

## ***New Voices Conference***

### **“The Bold Soldier Boy”: Performance and Irish Boldness in New York in 1855**

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Our faith is the weapon most feared by our enemies, for thereby shall we lift our people up against those who would destroy us. Our name is called the Dead Rabbits, to remind all of our suffering and as a call to those who would suffer still to join our ranks, however so far they may have strayed from our common home across the sea. For with great numbers must come great strength and the salvation of our people.

—Amsterdam Vallon, in Martin Scorsese’s  
*Gangs of New York*<sup>1</sup>

#### **Nationalism, Control and Diversity in Irish Performance**

The voice-over by Leonardo DeCaprio’s character in Martin Scorsese’s *Gangs of New York* comes at a point in the film in which Amsterdam has resurrected a gang, the Dead Rabbits, once led by his father, “Priest” Vallon, an Irish Cross-wielding tough inspired by Roman Catholic icons and characterized by bellicose masculinity. A number of events have led to a crisis facing the gang and its Irish immigrant members. Amsterdam has decided to turn against “Butcher” Bill Cutting, the American nativist who years earlier had killed Amsterdam’s father but also later had taken the young Vallon under his wing. Political rivalries in the Five Points slum of New York have enticed Boss William

Tweed to ally with the Irish of the district against Cutting's candidates, prompting the "Butcher" to assassinate an Irish man, Walter "Monk" McGinn, friend and mentor to Amsterdam, who had been elected Sheriff. Finally, before a final confrontation with Cutting's loose alliance of "native" American gangs, Amsterdam manages to consolidate the power of Irish gang members to create what he terms "an army."

As ostensible commander of the Five Points Irish and defender of the Catholic Church, Amsterdam speaks for the men who revived the Irish alliance. Amsterdam's voice-over implies that many of them had buried their allegiances to their Irish brethren during the tenure of Cutting's leadership in the Five Points. The resurrection of the immigrant gang and therefore of a collective Irish pride is permeated with Irish nationalist themes—the memory of suffering, common origins in Ireland, and the shared destiny of a people. Given the context of these words, the film is not clear whether the faith Amsterdam invokes to sustain his people involves belief in Roman Catholic dogma or in Irish national solidarity. (At one point the revived gang protects a Catholic church from attack by Cutting-led nativists). Probably, it encapsulates both, making Amsterdam's soliloquy an apt condensation of a common view of Irish nationalism in America as a political ideology that was an amalgam of working-class Catholicism, resistance to Anglo-American hatred, and Irish nationalist memory.<sup>2</sup>

Most interesting about Scorsese's movie is that although the narrative leading to the final scenes portrays a commonly understood version of collective Irish identity (that which is given coherence by Amsterdam Vallon's soliloquy), there are many different varieties of Irish identities at work in the lives of Five Points residents. Cutting's assistant (McGloin) shares a violent lifestyle and an Irish brogue with many other characters. A parade of the Irish Brigade, most probably patterned after the 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment, makes its way through the New York streets. "Monk" McGinn speaks Gaelic and urges Amsterdam to love his people, as his father did. And throughout the movie, many varieties of Irish national culture, especially manifested by the performance of Irish music, including instrumental reels, jigs, and airs, as well as ballads sung in taverns and in the streets, are introduced to add texture to the story.<sup>3</sup>

*Gangs of New York*, then, asks viewers to privilege one variety of national identity over a wealth of others, not unlike a prominent strand of the historiography on Irish America. That interpretation envisions Irish nationalism as a monolith, expressed by a group of elites and either accepted or rejected by the mass of immigrants to America.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, many works view Irish identity in America as a shared belief, forged by the convergence of nationalism, resistance to nativism, and Catholicism, much in the same vein as Amsterdam Vallon's soliloquy.<sup>5</sup> Other recent studies are either more ambivalent about how nationalist discourse was interpreted by the masses<sup>6</sup> or investigate the "factionalism and internal disputes" which accompanied the evolution of the nationalist movement.<sup>7</sup> Most of the literature, however, emphasizes Irish

nationalism as a common idea that provided a unifying belief for Irish people in America.

My study seeks out differences in the meanings of Irish nationalism by looking at the way it was most often expressed: in performance. Much has been done to elaborate the diversity of the Irish community in America.<sup>8</sup> The process of identity formation, however, especially as it involves *performed* Irish nationalism, has rarely been scrutinized. Scholars often characterize parades, orations, plays and variety sketches, and, significantly, music, as symbols of Irish unity, or an Irish voice, or dissociate such cultural forms from nationalism, defined narrowly along the lines of revolution in Ireland. As a result, many histories of the American Irish reinforce nationalist notions of uniformity.

Because nations gain legitimacy by claiming unique cultural traits (just as they claim territorial boundaries and unbroken histories), the rhetoric and practice of cultural nationalism seeks to affirm the "natural" or essential existence of a collective, a group more homogenous than diverse.<sup>9</sup> Practically, this pattern takes form in cultural expressions like Amsterdam Vallon's speech; such performances can seem to give coherence to the Irish community. By claiming to speak for a "people," Amsterdam imagines the community's boundary by performing it. Those who belong to the nation identify with their home across the sea, and share a history of suffering. More important, the Irish community in Amsterdam Vallon's New York possesses great strength and therefore the possibility of salvation if only its members would recognize their common bonds. Similarly, when people marching in parades, actors on the stage, musicians in intimate or public settings, ballad mongers on the street, or orators at annual dinners performed their national identities, they established boundaries by articulating the limits of national identity and naturalizing it into visible, commonly accepted signs and expressions.<sup>10</sup>

However, national culture and its diverse meanings cannot be easily contained. Partly because songs, orations, or public displays entail the vexed relationships between performers and audiences, and partly because displays of national culture often involve abridged or selective iterations of national themes or memories, diverse ideas about national identity are dispersed, rather than contained, by such performances.<sup>11</sup> Especially if we define nationalism as "a series of continually negotiated relationships between people who share occupancy in a defined geographic, political, or ideological space"<sup>12</sup> and understand its meanings as emerging from conflicts over the control and definition of the nation, we can see that national performances play a key role in the production of collective identity and aid in producing difference based on one's position in society. By enabling specific, mutable, and context-bound material practices to be framed in terms of national identity, and by producing a discourse that attempts to articulate national values and ideals, national performance gives rise to both patterns of control and dissemination of national identity.

A study of the historical context of mid-nineteenth century New York, which is the setting for Amsterdam Vallon's travails, reveals such patterns of control,

conflict, and difference in the ways in which immigrants experienced Irish nationalism. Public processions, orations, and music were part of the rich performance culture of the city, and they represent different material practices that produced national identity. The masculine and martial national symbols that emerged through those varied performances obscured class, religious, and gendered identities. Reporters and editors who recorded these events, as well as the performers themselves, generated an equally rich discourse about what these performances meant. In particular, notions of Irish boldness<sup>13</sup> associated with the vices of the city's male working-class subculture in 1855 destabilized the portrayal of a community united against Anglo-American intolerance and, by extension, British oppression at home. Though a shared symbolism of masculine resistance existed in many performance settings, different contexts enabled different interpretations of what such bold resistance meant. Set against the backdrop of New York's diverse Irish population, these performances and the discourse surrounding them enacted the conflicts and mutual understandings commensurate with the production of national culture.

### **The New York Irish in 1855: Masculinity, Conflict, and Communitas**

New York City in the mid-nineteenth century witnessed a wave of immigrants from Ireland, many of whom fled the potato famine in the decade between 1845 and 1855. Other Irish, however, arrived as political refugees as a result of a failed Irish uprising against British rule in 1848. A much smaller but not insubstantial group of Irish immigrants from earlier generations, both Catholic and Protestant, greeted them. The result was a diverse mix. An amalgam of laborers, with working-class views of the political atmosphere and a range of cultural experiences, joined, among others, saloon owners, political party operatives, and merchants, as well as nationalist elites who sought to direct Irish interests toward rebellion in the homeland.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, as *Gangs of New York* shows, nativists also greeted Irish immigrants to the city. Intolerant of Irish immigrants, especially of Irish Catholics, these Americans were also themselves equally divided by class, gender, and religious interests, although many belonged to a political party popularly known as the Know-Nothings. Bill Poole, who provided the inspiration for the movie's "Butcher" Bill Cutting, was among them. His death in early March of 1855 provided the backdrop for a number of national performances that Irish immigrants staged that year. As the city's press declared in prominent headlines, Poole was shot in a seedy tavern named Stanwix Hall by a member of an Irish gang. He died several days later. A massive procession through the streets of New York following Poole's funeral on March 11 set the stage for a number of different Irish performances in the city leading up to and including the annual St. Patrick's Day celebrations.<sup>15</sup>

Irish immigrants had celebrated the holiday in the city as far back as 1762, and some of the earliest events involved dinners held by Protestant elites, Catholic church services, and family events. In 1766, city residents witnessed the first military procession on St. Patrick’s Day, and after the turn of the nineteenth century, local groups held different parades and a number of benevolent associations held dinners to mark the day. The 1840s Irish immigration swelled the ranks of the parade, and, by the early 1850s, a convention of Irish societies organized it into a single mass event. By mid-century, then, the procession had evolved into a spectacle for the masses and as such became a performance event, a site for different interests in the Irish community to advocate for their own agendas.

