more of Castillo’s poems, including ‘Old Sam’ in October (on p. 298), so providing an attribution denied by Nelson in his 1832 edition.

1834

Oad Isaac, a Poem, composed of Facts and Similitudes in the Yorkshire Dialect
(Whitby, 1834)
Title page: ‘Printed by R Rodgers, Old Market Place.’
Colophon: ‘R. Rodgers, Printer, Whitby.’
British Library

This is a different typesetting from the 1833 edition by the same publisher, introduces ‘Yorkshire Dialect’ into the poem’s title for the first time, and drops ‘For 1826’. This is the edition that Burton quotes, but fails to attribute to Castillo. 42

1837

A Specimen of the Bilsdale Dialect; In the History of Isaac Tell-Truth
(Kirbymoorside 1837)
Cover has ‘Printed & sold by J. Lumley.’
Title page: ‘Sold by J. Lumley.’
Colophon ‘Printed by J. Lumley, Kirby-moorside.’
York Minster Library, Hailstone Collection

Lumley is alone in repeating the use of ‘Bilsdale Dialect’ from the Nelson edition, but otherwise this edition differs from Nelson in typesetting, dialect spelling, and punctuation. Lumley was the father of W T Lumley, who published the 1850 anthology.

1840-1

Oad Isaac, a poem, composed of facts and similitudes, in the Yorkshire dialect
(Scarborough, no date)
Title page has ‘Reprinted by J. Grice, 78, Newbro’.
Date of 1840 implied from the printer’s history.
York Minster Library, Hailstone Collection

This is a 21 pp 15 cm pamphlet, bound as an individual item without its original wrappers. Grice seems to have established his business in 1836. He is listed in premises at 78 Newbro’ Street in the 1840 trade directory and the 1841 census, but 79 Newbro’ (perhaps merely a renumbering of premises) in 1846 and subsequently. So there is a high probability that this edition was printed between 1836 and 1845, hence catalogued here as 1840. The many similarities with the ‘Oad Isaac’ versions in 1833 and 1834 (Rodgers, Whitby), suggest they were the ones being ‘reprinted’, rather than Lumley’s 1837 edition which is significantly different.

42 Complete Poems of William Barnes, p.lxxi.

This item has not been located, but is mentioned in the manuscripts of Arthur Humble in the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society archives. According to that note, he was lent this edition by Major Fairfax-Blakeborough around 1968: ‘This 12mo 32pp pamphlet lists books published by Lumley including *Life and Journals of J Nelson*. Nelson wrote introduction to 1831 specimen of the Bilsdale Dialect J Metcalfe Northallerton’.

The use of ‘corrected’ in the title probably refers to the 1837 edition published by Lumley, the attribution to Castillo and omission of a reference to the Bilsdale dialect.

Castillo, John. 1843. *Awd Isaac, The Steeple Chase, and other Poems with a glossary of the Yorkshire Dialect* (Whitby: Horne & Richardson)

Title page: ‘Published by Horne & Richardson.’
Colophon: ‘Whitby: Printed by Horne and Richardson’.

Four different digitized copies are available online; from the libraries of the Universities of California and Princeton, the Bodleian Library, and the British Museum. Typographical errors indicate there were at least two print-runs. This is the first published edition in Castillo’s name, and his signed Preface indicates he was involved in its preparation, although there is no evidence he ever saw the printed volume. Smales claimed that this edition was edited by John Hodgson, but no other evidence has been traced. In Wright but not Skeat.

* A Specimen of the Yorkshire Dialect in *The History of Awd Isaac* (Beverley, 1844)

Title page: ‘Printed and Sold by J. Kemp, Market Place.’
Colophon: ‘J. Kemp, Printer, Market-Pace, Beverley.’
University of Leeds Brotherton Special Collection, Sheppard Pamphlets.

The author’s name is handwritten on the cover of both this copy and another in the City of Leeds Library. This edition is included in Skeat.

* Oad Isaac; A Poem, composed of Facts and Similitudes, in the Yorkshire Dialect* (Easingwold, 1846)

Wrapper has ‘Printed by Thomas Gill, Market-Place.’
Colophon has ‘T. Gill, Printer, Easingwold.’

In City of Leeds Public Libraries, this is a rebound pamphlet, but with original pink paper wrappers. The print date is given on the Title page as 1847. Gill is noteworthy as the author of *Vallis Eboracensis, comprising the History and Antiquities of Easingwold and its neighbourhood* (1852). The 1852 version by the same printer has different dialect orthography, spellings, and layout. Skeat refers to an edition as ‘Oad Isaac, Leeds, 1846’; if that was not an error for this edition then it indicates another, untraced, edition.
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1850.1
Castillo, John. 1850. The Bard of the Dales, or Poems and Miscellaneous Pieces, Partly in the Yorkshire Dialect (Kirbymoorside: Lumley)

Title page: ‘London: John Hughes, 12 Ave Maria Lane, Kirby-Moorside: W. T. Lumley; and all booksellers.’

