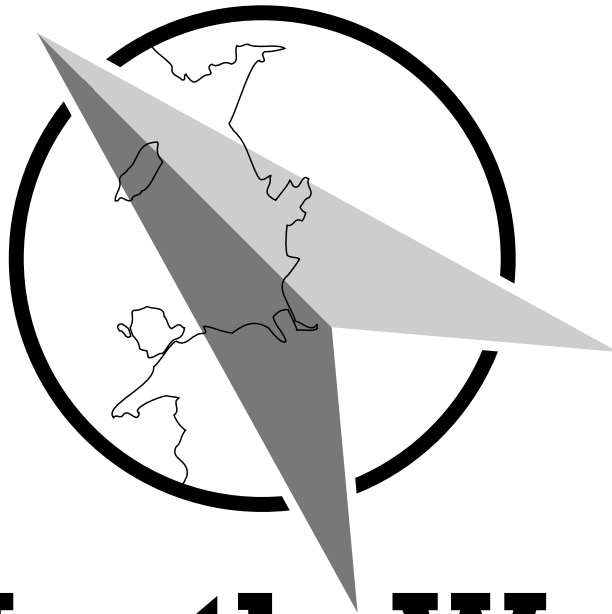


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“I shall never return to Hibernia’s bowers”: Irish migrant identities in early Victorian Manchester

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the text of five broadside ballads dealing with Irish concerns in early Victorian Manchester. By way of introduction, there will be a discussion of the significance of soundscapes in Geography, with particular reference to Political Geography. The origin and nature of broadside ballads will then be examined and the history and geography of Irish migrant settlement in Manchester discussed. Five recurring themes which emerge from a ballad collection printed in the city will be analysed, and it will be argued that they reveal a people caught between two contrasting culture worlds.

Keywords

Manchester, Irish identity, broadside ballads, music.

Introduction

Recent writing has stressed the value of the aural dimension, especially the place of song, in geographical studies (Smith 1994). In particular, a focus on popular music has been welcomed as a cultural form which reveals what ‘ordinary’ people think and feel (Kong 1995a, 1995b). In this paper it is proposed to interrogate the text of five broadside ballads dealing with Irish concerns in early Victorian Manchester. The intention is to reveal the varied and sometimes divergent pulls on the loyalties of the Irish migrant population in the most economically dynamic British industrial city of the mid-nineteenth century. First, there will be a discussion of the significance of soundscapes in Geography, with particular reference to Political Geography. The origin and nature of broadside ballads will then be examined and the history and geography of Irish migrant settlement in Manchester discussed. Five recurring themes which emerge from a ballad collection printed in the city will be analysed, and it will be argued that they reveal a people caught between two powerful and contrasting culture worlds.

Soundscapes in political geography

The aural is one of the vital dimensions of life and makes a key contribution to the cultural landscape. In particular, sound in the form of music has an extraordinary power to evoke a sense of place, space,

territory and time, with the potential to “... influence, change or enrich the interpretation of particular scenes.” (Smith 1994, 234). Consequently, “... geographical issues of economy, society and culture are present in the production, performance, transmission and consumption of music.” (Leyshon *et al.* 1995, 425). Both words and tune can be significant in geographical studies. The lyrics, like any spoken or written material, can evoke the full range of human images, emotions and reactions. However, when sung, they can be the key to a whole new dimension of human reaction: “songs can reveal the utmost depth of feeling, and can document reactions to circumstances and their causes which might not be evoked, because of an inability to find appropriate words.” (Litvack 1996, 70). The accompanying music plays a vital role. It “... provides a mnemonic which helps songs to be remembered in a way which other works of literature can only envy ... (songs) have the ability ... to move in ways which are not wholly rational.” (Litvack 1996, 70). This is particularly true in a communal context, with a singer performing to an audience or, even more, with the audience joining in. The act of performance bonds singer to audience and the members of the audience to each other, hence the argument that “... music is one key to understanding the interplay of spectacle to emotion and with a wider political and economic agenda.” (Smith 1994, 235, discussing Fulcher 1987).

In particular, this paper argues for a greater appreciation of the value of the study of songs and music for further understanding the nature of national identities. It endorses the view of Cohen (1995, 445) that "the production of place through music is always a political and contested process and music has been shown to be implicated in the politics of place, the struggle for identity and belonging, power and prestige". It is assumed that national identity is a flexible social construction rather than something 'natural' and immutable (Jackson and Penrose 1993), and that song, in the form of both words and music, has played an important role in moulding, evoking and preserving national(ist) sentiment. Nationalist songs can of course have a variety of uses. They may be instruments of hegemonic rule, employed by imperial, colonial or cultural elites to broadcast and justify their supremacy and seduce those they rule into acceding to or even positively supporting the regime and the values it seeks to impose (Kong 1995a). Alternatively, they may be vehicles of resistance to such regimes. As such, they can be used to encourage incremental modifications to the existing power relations or cultural assumptions. Much more fundamentally, they can articulate radical dissent, challenge the legitimacy of the existing regime and help suggest an alternative set of power relations: "... anthems and ... songs inspire nationalist sentiments and movements whilst other musical styles might be linked in similar ways with issues of class and hierarchy." (Cohen 1995, 445). In an imperial context this can be done for a subordinate population by evoking group memories of an often mythological and deliberately constructed past, with its heroic deeds and figures and idealised picture of life before the invaders arrived. The contemporary populace is inspired and mobilised by invitations to emulate and restore this imagined past and the songs paint a picture of how life could be if the occupiers were defeated and 'the risen people' controlled the institutions of national life. "Music has ... been part of the painful geography of decolonisation and of internal colonisation as well as part of the pattern of resistance to these oppressions." (Smith 1994, 236).