At the same time, St. Patrick’s Day dinners, expensive to attend, remained the domain of the elite.<sup>16</sup> The oratory and traditional “toasts” that highlighted the annual dinners of the Irish leadership provided another strand of Irish nationalist identity. Although some speakers at these events found common ground between Irish and American republican ideals, others used Irish national themes to promote ongoing ideological resistance to British imperialism and to Anglo-American nativism, the local intolerance of (especially Irish Catholic) immigrants so powerfully symbolized by the outpouring of grief for Bill Poole.

At the same time, Irish laborers and gang members who lived in a different segment of New York society projected another image of Irish identity. Accounts of Poole’s murder portrayed Irish men as belonging to an underworld that rejected genteel or bourgeois niceties. Bare-knuckle boxing, gambling, prostitution, and similar vices characterized this “bachelor subculture,” and the expression of national loyalties that emerged from it took on different forms and different meanings.<sup>17</sup> For some gang members, national resistance involved physical force—fighting was cast as defense of national pride. For others, Irish national culture was experienced primarily in terms of urban spectacles like the St. Patrick’s Day parade, or through songs and ballads. The parade and music, like many types of performance, gave rise to divergent meanings of Irishness. Some ideas would be congruent with St. Patrick’s Day oratory, some with the experiences of gang members or working men. And several songs, like “The Bold Soldier Boy,” were performed in different contexts that March, and they could be interpreted in a variety of ways.

Despite the diverse expressions of Irish nationalism, such examples reveal commonalities as well. Most notably, Irish nationalism in New York was often expressed in terms of gender.<sup>18</sup> An emphasis on masculine “boldness” characterized many performances, which ranged from songs about brave roving boys and Irish soldiers to orations evoking the feats of exiled freedom fighters to accounts of physical brutality responding to nativist insults. The symbolism of male boldness reinforced a perception of commonality despite the different meanings it evinced. The St. Patrick’s Day parade and the accompanying dinners in particular were annual rituals that, like other popular national celebrations in

the American antebellum period, were part of a “common festive culture” that downplayed differences based on the social structures that fragment communities. Such Irish performances gave rise to what Victor Turner has termed “*communitas*,” that is, a “sense of comradeship and communion” that arose when staged national symbols or semantic codes appeared to diminish social difference and reinforce common ideas. “*Communitas* exists where social structure is not,” Turner once noted, emphasizing the role that communal rituals play in projecting a sense of unity among a group’s members.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the 1850s, St. Patrick’s Day organizers depicted the parade as a structure-less celebration of Irish unity that emphasized common symbols, and orators characterized their community as bound together by these ongoing cultural performances. In doing so, they were articulating a “positive vision” of Irish cultural nationalism; they envisioned the imagined community as unified, uncontaminated by dissent or difference.<sup>20</sup> However, cultural performances in 1855 also enabled a “negative vision” of Irish nationhood to emerge as well. Although St. Patrick’s Day rituals provided an expression of *communitas*, Irish performances and the meanings to which they gave rise produced dissent and debate over what they meant. Shared or mutually established meanings of Irish nationhood, masculinity, and the culture that embodied those ideas therefore existed alongside debate and alternative understandings. The tensions between positive visions enabled by ritualistic *communitas* and negative visions of contamination produced by the diverse meanings embedded in cultural performance emerged in the days leading up to and including the St. Patrick’s Day festivities in New York in 1855.

### **The Gangs of New York: Bill Poole, Jack Morrissey, and Physical Resistance**

The male Irish community in New York was diverse. Class dynamics often fragmented the community, both in terms of what the St. Patrick’s Day parade in particular and Irish nationalism more generally meant, as well as how it was experienced. Because the parade, speeches, and nationalist rhetoric prominently emphasized masculinity, different ideas, particularly with regard to Victorian definitions of masculinity, produced friction between laborers and elites, and prodded St. Patrick’s Day organizers and bourgeois orators to channel working class experiences in the parade to meet their national ideals. As Eliot Gorn has pointed out, the exigencies of industrial labor in New York and other burgeoning cities could undermine “independence,” “self-reliance,” and “the bourgeois concept of masculinity” which was equated with “autonomy and self-possession.” Both Irish and non-Irish commentators often championed bourgeois ideals for curtailing passions, including self-imposed moral restraints on sexuality, drinking, and violence. By contrast, a “bachelor subculture” of working-class men asserted alternative definitions of masculinity that rejected such restraints. References to drinking, gang warfare, gambling, prize fighting, and other “vices” enlivened

songs about national identities, national heroes, and especially national characteristics such as Irish boldness.<sup>21</sup> The boldness, or the spirit of fight, characterizing the Irish nationalism depicted in broadside ballads was part of the culture of the saloon and the vice-ridden "oppositional" masculine subculture of the city.

Sometimes celebrated in songs and speeches, sometimes condemned by American reformers as a corrupting influence on the republic, these vices were widely publicized in the weeks leading up to the parade as a result of the gang rivalries in the city. In the waning days of February 1855, tensions climaxed with the fatal shooting of Bill Poole by a member of an Irish gang led by a man named Jack Morrissey. The press reported Poole's deathbed scene in melodramatic detail, and his funeral, held a week before the annual St. Patrick's Day celebrations, drew a reported "one hundred thousand persons" in a demonstration of anti-Irish sentiment.<sup>22</sup> An open hearse bore Poole's coffin, which was covered by an American flag. A large gilt eagle stood over it. Around the top of the hearse ran a silver fringe, and just beneath, on a band of black velvet, on each side, were Poole's final words, "I die a true American."<sup>23</sup> The outpouring of grief (as well as the antipathy expressed toward the Irish) impressed a *New York Daily Times* reporter. "The motive for this display," the writer noted, "was the fact that Poole was foully murdered by a gang of ruffians, led on by an Irishmen, he [Poole] being an American, representing the lower strata of the technical American feeling of the day; and when the nation boils the scum will rise."<sup>24</sup>

While some writers condemned this world of toughs, not distinguishing between American and Irish gangs, others singled out the Irish menace as the source of the conflict. Strident condemnation characterized the more intolerant newspapers. "Bloody crimes like these," the more moderate *New York Daily Tribune* noted, "are but the fruits of the hydra of vices which has been tolerated in our midst, and which, acting in an offensive and defensive alliance, constitute a fearful power in this city." The "vices"—"drunkenness, gambling, prostitution, prizefighting and their associate evils"—formed elements of the masculine underworld culture of the city, and were symbolized by the antics and misadventures of the two gangs. "The difficulty," the report continued,

has assumed something of a National phase, Poole and his friends representing the American, Morrissey and his friends the Irish sentiment. The Ninth Warders, who mauled the Hibernian Society on the 4th of July, 1853, were reported to be "Short Boys," "Friends of Poole," &c., which had some influence in stimulating the foreign feeling against him as an American champion.<sup>25</sup>

The *New York Daily Times* put it more starkly: "It has been felt and believed everywhere that Poole was murdered because he was active in the organized

Native American interest,—because he was a very difficult man for the foreign rowdies to manage or conquer.” This “fighting man of the American order” was a “martyr to the Native American cause,” a writer for the *Daily Times* asserted.<sup>26</sup>

The city’s newspapers carried daily reports about Poole’s death and the coroner’s examination of suspects and witnesses. The accounts are interesting for their portrayal of manhood among laboring classes, as well as the ways in which Irish men in particular were attempting to perform their national allegiances.<sup>27</sup> Part of the coroner’s inquest published by the city’s newspapers—an examination of murder witness Cyrus Shay, proprietor of a “drinking house” on Church street, a “prominent Whig fighting man,” and a close associate of Poole—demonstrated the national hue that typified insults flung from group to group on the night of the assault. Morrissey had been drinking, Shay said, and was questioning the virility of Americans like Poole. Earlier in the evening, Shay said he saw Morrissey and two of his henchmen, Patrick McLaughlin (known as “Paugene”) and Lewis Baker, discussing whether to leave Stanwix Hall or to confront Poole, who was also there.

