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Irish Nationalism, British Imperialism, and Popular Song

Derek B. Scott

Given my subject matter, I should begin by remarking that I am alert to the truth of John MacKenzie's comment, though over two decades old, that 'historians of imperialism and popular culture have invariably worked in isolation'.¹ It leads me to wonder why some people appear to be convinced that however fraught politically British and Irish relations have been, they have had little impact on cultural production. In recognition of the critical insights found in the work of Edward Said, I want to align myself with his belief that seeing culture in social context, including an imperial context, *enhances* rather than *diminishes* our understanding of culture and artworks.² Said thought the era of British and French imperialism was over, but had little to say about Ireland, a country that he mentions as a 'continuous colonial problem'³ for the British. Anne McClintock, writing in 1992, has admonished us about applying the term 'postcolonialism' to cases where it is 'prematurely celebratory', adding that 'Ireland may, at a pinch, be "post-colonial," but for the inhabitants of British-occupied Northern Ireland [...] there may be nothing "post" about colonialism at all'.⁴ The Irish nationalist perspective does, indeed, see the colonial problem continuing. Ron Kavana's song 'The Lament of Limerick' (1998)⁵ refers to Britain's claim to a union with Ireland as its 'last imperial stand', and the six counties are described as 'under John Bull's tyranny' in Dominic Behan's 'The Patriot Game' (1960).⁶ So, I ask why it is that anyone who wishes to explore British imperialism in the context of Irish history is so often confronted with silence and awkwardness. For example, although Robert Young states unequivocally in his widely read book *Colonial Desire* (1995) that a contemporary form of colonialism

¹ John M. MacKenzie, ed., 'Introduction', *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, Manchester, 1986, p. 9.

² See Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London, 1994, orig. pub. Chatto and Windus, 1993, xv.

³ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 87.

⁴ Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-colonialism'," in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, orig. pub. *Social Text* [Spring 1992], 1–15, pp. 291–304, at p. 294.

⁵ On the album *Irish Songs of Rebellion, Resistance and Reconciliation*, Dejavu Retro Gold, R2CD 40–73 (2001).

⁶ On the album *Easter Weekend and After: Songs of the IRA*, Topic Records 12T44 (1960).

exists in Northern Ireland, he goes on to largely ignore Ireland.⁷ It is true that the mere suggestion that Britain faces a remaining colonial problem in Northern Ireland can sound to many like the raving of an unreconstructed Marxist-Leninist revolutionary. Yet, there is no disputing that an Anglo-Scottish settler colony was established in Ulster in the early seventeenth century after the Union of Crowns.⁸ All the same, a majority in Britain would hold much more happily to the notion that religion is the cause of the Troubles, ignoring the historical and political reasons that link Catholicism to nationalism and Protestantism to British interests.

It is possible to trace Irish struggles back to the middle ages, to Brian Boru defeating the Danes at Clontarf in 1014, or to the Anglo-Norman occupation of Dublin in 1171 (after Pope Adrian IV—the only English Pope in history—gave Ireland to Henry II). Indeed, the chorus of Francie Brolly's 'The H-Block Song' (1976) reaches back that distance in time:

So I'll wear no convict's uniform
Nor meekly serve my time
That Britain might brand Ireland's fight
800 Years of crime.

However, the historical events that were looked back on with most relish or woe in the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century British imperialism were the struggles between the deposed monarch James II and his successor William of Orange. Ireland became part of a United Kingdom with Britain in January 1801, after the defeat of the United Irishmen's revolt. This never satisfied the majority of the population, and in the 1840s huge meetings were held calling for Repeal of the Union. At the same time, there were also huge meetings in England organized by Chartists demanding the working-class right to vote. The typical emphasis on nationalist struggle rather than class struggle in a colonized country comes about because an imperial power exploits the whole country for commercial gain, a situation that demands to be resolved first. The 'Irish Question' was formulated a little differently by Benjamin Disraeli, who defined it in 1844 as 'a starving population, an absentee

⁷ A book that does confront the issue is David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture*, Manchester, 1988.

⁸ The officially sanctioned colonization of Northern Ireland began in 1609, after a proclamation by James I. The settler colony was predominantly Scottish, but it makes no sense to speak of Scottish imperialism since political power resided in Westminster.

aristocracy, and an alien church, and in addition the weakest executive in the world'.⁹ John Hobson, in his seminal book *Imperialism* of 1902, answers the question 'who benefits from imperialism?' by citing those who have invested in foreign lands and who rely upon the resources of their government to minimize political risks. Hobson saw wider support being gained for imperialism through the manipulation of public opinion by the press, which he claimed was becoming more and more the 'obedient instrument' of the great financial houses.¹⁰

The divided population of Belfast existed in the nineteenth century, including the Catholic Falls Road and the Protestant Shankhill Road. The 12th of July marches commemorating the victory at the Battle of the Boyne began early in that century; previously, it was King William's birthday on 4 November that was celebrated. In Dublin, this was done by 'dressing' his statue in College Green:

his Majesty was decorated with a crown of orange lilies, intertwined with blue ribbons, and ample orange sash, and silk coat of same'.¹¹

Someone managed to tar the statue on the night of Saturday, 2 November 1805, deceiving the watchman by telling him that he was dressing William early in order not to work on Sunday. The incident prompted the satirical subject matter of the street ballad 'Billy's Birthday'.¹²

Orange gatherings began in the 1790s, and were co-ordinated after 1797 by the Grand Lodge, which declared its loyalty to the crown and its intention to 'maintain the Protestant ascendancy for which our ancestors fought'.¹³ The earliest Orange song books date from the turn of the nineteenth century and were published in Dublin.¹⁴ Orange broadside ballads were published in large numbers, from the 1830s on, in Belfast. The popular Orange song 'Dolly's Brae', for instance, was printed as a broadside by Nicholson, Belfast, in 1849.¹⁵ The 12th of July marches were the

⁹ Speech, *Hansard*, 16 February 1844. He follows the quoted statement with: 'That is the Irish Question.' The Great Starvation was to begin the next year.