Both 'classical' and 'popular' songs can contribute powerfully to feelings of national identity, binding hitherto isolated individuals and groups of very different social and class backgrounds to each other, establishing links with their, often mythological,

common past and evoking shared images of idealised landscapes and territory: "the imitation of natural sounds, the quotation of folk songs and dances and references to localities and regions could rhetorically tie music to the rhythmical structures of land, landscape and language." (Leyshon *et al.* 1995, 426).

The Irish in Manchester

Manchester has long-standing military and commercial links with Ireland (Busteed and Hodgson 1993) and there are traces of an Irish born element in the city's population as early as the 1740s (Busteed 1996), but it was during the closing decades of the eighteenth century that the rate of Irish immigration to the city began to accelerate. The motives for this migration were overwhelmingly economic. Manchester, as a growing industrial city, was increasingly attractive to an Irish population which was growing rapidly from the late eighteenth century onwards and bearing down heavily on the indigenous resource base. Estimates placed the total of Irish at 5,000 in 1787 (Holt 1795), between 10,000 and 15,000 in 1804 (The Manchester Guide 1804), and from 26,000 to 46,000 in the early 1830s (Busteed and Hodgson 1994a). The 1841 census recorded 30,304 Irish born in the city, about 12.5% of the total population. The largest influx of Irish into Manchester, and indeed Britain as a whole, came in the years immediately after 1845 when, for several successive years, potato blight devastated a significant proportion of the basic foodstuff of the Irish peasantry (Kinealy 1994). Approximately one million people emigrated from Ireland between 1845 and 1851, most to North America but a significant number to Great Britain (Daly 1986). Between 1841 and 1851 the number of Irish-born in Manchester rose by 22,497 to 52,801 or 13.1% of the population, though research suggests that if children born outside Ireland to two Irish parents were added, then the number of 'Irish' should be boosted by about 17% to give 61,777 or 15.3% of the total population (Busteed, Hodgson and Kennedy 1992).

Irish migrants were distributed throughout the city, but there were concentrations in three districts: 'Little Ireland', the smallest but best known district on the south-western side of the city (Busteed 1995-6); north of Great Ancoats Street where the Irish occupied some of the smaller streets and courts set back from the main thoroughfares; and the largest concentration, parts of which were variously known

as Angel Meadow, New Town and Irish Town, on the north-western side of the city behind Victoria Station (Busteed, Hodgson and Kennedy 1992; Busteed and Hodgson 1994a, 1994b). These areas were a mixture of heavy industrial and commercial land use, combined with poor working class housing. There was a marked degree of residential segregation of the Irish from their fellow workers (Busteed and Hodgson 1996), and they also tended to be in the less skilled, more poorly paid and more physically demanding occupations.

In many ways nineteenth century Britain was a hostile environment for Irish immigrants. The fast growing industrial city of Manchester was the pioneer of the new machine based manufacturing system. By contrast, the vast majority of Irish migrants came from a rural, subsistence background based on communal peasant agriculture and many were Gaelic speakers. Since they were overwhelmingly Catholic, they also encountered historic anti-Catholic and anti-Irish prejudice. Indeed, their arrival, and the boost they gave to Catholic numbers in Great Britain, helped renew and prolong these sentiments. To a considerable extent the Irish were held responsible for many of the evils of urban industrial life, especially the poor housing, low wages and living standards, improvident habits and violent, drunken behaviour found amongst some elements in the new urban working class. The argument was that the Irish, coming from a lower level of civilisation, had lower expectations in terms of housing and wages and therefore lowered the living standards of the entire working class. Moreover, their alleged habits of spending little on domestic comforts and saving virtually nothing, but spending any surplus on drink was held to be an all too attractive example to the native workers who followed it with alacrity (Kay 1832). Residential segregation and antisocial behaviour amongst some of the Irish in mid-nineteenth century Manchester may have been mechanisms for coping with this multi-dimensional hostile environment (Busteed and Hodgson 1996). Other reactions may be discerned in the broadside ballads which were printed in the Irish districts of the city.

Broadside ballads

Broadside ballads were a remarkably long-lived form of street entertainment in Britain and Ireland. The

earliest extant example dates from 1540 (Palmer 1996), and there are traces of the tradition surviving until at least the 1930s (Shepard 1973). Strictly, a 'ballet' or ballad is a verse narrative intended for singing with a dance, but in practice the term came to apply to almost any song, especially if printed broadside fashion. The term 'broadside' applied to an unfolded sheet of paper of about A5 size, with printing on one side only – when printed on both sides it was a 'broadsheet'. Occasionally a large number of ballads were printed on longer sheets known as 'garlands' or several broadsides would be bound into a pamphlet referred to as a 'chapbook'. Broadside and broadsheet were often decorated with crude woodcuts at the top of the page. There was a limited number of standard designs, and the woodcut frequently bore little or no relevance to the subject matter (Figure 1).

The authorship of ballads was of very mixed nature. At the outset in the sixteenth century some quite reputable authors contributed, and down through the centuries writers of quality tried their hand, including Jonson, Garrick, Fielding and Dickens (Palmer 1996). However, governments were always nervous of unauthorised compositions and sporadic efforts were made to exert some form of control, sometimes involving quite severe punishment. There was also a tendency in some literary circles to disparage ballad composition, with the result that the more reputable authors either refrained or wrote anonymously, and anonymous authorship was thereby established as the norm. Although some of these anonymous authors were of quite humble origins and were involved in the incidents they wrote about, the backbone of the trade was an almost professional class of hack versifiers ready to turn out material on any subject likely to appeal to popular taste and earn some money (Simpson 1966).

A ballad was normally written to a widely known existing tune – even popular hymn tunes were pressed into service. Consequently, musical notation was rarely provided, and even in the few cases where it was present, it was frequently inaccurate. Some of the earliest ballads did carry tune directions, but this feature gradually faded during the eighteenth century to the point where it was a rarity (Simpson, 1966). Of the ballads in the volume to be discussed in this paper, none bore musical notation, and only six, two on Irish themes, had a tune direction¹. From this one must

assume that the remainder were sung to tunes which would be instantly recognisable once the singer struck up.

