History in Songs and Songs in History

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Abstract

Through music Ireland expresses its culture like no other nation in the world. Important events and the people involved in them are recorded in music to preserve them in people´s memory. Ireland has a long history of conflict between the the Irish and the British and music, as an expression of culture, provides so much information about the different ideologies.

The objective of this work is to explore the connection that exists between music and history in the isle of Ireland. The first part of the work focuses on different types of songs and styles that are used to express certain ideas and ideologies like *rebel songs* or *emigration songs*. This part helps to classify some of the songs that are presented in the work. After this, a few events and some of the protagonists that were involved are analysed from a historical perspective in order to see how they are represented in music. The events analysed have a relevant role in Irish history. Namely, they are the Great Famine, the emigration, the Easter Rising, the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. In the third part of the work I focus on three Irish songs and analyse their backgrounds and story as a way to show these songs in their historical and cultural context and see how they became so important.

The analysis of the songs is carried out using with a bibliography that deals, mainly, with history and Irish music separately. However, some sources about music and history together are used too. As a result, music proved to be a good mechanism to explore history from a different perspective to the narrative that can be found in classic history books. The relationship between music and history works in both ways, since one part gives depth to the other. Finally, in Ireland, music has a great symbolical power and the use of language, for instance, can produce political reactions, as can be seen with the Irish Anthem.

1. Introduction

Music reflects the soul of nations. It tells about its people, its landscape and its past. History is important for countries since it narrates the past in order to not forget the roots, the ancestors or even the heroes. One nation that expresses this feeling like no other is Ireland. Irish music has become one of the most precious signs of identity for Irish people. In its songs, singers remember those who died in the Great Famine, the martyrs of the Easter Rising, and they also sing about the anonymous people that fought for an independent and unified Ireland on both sides of the border. This work aims to bring together the music and the history of Ireland in order to mix these two realities and show how one has influence in the other. There are events and people that were recorded in songs, whether for good or bad reasons; and on the other hand, there are songs that remained as anthems of generations. I will review some Irish events that were recorded in music. As the title suggests, there are songs that now seem to be anthems, some of them are sung at Sports events, for example. It is interesting to take a look at the story of these songs to understand how they became so important.

The "spatial area" that this work covers involves the "two" Irelands: the present-day Republic of Ireland, and Northern Ireland, that still remains as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at this date. As for the historical events, I focus mainly on those that History books reference as "great events". Therefore, the main events analysed in this work are: The Great Famine, the Diaspora, the Easter Rising of 1916, the Independence War and the Civil War. The Troubles were supposed to be here too, but space limitations made this period impossible to cover. Songs are not always from the same period of the person or event to which they refer. For example, a song from the 1980´s may deal with events from the Easter Rising, which occurred in 1916.

In each part, the lyrics of the songs, and in some cases the context and/or the intention of the author, are placed in dialogue with the historical time and space. For this analysis, the main sources are the songs themselves, history texts, articles and essays mostly found on the internet, since there is not enough bibliography that deals with the topic discussed here beyond some essays about concrete events. As for the songs, most of them are, obviously, by Irish authors. However, in order to gain in "impartiality", I researched for songs from other nationalities like English, American or Canadian, though results were poor. It must be taken into account that although the nationality could be another, some of the authors are descendants from Irish, and therefore, there is always a "risk" of partiality in the discourse.

2. Genres

Irish music has several "genres" that correspond to its cultural and historical circumstances. In this part of the work I give a brief account of different types of song, although these are only a part of the very varied Irish music.

Firstly, the *Come-All-Ye* is a type of song that owes its name to the fact that many of these songs include the word *come-all-ye*. Hugh Shields distinguishes this genre within the *ballads*, that are "a type of narrative song written in stanzas of four or eight lines, with the same music repeated for each stanza" (Long 27), which he divided into *old ballads*, those that are versions of English and Scots ballads; and the *new ballads*, that are usually in first-person and give an account of dates, names and places. As Valley (144) points out, being the *come-all-ye* a form of *ballads*, "they borrowed their plots structures from Britain, but gradually developed their own Irish idioms". These songs could be addressed to different "targets" like the Black and Tans or "fellow Irishmen/frisky young fellows" Valley (144).