¹⁰ John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, New York, 2005; orig. pub. London: James Nisbet, 1902, p. 60.

¹¹ *The Wearing of the Green Song Book*, Boston, MA, 1869, p. 61.

¹² Reproduced in *The Wearing of the Green Song Book*, pp. 61-3.

¹³ Quoted in Georges-Denis Zimmerman, *Songs of Irish Rebellion: Political Street Ballads and Rebel Songs 1780-1900*, Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1967, p. 295, from a citation in R.M. Sibbett, *Orangeism in Ireland and Throughout the Empire*, Vol. 1, London, 2nd ed. 1939, orig. pub. Belfast: Henderson, 1914, p. 354.

¹⁴ See Zimmerman, *Songs of Irish Rebellion*, pp. 298-99.

¹⁵ It is given in full in Zimmerman, *Songs of Irish Rebellion*, pp. 311-13.

catalyst for violent conflict in Belfast as early as 1813.¹⁶ In 1835, the House of Commons appointed a Select Committee to investigate the Orange Lodges and to look into causes of conflict with Catholic nationalists. It was found that clashes commonly occurred during marches, especially when tunes were used that were ‘considered peculiarly appropriated and belonging to the Protestant party’.¹⁷

Following the Act of Union, Dublin began to decline as a capital of high culture, as many of its patrons of art and music left. Irish composers, such as John Field, Michael William Balfe and Vincent Wallace sought opportunities abroad, and young nationalists called for the void to be filled with music of a distinctively Irish character.¹⁸ Cities have never been found suitable by those in search of rich nationalist pickings, so it was inevitable that the oral traditions of the countryside would become the focus for collectors. The folk revival took on a nationalist and anti-imperialist character. Harry White comments on two Irish musical preoccupations in the nineteenth century, the ‘antiquarian restoration of music as a fact of the past’, and the ‘growth of balladry as an expression of the politics of Young Ireland and of nationalism in general’.¹⁹ In 1842, the Young Irelanders founded the weekly periodical *The Nation*, in which poems written in emulation of street ballads appeared frequently.²⁰ Antiquarianism was represented by the first volume of the *Petrie Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland*, published in 1855.²¹

Later in the century, antiquarianism received fresh impetus from the founding of the Gaelic League (1893); here, it went hand-in-hand with a rejection of English culture (as well as that of continental Europe), but not a rejection of the values of ‘high art’. Members of the League were predominantly middle class and, although Gaelic songs and airs were always held in high esteem, they did not hold much regard for Irish vernacular music practices; they were seen as vulgar or culturally

¹⁶ See John McLaughlin, *One Green Hill: Journeys Through Irish Songs*, Belfast, 2003, p. 133.

¹⁷ *Report from the Select Committee*, p. 22, quoted in Zimmerman, *Songs of Irish Rebellion*, 297. A study of marches in more recent times is provided by Katy Radford in ‘Drum Rolls and Gender Roles in Protestant Marching Bands in Belfast’, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10/2 (2001): 37–59.

¹⁸ Joseph J. Ryan, ‘Nationalism and Irish Music’, in Gerard Gillen and Harry White, eds, *Irish Musical Studies 3: Music and Irish Cultural History*, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, 1995, pp. 101–15, at pp. 105–7.

¹⁹ Harry White, *The Keeper’s Recital: Music and Cultural History in Ireland, 1770–1970*, Cork, 1998, p. 53.

²⁰ White discusses *The Nation*, and its offshoot *The Spirit of the Nation*, pp. 55–60. See also the account of music and Young Irelanders in May McCann, ‘Music and Politics in Ireland: The Specificity of the Folk Revival in Belfast’, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 4 (1995): 51–75, at 57–62.

²¹ *The Petrie Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland* has been republished in an edition by David Cooper, with the Irish modernized and edited by Lillis Ó Laoire, Cork: Cork University Press, 2002.

contaminated. Conservatory-trained revivalists Arthur Darley and Patrick O’Shea argued that rustic music should be mediated by musically educated Irish-born persons, and that would ensure it was ethnically Irish. Being born Irish, however, does not necessarily guarantee ‘authenticity’, as Francis O’Neill found when he included Balfe’s setting of ‘Killarney’ (1864) in his *Music of Ireland* (1903). Despite Balfe’s Irish birth and his attempt to give an Irish character to the song, O’Neill faced ‘petulant criticism’ from friends who claimed that Balfe’s music ‘was not Irish at all, even if he was’.²² The Gaelic League disliked music hall especially (their objections can be found in their paper *The Leader*), but then so did Cecil Sharp in England. The term *céilidh* (the preferred Irish spelling is now *céili*) was first adopted from Scottish Gaelic by the London Gaelic League for a St Brigid’s Night event, 1 Feb. 1897.²³ The earliest reference to a *céilidh* in Ireland is the following year.²⁴ The Gaelic league in Dublin and in London began publishing Gaelic songs as the nineteenth century moved into the next.

Britain learned from its other colonies how to deal with Ireland. For example, there had been landlord and rent problems in India, and the Bengal Tenancy Act was looked to as a model for solving Irish tenancy problems in the 1870s.²⁵ Figure 1 is a *Punch* cartoon showing that Britain had no difficulty making connections between trouble in one colony and trouble in another. Erin declares uneasily, ‘I’m afraid, Doctor dear, his symptoms are getting dangerous’. Dr Bull replies reassuringly, ‘Ha! I see! I treated a somewhat similar case to this very successfully in India; leave him to me’.