We stayed till about 1 1/2 o clock, when six men came in. Paugene, Baker, (Jim) Turner (and three others); these men came in company together; the moment he got in, Paugene collared Poole; Poole was talking with Campbell, and Paugene reached across Campbell’s breast to take hold of Poole, exclaiming, “You’re a pretty American son of a b——,” and “Now aint you a pretty American?” Poole replied, “Yes, I am their standard bearer.” I told Poole not to make any reply, as the party was armed with pistols; Paugene, Baker, and Turner had pistols under their coats; Paugene kept hold of Poole’s handkerchief, and spit in his face three times; called him “a black muzzled son of a b——,” and wanted to fight him.

According to the *Tribune*, Shay testified that Poole was unarmed, and did not return the Irish gang’s threats. When he was attacked, the paper continued, “Poole threw up his hand, saying, ‘My God, have you come here to murder me?’”<sup>28</sup>

Shay’s account coincided with the image of Irish intemperance, passion, and brutality that had gained currency at the time. Dale Knobel has shown that the image of the Irish in “American conversation” had become pejorative by the mid-1850s: they were often portrayed as “wild,” “mercurial,” “lawless” and, in particular, given to outbursts of violence.<sup>29</sup> Poole’s conduct, according to Shay’s account, was above reproach, when contrasted with the “gang of ruffians” who had assaulted him. “His own behavior” an editorial observed, “was forbearing and yet manly to the last degree. . . . [H]e commanded his temper with unwonted coolness and submitted to the grossest insults to avoid a fight.”<sup>30</sup> The American Poole was the romantic victim in this version of the story, a noble man adhering



to an ideal (as native standard bearer), whose naïve incredulity at this unprovoked Irish aggression was the source of his undoing.

Not surprisingly, other testimony provided a conflicting account of the events. In particular, James Irwin gave what might be understood as the Irish version of the story (testimony that later landed him in jail for perjury). This version, recorded with other accounts in the widely publicized coroner's investigation, depicted Poole as having his hand in his pocket and hiding his own pistol throughout the prelude to the fatal encounter. Irwin had overheard Morrissey, enjoying himself in a back room earlier in the evening, saying, "I have never assaulted a man in my life, without reason."<sup>31</sup> When the strapping Irishman came over to where Poole and his associates were drinking, Irwin said, it was the American Poole who accosted the *Irish* standard bearer:

[Morrissey] said, "How have you been?"

Poole said, "You have tasted me, you ought to know."

"Yes," said Morrissey, "you black-muzzled son of a b—, you and your gang tried to murder me."

Poole replied, "You are a d—d lying, Irish son of a b—. . . ."

(After a scuffle in which Poole drew his weapon), I spoke to Mr. Poole in this way: "Poole," says I, "won't you put that away, Morrissey hasn't got any weapon"—and that's just the way I spoke to Mr. Poole. Mr. Poole did not put the pistol away, but jumped out on the floor to Morrissey, saying, "You Irish son of a b——, I'll fight you breast to breast with pistols."<sup>32</sup>

Irwin said he and another man, a "Mr. Mark McGuire," continued to plead with Poole not to fight the defenseless Morrissey, not to "murder him in cold blood." The American, however, was bent on vengeance:

Poole . . . continued to call Morrissey names. I then got hold of Morrissey and shoved him against the wall, saying, "Won't you go away—you'll get shot"; Poole was calling him at this time "an Irish son of a b——," "an Irish bastard," &c. Morrissey at the same time was calling him a "d——d cowardly loafer"; then Poole got behind the eating bar, and called names; and Mr. McGuire said, "An Irishman is as good as anybody else, as long as he behaves himself"; upon which Mr. Poole replied, "You are a d——d liar," and they gave the lie several times when Poole dared him to fight.<sup>33</sup>

The two versions of this story offer significant contrasts between men with different national and party affiliations. In Shay's version of the events that

night, belligerent Irish men seemingly without rational motive victimized the virtuous American Poole. Confronted by the national antipathy supposedly held by his assailants, he nobly avoided ethnic epithets; instead, he assumed the role of an American emblem, a “standard bearer.” The story was all the more poignant because he had no motive for fighting the Irish gang and had attempted to alert the authorities about potential trouble the night of the murder. Finally, fatally wounded, he cried out melodramatically to God when he realized the foul intentions of the Irish crew.

Similarly, Irwin’s story presents its Irish hero as unarmed; indeed he seemed initially friendly toward Poole. When challenged, however, Morrissey did not pose as an innocent; instead, he responded physically. He refrained, however, from deriding Poole as an American, instead casting him simply as a “black-muzzled son of a b——”. This suggested that Morrissey had no national prejudices, but was willing to fight against any “blackguard” who would insult *his* country. And it is important that the Irishman seemed rational—he said he would not fight “without reason.” The implicit message was that Poole’s nativist stereotypes were unreasonable and unprovoked. They prejudiced him unfairly against the Irish. In addition, Poole had the advantage: he was armed, and surrounded by his associates; Morrissey faced overwhelming odds. His antagonist, however, persisted in defaming the Irish, whose character, despite the odds, Morrissey was willing to defend.

These scenes suggest that one way to assert Irish masculine heroism was by engaging, like Morrissey and his associates, in boxing matches and gang rivalries with perceived national enemies—those who insulted Ireland. Thus it is no surprise that such heroism appeared in national ballads of the period. Morrissey and Poole became the subject of songs published in newspapers and on broadsides sold in the streets. Their lore circulated alongside that of other Irish heroes like Thomas Francis Meagher, John Mitchel, Robert Emmet, Wolfe Tone, and Daniel O’Connell.<sup>34</sup> Prizefighting and the gang violence with which it was associated, then, produced one type of Irish national boldness. Perceived by some elites as illegal and corrupt, it was especially associated by nativists with other manifestations of the unsavory Irish character. Morrissey had made his name in illicit boxing, and he had cultivated a wide following among the city’s Irish sportsmen.<sup>35</sup> His legacy, like those of other Irish pugilists and fighters, found its way into songs sung by members of the sporting fraternity in taverns decades later. In such broadside ballads, Morrissey is also viewed as being primarily an Irishman, more than willing to fight for the honor of “old Paddy’s land”:

Then up spoke Jack Morrisy, with a heart so stout and true,  
Saying, “I am a gallant Irishman that never was subdued;  
Oh, I can whale a Yankee, a Saxon Bull or Bear,  
And in honor of old Paddy’s land, I’ll still those laurels wear”<sup>36</sup>

Much like the nationalist Irish militarism expressed during the March 17 observances in 1855, this song expressed the heroism of boldness and loyalty. Like St. Patrick's Day orators, the "Jack Morrisy" of song performed his allegiances. He was the national standard bearer, a hero to working men in grogshops and shebeens. The fighting spirit represented in such songs defined the Irish character in a certain way; being able to "whale" Yankees and Saxons displayed a heart inherently "stout and true."

### **A "Positive Vision" of Nationhood: Toasts and Orations on St. Patrick's Day**

By March 17, 1855, accounts of Poole's murder and subsequent funeral procession had exacerbated national tensions in the city. Fearing wide-spread disturbances during the St. Patrick's Day parade, city authorities dispatched nearly the entire first division of the New York state militia—including the 69<sup>th</sup> regiment, whose ranks consisted primarily of Irish residents of the city—to quell any rioting. The decision was particularly bitter for the Irish community, since Irish-dominated militias and the spectacle of regimental bayonets had been in past years features of St. Patrick's Day. Inclement weather on parade day kept many spectators indoors, though, and when it became clear that the day would be peaceful, the local regiments were released from city armories. Nevertheless, the toasts, songs, and orations at the annual St. Patrick's Day dinners of the Irish elite in the city reflected nationalist themes of resistance to British imperialism as well as disdain over Anglo-American prejudice. In contrast to the accounts of the Morrissey gang that depicted belligerent boldness, this version of Irish nationalism performed restraint and channeled Irish resistance into a sense of duty to the homeland.