Dating is as problematic as authorship and music. Some can be quite easily fixed from internal evidence. Occasionally there is direct reference to dates or events which may have inspired composition in the first place. Others, however, deal with timeless human concerns such as romantic love and domestic disputes, some were long in oral circulation before being fixed in print, many were constantly reprinted and still others were altered to meet changes in time and place of performance. Ballads were intended to be sung wherever people gathered or circulated – in public houses, inns and hostelries of every description, and, most frequently, in the open air, at markets, fairs, recreation grounds, in squares or streets. They were sold from bookstalls or fair booths, and were famously hawked around the streets by men or women who also sang them to demonstrate their qualities. They were a form of popular street entertainment, and as such were part of the boisterous street life of early urban Britain and Ireland. They have been described as "... essentially an urban variety of sub-literary expression" (Simpson 1966, xi). Establishment attitudes towards them were ambivalent. The traditional wariness of unauthorised publishing has been noted, but those concerned to encourage patriotic sentiments and 'proper' moral values in the new urban working class used the medium themselves. Subsequently, when ideas on acceptable behaviour in public spaces altered (Jackson 1989), the police were inclined to encourage singers to 'move on', but many later nineteenth century writers looked back with nostalgic affection to the days of the street ballad singers, regarding them as an integral part of the popular urban cultural landscape. In the closing years of the century such ballads were gradually replaced by the songs of the popular music hall and, with the advent of mass literacy, by the pulp novel and the popular newspaper.

It is hardly surprising that ballads have been described as "... a kind of musical journalism, the forerunner of the popular newspapers, and a contin-

uation of the folk tradition of minstrelsy." (Shepard 1973, 21). It is significant that they originated in the sixteenth century, a period of radical religious and political change. They flourished in the next century of civil war, religious dispute and constitutional revolution, but declined in the following century. However, they enjoyed a final, remarkable flowering in the urban Britain of the nineteenth century industrial revolution. Although religion and high politics may have been the original inspiration and were to remain significant themes, the subject matter rapidly expanded to include every imaginable aspect of life as experienced by the common people, from the profound to the utterly grotesque, including "... battles, executions, disasters, domestic life, local events, sex and scandals, adventures and fantasy" (Palmer 1996, 20), as well as "... marvellous signs and wonders, monstrous births, merry love songs and all the gossip of the day" (Shepard 1962, 51).

The value of ballads is that they provide an insight into popular opinions and preoccupations: "broadside ballads are of enormous importance for the light they throw upon the everyday interests, activities, events and opinions of the common people over several centuries" (Shepard 1962, 54). The same authority argues that "... this kind of literature is the life-blood of popular sentiment and action ... it is the inchoate mass of popular feeling, with its strange mixture, untruth and sheer banality which is the pulse of history and which has shaped the destiny of nations" (Shepard 1973, 35). Composers wrote with a keen eye to the popular market and consequently their material can be accepted as a fairly accurate reflection of popular feelings and tastes. As such, they reproduced common grievances and anxieties and frequently expressed a desire for change, either in the form of nostalgic yearning for the imagined good old days or for progressive improvements to contemporary conditions. Some, as already noted, were written with a specific political or moral agenda in mind. Such ballads could not merely confirm but could actually influence popular feeling, "they reflect history, but also hope to change it for the better" (Palmer 1996, 29).

Figure 1 (below): A Broadside ballad printed in early Victorian Manchester. The printer, Thomas Pearson of Chadderton Street, bought out a rival's stock and obliterated his name. The figure 83 at bottom right is the batch number. Clearly, both Irish and Scottish migrants enjoyed such ballads. The crude woodcut typically bears no relation to the subject matter.



ERIN'S GLORY

You sons of Patrick's lovely land, come listen to my story,
 With a heart sincere I will declare how Erin suffer'd sorely;
 Since Strongbow landed on our shore, we were wrecked with
 lamentation, [nation.
 Our priests and prelates suffer'd sore thro' Erin's matchless

CHORUS.

Now brave boys your voices raise, & tell each whig & tory
 That Tara's hill refulgent still, will shine with Irish glory.
 Base Oliver Cromwell did enslave St. Patrick's sons and
 daughters,
 Believe me you, our clergy he did hang in chains and halters;
 It was his delight both day and night, to pull down church
 and steeple, [people.
 And murder all both great and small, and trample on God's
 Now brave boys, &c.

Dutch Bill came o'er from Holland's shore, full of wrath
 and indignation, [our nation;
 And he swore King James he would lay low, and captivate
 It's at the Boyne we all did join, with Sarsfield our
 commander, [ten to one sir.
 For a summer's day we show'd then play, and fought them
 At Ballinainch & Vinegar hill, we struggl'd hard for freedom,
 Like Brien Bourne we thousands slew, usurpers we left
 bleeding; [Boyne water,
 On Tara's plain we would regain what was lost at the
 But we were sold for English gold and our commander
 slaughtered.

Now to conclude and make an end, long life to Queen
 Victoria,
 May we soon see our nation free from tyrant whig or tory;
 May plenty smile round Erin's isle may peace and plenty
 flourish,
 May all agree in unity, and broils and quarrels perish.



BANKS OF SWEET DUNDEE.

n, Printer, en Street, Oldham
 Road, Manchester.

Its of a farmer's daughter, so beautiful I'm told,
 Her parents died and left her five hundred pounds in gold,
 She lived with her uncle the cause of all her woe,
 You soon shall hear this maiden fair did prove his overthrow.

Her uncle had a ploughboy young Mary loved full well,
 And in her uncle's garden their tales of love would tell,
 But there was a wealthy squire who oft came her to see,
 But still she loved her ploughboy on the banks of sweet Dundee.