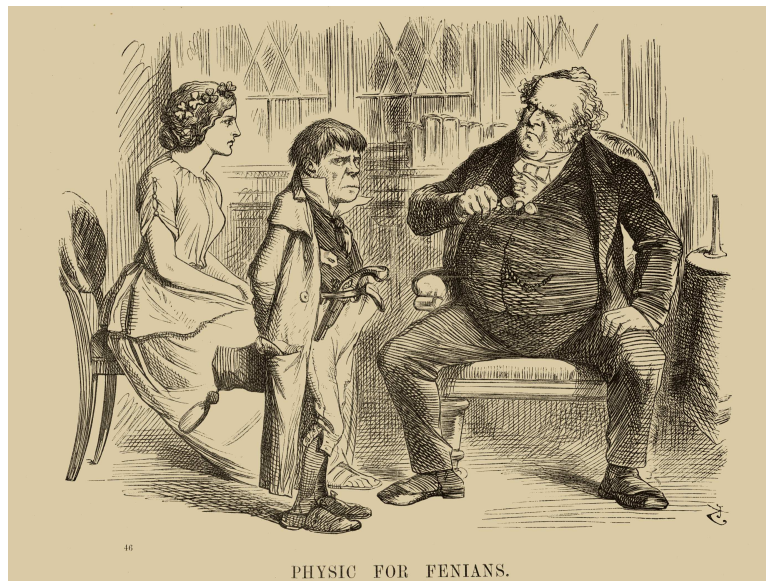
²² Francis O’Neill, *Irish Folk Music: A Fascinating Hobby*, Darby, PA, 1973, orig. pub. Chicago: The Regan Printing House, 1910, p. 80. The lyrics, too, are by an Irish writer, Edmund Falconer.

²³ Reg Hall, *Irish Music and Dance in London, 1850–1980*, Chap. 2 ‘The Gaelic Revival, 1890–1945’, Farnham, forthcoming.

²⁴ Reported in the Gaelic paper *Fainne an Lae*, 8 Jan. 1898, cited by Reg Hall in ‘Gaelic Revival’ chapter of *Irish Music and Dance in London*. In Irish reformed spelling, the word is now *céili*.

²⁵ See Timothy H. Parsons, *The British Imperial Century, 1815–1914*, Lanham, Maryland, 1999, pp. 55–6, and p. 133.

Figure 1: *Physic for Fenians*, 1866. John Tenniel, *Cartoons from "Punch" Second Series (1862–70)* (London: Bradbury, Evans, n.d.), p. 46.



Britain also learned from Ireland how to deal with trouble in England. For example, the effectiveness of plastic bullets in quelling disturbances was first put to the test in Northern Ireland. There was nothing especially new about the emphasis on Irish terrorism in the 1970s; Figure 2 shows Gladstone confronting the Irish National Land League in 1881, which fought for the rights of tenant farmers. Terrorism took over when the Land League was suppressed.

Figure 2: *Strangling the Monster* (detail), 1881. John Tenniel, *Cartoons from "Punch" 1871–1881* (London: Bradbury, Agnew, 1895), p. 133.



Victory over terrorism, however, is not like victory in war. The monster is particularly resistant to being strangled; a political solution is usually required. Yet terrorism can be cited effectively as a reason for a government to introduce coercive measures, and a population fearful of a terrorist threat can be won round to thinking those measures just. ‘A New Song on Michael Davitt’, a broadside that appeared in 1881, the same year as the *Punch* cartoon in Figure 1, praises the leader of Land League, and recounts the repressive actions taken by the British government.

Oh, the Lords and the Commons, Bill Gladstone and Bright,
Thought to settle our troubles in a day or a night,
So they clapped on Coercion, then brought in the Bill,
And arrests and evictions are going on still.²⁶

Belfast’s population grew massively in the nineteenth century. Belfast ship builders (especially Harland and Woolf) and the city’s engineers served the needs of the British Empire. Yet, at the end of the twentieth century with the Empire gone, Anthony Easthope remarked that the political situation in Northern Ireland resembled the struggles against colonialism in Algeria and Kenya in the 1960s, that it was ‘outmoded and atavistic, not a genuinely contemporary form of politics’. He argued: ‘Thirty years later political attention concerns other things—the shift from smaller to larger blocs, globalisation, tensions between nations and supra-national organisations’.²⁷ So why did Britain continue to hang on to Northern Ireland when the days of Empire had passed? Was it because most businesses continued to be in the hands of British firms, and huge financial investments had been made over many years? The high cost of maintaining law and order in the north, and the growing investment opportunities in the south, however, began to counter the advantages of continuing the Union. Added to this, was the much-vaunted ‘Celtic Tiger’ economy of the south that arose in the final decade of the twentieth century, though the global economic meltdown in 2009 overturned those economic gains.

Perhaps the history of Ireland in the twentieth century might have been very different if the opportunity to give Home Rule to Ireland in the 1880s had not been lost. Gladstone, introducing the first Home Rule Bill, 8 April 1886, stated: ‘The passing of many good laws is not enough in cases where the strong permanent

²⁶ Song reproduced in full, set to the tune of ‘Garryowen’, in Zimmerman, *Songs of Irish Rebellion*, pp. 275–77.

²⁷ Anthony Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture*, London, 1999, p. 193.

instincts of the people [...], the situation and history of the country, require not only that these laws should be good, but that they should proceed from a congenial and native source'.²⁸ Others thought they could control Ireland by playing the Orange card. The loyalist Orange Society had long opposed Irish independence from Britain (see Figure 3 depicting Charles Parnell, as Pluto, anxiously watching Stafford Northcote, as Orpheus, being offered an orange by Miss Ulster).