"The storm" of that day became a figure for nativism in several orations during the dinners of different benevolent societies that night, including the Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, the Young Friends of Ireland, and the United Sons of Erin. Some included older themes of accommodation to the host country, as Irish leaders cast immigrant endeavors in the light of American republicanism.<sup>37</sup> Many speakers, however, emphasized Irish uniqueness, traditions of Irish militarism, musical expression, and festiveness. These appeals were an attempt to situate the meanings of the day's parade—and the previous weeks' events—within a communal ideal of resistance to American intolerance and British imperialism. Thus, when William Robinson argued that George Washington favored immigration from Ireland at the United Sons of Erin dinner at National Hall, he was claiming "the name of American" for "adopted as well as native citizens." Washington was the quintessential American hero, he observed, and his position underscored Irish immigrants' value as citizens. Robinson advised the Irish to have "patience under adversity," since "the storm" of nativism "will pass away," but he also celebrated the Irish holiday and the

uniqueness of the Irish people, and condemned the city's attempts to "put down the celebration of St. Patrick's Day," and journalists' irreverent suggestions that "St. Patrick was a Protestant Presbyterian!"<sup>38</sup>

Another orator, at the Young Friends of Ireland's annual festivities, asserted that Irish traditions would persist in New York precisely because its sons "are deeply imbued with a love for fatherland, and entertain a profound veneration for her ancient customs." He urged that they "continue to celebrate St. Patrick's Day" because "it tends to refresh the memory, strengthen our patriotic attachment, and infuse us with a spirit commensurate with the exigencies of the times."<sup>39</sup> The orator celebrated a revived spirit of Irish nationhood, providing an answer to the "exigencies" of the times, which in New York in 1855 certainly referred to the nativist anti-Irish and anti-Catholic antipathies that had marked Poole's funeral. In doing so, he linked Irish resistance to Anglo-American nativism to the ancient hatreds of British imperialism in Ireland.<sup>40</sup>

Some of the most fervent expressions of Irish national resistance took place at the dinner of the elite Friendly Sons of St. Patrick. One hundred and fifty members of the city's most prominent Irish Americans attended the dinner, held at the stylish Metropolitan Hotel. A "supply of whiskey punch, a national beverage," enlivened the scene, and the evening's festivities were punctuated by two traditions: the playing of "Irish and other airs" by Dodsworth's Band and the giving of "toasts,"<sup>41</sup> which on this night became extended orations detailing how the Irish community ought to conduct itself in an era of intolerance. James Brady, one of many speakers who identified himself with the embattled Irish minority both in America and at home in Ireland, gave a toast to "The United States, Freedom's safest fortress," which received "enthusiastic applause." Brady's self-conscious desire to ally himself with the plight of Ireland set a tone that others followed later in the evening:

I feel at the moment when my voice is first heard among you, that not all the voices of the congregated universe could do to my native land the honor she deserves tonight. I say this is my native land, in no boastful spirit, because I am divided between the homage I feel for the past and the duty I owe to the present [loud applause]—for my parents were poor peasants on the soil from which most of you come . . . I was not sure I would be here at all; no one here knows much of, or cares much for, me; still though I am one who never could share in the triumphs of the Irish blood, I wish to be permitted to share in its persecutions. [Enthusiastic applause.] The gentleman whose voice has just been hushed, and many other warm-hearted Irishmen, can look with personal hope to the hour of her glory, but I wish to share the disgrace which the malignity of prejudice would wish upon her children on this soil. [Loud applause].<sup>42</sup>

Although Brady expressed ambivalence over where he belonged, he quickly resolved it by recalling the memory of his Irish parents and the soil from which they came. Most significantly, however, his speech linked nobility with sharing the burden of intolerance in America. If Irwin's story from the newspapers earlier in the week explained John Morrissey's physical defense of the Irish, Brady's voice was a more restrained elaboration of that indignation. His embrace of his parents' heritage, echoed by John McKeon, a U.S. District Attorney of Irish heritage who "claimed some right, with Mr. Brady, to share the persecution of the adopted citizens," was a conscious decision to resist American nativism. Publicly, in a performative space, he declared his allegiance.

Such recognition was central to the evening's most prominent Irish speaker, Thomas Francis Meagher. With John Mitchel, Meagher was one of New York's most fervent Irish nationalists. Both men had been involved in the failed 1848 uprising in Ireland. The tactics for that rebellion, spurred by the ideology of "Young Ireland," diverged from those of less radical reformers in 1840s Ireland. Contrary to the legal reforms advocated by Daniel O'Connell, leaders of Young Ireland believed they could consolidate Irish factions into an inclusive, resistant fighting force "to which Catholic and Protestant, peasant and landlord, Gael and Anglo-Irish, could give their authority." Music and oratory were two key strategies for fostering cultural nationalism.<sup>43</sup> Though they had been inspired by the French uprisings in the winter of 1848, Mitchel and Meagher were less successful, and after the rebellion failed in July, both were sentenced to transportation, and eventually found their way to New York City.<sup>44</sup>

Meagher's presence at the evening's banquet, like Mitchel's appearance on other occasions, lent an air of authority to the proceedings. Despite the uprising's failure, the romantic nationalist gospel of "Young Ireland" transformed them into Irish heroes. Meagher's appearance that night was as a symbol of Irish military resistance, of Young Ireland, and of exile. His toast, given to "Ireland, our mother, forsaken, not forgotten," evoked the spirit of the day, a celebration that was perpetual and international. Ireland, Meagher said, was the world's nation, though the nation could seem disembodied, at times even a specter:

There is a skeleton at this feast; some few may not behold it. But to me, the shroud, and the sealed lips, and the cold hands, and the beautiful head, bound with the cypress wreath, are visible. . . . On the girdle of the faded gold there is in ancient letters the name of her—the forsaken but not forgotten one—whose sons and daughters we this night, with love and pride, confess ourselves to be. . . . [Even in New York], there is a memory which cannot be effaced, there is a loyalty which cannot be disturbed; there is a bright fact which, set and planted in the old chronicles, perpetuates itself in every clime, in every season,

year after year, with the promise that its vitality shall be enduring. [Loud Cheers]. It is a festival of memory—a festival of filial truth, piety and love.<sup>45</sup>

Meagher referred to the specter of the national mother, often referred to in song as the “Shaun Vaun Voght” (or, alternatively, “Shan Van Vauth”) or “Granau Weal,” and used the figure as coded language for the Irish nation.<sup>46</sup> Meagher viewed those gathered at the banquet as the embodiment of the nation: a family, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, whose common descent united them in common feeling. And they celebrated this familial bond perpetually. Just as Brady solemnly confessed his desire to partake in the sufferings of the nation, Meagher the symbolic freedom fighter and emblem of persecution, the peasant class, and penal exile, granted all the right of entry into the Irish family, and blessed the process by which those who wished to reassert their descent were received into the national family. He made the invisible nation visible, and consecrated the (imagined) family.<sup>47</sup>

In this context, Meagher made clear his own role as a national agitator in a foreign land: as an exile, he was a romantic figure whose presence symbolized the extended family of the Irish nation. In speaking for the Irish community, Meagher enacted a national tradition and sought to ensure that Irish culture persisted. For such elites, St. Patrick’s Day festivities, including the annual parade and banquets, maintained a sense of nationhood that enhanced group unity and reinforced tradition. Meagher himself noted that those gathered at the Metropolitan Hotel that night formed a “portion of that great chorus” of Irish throughout the world that has spread “a hymn invoking blessings on that beggared outcast, who, amid the scoffs and buffetings of the multitude, has been true to the cross.” The exile was a martyr to the sacred cause of the nation, and Meagher, in embodying that role, asserted his own authority to exhort the nation to remember its cultural heritage. His own experience personified the life of the nation, its identity threatened not only by American intolerance, but also by the diaspora itself. But he also imagined Ireland as a renewed, regenerated body. The agent of this renewal, he said, was the annual St. Patrick’s Day celebrations:

I see, as I saw four years ago, the green flag flying in front of an Irish homestead, bosomed in the depths of the brown Tasmanian wood; and I hear, as I heard it there four years ago, the fond prayer bubbling up from the hearts of an old Irish couple, that Ireland might be blessed, that her wounds might be healed and made luminous, and that, for the ignominies and agonies she has endured, her crown of thorns might blossom into flowers. [Loud and renewed applause.] And here throughout this vast Commonwealth, there are songs sung; and there are banners waving; and there are bayonets

lifted; and there are ballads, and hosannahs, and panegyrics, without end or measure; and there are copious cups filled and emptied, and then replenished, and then exhausted, and so on in incalculable rotation [laughter], besides innumerable floors being welted, and acres of shamrock turned up, turned out, turned in and drowned; [laughter]; all and everything in honor of that magical Saint who, though born in France, and though a foreigner, served Ireland, the land of his adoption, well.<sup>48</sup>