Perhaps, the most important type within the context of history is the *political song,* with all its "sub-genres", like the *Jacobite song* or *Orange/loyalist song*. Long (317) point out that Hugh Shields also claims that "songs of outlawry and desertion or resistance to enlistment should really be considered as extensions of political song". The rebellion of 1798, for example, inspired many *political songs* from both sides, the insurgents and the Orange yeomanry, and some of them are still sung even nowadays, like *By the Rising of the Moon* or *Who fears to Speak of 98*. Besides, *political songs* have many "sub-categories" since it is possible to categorize the songs in a political movement or ideology. Examples of these are the songs against recruitment during First World War, about the Easter Rising of 1916, the Black and Tan War, or the Civil War "although most of the songs of this period were sympathetic to the republican rebels who refused to accept the treaty [The Anglo-Irish Treaty or *An Conradh Angla-Éireannach* of 1921] (Valley 653). Although these songs are mainly performed in a "traditional" style, there are rock or pop songs about certain themes that can also be classified as *political songs*, for there are songs, like *Zombie* by The Cranberries, that deal with the Troubles in Northern Ireland, asking for a halt of violence and a desire for peace.

Rebel Song is a term often applied to the *Nationalist/republican song* in a pejorative way. As Long (325) says, these songs were associated with the support of violent Republicanism during de 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and this led to a disdain for this genre. They not only give historical events, but also the "feeling or political viewpoint of people who are otherwise under-represented in standard historical works" (Long 325). *The Orange/loyalist song* is the counterpart of the *Nationalist/Republican song* or *Jacobite song,* depending on the time. These songs are related with the Orange Order, founded in *Ard Mhacha* (Co. Armagh) in 1795. It is a type of music that shows the views of the Protestant Irish communities, mainly in Northern Ireland, which is in general loyal to the

English Crown. One of the oldest Orange songs is "*Boyne Water"*, a song that celebrates the victory of William of Orange over the Jacobites in 1690 in the known as "The Battle of the Boyne". The *Orange/loyalist songs* are mostly published by the Ulster Society, and the printed material proves a strong singing tradition. This type of songs, as well as the *Nationalist/republican songs* were "important expressions of opposing political viewpoints" (Long 299).

During the Great Famine, in Irish *an Gorta Mór,* songs about the emigration of Irish flourished. Although emigration had taken place mainly in the 17th and 18th centuries, and during the 19th century, with the Famine, it was massive. The destinations were mainly the U.S, Canada, Australia or Great Britain. There are also more modern songs that deal with this topic written by songwriters "such as Robbie O´Connell and members of the Pogues." (Long 126). In the Irish language only a few songs from the time of the Famine survive, and, like those in English, they "are rarely heard today" (Long, 2005:164). In a certain way, these songs can be also classified as a sub-genre of the *political song* since "The songs of the Famine time, the evictions, the emigration and the shooting of landlords and their agents all tended to take on a political aspect, in that many of the landowners were absentee landlords living in England" (Valley 652).

Finally, there is the *sean-nós.* This term is applied to music sung in *Gaeilge*. The origins are unknown, but it is believed that "they may have been invented by the Gaelic League (*Conradh na Gaeilge*) to distinguish what that they saw as "old style" singing in Irish from singing in English" (Long 349). This particular type of song is found mainly in the *Gaeltachtaí*, the areas where *Gaeilge* is still spoken. However, according to Ó Maoldomhnaigh,

> It would not be correct to say sean-nós is not practised outside these areas, but only those four distinct styles can be recognised. Singers from the Gaeltachtaí (i.e. outside the Gaeltacht or Irish-