‘Bard of the Dales’ appears here for the first time, and is the title printed on the spine, but there is no evidence that Castillo knew of the epithet, or accepted the accolade. Apart from five pieces added at the end this is the same content and sequence as 1843, but there are significant editorial differences. There are no references to Castillo himself: the signed Preface to the 1843 edition; the ‘Life’; Castillo’s death; his burial place; his tombstone’s epitaph; all are in the 1858 edition but omitted here. Dating when this edition was first assembled is problematic: it could have been first arranged for publication at any time before or after the 1843 edition. The absence of the Preface suggests before the 1843 edition, with that edition then copying the sequence and pagination of this. One possible explanation is that Castillo arranged publication with the Lumley’s before the ‘fearful breach’ between local Methodist creeds, but then withdrew consent and arranged publication with Horne & Richardson. After he died, perhaps the Lumley’s then capitalized on their earlier investment. Both Skeat and Wright have this edition.

1852
Oad Isaac; A Poem, composed of Facts and Similitudes, in the Yorkshire Dialect (Easingwold, 1852)

Wrapper has ‘Printed and Published by T. Gill.’

Title page: ‘Printed by Thomas Gill, Market Place.’

Colophon: ‘T. Gill, Printer, Easingwold.’

This version is available online from Google Books, digitized from the original in the University of California Library. It appears to be a pamphlet, with original orange-brown wrappers. Extensive changes to the layout and detailed spellings of dialect words and punctuation show this not to be a mere reprint of Gill’s 1846 version.

1855.1
Awd Isaac; A Poem in the Yorkshire Dialect, composed of Facts and Similitudes (London, no date)

Title page: ‘Published by Webb, Millington & Co, Wine Office Court, Fleet Street, also Leeds and Otley.’

Colophon: ‘C. R. Empson, Printer, Beverley.’

Undated, probably 1855 as in Leeds library catalogue.

City of Leeds Public Libraries Local Studies Collection.

An 18 pp 16 cm pamphlet bound with its original gray wrapping. This edition has a stanza omitted probably to free the last page for the Glossary. Apart from the title font this is virtually identical to the Theobald edition below, but this has line wraps caused by narrower paper. The provisional date allocation of 1855 is justified by the printers’ history, and his relationship with Webb, Millington & Co.
1855.2
*Aud Isaac; a poem, in the Yorkshire dialect, composed of facts and similitudes* (London, 1855)
Wrapper and Title page: ‘R. Theobald, 26, Paternoster Row.’
Colophon: ‘R. Pickering, Printer, York.’
York Minster Library, Hailstone Collection
This 18 pp pamphlet has been rebound without its original wrappers. Apart from the title font this is virtually identical to the WM edition above, but this has no line wraps and wider paper. This edition is included in Skeat.

1858
Castillo, John. 1858. *The Bard of the Dales, or poems and miscellaneous pieces with a life of the author written by himself* (Stokesley: Pratt)
Title page: ‘Published by W. F. Pratt. Sold by all booksellers.’ Preceding page has recto: ‘CASTILLO’S POEMS’ (capitals as in print, centered), and ‘Copyright Edition’ in small capitals on verso.
Colophon: ‘W. F. Pratt, Printer, Market Place, Stokesley.’
Castillo’s autobiography is included here for the first time, although it may have been largely completed for the 1843 edition. There is a second preface ‘Preface to this edition’ worded as though written by the author himself, but ambiguously so. There is a discordance between the personal tone of the prefaces and ‘Life’, and the fact that the author died thirteen years before publication. The publisher inserts a notice of the death, and reproduces the tombstone, almost as an afterthought. In the 1876 and 1902 editions this new preface becomes the so-called ‘preface to the second edition’ and has led them to be catalogued as though they were the second editions.
This is a much more comprehensive collection of Castillo’s poems than the earlier editions: 125 pieces compared with sixty-six and seventy-one in 1843 and 1850 respectively. Four poems in the early editions are not in 1858, with no obvious common factor to suggest why they were excluded. The dialect orthography in this edition is inconsistent, for example the three copies of the tombstone verse are all different (on the title page, in the poem on p. 67, and in the tombstone engraving p. 350). None match the tombstone in the Pickering chapel yard. Skeat mentions this as a later and enlarged edition of the 1850 anthology.

1860.1
*Specimens of the Yorkshire dialect, in various dialogues, tales, and songs, to which is added, Aud Isaac, a poem composed of facts & similitudes* (Otley, no date)
Darlington Local History Library.
This edition is included in Skeat and Wright, although neither ascribe a date. Dated 1860 here by analogy with the other item from the same publisher. It contains twenty other dialect items and a glossary.

1860.2
*Specimens of the Yorkshire dialect, in various dialogues, tales, and songs, to which is added, Aud Isaac, a poem composed of facts & similitudes* (London, no date)
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The similar names on these two items dated 1860 show that the publisher operated under variable identities. The histories of these publishers and printers supports the date allocated in this catalogue for both items, but the sequence in this article is random.