By invoking the figure of the Irish exile, Meagher turned the attention of his audience from American intolerance to the wave of *famine* immigrants, and toward the political history of British imperialism in Ireland. Kerby Miller has noted that the exile motif formed a central element of Irish identity in America and constituted a powerfully emotional explanation for the emigration of millions from Ireland: Britain was to blame for the famine that forced them from their homeland.<sup>49</sup> The presence of an exile, and the national performance of the figure of an exile, created a surrogate hero for immigrants in New York—and it was a hero whose memory was selective.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the wide spectrum of Irish experiences, the oration implied that all Irish were political exiles like Meagher; thus, his oration represented a “public enactment of forgetting” other social realities.<sup>51</sup> Meagher exhorted other elite Irish men at the gathering, whose own speeches embraced his version of the embattled Irish nation, to continue with such celebrations. Much, he implied, was at stake. A nation forced into exile must reassert itself. His very presence and the power of his oratory testified to the diasporic continuation of the spirit of the island nation—its celebration, even in Tasmanian and American exile. By implication, then, as exiles all Irish must await the day when they will return home to revive the nation and free “her” from British bondage.

The power of national descent was also asserted as a willingness to celebrate that descent: through alcohol consumption, the carrying of banners and bayonets in the annual parade, and through song. The “great chorus” Meagher mentioned is the figure of the Irish in the diaspora. The nation was imagined as an international family of musicians and revelers. The “songs sung,” the “ballads, and hosannahs, and panegyrics” that are performed “without end or measure” represented Meagher’s evocation of an ethnic performance of perpetuity—the continuation of the family, and the Irish-American imperative of making the invisible mother-nation visible. The nation was performed through the power of voice and music—oration and song. Such cultural play gained its power because its working continued the nation. If, on March 17, 1855, parades took place, songs were sung, banquets were held, and “toasts” were made, then Ireland continued as a nation. The heritage that, in other’s eyes, marked someone as inferior became the emblem of nobility and international fellowship, hopes for independence were reinforced, and the cultural past was reasserted as a worthy

and meaningful struggle, not a national defeat. The mark of inferiority gained a regenerative power: the “crown of thorns” eventually “blossom[ed] into flowers.”

### **Diversity and Communitas: Song and Procession in 1855**

By March 17, 1855, it was customary for such orations as Meagher’s to introduce the performance of a national song. That night, Dodsworth’s Band played “The Bold Soldier Boy” as a response to the toast. It was one of the ensemble’s repertoire, a song they undoubtedly also played during the parade earlier in the day. It is likely also that Meagher’s words were intended to give meaning to the song’s lyrics, emphasizing what could seem to be commonly shared national ideals. The soldier boy, speaking to an unnamed future wife, says that

. . . without scandal  
 Myself will proudly dandle  
 The little farthing candle  
 Of our mutual flame, my joy;

May his light shine  
 As bright as mine  
 Till in the line  
 He’ll blaze  
 And raise the glory of his corps,  
 like a bowld sojer boy!<sup>52</sup>

If for Meagher the continuity of “song” and St. Patrick’s Day celebrations were interwoven with the existence of the Irish nation, this song incorporated an even more specific connotation: Ireland persisted from one generation to another, from one soldier to another, from father to son. This patrilineal and martial transfer of Irish national identity occurred during a parade alluded to earlier in the song, which also provided the opportunity for the ideal son of Ireland, the rover and soldier, to march for the pleasure of on-looking women. In later verses, the male sexuality implicit in the song was neatly reined in: “without scandal” an idealized Irish masculine sexuality involved mating with a woman who admired and understood the necessity and nobility of the Irish soldier parading in the streets. This commingling was idealized because it promised another generation of soldiery, who will “blaze and raise the glory of his corps.” The nation was imagined as continuing literally through the expression of militarism in the song, and the persistence of the celebrations of the St. Patrick’s Day procession. It was an expression of a masculine identity, performed in public, embodying a martial spirit projected as a shared ideal among all the Irish in New York.



The song, like many other songs about bold Irish men, elucidated aspects of masculine nationalism quite different from those promoted by Meagher. These parallels provide keys<sup>53</sup> to understanding diverse meanings of other Irish performances, including the St. Patrick's Day parade itself. As mentioned earlier, rain and snow diminished the turnout for the 1855 parade, and the anticipated spectacle of what newspapers termed Irish national "enthusiasm" that had marked the day one year earlier never materialized. Most of those who showed up for the procession did not see what had become a staple of St. Patrick's Day—the appearance of a detachment of the New York 69<sup>th</sup> regiment, a group dominated by Irish soldiers—because it stood on call in the armory ready to police any unrest. Thus the 1855 parade did not resemble the "grand celebrations" of previous years.

In 1853 and 1854, Irish organizers and American observers had hailed the parades as "triumphant" spectacles of Irish unity and pride. As one orator noted in 1853, the parade

shamed [rival Irish groups] out of their envious feelings of one another. Before . . . it was no unusual thing for the Irish Societies to walk different routes on Patrick's Day, and they would shun each other and if they met they were sure to have a fight. . . . The Irish had this day established a character for themselves, of which some who were now in Ireland would gain the benefit. Henceforth when an Irish emigrant lands here, he will not have to contend against such prejudice as he heretofore had. The character of the Irish people was rising in the estimation of the citizens of America every day.<sup>54</sup>

The speaker conceived of the procession as an expression of an Irish *character*, a national symbol, and a visible demonstration that in its presentation of regimental bayonets was manifestly male. In an era in which words like "character" were figures for national "genius," often viewed as being rooted in racial origins, the "grand" masculine spectacle could be envisioned as both an organic expression of Irish brotherhood and unity in America, *and* as evidence for American spectators and readers of newspapers that Irish men possessed republican *virtu*—the virtuous faculty of a male citizenry eager to defend the American republic.<sup>55</sup> Manly Irish national expression fit with American republicanism's demand for civic virtue by displaying the valor that would help to preserve the integrity of the nation. This appeal to American republican ideals, conceptualized as one role of the parade, merged with one tradition of Irish soldiery: the republican volunteers of 1782 and 1798 who, inspired by the American Revolution, revolted against imperial Britain. Though the Irish rebellions failed, Irish nationalists, including working-class mechanics in the city, might have used Irish republicanism as a resource in establishing a common bond with their fellow Americans.<sup>56</sup>

In the American press, however, the 1855 parade was a symbol both of Irish lack of devotion to American ideals as well as poor citizenship and a frail work ethic. One reporter for the *Daily Tribune* wrote that “the weather was too damp—in fact it put a damper on their affections for St. Patrick—some few did not join in the procession, but, pocketing their regalias, sought comfortable quarters within doors; and the greater part of those who took their place in the line of march left the procession and disbanded long before the end of the route.”<sup>57</sup> To the writer, the hasty dispersion of the Irish demonstration confirmed the suspicion that Irish national feeling, exhibited in New York as keenly felt passion for the national saint in parades and festivals, was in actuality evidence of both idleness and restlessness which, in the anti-Irish sentiment of the day, outstripped the positive aspects of Irish nationalism. Cynically, it implied that St. Patrick’s Day was an excuse to avoid work and indulge in the vices attributed to the Irish. Bourgeois observers could quickly dismiss the holiday, like other demonstrations of the laboring classes, as a spectacle of what was called “vulgar ostentation.”<sup>58</sup>

To many Irish leaders, however, the parade as a symbol of Irish unity served to counter Anglo-American prejudice. Parading, marching, and appearing en masse, was for some New York Irish men, like many ordinary Americans, one way in which the working-class could experience political popular culture. The parade itself, imagined as a demonstration of male bodies, carried other meanings for men of different classes. For laborers, mechanics, Hibernian organization men, and members of Irish militia groups, it provided a tangible opportunity to demonstrate bold resistance through military demonstration.