It was one summer's morning her uncle went straightway,
 He knocked at her bed room door and unto her did say,
 Come rise up my pretty maid, a lady you may be
 The squire is waiting for you on the banks of sweet Dundee.

A fig for all your squires, your lords and dukes likewise,
 My William's hand appears to me like diamonds in my eyes,
 Begone, unruly female you ne'er shall happy be,
 For I mean to banish William from the banks of sweet Dundee.

Her uncle and the squire rode out one summer's day,
 Young William is in favour—her uncle he did say,
 Indeed 'tis my intention to tie him to a tree,
 Or else to bribe the press-gang on the banks of sweet Dundee.

The press-gang came to William when he was all alone,
 He boldly fought for liberty, but there were six to one,
 The blood did flow in torrents pray kill me now cried he,
 I would rather die for Mary on the banks of sweet Dundee.

This maid one day was walking lamenting for her love,
 She met the wealthy squire down in her uncle's grove,
 He put his arms around her, stand off base man said she,
 You sent the only lad I love from the banks of sweet Dundee.

He clasp'd his arms around her and tried to throw her down,
 Two pistols and a sword she spied beneath his morning gown,
 Young Mary took the pistols, the sword he used so free,
 But she did fire & shot the squire on the banks of sweet Dundee.

Her uncle overheard the noise and hasten'd to the ground,
 O since you've killed the squire I'll give you your death wound,
 Stand of, then said young Mary, undaunted I will be,
 She trigger drew her uncle slew on the banks of sweet Dundee.

A doctor soon was sent for, a man of noted skill,
 Likewise came his daughter for him to sign his will, **83**
 He willed his gold to Mary who fought so manfully,
 And closed his eyes no more to rise on the banks of sweet Dundee.

The printers were primarily concerned with the ballads as a commercial product. The largest single centre of production was London, with the Seven Dials district particularly notable, but every major urban centre in Britain and Ireland had its printers who turned out ballads. Some gave their products cumulative stock numbers, which sometimes helps dating, and after the naval mutinies of 1797 all were supposed to imprint them with their name and address as well, though this did not always happen. The most prolific printer of ballads in nineteenth century Manchester was Thomas Pearson of 6 Chadderton Street, Oldham Road (Figure 1), whose firm is recorded in directories from the 1850s to the 1890s.

Even when newly printed, ballads were physically fragile and since the subject matter was usually highly topical this material is true ephemera. It is therefore remarkable that so much has survived, thanks usually to the efforts of a few local collectors. In the case of Manchester a large collection is located in the Language and Literature section of the city's Central Library. It numbers almost 3,500 ballads in twelve volumes of which about 14% have Irish themes². One of the volumes was selected, the songs with Irish material examined and from these, five were chosen which represented the main themes found in the Irish ballads. The text of each will be interrogated to illustrate some of the loyalties and preoccupations of Irish migrants in the city in early Victorian times. All are anonymous, but the very fact that they were being printed and reprinted in Manchester indicates that Pearson believed they would find a ready echo and thus a market amongst Irish migrants in the city. Litvack (1996, 71) is by no means alone in regarding such material as providing insights into Irish migrant concerns:

These songs, which were amongst the most immediate and candid reactions to the migration experience, embodied the thoughts and feelings of those leaving and those left behind ... the ballads were, unlike most Irish folksongs, tailor-made compositions ... Though not works of great literary merit, the songs nevertheless fulfilled an important cathartic role ... Their abundance and popularity attest to the depth of their penetration into the popular psyche.

Themes and identities

Exile

The theme of exile is repeatedly struck in Irish ballads on emigration. Indeed, Miller (1988) argues that this is merely an extension overseas of a traditional literary trope whereby the Irish used the exile theme to interpret the history of their land ever since the first Anglo-Norman landing in the 12th century. Within this narrative conquest, rebellion, defeat, land confiscation and penal legislation affected such a revolution in patterns of political, economic and social power in Ireland that the Irish were reduced to a state of subordination analogous to exile within their own country. When subsequent economic and demographic forces impelled many to emigrate the exile theme could be applied even more convincingly, since the Irish were now being compelled to leave their homeland for another country. Moreover, given that Ireland until the second half of the twentieth century was still a largely rural and small town society dominated by links of kinship and locality, the break induced by migration must have been severe and devices for compensation and explanation at a premium: "the close, vital and passionate relationship of the Irish with land meant a traumatic wrench when it was left; hence the importance of mechanisms that kept the sense of connection alive, like the Irish pub in Manchester or Chicago." (Foster 1988, 370). One of the most notable features of such venues was listening and singing along to ballads, another device for preserving the connection. This sense of exile was, if anything, reinforced by the alien nature of the new urban socio-economic environment into which the migrants had been decanted and the hostile attitudes of the native populace referred to above.

It is hardly surprising therefore that so many ballads are marked by a poignant sense of displacement and dislocation, maudlin self pity and nostalgic yearning for people and places left behind in Ireland, as exhibited in *The Poor Irish Stranger* (verse 1-3, box 1). Moreover, the device is even more serviceable when the agents of exile and dispossession are the landlords (verse 4, box 1), who confiscated not merely the produce of the farm, but also the family home itself, presumably by eviction.

Box 1 - The Poor Irish Stranger

*O pity the fate of a poor Irish stranger,
That wander'd this far from his home,
I sigh for protection from want, woe and danger,
But know not which way to roam,
I never shall return to Hibernia's bowers,
For bigotry hath trampled her sweetest of flowers,
That gave comfort to me in my loneliest hours,
They are gone and I'll ne'er see them more.*

*But Erin, dear Erin, it grieves me to ponder,
The wrongs of thy injured isle,
Thy sons, many thousands deploring do wander,
On shores far away in exile.*

*Farewell then to Erin and those I left weeping,
Upon that disconsolate shore,
Farewell to the grove where my father lies sleeping,
That ground I still dearly adore,
Farewell to each pleasure I once had at home,
Farewell now a stranger in England I roam,
O give me my past joys or give me a tomb,
Yes, in pity I ask for no more.*

...