> speaking areas) and indeed from outside Ireland may blend them, depending on where they learned[sic]

The styles this author refers are Donegal style, Connemara Style, West Munster Style and East Munster Style. This division corresponds approximately to the main dialects of *Gaeilge*. I focus on the singing part of the *sean-nós*, since the narrative of the lyrics is more important for the purpose of this work. They reflect on several themes such the Famine, rebellions or *devotional songs*. One topic these songs refer very often is the decline of the *gaelic* lifestyle (language, traditions, etc). There is still a debate about the connections between the *sean-nós* and other singing styles. Hugh Shields finds links with Europe whereas others authors, like Bob Quinn, sees some relation in an "Atlantic arch" with links between Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany, Morocco, Tunisia, Spain and Egypt.

3. History in songs

1840´s: The Great Famine and the massive emigration

Between 1841 and 1851, the population of Ireland fell from an estimated 8, 175, 124 to 6, 552, 385 because of the Great Famine. The real number, however, is still unknown, for "where entire families died, there were no statistics, and until 1864 inscription of births, marriages and defunctions in the Civil Service was not obligatory"[1] (O´ Beirne 154). This Famine was not the only one that stroke Ireland, for there were famines before in 1807, 1817, 1821-1822, 1830-34,1836 and 1839, although these were always restricted to certain areas.

It was during the summer of 1845 when the *phytophthora infestas* came from Britain and Europe and affected the potato fields, which were the main resources for many families to pay the rent to the landlords and for their sustenance. There was no money to bury the corpses properly so diseases like cholera or typhus spread all around the country.

[1]Translated from Spanish.

Landlords evicted hundreds of peasants unable to pay the rent. O´ Beirne (155) claims that "in the summer of 1847, three million people were fed by private charity organizations-often organized by Quakers- or with public money."[2]. This crisis led to massive emigration to English-speaking countries, such as Great Britain, Australia, the US or Canada. O´ Beirne (155) points out that emigration rose from 75, 000 in 1845 to 250, 000 in 1851, and that thousands of emigrants died in their way to a better life in the "coffin ships". Among the consequences of the Famine and emigration was the fact the potato lost its importance in the countryside, since peasants changed from agriculture to shepherding, and that there were four million Irish living abroad, almost the same number as Irish in Ireland.

Another effect of the Famine -and emigration- was the decline of the Irish language, which had been the language for four million people in the previous years, but it was spoken by about 527, 000 people by 1911. The reason, among others, was that the Famine was harder in the poorest regions of the country, the West coast and the South, where the language was still pretty alive before the disaster. Because of this, *Gaeilge* was gradually disgraced and associated with poorness, whereas English became the language of success, wealth and school, where the *bata scoir* was a common practice. The *bata scoir* (tally stick) consisted in a stick that children had to wear around the neck. Each time the child used Irish a notch was cut into the stick. By the end of the day, the child was punished according the number of notches he had. It was a practice performed by the Irish themselves "without any official edict" and "reflects a depressing fatalism" (O´Beirne 164)[3]. It is striking to see the effects of the Great Famine in Irish Culture:

> [...]Séamus Ennis, remarked how people still refrained from using the word 'famine': "I spent the rest of my visit talking and writing about the Famine – or '*Drochshaol'* ['bad times'], as they still call it here all the time". This denial lasted more or less until the end of the XXth [sic] century,

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[2] Translated from Spanish.
[3] Translated from Spanish

> only phasing out very gradually: The Famine, until the 150-year commemoration from 1997, was not a part of Irish history or folklore prominent in public discussion. Indeed, an air of shame and denial characterized popular memory. (Falc'her-Poyroux)