However, the virility of the parade—and of a type of Irish militaristic song—also had sexual overtones. Gambling, fighting, and drinking prominent in New York saloon culture also accompanied another anathema to American elites: prostitution. In this vigorous subculture men demonstrated their masculinity with swagger and bravado and, especially, expressions of unrestrained sexuality at odds with bourgeois norms of sexual restraint. The controlled sexuality of the urban middle-classes conflicted with the perceived “incontinence” of the working classes, which included many Irish immigrants. At the same time, though, the existence of a residual ideology that “placed a premium on aggressive masculinity” reinforced fears that emerging middle-class notions of manhood were sapping the virility of the nation. The parade and accompanying musical performances was a place where these ideas of manhood, as well as Irish nationhood, could be asserted and contested.<sup>59</sup>

Dodsworth’s Band, an ensemble that often performed for the event and that later played at the dinner of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, included “The Bold Soldier Boy” in its repertoire. The popular broadside ballad was likely known to many working-class Irish.<sup>60</sup> The song was one of many Irish ballads in the period that valorized “boldness” and virile masculinity as heroic traits of common Irish men. However, the male sexuality of the song reflected other strands of Irish nationalism in the city, and the song’s performance, as well as

the discourse surrounding Irish nationalism that year, elicited ideas about national performance quite different from Meagher's.

A wide range of Irish songs involved sexual boasting and themes of masculine aggression and national potency. Working-class men could find in such songs compensation for the rigors of urban labor. And, in a more specific context, the immigrant Irish, assailed by nativist enemies who were powerfully represented by the crowds at Poole's funeral, found in songs the assertion of Irish pride characterized by the elite orations that day. Claims concerning aristocratic women's fascination with Irish men characterized ballads like "William O' Brine of Tipperary and the Mayjor's Dauter," and "A New Song Call'd the Pride of Ardagh." The latter, published in Dublin around mid-century, is a story of a rich woman, and a noble but impoverished lad, who had a knack for military history as well:

. . . I told her that in days of yore  
Old Ardagh was the seat of love  
How chiftain's weltered in their gore  
To free the maids of Ardagh

She grasp'd my arm stout and brave  
When I said I'd cross the briny wave  
To fight and Erin dear to save  
And free the maids of Ardagh.<sup>61</sup>

Many such ballads, found in popular broadsides and anthologies of Irish ballads, circulated widely in New York City by 1855.<sup>62</sup> Others, like "Broth of a Boy," "The Bold Shoemaker," and "The Brogue" reflected the celebration of "raucous companionship" and unrestrained sexuality that characterized the oppositional bachelor subculture of the city.<sup>63</sup> During the St. Patrick's Day parade and the dinners that followed in the evenings, songs like "The Bold Soldier Boy" reinforced notions of Irish masculine bravado. They equated boldness with appearing Irish in public as well as with boastful sexuality. "The Bold Soldier Boy" opens with the appearance on the street of an Irish "sojer boy" as the epitome of tradesmen and workers.

Oh, there's not a trade that's going  
Worth showing or knowing  
Like that from glory growing  
For a bowld sojer boy.

Whether right or left we go  
Sure you know, friend or foe  
Will get the hand—or toe  
Of a bowld sojer boy.<sup>64</sup>

The bold boy of the song was, tellingly, “worth showing,” and the street demonstration provided him with an opportunity to publicize his identity. He was a public object willingly placed under scrutiny in a public place, and as such, he displayed parts of himself (the “hand or toe”) to spectators as he went along. The song suggested that the display *was* bold, because it implied a physical threat and associated that with national glory. While contemporary accounts indicated that both men and women participated in the annual parade, the song’s lyrics depict it only as the procession of men. Its militaristic flavor is just one element of this male demonstration; the parade also makes visible male Irish sexual potency:

There’s not a town we march through  
 But the ladies, looking arch, through  
 The window panes, will search through  
 The ranks to find their joy

While up in the street  
 Each girl you meet  
 Will look so sly  
 Will cry  
 “My eye!  
 Oh! Isn’t he a darling—the bowld sojer boy!”

. . . ‘Tis then the ladies fair  
 In despair  
 Tear their hair  
 But the dev’l one I care  
 Says the bowld sojer boy;

For the world is all before us  
 Where the landladies adore us,  
 And never refuse to score us,  
 But chalk us up with joy.<sup>65</sup>

Just as a multitude of songs could refer listeners to the military history and bellicose pride of the immigrant Irish, so too could contemporaries identify this male celebration in “The Bold Soldier Boy” with other ballads lauding roving boys and Irish rascals, and especially unrestrained Irish male sexuality.

At the same time, contemporary Edward Hayes considered broadside ballads and songs like “The Bold Soldier Boy” as constituting an Irish minstrel tradition;<sup>66</sup> expansive anthologies and cheap broadside sheets printed similar songs of Irish valor. The theme of Irish fighting boys accompanied Irish emigrants and entered the public sphere of newspapers in New York, as typified by “The Saxon Shilling” and “St. Patrick’s Day in New York.” “The Saxon Shilling,” was intended as a

warning especially to Irish "hearts." The lyrics depicted the "Irish heart" as thrilled by the display of ribands and feathers associated with parades of military men. In the ballad, the sound of fifes and the tramp of feet dazzled "bold recruits," and the spectacle of the procession evoked the bravery of other Irish fighting men. However, the song, an "anti-recruiting ballad" popular among the "repealers" and "Young Ireland" rebels from 1848, warned that the attraction Irish men have for displays of bravery implicit in military parades could get them into trouble, because such qualities were manipulated by British recruiting drives. Still, these songs were popular with "Young Irelanders" like New York Irish leader Thomas Francis Meagher because they also implied that Irish men were naturally inclined stalwartly to defend selfless ideals.<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, "St. Patrick's Day in New York" celebrated the military prowess Irish men demonstrated at the 1745 Battle of Fontenoy in Belgium which Irish volunteers fought with French forces against the British. The song was a plain-spoken account of the New York procession celebrating the "glorious turn-out" for the parade, probably in 1853 or 1854. Like other popular ballads of heroes fighting a losing battle against oppressors, the song expressed how the national martial demonstrations in the New York parade owed their vitality to an unbroken historical pattern of resistance. "St. Patrick's Day in New York" exhorted the New York Irish to "cheer up," for "the whole day long will be our song" one day when "Old Ireland, she is free." The song echoed the theme that Irish men were vulnerable to the allure of martial regalia found in "The Saxon Shilling." However, it also emphasized the other side of the coin: if Irish men were constitutionally disposed to martial display and military prowess, it suggested, those characteristics could be channeled into a powerful force, embodied by the parade.<sup>68</sup>

"The Bold Soldier Boy," like "The Saxon Shilling" and "St. Patrick's Day in New York," echoed the mythology of Irish soldiers in 1745, the 1848 rebels, and the United Irishmen of 1798. As a result, cultural propaganda, especially ballads like "The Saxon Shilling," helped to establish the perception that the nation was a community united in rebellion. In New York, the promise of the lengthy cheer, of what one song termed "Freedom's smile," and the enticement to bold patriotic duty, appeared in isolated moments in the 1850s during the St. Patrick's Day processions. It is this convergence—the sexual boastfulness of the song allied with bold visibility and an invented tradition of rebellious militarism—that made the "The Bold Soldier Boy" a popular choice for the parade and other celebrations among the Irish elite. The song's male character was determined to parade, and despite the temptations that arose because of his potent sexuality, he persisted in his march for "the glory of his corps."

The lyrics were mirrored by the outcome of the day's events in 1855. Although writers for the city's newspapers were relieved that the inclement weather had "put a damper on [Irish residents'] affections for St. Patrick,"<sup>69</sup> and thus diminished the threat of a riot, the parade did take place. The *New York Daily Times* observed that about 1,000 people waited at city hall to see

the remaining troops in the parade pass in review. The newspaper remarked on their determination to remain, despite the driving rain and snow that made ankle-deep puddles of mud and slush in the street. Though the parade disbanded early, a “large number . . . lingered until after 4 o’clock, evidently reluctant to yield to the doom of disappointment in seeing the natal day of their patron saint pass without the usual concomitant parade and stir, and martial music.”<sup>70</sup> The *Daily Tribune* also took note of the Irish 69<sup>th</sup> regiment’s determination to march although they had been ordered to be ready to put down a riot. Immediately after they were released from the arsenal, they marched to the park near city hall. There, where Irish military companies had paraded before the mayor and other city dignitaries in the past, only a small crowd of Irish residents remained, equally determined to see them pass.<sup>71</sup>

Perhaps the most salient characteristic of the 1855 Irish performances in New York involved the struggle over national codes of masculine boldness, and what it meant to embody this Irish persona in public. Songs, oaths and insults, toasts and orations, and the St. Patrick’s Day parade itself constituted an array of Irish performances in 1855. Such expressions of cultural nationalism, Richard Handler has observed, envision the community as an organic whole, a collective individual or collection of individuals, who appear to be homogenous and continuous. Those who embrace this vision also embrace a conception of national culture that is similarly organic and whole. However, because this “positive vision,” obscures real differences among the populace and real conflicts over the definition of national identity, it is always accompanied by anxieties and “negative visions” of corruption or pollution. What occurred at the dinner of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick in 1855 (as well as in subsequent histories of the Irish in America) involved attempts to contain Irishness into discrete and knowable categories, as well as subtle and sometimes overt struggles against control. “Haunted by a vision of totality,”<sup>72</sup> Irish leaders could not completely contain the many meanings of Irish nationalism in circulation in New York. At the same time that the tradition of bold militarism was being reined in by Irish elite orators, the spectacle of the male procession and the meaning of boldness eluded authoritative definitions. And just as crowds and mobs could threaten perceptions of Irish unity and well being, ballad traditions—of Irish male sexual and physical prowess—animated different versions of boldness shared by working-class Irish men and called other national ideals into question.