Figure 3: *Orphée aux enfers* (detail), 1883. John Tenniel, *Cartoons from "Punch" 1882–1891* (London: Bradbury, Agnew, 1895), p. 29.



Orangemen signed an Ulster Covenant in 1912, which declared that Home Rule would be ‘disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster’ and ‘perilous to the unity of the Empire’. The Ulster Volunteer Force was created in 1912, as part of Orange Unionist resistance to the third Home Rule Bill. In response, the Irish Volunteers, later known as the Irish Republican Army, began to prepare for conflict. Sinn Féin was, at this time, a moderate movement (established in 1905) that rejected the use of violence. Partition (the Anglo-Irish Treaty Settlement of 1921) followed the Irish War of Independence (1919–21). The cultural consequence was a growth of rebel songs in the south, and, as Irish identity became linked to Catholicism, a strengthening of Orangeism in the north.²⁹

²⁸ In A. H. Dodd, *Documents from History*, unpub. ms..

²⁹ May McCann, ‘Music and Politics in Ireland: The Specificity of the Folk Revival in Belfast’, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 4 (1995): 51–75, at 62–63.

The political songs of Ireland present us with their own four-hundred-year history of imperialism to set against the accounts of historians. What do they add to our knowledge? As far as the words are concerned, we should note not only the content, but also the choice of subject matter. In exploring the music, we should consider the following:

- 1 Many more political songs than political poems exist; therefore, music must be important.
- 2 We need to ask what sort of music is found suitable for these ideas and why. Is it one type or many types? Do imperialists choose a different music from nationalists?
- 3 What is the effect of the music? What feelings is it designed to evoke – war-like feelings, nostalgic feelings, pride, anger?
- 4 How are the songs used to demarcate communities and police sectarian divides?³⁰
- 5 How effective as political tools have the songs been? What evidence is there of music being a political threat?

Figure 4: *Silencing the Trumpet* (detail), 1870. Tenniel, *Cartoons from "Punch" Second Series*, p. 98.



³⁰ See Martin Stokes on the use of music to police Irish and British identities in Northern Ireland, in Stokes, ed., *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, Oxford, 1994, pp. 8–10.

Figure 4 shows the necessity of silencing a Fenian trumpeter (here used metaphorically to represent the seditious press). The musician is accused of stirring up others to war and bloodshed, while having no spirit for the fight himself. The moral is given as: ‘He who incites to strife is worse than he who takes part in it!’ In a book containing a series of letters written during a trip round Ireland in the heat of the Home Rule debate of 1893, the special commissioner of the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* makes the following comments about brass bands:

In Ireland, even more than in England, brass bands are necessary to the expression of the popular emotion. [...] Not a murderer in Ireland whose release would not be celebrated with blare of brass bands, and glare of burning grease.³¹

Where British imperialism is concerned, I am interested in evidence that shows how music has been used as a symbolic support for imperialism, in discovering whether the reception of that music confirms its efficacy in that capacity, and in knowing which sectors of society are most susceptible to its effects. I want to understand how a sense of imperialism is constructed and valorized by music. Why was it that a warm reception for imperialist ideas could be assumed as much in Glasgow (the ‘Second City of Empire’) as in London?³² The easy answer is that Scottish soldiers did more than their fair share of fighting for the Empire. Imperialism was a theme that appealed across classes – however much it might be seen as counter to working-class interests – and it was thus suited to the increasing social mix of music halls in later nineteenth-century Britain.

When building an empire or, alternatively, resisting imperialism, people are likely to draw upon old songs, or invented old songs, to establish continuity with the past. I researched the frequency of new publications in the nineteenth century of the four best-known British patriotic songs that predate that century: ‘God Save the Queen’, ‘Rule, Britannia!’, ‘The British Grenadiers’, and ‘Heart(s) of Oak’.³³ I found

³¹ Robert John Buckley, *Ireland As It Is and As It Would Be under Home Rule*, sixty-two letters written by the Special Commissioner of the *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, between March and August, 1893, Birmingham, 1893, 91. I am grateful to David Cooper for alerting me to this publication.

³² See Paul Maloney, *Scotland and the Music Hall 1850–1914*, Manchester, 2003, pp. 18–20, and p. 158.

³³ ‘God Save the King’ (words and music anon.) was first published in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 15 October 1745. The words of ‘Rule, Britannia!’ are by James Thomson, and the music by Thomas Arne. ‘The British Grenadiers’ is mid-eighteenth century (words anon.), although the tune is earlier. The words of ‘Heart of Oak’ are by David Garrick, and the music by William Boyce. The ‘s’ is sometimes added to ‘heart’, though it is no more accurate than the ‘s’ sometimes added to the imperative verb form in ‘Britannia, rule the waves!’

that peaks occurred during the Crimean campaign and during the late 1870s that many see as marking the beginning of the ‘new imperialism’. As one might expect, other peaks occur at Victoria’s Golden and Diamond Jubilees and during the Boer War. Old patriotic songs act as the musical equivalents of the heroic ancestors mentioned in song lyrics, those whose sacrifices place the next generation in debt. Examples are the Ulster loyalist song ‘The Sash My Father Wore’, the rebel song ‘Boys of the Old Brigade’, and the second verse of ‘Land of Hope and Glory’, which contains an admonition about the ‘false joy’ of remaining content with ‘what our sires have won’, and proclaims: ‘The blood a hero sire hath spent / Still nerves a hero son’.³⁴