*With wonder I gazed on yon broad lofty building,
As in grandeur it rose for its lord,
With sorrow I beheld my own garden yielding,
The choicest of fruit for its board,
But what is my father's low cottage of clay,
Where I did spend many a long happy day,
Alas, has his lordship contrived it away,
Yet its gone and i'll see it no more.*

In fact, though the Irish diaspora was on an unprecedented scale and the famine exodus in particular accompanied by extreme privation, Miller (1988) argues that the Irish were no more involuntary exiles than any other migrant group. However, the schema of exile was simply too attractive and convenient, and indeed too lucrative for the ballad composers, to be lightly abandoned. For those migrants who felt guilty about leaving home, family and country, it was a relief to be able to argue that theirs was a compelled departure and to project the blame onto someone else. It was particularly satisfactory to place responsibility on Britain, traditionally assigned the role of oppressor in ballads, and on its agents, the landlords: "... emigration was not interpreted as a rational, individualist alternative, but as evidence of British disruption of the Irish way of life" (Foster 1988, 370). Essentially therefore, there was a tendency for Irish migrants to see themselves still as Irish people, but forced to live abroad in a state of involuntary exile.

Peasantry

Other ballads suggest that such exiles were still at heart a peasant people. Several of the songs have the characteristics of a pre-literate community under stress, with their mixture of issues and sentiments, their recollections of ill-digested fragments of history, myth, popular religion, superstition, politics and everyday concerns. Of these, Columbkil's Prophecy is one of the most striking (Box 2). From internal evidence it can be dated to somewhere between 1838 and 1841. It is redolent with the pressures bearing down on Irish society at the time, and the sense of impending crisis which they created. These pressures came from a variety of factors, but the accumulating impact of a growing population on a fixed resource base was fundamental. As already noted, there was a variety of responses, of which emigration, the most painful, was increasingly common. There was also a series of poor harvests, partial famines and outbreaks of infectious diseases in the years immediately after 1815, which suggest that the pressures on resources were steadily growing and the margins of survival becoming narrower.

It is hardly surprising therefore that some sections of Irish rural society sought compensation or escape in periodic bouts of popular millennial speculation³. This phenomenon has been observed to occur in societies marked by intense individual and collective anxiety, insecurity and frustration. Amongst the factors believed to produce these reactions are disaster or the fear of disaster, the lack of legitimate means to articulate and seek redress for grievances and a series of recent defeats of efforts to seek a solution by secular military or political means (Donnelly 1983). All three conditions held true for large parts of Catholic rural Ireland in the early nineteenth century, a period when millennial excitement ran high (Foster 1988). This took the form of prophecies which circulated amongst the peasantry via tracts and handbills distributed by pedlars and school teachers and the itinerant 'prophecy man' who wandered the countryside reciting traditional stories. The broadside ballad was "another important vehicle for the transmission of millennial hopes, and an outlet for sectarian feeling" (Donnelly 1983, 122).

Several overlapping groups of prophecies were in circulation, but two in particular were immensely popular. One was the so-called Pastorini prophecies, derived from a lengthy pseudoscholarly work on the

Box 2 - Columbkil's Prophecy

*You have heard how Columbkil, when his prophecy began,
As he traced it to the last generation,
I'm sure you will find it true, for the tax that's laid on you,
Will surely oppress our Irish nation;
Since the poor laws did take place, you will shortly want no
lease,
You will disown both your cattle and your country,
From your farms you will run away, as your rents you cannot
pay,
Since the Union left our dear Irish nation.*

*Its after New Year's day those heavy taxes you pay,
To keep the poorhouse in good order ...
Be quick, look at your ground, for the rent it can't be found,
And go call home your noblemen from London,
Or you must work like slaves, while you go to your graves,
Unless that the Union return.⁴*

*You learned men of fame excuse my feeble frame,
For want of education I am stupid,
These verses I pen down, in praise of Queen and Crown,
And Lord Mulgrave the pride of our nation.*

...

*So now I will end my song, as my verses are not long,
I hope that I have told you no treason, ...
Victoria may long reign, and Prince Albert the same ...⁵*

also some very materialistic concerns about tithes, rents, rates, absenteeism and the repeal of the Union, all grievances which it was asserted would disappear under the new dispensation.

The survival of Protestantism after 1825 was clearly something of a blow, but the thought forms persisted, as did the material grievances which were creating the sense of stress and popular expectation of deliverance. In the early 1820s this inflammable mixture of sentiments helped generate the atmosphere and indeed provided a quasi-religious justification for the violent secret peasant societies commonly known as Rockites who terrorised large parts of south-western Ireland. These groups, operating clandestinely in oath bound cells under the leadership of the legendary 'Captain Rock', terrorised all whom they perceived as trying to extract or support the imposition of rents, rates or tithes. Consequently landlords and their agents, Anglican clergy, members of the police, yeomanry and army or their families, sympathisers, servants and property became targets. The anonymous literature of these societies, in the form of proclamations, threats and warnings, was couched in the terminology and expectations of the prophecies. In the late 1820s, as the Rockite movement and millennial expectations faltered, there was a transfer of both expectations and membership into the grassroots of Daniel O'Connell's movement for Catholic emancipation, with the result that "... millenarianism continued to be a factor of some weight in the new political agitation ..." (Connolly 1983,136). The excited hopes of the peasantry came to focus on the programme of the new Catholic Association and its leader.

Catholicism

This swing of support behind O'Connell's movement and the text of the ballads reveal the fact that the Irish peasantry and the migrants drawn from it were steeped in a robust and vehement Catholicism which at times verged on the sectarian. Indeed, one authority goes so far as to claim that "a blistering sectarianism was central to the popular mentality and was to remain largely untouched by the liberal principles of nationalist leaders ... popular ballads ... displayed fierce sectarian animosity" (Thuente 1989, 59-60). The ballads under scrutiny (e.g. Box 3) constantly make reference to the historic legitimacy of the Irish Catholic church, the calamity that was the Protestant

Reformation, the injustices and persecution of penal times and the enduring tenacity of Catholic believers.