## Notes

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1. *The Gangs of New York*. Directed by Martin Scorsese, Miramax, 2002.

2. See Kenneth Moss' "St. Patrick's Day Celebrations and the Formation of Irish-American Identity," *Journal of Social History* 29 (Fall 1995), 125-148, for a discussion of the historiography and another examination of Irish performance culture. Moss argues that disparate strands of Irish identity in the years following the famine migration were melded into a distinct Irish community unified by nationalist and sectarian ideas. Another helpful recent study by Mike Cronin and Daryl Adair, *The Wearing of the Green: A History of St. Patrick's Day* (New York: Routledge, 2002), also examines cultural performance to uncover the struggle it engendered in the creation of Irish identity. Because both of these examine change over time, they concentrate less on specific local contexts in which Irish national identity was rooted, and so can miss some other important variations of Irish national culture.

3. The role of music and performance in constructing national identity is highlighted in Kelly Askew's *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) and Richard Handler's *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988) among others. William H.A. Williams' *'Twas Only an Irishman's Dream: The Image of Ireland and the Irish in American Popular Song Lyrics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), and Maureen N. McLane's "The Figure Minstrelsy Makes: Poetry and Historicity" *Critical Inquiry* 29 (Spring 2003): 429-452, both note the important associations between nationalism and music in the Irish and Scottish "minstrel" traditions. Eric Lott's *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) demonstrates the role Irish men as blackface minstrels played in the contest of national popular cultures in the United States. Much of the historiography of the Irish in America links Irish music and performance to national identity but does not critically investigate its role in the construction of Irish nationalism. See for example Edward Hayes, ed. *The Ballads of Ireland* (Boston: Patrick Donahoe, 1856) 2; Carl Wittke, *The Irish in America*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956): 241; Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985): 5; Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, (New York: Routledge, 1995): 88-89, 108-109; Dennis Clark, *Erin's Heirs: Irish Bonds of Community*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991): 4, 116-120.

4. Moss' "St. Patrick's Day Celebrations," like Lawrence McCaffrey's "Forging Forward and Looking Back" in Ronald Bayor and Timothy Meagher, eds., *The New York Irish*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press): 213-233, for example, suggest that Irish nationalism, whether communally shared or generated through struggle, ultimately represented a coherent position. Thomas Brown's *Irish American Nationalism* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1966) and Miller's *Emigrants and Exiles* favor a top-down model in which nationalism is defined by an elite and either accepted or rejected by the Irish masses.

5. See Lawrence McCaffrey, *The Irish Diaspora in America* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1976), 67; Moss, "St. Patrick's Day Celebrations"; Edward Wakin, *Enter the Irish American* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1976): 61-62; William Shannon, *The American Irish* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1963): 19-20, 27; Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism*, 22-23, 26-27; Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 1.

6. Hasia Diner, "'The Most Irish City in the Union': The Era of the Great Migration, 1844-1877" in Bayor and Meagher, eds., *The New York Irish*, 104-105; Kerby Miller, "'Scotch-Irish,' 'Black Irish,' and 'Real Irish': Emigrants and Identities in the Old South," in Andy Bielenberg, ed., *The Irish Diaspora* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2000): 139-157.

7. Moss' thesis in "St. Patrick's Day Celebrations" is that conflict was part of the evolution of an Irish-American identity. Quote in Diner, "'The Most Irish City in the Union,'" 104.

8. Bayor and Meagher, eds., *The New York Irish*, as well as Michael Gordon's *The Orange Riots: Irish Political Violence in New York City, 1870 and 1871* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) are good examples regarding the Irish in New York. Others of note include Dennis Clark's *Hibernia America: The Irish and Regional Cultures* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986); David Emmons *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875-1925* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); and R.A. Burchell's *The San Francisco Irish, 1848-1880* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). Donald Akenson's "Irish Migration to North America, 1800-1920" in Bielenberg, ed., *The Irish Diaspora*, 111-138 is a call for scholars to think more carefully about diverse identities in the Irish American population.

9. I am indebted to Handler's *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* for this view.

10. Simon Newman's *Parades and Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) notes that such parades provided both a sphere for political ritual but also incorporated street conflicts and politics. Kathleen Neils Conzen's "Ethnicity as Festive Culture: Nineteenth Century German America on Parade" in Werner Sollors, ed., *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 44-76, argues that performed ethnic rituals provided a public realm of collective symbolism

and therefore played an important role in identity formation. Susan Davis' *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 142-143, argues that by mid-century workers' parades could at times evoke anxiety among American middle-class observers, leading some workers to distinguish between themselves and the "rabble." This took the shape of national rivalries, especially in the context of anti-Irish nativism.

11. Much recent literature on national performance emphasizes conflicts enacted during performances. See, for example, Askew, *Performing the Nation*; Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*; and Dominic Bryan, *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition, and Control* (London: Pluto Press, 2000). Louise Meintjes' "Paul Simon's *Graceland*, South Africa, and the Mediation of Musical Meaning." *Ethnomusicology* 34 (Winter, 1990): 37-73, argues that, borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu, the understanding of musical meaning is intricately linked to one's social positioning.

12. Askew, *Performing the Nation*, 12.

13. By examining the symbolism surrounding performances of masculine Irish "boldness," I am employing an emic research and writing strategy. Current usages of this term, or usages foreign to the cultures of the immigrant Irish, do not convey fully the nuances and complexities of its many meanings in this context. By assuming that performances of Irish national boldness carried the term's polyvalent qualities, I can conclude that a study of these performances will reveal variations in Irish nationalism. Irish national boldness might therefore connote assertiveness and validate an Irish elite's positive vision of national identity. At the same time, other Irish immigrants adopted meanings of boldness associated with disruptiveness, aggression, or belligerence, which Irish elites and other American critics of the Irish disdained and which were connected to stereotypical images of Irish intemperance and bellicosity.

14. Bayor and Meagher's edited edition of *The New York Irish* provides a good overview of the diverse constituency of the city's Irish population.

15. *New York Daily Times*, March 12, 1855.

16. See Cronin and Adair, *The Wearing of the Green*, 11-17, 34-38; Moss, "St. Patrick's Day Celebrations," *passim*; See also *New York Daily Tribune*, March 18, 1853.

17. Eliot Gorn's "'Good-Bye Boys, I Die a True American': Homicide, Nativism, and Working-Class Culture in Antebellum New York City," *Journal of American History* 74 (September 1987): 391-400 provides another perspective on the events of Poole's death. Gorn contends that class divisions are more significant than national interests in the formation of cultural identity. Quote on 406.

18. Catherine Nash's "Embodied Irishness: Gender, Sexuality and Irish Identities," in Brian Graham, ed., *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1997): 108-127 observes that Irish nationalism was distinctly gendered as "hyper-masculine" in response to British discursive feminization of colonial Ireland. Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995) also influenced my views of immigrant Irish culture. It should be noted that women participated in the St. Patrick's Day festivities studied here, but that the nationalist discourses I examine tend to cast feminine figures as persons in need of defense. For a good description of Irish women's diverse roles, see Bayor and Meagher, eds., *The New York Irish*, and Hasia Diner's *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

19. Quoted in Conzen, "Ethnicity as Festive Culture," 47.

20. According to Handler's *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, 8-19, a message of "homogeneity enveloping heterogeneity" creates the perception that individuals are contiguous with each other and with the nation itself. This perceived unity, constructed through cultural performance, is a way of delimiting the nation—establishing boundaries by defining cultural traits. This relates to other versions of national discourse, which Handler identifies as time-boundedness and territoriality: "In principle a nation is bounded—that is, precisely delimited—in space and time: in space, by the inviolability of its borders and the exclusive allegiance of its members; in time, by its birth or beginning in history. In principle the national entity is continuous: in time, by virtue of the uninterruptedness of its history; in space, by the integrity of the national territory." Quote on 15. I argue that the national performance was one method of maintaining the perception that the nation's history was continuous—and therefore maintaining the uniqueness of the nation, a key to Irish resistance.