In the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Friedrich Nietzsche discusses how the ‘private legal relationship between debtor and creditor’ has been interpreted disturbingly as a relationship of debt between a generation and its forefathers.³⁵ He traces it back to what he terms ‘the original race-community’ wherein ‘the conviction prevails that the race only *exists* by virtue of the sacrifice and achievements of the forefathers – and that one is obliged to *repay* them through sacrifice and achievements’.³⁶ The fear of racial extinction is found towards the end of Act 2 of Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell* (1829), when Walter Fürst asks anxiously, “our indomitable forefathers defended their old freedoms, does their race extinguish itself in you?”³⁷ The historical debt to forefathers is likely to be pushed further and further back in time so as to mythologize events. The refrain of ‘The Sash’ in an edition from around 1935³⁸ runs as follows:

It’s ould but it’s beautiful, it’s the best you ever seen,
 Been worn for more nor ninety years in that little Isle of Green,
 From my Orange and Purple Forefather it descended with galore,
 It’s a terror to them paypish boys, the sash me father wore.

The refrain sung today has no truck with ‘ninety years’ and reaches back more than 300 years:

It’s old but it is beautiful, its colours they are fine,

³⁴ For a history of ‘The Sash’ see David Cooper, ‘On the Twelfth of July in the Morning ... or the Man who Mistook His Sash for a Hat’. *Folk Music Journal* 8/1 (2001): 67–89. ‘Boys of the Old Brigade’ (words and music anon.) is a song of the Irish War of Independence, 1919–21. The words of ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ (1902) are by Arthur C. Benson, and the music by Edward Elgar.

³⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* [1887], trans. Douglas Smith, Oxford, 1996, Second Essay, Section 19, pp. 68–70.

³⁶ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, p. 69.

³⁷ *nos ayeux indomptés ont défendu leurs vieilles libertés, est-ce en vous que s’éteint leur race?* These exact sentiments do not appear in Friedrich Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell* (1804), but there are several invocations of *unsre Väter* in the equivalent scene (Act 2, sc. ii).

³⁸ *Orange Standard*, Glasgow, n.d., pp. 6–7.

It was worn at Derry, Aughrim, Enniskillen and the Boyne,
 My father wore it as a youth in bygone days of yore,
 So on the twelfth I proudly wear the sash my father wore.

An item of clothing belonging to or associated with an ancestor ensures an emotive appeal can be made to a person's moral conscience. Another example is the Ulster Volunteer Force song 'Daddy's Uniform', the final verse of which runs as follows:

So son, please take my uniform and go and fight the foe,
 And just like your father did so many years ago,
 For Ulster it is calling and we must never fear,
 So take my gun my only son and join the Volunteers.³⁹

New patriotic songs continued to be written by those on both sides of the conflict in Ireland throughout the twentieth century, long after the taste for them had waned in mainland Britain. In the fifty years following the British coronation of 1953, only six new publications of 'Rule Britannia' were registered at the British Library, whereas in the fifty previous years there had been 65. During the First World War, the Germans mocked the British with a version entitled 'Lie, Britannia!',⁴⁰ which opened with the line, 'When Britain first at Hell's command'. Examples that show the continuing appetite for political songs in Ireland in the second half of the twentieth century are 'Four Green Fields'⁴¹ (nationalist) and 'We Are the Billy Boys' (loyalist). This is exactly what one would expect in a country still confronting an imperialist legacy. A country disenchanted with imperialism does not do this: there was not much in the way of patriotic music, new or old, being used to provide symbolic endorsement to the British and American military intervention in Iraq in 2004. In Michael Moore's film *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), an American soldier in Iraq (2004), talking of going into battle, said: 'You got a good song playing in the background, and it gets you real fired up', a favourite being 'The Roof Is on Fire'.⁴² The disintegration of the British Empire in the years after the Second World War had spoiled any appetite for imperialist songs in England. A Nazi propaganda broadcast

³⁹ The lyrics are given in Radford, 'Drum Rolls and Gender Roles', pp. 54–5. Ironically, internal rhyming (as found in the last line quoted here) is a favourite device of Gaelic poetry; see Donn Byrne, *Ireland: The Rock Whence I Was Hewn* [1929], excerpted in David Pearce, ed., *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), 302–4, at 303. In "Daddy's Uniform" the influence, however, may be Rudyard Kipling (for example, "Men swift to see done, and outrun, their extremest commanding" from *The City of Brass*, 1909).

⁴⁰ Published in Berlin in 1915.

⁴¹ Words and music by Tommy Makem, 1968. It can be found in The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, *The Irish Songbook*, New York, 1979, pp. 130–31.

⁴² Originally recorded by Rock Master Scott & the Dynamic Three (1984), but rearranged in the song 'Fire Water Burn' by the Bloodhound Gang (1996).

had proved prophetic in this regard with another satirical song for Britain, ‘Bye Bye Empire’.⁴³

Hong Kong, Burma, Singapore,
I never cared for you before,
Bye Bye Empire.⁴⁴

In the nineteenth century, the British ruling class used songs like ‘The British Grenadiers’ and ‘Heart of Oak’ in much the same way as Ulster loyalists and the Orange Lodge have used songs like ‘Derry’s Walls’ and ‘The Green Grassy Slopes of the Boyne’.⁴⁵ It may be objected that ‘The British Grenadiers’ is indeed an old song, but the British Library possesses not a single publication of it issued between 1770 and 1835. It holds four that appeared between 1835 and 1850, ten that appeared 1851–75, and eight that were published 1876–1900. Similarly, with ‘Heart of Oak’, the Library holds no publications issued between 1785 and 1803; then it possesses three more up to 1850, seventeen from 1851–75, and fifteen from 1876–1900. British sailors and soldiers were never such popular symbols of British might as in the nineteenth century, and singing about them lent support to imperialist endeavour.