This is no mere reactionary lament for times past – it is actively revanchist and restorationist. There is a lively sense of an imminent deliverance which will be accompanied by the dispensing of justice on those responsible for past persecution. This deliverance will be brought by the efforts not only of true Irish Catholics, but with help from European Catholic powers. When this is achieved, the new Ireland will be uniformly Catholic and, moreover, free from exploitation, oppression and injustice.

Irish

Some of the ballads display not merely an ongoing general interest in the affairs of Ireland but also an identification with the growing sense of explicitly Irish nationalism which gathered momentum as the nineteenth century progressed. “The songs ... convey the implication that departure does not mean severing one’s ties with Ireland completely ... it is impossible to shake off one’s Irishness – an essential component of the migrants’ cultural baggage.” (Litvack 1996, 74-75). In popular ballad form this was expressed in admiration, bordering on adulation, for two iconic figures, the historical character of St. Patrick and the contemporary nationalist leader Daniel O’Connell. St. Patrick became an almost mythical cultic figure for the Irish both at home and abroad: “the history and legend which surround the saint have transformed him into a symbolic icon for Irish Catholics, embodying their country, their faith and their destiny ...” (Litvack 1996, 78). The same author’s comments on Patrick’s significance in Catholic hymns could equally apply to his role in popular ballads: “... the writer’s thoughts on supernatural judgement and anti-Protestantism often came together in focusing on St. Patrick ... a clear symbol of stability and confidence, [he] served as the receptacle for polemical outpourings which could, at best, serve as the Irish Catholic expression of feelings about their situation, which was often uncertain, and their future.” (Litvack 1996, 79). Thus, in the ballads under discussion he is given his legendary role as the evangeliser of Ireland, the scourge of its reptiles, and the founder of the Irish Catholic faith, but he is also shown as sensitive to its ancient traditions (Box 3).

But by the 1820s the Irish had a contemporary leader who, with astonishing rapidity, graduated to heroic, indeed almost legendary stature: “... [Daniel]

Box 3 - The Shamrock Green Island

*... a serpent arose as it happen’d before,
When Adam and Eve were in Eden,
And kindled the torch which Luther enforced,
By rising the new reformation;
There is Calvin and Cranmer and Henry,
And joined the new system and signed the decree,
Corrupted our scripture and poison’d our creed,
And they were assisted by all rotten members,
That fell from the church increasing their numbers,
Till they reach’d our shores we make it no wonder,
It affected our Green Shamrock Isle.*

...

*All Catholic powers in Europe all round,
Are waiting with patience to lead ‘em;
The knights of St. Patrick are already at hand,
They are waiting with patience to get the command ...
To scourge all those vipers and quickly dispatch them,
To Clontarf we’ll beat, like Danes we’ll march them,
And there in the lake for their sins we’ll wash them,
And clear the Shamrock Green Isle.⁶*

*Religion will smile once more in our isle ...
The half of the rents we will then cast away,
The tithe and high taxes no longer we’ll pay,
The fruits of our labour we’ll have to this day,
No long we’ll have either bailiffs or proctors,
Informers or spies or all such workers ...
All over the Shamrock Green Isle.*

...

*St. Patrick the apostle before he considered,
The torture we bore in our nation,
It was then with his cross,
He drove the toad and the serpent,
And all the obnoxious creatures;
Then he consecrated the kingdom all round.
The gospel he preached for the heathens he found,
Then on a rock Christ’s church he erected,
The blest inclination by him was respected,
The ranks of heathens he had them converted,
All over the Shamrock Green Island.*

O’Connell is by far the most popular folk hero ... They preferred to remember him as the indomitable counsellor, the cunning lawyer whose tricks outmanoeuvred English law and brought practical, concrete benefits ...” (Thuente 1989, 59). In addition, as already noted, his Catholic Association benefited from the millennial excitement of the early 1820s and the associated Rockite activities, and many of the expectations roused by these movements were transferred onto the personality of O’Connell and the movement he led⁷. Consequently, stories about O’Connell were legion: in them and the ballads they inspired he is invariably represented as facing down

the English, in the form of both officialdom and private individuals, outwitting them and coming off best in either a material or verbal sense, and sometimes both (verse 1, Box 4). In the same ballad O'Connell encountered two Irish tinkers who had been turned out of a London hotel. Assisting them to return in disguise as respectable guests, they installed themselves in state and over four days created such a noise that the landlord gladly paid them one hundred pounds to depart. The closing lines are an expression of Irish national pride focused on one their own who had done well for himself and his people (verse 2, Box 4)

Undoubtedly part of the adulation of O'Connell flowed from his personal qualities. He was a brilliant advocate, a thrilling public orator and a splendid parliamentarian. Moreover, he possessed an imposing physical presence as well as considerable personal charm, humour and wit (Trench 1986). But there was another dimension to him. In the recent past Irish political leaders had been liberally minded members of the Anglican Ascendancy class and their achievements, such as legislative independence, had not endured. Those such as Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet who had taken the military option had been defeated in 1798 or 1803. O'Connell, however, was a new phenomenon. He was the first national leader for many generations sprung from native Irish Catholic stock, he had dared to defy the authorities and moreover, he had forced them to concede Catholic emancipation. When combined with the transferred messianic expectations referred to earlier, it is little wonder that a peasant people, imbued with a folklore recalling defeat and oppression, quickly constructed him into a heroic figure of almost legendary proportions even while he lived. He gave the (Catholic) people of Ireland a new sense of self respect, confidence and pride in being Irish.