1872
Tweddell, G. M. (ed). 1872. The Bards and Authors of Cleveland and South Durham and the Vicinage: First Series (Stokesley: Tweddell)
Title page: ‘Tweddell and Sons, Cleveland Printing and Publishing Offices, Stokesley.’

George Markham Tweddell included a memoir of Castillo in this edition (pp. 210–23), later expanded and published in 1878. Biographic details are largely copied from the 1858 ‘Life’. Forty-six stanzas of ‘Awd Isaac’ are selected and quoted as ‘the best verses’. Tweddell edits the text, but not in any way consistently with that of his subsequent 1878 edition. In Wright.

1876
Castillo, John, 1876. The Bard of the Dales, or poems and miscellaneous pieces, with a life of the author written by himself. (Stokesley: Johnson)
Title page: ‘Stokesley, A W Johnson; London: Whittaker & Co Ave Maria Lane; Warne & Co Bedford Street’

This edition has only been traced in British Library copy, and appears to be a partially completed version of the one to appear in 1902. ‘2nd ed’ appears in the catalogue listing, but is not on the title page. The 55pp total in the catalogue reflects only the last page number in this bound copy, and not the actual number of printed pages. It contains only the prefaces, ‘Life’, and the first eight stanzas of Awd Isaac, despite the ‘contents’ list being the same as 1858. Page numbering in the ‘contents’ does not match the print, where the numbering is not continuous. A ‘Publisher’s Notice to this Edition’ is repeated in the 1902 edition without a spelling mistake that occurs here, indicating perhaps that Johnson started to prepare this edition before relocating to Windermere.

1878
Tweddell, G. M. (ed). 1878. Poems in the North Yorkshire Dialect, by the late John Castillo, Journeyman Stonemason and Wesleyan Revivalist. Edited, with a memoir and glossary (Stokesley: Tweddell)
Title page: ‘Rose Cottage, Stokesley: Published by the Editor. J. Gould, Printer, Middlesbrough.’

Tweddell’s memoir adds nothing to Castillo’s own ‘Life’, but has an interesting historical reflection on the Irish diaspora, and contemporary attitudes to Catholicism. He claims to have met Castillo, and had a mutual friend, yet records
Robert Bridge

neither his appearance or character, nor any conversation regarding his personal life. The volume is dedicated to Mr Joseph Dale, Yeoman, of Danby Head: ‘to do justice to the memory of his departed friend’. Tweddell wrote to the Whitby Gazette to correct this dedication, but the correction was itself mistaken. ‘Awd Isaac’ is reproduced in its entirety, but with Tweddell’s revised dialect orthography. This is the edition used as an example of the ‘Stokesley Dialect’ by Klein in *Der Dialekt Von Stokesley In Yorkshire*, and extensively used as a source of dictionary entries by Wright.

1880

*Specimens of the Yorkshire dialect, in various dialogues, tales, and songs, to which is added, Aud Isaac, (etc)* (London, no date)


York Minster Library Hailstone Collection

This 19 cm, 29 pp chapbook—number 79 in Royal Pocket Library series—is bound as the twenty-ninth in a set of thirty. Original red covers have the series title and item number. The date allocated here is derived from the place of this pamphlet in the numbered series.43

1885


Burnett was a journalist and author who composed many dialect poems, some printed in this volume. ‘Awd Isaac’ is the only item of Castillo’s, the others items are from the *Specimens* or by Mrs G M Tweddell. Burnett’s preface to this volume includes forthrightly negative views of Castillo’s verse, that he expands elsewhere.44

In the bibliography in Wright.

1890

*Specimens of the Yorkshire dialect, in various dialogues, tales, and songs, &c, including Aud Isaac, a poem composed of facts and similitudes …* (Richmond, no date)

Title page: ‘Printed and Published by Thos. Spencer, Printer, &c. Finkle Street Corner, Market Place.’

York University Library, Special Collections.

This 23 cm, 32 pp chapbook is in a bound collection of various dates and subjects, priced 6d. It is the only version to have the same stanzas and title as Nelson’s 1832 edition. Thomas Spencer worked in Richmond as a printer from around 1861, but the first recorded publication in his own name is in 1889: *Spencer’s Illustrated Guide…* 45

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to Richmond, Its castle, and Neighbourhood. Further publications extend into the early twentieth century. Provisionally, therefore, it has been given a date of 1890, although catalogued by York University Library as 18–? (nd).

1902
Castillo, John. 1902. The Bard of the Dales, or Poems and Miscellaneous Pieces, with a Life of the Author written by himself (Windermere: Johnson)
Title page: ‘A. W. Johnson & Sons, Caxton House.’

This edition is identical in sequence to the partial 1876 Johnson edition published in Stokesley. Some catalogues refer to this as a ‘2nd edition’, but this is an error probably derived from there being a ‘Preface to the Second Edition’. There are minor editorial differences within ‘Awd Isaac’ between this edition and 1858. Quinlan refers to a 1902 edition ‘of Messrs L D Walker and Wilson, Darlington’, but this is an error in reading the wholesaler named on the cover as the publisher.