Language plays a significant role in identity construction. A popular recording of ‘Four Green Fields’ (Tommy Makem, 1967) by the group Flying Column begins with a recitation of Pádraig Pearse’s poem *Mise Éire* (I am Ireland) in Irish Gaelic.⁴⁶ Since this is translated into English at the end of the song, it is clear that its significance is symbolic, and the purpose of including it is to underline a sense of ancient Irish identity and ancient wrongs (Pearse had been one of the leaders of the Easter Rising⁴⁷). The Irish language has been compulsory in schools in the Republic since 1925, but despite that – or perhaps because of it – a majority of Irish people have little interest in speaking Irish. The device used in this song of symbolizing

⁴³ The words of the original, ‘Bye Bye Blackbird’ (1926), are by Mort Dixon, and the music by Ray Henderson.

⁴⁴ Propaganda song from a Nazi broadcast of 1942, recorded by the BBC. It appears on disc two of *Swing Tanzen verboten!* 4 CDs, Properbox 56 (2003), track 16.

⁴⁵ The author of the lyrics remains anonymous, but tune is related to the nineteenth-century American song ‘Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean’. It can be found in Hanvey, Bobbie, ed., *The Orange Lark and Other Songs of the Orange Tradition*, Lurgan, 1985.

⁴⁶ It can be found on The Flying Column, *Favourite Irish Rebel Ballads*, P. H. Pearse Records CDCELT5 1916 (2000), track 10. It was originally released in 1971. While the poem is spoken, a mandolin intones the melody of ‘Róisín Dubh’ (Black Rose), another personification of Ireland, but as a young woman. Seán Ó Riada’s score to George Morrison’s *Mise Éire* (1959), a film about the 1916 Rising, was based on ‘Róisín Dubh’.

⁴⁷ He was also one of the leaders of the Gaelic League (*Conradh na Gaelige*) founded by Protestant Douglas Hyde in 1893.

Ireland by an old woman, is not, of course, new,⁴⁸ but neither is the symbolizing of the four provinces Ulster, Leinster, Munster, and Connaught as ‘four green fields’. An essay on Irish politics was given that title in 1936.⁴⁹ Notice the idea of debt is part of the song: her ‘fine strong sons’ died fighting to save her jewels, but, she cries, ‘my sons they have sons’, and these will prove as brave as their fathers.⁵⁰

The treatment in songs of the labels ‘British’ and ‘Irish’ as mutually antagonistic has done much to create unease around the description ‘Irish’ in Ulster, and helps to explain why the term ‘Ulster Scot’ has gained ground. In the Clancy Brothers’ version of the song ‘Kevin Barry’, about an 18-year-old IRA fighter hanged in 1920, anti-imperialist sentiment is expressed with a stronger-than-usual polarization of British and Irish:

Another martyr for old Erin,
Another murder for the Crown,
The British laws may crush the Irish,
But cannot keep their spirits down.”⁵¹

The more common version of the song refers to the law as ‘brutal’ rather than ‘British’.

There has been a growing interest in an Ulster Scots language in Northern Ireland – some attribute its ‘rediscovery’ to Unionist desires to take a share of the state funding that had been made available for promoting Irish Gaelic. Ironically, Ian Adamson, a former Unionist Mayor of Belfast had been prominent in promoting the Irish language in Northern Ireland.⁵² It illustrates how the politics of identity revolves around position taking. Cultural identities are unstable; as Stuart Hall has explained, they are ‘points of identification [...] made within the discourses of history and culture’. Hall emphasizes that they are ‘[n]ot an essence but a *positioning*’, and argues, therefore, that ‘there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position,

⁴⁸ The well-known air ‘The Shan Van Vocht’ (An Sean Bhean Bhoicht) is found in print for the first time in Edward Bunting’s second collection, *The Ancient Music of Ireland*, published in 1809.

⁴⁹ George O’Brien, *The Four Green Fields*, Dublin, 1936.

⁵⁰ The old woman’s words come from W.B. Yeats’s play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), in which the eponymous character speaks of her ‘four beautiful fields’.

⁵¹ The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem (based in New York) released *The Rising of the Moon*, an album of Irish songs of rebellion in 1956 (re-recorded and re-released in 1959). It was reissued in 1998 as part of the commemoration of the 1798 United Irishmen Rebellion. At the time of writing, the lyricist has still not been identified and, indeed, the words exist in several variants. The tune is taken from the sea shanty ‘Rolling Home to Dear Old Ireland’ (which is also sung with the names of other countries, including England, replacing Ireland).

⁵² David Cooper, *The Musical Traditions of Northern Ireland and Its Diaspora: Community and Conflict*, Farnham, 2009, p. 46.

which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental “law of origin”’.⁵³

In 2004, the musical *On Eagle’s Wing* by John Anderson (premiered in Belfast, 28 May) was intended as a celebration of Ulster Protestant culture, and heroes whose roots can be traced back to that culture, like Davy Crockett. It received support from the Ulster Scots agency, whose spokesperson, Lord Laird, claimed Ulster Scots had been ‘airbrushed out of Irish history’.⁵⁴ A report carried in the *Guardian* newspaper stated that there was not a word of Ulster Scots language in *Eagle’s Wing* since the Belfast audience would not have understood it. Lord Laird did not think its absence a crucial issue, because ‘After all, its vocabulary is only 8,000 words’. Ironically, the musical contains a Gaelic song that, though Scottish, would have been intelligible in large part to Irish Gaelic speakers.⁵⁵ The Ulster Scots tongue, it would appear, is another example of a dialect seeking the status of a separate language, a familiar occurrence in identity position taking, and a feature of many past identity struggles.