Loyalty

It is an apparent paradox that some of these very same ballads which deplore oppression by the Anglo-Normans and English, elevate O'Connell and celebrate Irishness, also contain assertions of modesty, deferential admiration for the British administration and loyalty to the British monarch (verse 3, Box 2). Columbkil's Prophecy proceeds to praise O'Connell, recall the Columbkil prophecy, the oppression of the Catholic church and grievances over rents and taxes

Box 4 - O'Connell and the Irish Tinkers in London

*One day through the streets as brave Dan was walking,
A party of Cockneys to view him they stood;
In order to humbug the monarch of Ireland,
One pulled out a note and said, sir, is that good.
To answer the joke brave Dan was not lazy,
The note to his job he conveyed in a trice,
When asked to return he says to the fellow,
Sir, I am a counsellor, pay for advice.*

...

*Since Daniel O'Connell he first was elected,
The rights of Old Erin he always maintained,
Let them never think of a joke on the Irish,
They'll never play tricks on O'Connell again.*

and to express hopes for the fall of the gentry. However, in the last verse it returns to the loyal theme (verse 4, Box 2).

Even more problematic is the ballad which recalls the popular historical narrative of religious oppression and military defeat – but also proclaims loyal sentiments and hopes for better times (Box 5). There are two possible explanations of this apparently contradictory mix of sentiments. One is that the loyal sentiments were nominal public nods towards government and crown, whilst the main body of the ballads expressed a deeper, clandestine tradition which was reactionary, restorationist, revanchist, Catholic, anti-Protestant and anti-English. There is evidence that such sentiments did exist in the Irish countryside in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, renewed by bitter memories of the 1798 rising and the disappointed millennial hopes of the early and mid 1820s, and carried by migrants to their new homes. This tradition of devious defiance in song was well established, sometimes using the safety of the Gaelic language as the medium of expression (Garvin 1981, Murphy 1979). Certainly this would explain why ballads such as "Erin's Glory" are torn between the tensions of folk memories of oppression and persecution at the hands of the English, grim satisfaction at the prospect of slaughtering them in revenge and, on the other hand, good wishes for the monarch and hopes for unity, peace and better days.

But there is an alternative explanation. It is possible that the verses should be taken at face value as a perfectly accurate reflection of the fact that in the

Box 5 - Erin's Glory

*You sons of Patrick's lovely land, come listen to my story,
With a heart sincere I will declare how Erin suffer'd sorely;
Since Strongbow landed on our shore, we were wrecked with
lamentation,
Our priests and prelates suffer'd sore thro' Erin's matchless
nation.
Base Oliver Cromwell did enslave St. Patrick's sons and
daughters,
Believe me you, our clergy he did hang in chains and halters;
It was his delight both day and night, to pull down church
and steeple,
And murder all both great and small, and trample on God's
people.
At Ballinahinch and Vinegar hill, we struggled hard for
freedom,
Like Brian Bourne we thousands slew, usurpers we left
bleeding;
Now to conclude and make an end, long life to Queen Victoria,
May we soon see our nation free from tyrant whig or tory,
May plenty smile round Erin's isle may peace and plenty
flourish,
May all agree in unity, and broils and quarrels perish.⁸*

nineteenth century many Irish had come to see themselves as both British and Irish. Consequently, assertions of Catholicism and Irishness were not necessarily at variance with loyalty to the British connection. The recalling of past injustices and rehearsal of current grievances could therefore be seen as demands for justice and equality within the British state and empire and the adulation of O'Connell, who frequently proclaimed his personal loyalty to the crown, as support for the man who had led them on their progress thus far. Moreover, for a conservative peasant people, loyalty to monarchical government and specifically personalised loyalty to the monarch as opposed to a government of 'tyrant whig or tory', would have been a natural sentiment, especially as the Irish Catholic church in the nineteenth century was always at pains to emphasise and encourage the loyalty of its adherents to the British crown.

Furthermore, such a mix of loyalties can be viewed as merely one aspect of the cultural hybridity characteristic of the nascent nationalism of subordinate peoples in the nineteenth century. This is the process whereby the cultural features of the colonized and the colonizer not merely overlap but interact and produce features which bear the marks of their diverse origins. Indeed, it has been argued that broadside ballads such as those analysed here were one of the key arenas in which Irish identity was

contested during the nineteenth century. Lloyd (1993) argues that for Irish nationalists, and especially for the Young Irelanders of the 1840s embarking on the project of constructing an Irish identity, popular culture was a vital arena because the institutions of government were in British hands. However, given the realities of Irish history, nationalists were faced with the fact that Irish development was marked by a series of disruptions and discontinuities, rather than the neat continuity they sought. At the popular level, and above all in the urban areas, they found a cultural tradition which, given the centuries of interaction between Ireland and Britain, was boisterously hybrid. This was particularly true of the broadside ballads, a feature of British urban life which diffused into urban Ireland in the seventeenth century and became so widely popular that it has been claimed the street ballads of Britain and North America owe a great deal to Irish immigration in terms of composition, subject matter and internal rhythm, which, it is claimed, in some cases is derived from Gaelic verse (Shepard 1962).

Evidence of linguistic hybridity can be found in eight of the ballads in the volume under discussion. They contain Irish Gaelic words or expressions, varying from titles such as "Erin Go Bragh" ("Ireland for Ever") and "Cushlamachree" (a phonetic, compound rendering of two Gaelic words meaning "O love of my heart") to terms of personal endearment incorporated within the text, such as "mavourneen" ("my darling"). Such hybridity infuriated nationalists of the Young Ireland school of thought, because it revealed a lack of 'purity' and underlined the colonizer's presence and influence. One response of the Young Irelanders was to write ballads which were more truly 'national' in their emphasis and format (Thuente 1989). Consequently, the conglomerate loyalties displayed in the ballads under discussion are merely reflecting the contested nature of mid-nineteenth century Irishness amongst Irish migrants living in urban Britain.