21. Gorn, "'Good Bye Boys, I Die a True American,'" 406, 409; and *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986): 141. See also Jon Kingsdale, "The 'Poor Man's Club': Social Functions of the Urban Working-Class Saloon," in Elizabeth Pleck and Joseph Pleck eds., *The American Man* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980): 255-284. Quote on 266-67. Roy Rosenzweig in *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers & Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 54-55, 57-64, argues that such music was an integral part of the leisure activities of saloon culture and formed an "alternative," if not "oppositional," culture in Worcester, Mass.



22. *New York Daily Times*, March 12, 1855; *New York Daily Tribune*, March 12, 1855.  
 23. *Ibid.*  
 24. *Ibid.*  
 25. *New York Daily Tribune*, March 10, 1855.  
 26. *New York Daily Times*, March 12, 1855.  
 27. Gorn has observed in "'Good Bye Boys, I Die a True American,'" that emergence of "national" conflicts in the case—especially the nativist canonization of Poole—is curious, given that neither Morrissey's nor Poole's gangs were perceived to be respectable. The common class identities of the men, Gorn argues, suggests that the "oppositional" masculine subculture they shared—a culture that contested "bourgeois and evangelical verities"—was more prominent than their national antipathies. Nevertheless, the murderous "affray" certainly had implications for the expression of national ideals, as the city's subsequent reports on the case—and accounts from the St. Patrick's Day celebrations—made clear.  
 28. *New York Daily Tribune*, March 10, 1855.  
 29. Dale Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1986): 27, 53, 130-31.  
 30. *New York Daily Times*, March 12, 1855.  
 31. *New York Daily Tribune*, March 13, 1855.  
 32. *Ibid.*  
 33. *Ibid.*  
 34. Broadside, New York Public Library, n.d.; *New York Daily Tribune*, March 19, 1850. For other examples of Irish heroes and physical confrontation, see Robert Wright's edited volume of broadside ballads, *Irish Emigrant Ballads and Songs* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Press, 1975): 73-74, 77-78, 223-226, 344.  
 35. Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 109.  
 36. *Ibid.*, 122.  
 37. David Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States: Immigrant Radicals in the Early Republic*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998): 1-11.  
 38. *New York Daily Times*, March 21, 1855.  
 39. *New York Daily Times*, March 20, 1855.  
 40. As Christopher Miller has observed in another context, in "Nationalism as Resistance and Resistance to Nationalism in the Literature of Francophone Africa." *Yale French Studies* 82:1 (1993): 62-100, the participation in one form of nationalism—resistance to colonial rule—can, when the conditions change, mutate into resistance to another type of nationalism—Anglo-American nativism, in this case. The resistance exhibited in such orations was "set in motion all over again," and "a new hybridity emerged," with the theme of exile a key mode of expression.  
 41. *New York Daily Times*, March 20, 1855.  
 42. *New York Daily Tribune*, March 19, 1855.  
 43. R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (New York: Penguin, 1988): 310-317.  
 44. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism*, 6-14.  
 45. *New York Daily Tribune*, March 19, 1855.  
 46. This is characteristic of understandings of Irish music in collections from the time as well as in more recent compilations. See James Hardiman, ed., *Irish Minstrelsy, or Bardic Remains of Ireland*. 2 Vols. (London: Joseph Robins, 1831): 138-146; and Hayes, *The Ballads of Ireland*, 28. Williams, in 'Twas Only an Irishman's Dream, an examination of nineteenth-century sheet music, finds that the image of the abandoned girl was a major theme in romantic Irish popular songs, 38-39; see also Georges-Denis Zimmerman, ed., *Songs of Irish Rebellion: Political Street Ballads and Rebel Songs, 1780-1900* (Hatboro, Penn.: Folklore Associates, 1967): 54-56.  
 47. In *Imperial Leather*, 352-353, Anne McClintock observes that the figuration of a nation as a family occurs in the context of colonial national identity, in which women became metaphors of symbols for the nation, and the colonial male is granted agency—men "are contiguous with each other and the national whole." See also Nash's contention that imperial "emasculat[i]on" of Ireland in the nineteenth century led to a "hypermasculine" role for Irish men in "Embodied Irishness."  
 48. *New York Daily Tribune*, March 19, 1855.  
 49. Miller's widely debated *Emigrants and Exiles* argues that such a mindset characterized the large body of immigrants despite the fact that many came to America for reasons not directly related to British imperial rule.  
 50. Joseph Roach, in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) argues that this process of "surrogation" and forgetting characterized what he terms "circum-Atlantic performance."  
 51. *Ibid.*, 3.  
 52. Broadside, n.d., New York Public Library.  
 53. Erving Goffman's suggestion to seek out keys to performance guides my method here. To Goffman, the interrelation between cultural performances and the discourses that surround

them in a given context provides keys to performances—"messages that convey instructions on how to interpret other messages being conveyed." Quoted in Richard Bauman, Richard, "Performance," in Richard Bauman, ed., *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 41-52.

54. *New York Daily Tribune*, March 18, 1853.

55. David Wilson's *United Irishmen, United States*, 7, argues that such a dynamic goes back to Irish immigration from the period of the 1798 and 1803 Irish rebellions. In the early years of the American republic, "United Irishmen" aligned themselves with the American republican tradition in order to "present themselves as being even more patriotic" than Federalists who referred to them pejoratively as Jacobins. See also Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984): 352-353; and Mary Helen Thuente, *The Harp Re-strung: The United Irishmen and the Rise of Irish Literary Nationalism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994).

56. Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States*, *passim*.

57. *New York Daily Tribune*, March 19, 1855.

58. *New York Daily Tribune*, March 12, 1855.

59. Melvin Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-70* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986): 234. Charles Rosenberg, "Sexuality, Class, and Role in 19th-Century America," in Elizabeth Pleck and Joseph Pleck, eds., *The American Man* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980): 219-254. Quote on 235-236.

60. *New York Daily Times*, March 20, 1855. The text for the song is from a broadside, n.d., from the Broadside Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts Department. New York Public Library, New York, and resembles other versions of the song found in other broadsides in other cities. One source for the score of the song, indicating its popularity among brass bands is Lavern J. Wagner, ed., *Band Music from the Benjamin H. Grierson Collection*, vol. 29 of *Recent Researches in American Music* (Madison, Wis.: A-R Editions, 1998): xvi.

61. Broadside, n.d., New York Public Library.

62. See for example Hayes, ed., *The Ballads of Ireland*; Halliday Sparling, ed., *Irish Minstrelsy, Being a Selection of Irish Songs, Lyrics, and Ballads* (London: Walter Scott, 1888); Wright, ed., *Irish Emigrant Ballads and Songs*; and Charles Gavan, Duffy, ed., *The Ballad Poetry of Ireland*, 40th ed., (Dublin: James Duffy, 1869).

63. Gorn, "'Good Bye Boys, I Die a True American,'" 406.

64. Broadside, n.d., New York Public Library.

65. *Ibid*.

66. Hayes, *Ballads of Ireland*, 2-40.

67. Georges-Denis Zimmerman, *Songs of Irish Rebellion*, 222-223; Wright, *Irish Emigrant Ballads and Songs*, 549. Joseph Bilby, in *Remember Fontenoy: The 69th New York and the Irish Brigade in the Civil War* (Hightstown, N.J.: Longstreet, 1995), notes that that battle of Fontenoy, referred to in songs like "St. Patrick's Day in New York," was a powerful reminder to Irish in America of its legacy of resistance to British rule. It provided the Irish in America with memories of the nation's military tradition throughout the Civil War.

68. Wright, *Irish Emigrant Ballads and Songs*, 549.

69. *New York Daily Tribune*, March 19, 1855.

70. *New York Daily Times*, March 19, 1855.

71. *New York Daily Tribune*, March 19, 1855

72. Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, 194.