Returning to patriotic songs, important questions are, what kind of music is used and why is it found suitable? Traditional airs are found in abundance, English as well as Irish: ‘The Foggy Dew’ (lyrics by Charles O’Neill), a rebel song of 1916, is sung to a variant of Dives and Lazarus. As might be expected Scottish or English tunes tend to be used by Unionists, although traditional Irish tunes are used, too. ‘Derry’s Walls’ is sung to the tune composed by Brinley Richards for the song ‘God Bless the Prince of Wales’ in 1862, and ‘To Be a Billy Boy’ is based on ‘To Be a Farmer’s Boy’ as well as the American Civil War song ‘Marching Through Georgia’ (Henry Clay Work). American tunes feature in nationalist songs, too: ‘God Save Ireland’ uses the melody of George Root’s ‘Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!’ (1864) and ‘The Lonely Woods of Upton’ (an eight-week Irish No. 1 hit in 1969 for Sean Dunphy) is indebted to Paul Dresser’s ‘On the Banks of the Wabash’ (1891). ‘God Save Ireland’ was the cry in court of three Irishmen, sentenced to be hanged after a policeman was accidentally shot during their attempt to release a prisoner from a van in Manchester.

⁵³ Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, London, 1993, pp. 392–403, at p. 395 (orig. pub. in J. Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, pp. 222–37).

⁵⁴ An Ulster Society, designed to promote Ulster-British culture, was founded in 1985.

⁵⁵ All quotations from Angelique Chrisafis, “Ulster Scots’ Eagle fails to take off,” *The Guardian*, Friday, 28 May, 2004, p. 10.

They became known as the ‘Manchester Martyrs’. Timothy Sullivan said that he set his verse to Root’s melody because it was popular in Ireland at that time. He remarks on the success of this tactic, claiming ‘it was sung in the homes of Dublin working men’ on the very day of its publication in *The Nation* (7 Dec. 1867), and that the next day he heard it ‘sung and chorused by a crowd of people in a railway at Howth’.⁵⁶

Pop and rock styles are not so common in political songs, although there have been significant contributions from U2 concerning Bloody Sunday of 1972 and from the Pogues concerning the case of the ‘Birmingham Six’ arrested (wrongfully, as it turned out) for the Birmingham pub bombings in 1974.⁵⁷ In general, however, as Bill Rolston notes, rock has tended to deal in ‘imprecise and individualistic’ rather than communal concerns.⁵⁸ An American country style is sometimes heard, since country music is popular in Ireland: a song in this style is ‘Blood on Our Land’, which also concerns Bloody Sunday.⁵⁹ The general tendency is for nationalists to go for songs that have a national flavour, thus stressing national identity and the continuation of previous struggles. Hence, there is a preference for folk material or folk-like material. For Ulster loyalists, on the other hand, an important consideration is a suitable tune for marching, or general singability (to promote joining-in and solidarity).⁶⁰ In the late 1970s, punk seemed to offer a non-sectarian style, and the band Stiff Little Fingers were guided by this ideal, while remaining politically aware.⁶¹

Patriotic songs forge bonds in a community, but they also test loyalty. They help identify those outside the community’s boundary. This was why ‘God Save the King’ rapidly became a regular item in London’s theatres in 1745 – to try to identify (and intimidate) supporters of the Jacobite Rebellion, because there were known

⁵⁶ Timothy Daniel Sullivan, *Recollections of Troubled Times in Irish Politics* (Dublin, 1905), p. 178, quoted in Zimmerman, *Songs of Irish Rebellion*, pp. 267–68.

⁵⁷ ‘Sunday Bloody Sunday’ (Bono and The Edge), from U2’s album *War* (1982); and ‘Streets of Sorrow/Birmingham Six’ (Terry Woods and Shane MacGowan), from the Pogues’ album *If I Should Fall from Grace with God* (1988). ‘Bloody Sunday’ is the name given to 30 Jan. 1972, the day British troops shot dead 13 Civil Rights marchers in Derry (a fourteenth marcher died of wounds later). Lord Widgery’s report at the time was widely regarded as a whitewash (he also dismissed the first appeal made by the ‘Birmingham Six’ in 1976). Lord Savile’s inquiry began in 1998, but it was not until 15 Jun. 2010 that the report appeared, pronouncing the killings unjustifiable.

⁵⁸ Bill Rolston, “‘This Is Not a Rebel Song’: The Irish Conflict and Popular Music”. *Race and Class* 42/3 (2001): 49–67, at 54.

⁵⁹ Authorship unknown. It appears on *The Best Of Irish Rebel Ballads*, Arran Records (2009).

⁶⁰ For example, ‘We Are the Billy Boys’, The Billyboy Singers, on *Forever loyal!*, AMCD 707 (n.d.).

⁶¹ For an account of punk in Northern Ireland, see Martin McLoone, ‘Punk Music in Northern Ireland: The Political Power of “What Might Have Been”’, *Irish Studies Review* 12/1 (2004): 29–38, and Sean Campbell, “‘Pack up Your Troubles’: Politics and Popular Music in Pre- and Post-Ceasefire Ulster’. *Popular Musicology Online*, Issue 4 (n.d.). <<http://www.popular-musicology-online/issues/04/campbell-01.html>>.

Stuart sympathizers in London. When, in the song ‘The Green Grassy Slopes of the Boyne’, you hear ‘I hope in the chorus you’ll join’, this is not to be taken simply as a polite indication that the singer thinks it would be rather nice if you were to join in. It also tells you that if you choose to remain silent, you will be taken for a rebel sympathizer.