Conclusion

The five songs discussed in this paper were amongst the Irish broadside ballads circulating in Manchester in the mid-nineteenth century. It is highly likely that they were not the only songs which would have been appreciated by the Irish in the city, but it is clear that they were sufficiently popular to justify constant

reproduction. Perhaps the most striking feature of the ballads is that, though printed for and circulating amongst a people who lived in mid-nineteenth century industrial Manchester, there are no direct references to the city or to the socio-economic and political issues which are to be found in non-Irish ballads (Palmer 1996; Shepard 1962, 1973). Instead, there is a preoccupation with Ireland and things Irish, a sense of displacement and the frequent use of the literary tropes of exile and victim.

But these concerns and devices are in themselves significant at a variety of levels. From one viewpoint they can be seen as escapist coping mechanisms for dealing with subordination, emigration and displacement into an alien political and urban industrial milieu and as means to transfer and excise the guilt of emigration. At another level, however, they may be seen as a quite realistic popular device for engagement with the complexities of being Irish migrants in a British city. The ballad form itself was an example of the resulting cultural hybridity, in that it was a product of English urban life which took root in the larger Irish urban areas – themselves an English import – and was carried abroad by migrants⁹. The constant use of the devices of exile and victimhood helped the migrant to rationalise departure and destination, the preoccupation with Irish issues whilst living in Britain, the duality of political loyalties and the use of Gaelic words and expressions in the ballads were in fact a realistic recognition of the fact that the Irish in mid-nineteenth century Manchester were a

people positioned awkwardly in the ambiguous space between two strongly marked culture worlds, both in the throes of profound change.

Such material is an invaluable source for reconstructing past cultural landscapes. In particular, it can help reclaim the popular preoccupations and sentiments which would otherwise be lost through an exclusive concentration on elite culture. They are of particular value to political geographers trying to recapture the frequently clandestine sentiments of a subordinate people denied access to more open, conventional means of expression by lack of resources or political power. Song can be an especially useful, and sometimes the only, means of resistance for a powerless group, since creation and performance can, if necessary, be accomplished with an absolute minimum of resources. Popular songs, sung in private or public venues, can question established authority and mores, and dissenting ideas can be expressed, affirmed and elaborated. They can be the means of bonding an otherwise scattered and alienated segment of the population and cultivating a sense of identity and solidarity. For a migrant people such as the Irish, with a strong tradition of communal music making, who had constructed for themselves an appealing popular narrative of oppression and forced migration, they were a valuable vehicle for expressing their reactions to the divergent forces bearing down on them and claiming their loyalties in mid-nineteenth century Manchester.

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Notes

1. The two ballads are "Ireland for the Irish! Home rule and the release of the Fenians." (Air: "The Grand Conversation") and "The Men of Sixty-Nine" (Air: "Auld Lang Syne").
2. The ballads analysed in this paper are filed as BR. Q 398.8. S9 Volume 1. Of the 361 ballads in this volume, 80 are concerned with Irish affairs. There is a cover note stating that the ballads have been in possession of the Library since publication. It also states that, while it is impossible to date them accurately and many were so popular that they were constantly reprinted, none are later than 1873. Pearson is the printer of the great majority of ballads in this volume, though some of the plates he was using were clearly the original property of other printers whose stock he bought. A small number bear the imprints of printers in Stockport, Hyde and Preston, but only those by Pearson have been used in this paper. It should also be noted that in addition to the twelve volumes noted here, there is also a volume on microfilm, another in the Library strongroom and two dating from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries printed in heavy Gothic type and referred to as 'black letter' ballads. None of these has been examined for this project.
3. The term refers to the thousand years of peace and prosperity which some Christian scholars of the book of Revelation believed would either precede or follow the return of Jesus Christ.
4. The Act of Union of Great Britain and Ireland which abolished the Dublin parliament and merged the two kingdoms into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland came into operation on 1st January 1801. The act setting up the Irish Poor Law system became operational on 31st July 1838.
5. Lord Mulgrave was part of a widely praised administrative team in Ireland under Henry Drummond, a notably able Chief Secretary between 1835 and 1840. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were married in February 1840.
6. Clontarf is now an area of Dublin on the north side of the river Liffey. At the time of the battle in 1014 the city was confined to a small area on the southern side of the river. During the battle the army of the High King Brian Boru defeated a combined force of Norse and their Irish allies. The climax of the conflict came when his followers broke the ranks of the enemy and drove them into the flooded river Tolka, where many were drowned.
7. Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847) led the successful campaign for Catholic emancipation (1829). He was an M.P. from 1829 to 1847, when he achieved some reform of the tithe and local government system in Ireland in the 1830s, but his campaign for repeal of the union in the early 1840s failed. He has been described as "The greatest leader of Catholic Ireland." (Foster 1988, 291, note iii).
8. Strongbow was the nickname of Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare, earl of Striguil and sometime of Pembroke. He had recently lost his title to the latter earldom and his displeasure at this had led him to an agreement with Dermot McMurrough king of Leinster to come over to Ireland and assist him in an ongoing dynastic dispute. The bargain was sealed by Strongbow's marriage to Dermot's daughter Eva and the promise that he would succeed to the throne of Leinster. The landing of the first Norman knights in 1169 and the subsequent marriage of Strongbow to Eva (the 'Aoife' of countless Irish songs and stories) came to be regarded in Irish folklore as the point at which Ireland's history was transformed for ever. Ballinahinch (Co. Down) and Vinegar Hill (Co. Wexford) were battles in the 1798 rising, in both of which British forces defeated Irish insurgents, with notable slaughter in the latter case. Brian 'Bourne' is a stylised reference to Brian Boru.
9. One of the most respected roles in Irish Gaelic society was that of the Seanchai, the traditional teller of stories and repository of folklore. The Irish broadside ballad singer could perhaps be seen as an adaptation of that role in the English speaking urban context, and perhaps as another example of cultural hybridity.

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