The *accent* (or idiolect) of the song can be important. I am referring to the musical style, though accent in pronunciation of lyrics is also important. Note that ‘Derry’s Walls’ has a British musical accent, not an Irish one. Note, too, that though to someone who is English everyone from Northern Ireland might seem to have the same accent, the long segregation of Catholic and Protestant communities has actually resulted in their having different accents. A Catholic can recognize an Ulster Protestant, and vice versa, by the way he or she speaks. One might wonder why there is not a gospel influence in rebel songs as there sometimes is in loyalist songs. It is because the gospel idiom (whether of white or black provenance) suggests the Protestant religion. It has the wrong musical accent. Arthur Sullivan’s ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’ (words by Sabine Baring-Gould) is sung by the Orange Order.

Yet, in spite of this, there are many overlaps in the musical and metrical features of the songs of Northern Ireland, especially when drawing upon traditional material. David Cooper notes that ‘the heritage of Gaelic song in terms of its impact on English-language verse is shared to some degree by both communities, and the (often unconscious) use of the metrical devices of Gaelic poetry is as likely to be found in “Orange” as “Green” party (or political) songs’.⁶² A Gaelic song that has found a place in the repertoire of many Ulster singers is ‘Úr-chnoc Chéin mhic Cáinte’ (The Burial Hill of Cian son of Cáinte). It was written by the eighteenth-century Ulster bard Peadar Ó Doirnin, and given a new musical setting in 1907 by Peadar Ó Dubhda of Dundalk.⁶³ The bodhrán and the uilleann pipes are particularly strong signifiers of Irish national identity, because they are immediately associated with a distinct Irish sound.⁶⁴ To many, they connote the Irish Republic, but in the nineteenth century it was not unknown for Protestant clergymen to play the Uilleann

⁶² Cooper, *The Musical Traditions of Northern Ireland*, p. 53.

⁶³ For the tune’s relationship to a football song that Ó Dubhda collected in the Omeath Gaeltacht in Louth in 1907, see Pádraigin Ní Uallacháin, *A Hidden Ulster: People, Songs and Traditions of Oriel*, Dublin, 2003, p. 236.

⁶⁴ See John O’Flynn, *The Irishness of Irish Music*, Farnham, 2009, pp. 159–60.

pipes.⁶⁵ Georges-Denis Zimmerman remarks that Orange songs ‘share various elements with the nationalist ones: their phraseology, sometimes their tunes’.⁶⁶ Often a traditional tune is given a march rhythm, and that is enough to colour it orange. ‘A New Loyal Song against Home Rule (printed by Nicholson, Belfast, in 1893) names the tune to which the words are to be sung as ‘The Name I Go Under’s Bold Erin-Go-Bragh’, which Zimmerman suggests is the same tune as ‘The Game Played I Erin Go Bragh’, No. 84 of Patrick Weston Joyce’s *Ancient Irish Music* (Dublin, 1890). The tensions caused by the Troubles in Northern Ireland in the 1970s increased the appetite for rebel ballads and contributed to the popularity among the nationalist community of groups like the Wolfe Tones. Simultaneously, young Unionists, although aware of traditional Irish music but found themselves less and less able to participate in it.⁶⁷

Sometimes, in the lyrics, one can find similar sentiments to those of a British imperialist song being reworked in an Irish rebel song. An example is “The Boys of the Old Brigade,” the original (Weatherly–Barri, 1881) referring to British troops in past imperial campaigns, the rebel version (using a different tune) looking back on past IRA campaigns. Likewise, imperialists and nationalists share a love of heroes (whether they be Drake or Emmet) and places of bold action (Wexford, the Boyne, Crimea). However, while Britain was personified as Britannia, Irish nationalists preferred to symbolize Ireland by the figure of the Shan Van Vocht, the proud though oppressed old woman, rather than by Hibernia, the preferred personification of Ireland by the British.

Is Ireland’s identity now globally oriented rather than nationally fixated? Or, is the national something to be exploited and re-worked in an age of globalization? Decisions about what to categorize as Irish music inevitably relate to matters of identity (political, national, or ethnic). Will the economic downturn prove to be a turning point for global ambitions and, instead, encourage nationalist retrenchment? John O’Flynn observes that the ‘celebration of Irishness in music’ appears to be ‘as much involved with economic conceptions of nationality as it is with cultural and/or

⁶⁵ See Cooper, *The Musical Traditions of Northern Ireland*, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Zimmerman, *Songs of Irish Rebellion*, p. 304.

⁶⁷ See Martin W. Dowling, ‘Confusing Culture and Politics: Ulster Scots Culture and Music’. *New Hibernia Review* 11/3 (Autumn 2007): 51–80, at 56–7. See also Fintan Vallely, *Protestant Rejection of Traditional Music in Northern Ireland: Jigging at the Crossroads*, Dublin, 2006.

political ideas'.⁶⁸ The performance of *Riverdance* to a highly appreciative audience during the interval of the Eurovision Song Contest in 1994 was probably the key moment when Ireland found it could produce new musical entertainment for a global market.

The rock band Snow Patrol lent their services to efforts designed to promote investment in Northern Ireland in 2007, winning friends on both sides of the political divide. The animosity the political songs of Northern Ireland generate, however, has certainly not disappeared in the twenty-first century. Sectarian songs are still sung by rival Celtic and Rangers fans at football matches in Glasgow. The hostility shown in this way at a match on 20 September 2004 prompted a rebuke by the First Minister for Scotland. It may seem embarrassing, or even inflammatory, to put such songs under the academic spotlight, but it can also be argued that a deeper understanding of the ways in which music functions as a means of creating social divisions – discord rather than harmony – may help to strengthen efforts to secure peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

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⁶⁸ O’Flynn, *The Irishness of Irish Music*, p. 3; see also pp. 22–3 and pp. 129–35.

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