On these topics, Falc'her-Poyroux points out two genres of music highlight: the *sean-nós* and the *ballad singing*. He also noted that only a few songs can be traced back to the time of the Great Famine, including "*Na Prátaí Bána*" (The White Potatoes) or *An Droch-Shaoghal* (The bad life). "*Amhrán na bPrátaí Dubhna"* (the song of the Black Potatoes) was composed during the events by Máire Ní Dhorma, in Dungarvan. Poyrux states that the song is almost an appeal to mercy from God: "*A Dhia na Glóire fóir agus freagair sinn*" (O God of glory protect us and answer us). This was initially thought to sustain the "belief expressed by many that the famine was a divine intervention […]" (Falc'her-Poyroux). However,

> As this was also the view supported by the Catholic clergy in Ireland, "Amhrán na bPrátaí Dubha" stands out as a strongly discordant voice, with a tone of social and political protest summed up in one line of the song, where faith gives way to a passionate objection: "Ní hé Dia a cheap riamh an obair seo, Daoine bochta a chur le fuacht is le fán" (It wasn't God's work, sending out poor people to cold and wandering). This line, which has more recently been used on several memorials to the Great Famine victims, from Limerick to Melbourne, could explain why the song was very rarely heard until the mid-20th century. (Falc'her- Poyroux)

As Falc'her-Poyroux refers, criticism was present in some of these songs, like in *An Bhuantais*, criticizing the Catholic Church with the story of a priest that buys new boots instead of helping his parishioners. This criticism is bitterly expressed in *Johnny Seoighe*, but in this case, it is only understood with the *scéal* (literally *story, tale)* the story that accompanies the song. This particular song was a taboo and only started to be sung in public in the 1950s by Seán Mac Dhonnchadha, from County Connemara. Also, from this county is the song "*Soup house Mhuigh-Iorrais*", which

> includes one of the very rare descriptions of the effects of hunger: Níl duine ar bith sách láidir ag an ocras ach aon lá amháin, scaipeann sé na cnámhaí agus leaghann sé an fheoil (Nobody is strong enough to endure hunger for a day, it slackens the bones and dissolves the flesh). (Falc'her-Poyroux)

The countryside ceased to be the vibrant source of music and dancing, especially in the *Gaeltachtaí.* Falc'her-Poyroux notes that:

> It is quite remarkable that so few folk songs in Irish about the Great Famine have survived, given its huge impact on Irish history and the very high number of Irish-speakers at the time: economist and historian Cormac Ó Gráda suggests "an Irish-speaking figure of 3-3.5 million on the eve of the famine, an all-time high". It has however often been remarked that hunger silenced the country for a prolonged period of time after 1849: in some areas, mostly in the South and the West of Ireland, no human being could be heard and no living animals could be seen for miles.

As already mentioned, several songs in Irish were lost. Apart from the death or migration of Irish speakers, Falc'her-Poyroux writes that another reason could be that collectors of folk songs in the eighteenth century did not take texts in Irish since it was regarded as "dead, or not delicate enough for educated ears." Sometimes they used their own poems instead of the real words, and very often, what remains is "a title and a melody, which was itself often modified to suit the taste of the time" (Falc'her-Poyroux), like the melody of *Danny Boy,*

> ...originally collected from an itinerant piper in Limavady, Northern Ireland, by Jane Ross, without a name and without words. The melody as printed in George Petrie's 1855 volume 1 of "The Ancient Music of Ireland" offers such a wide compass that it can safely be considered as having been modified to bring it closer to art music than to folk singing (Falc'her-Poyroux)

From the death of the old songs in Irish, a new tradition emerged, but now it was made in English. The new music in the English language is the *ballad*, and in contrast to the *sean-nós*, which offers events known by the community, ballads "were more inclined to describe a similar event chronologically and systematically" (Falc'her-Poyroux). It was common, especially in Northern Ireland, to mix English and Irish in songs, like in *the Potato Digger's Song*", with lyrics like *Come, Connal, acushla, turn the clay, And show the lumpers the light, gossoon!*", "where 'acushla' is a hackneyed Irish expression, from Irish Gaelic '*a cuisle*' (oh, darling!), and '*gossoon'* means 'boy' (from French, '*garçon')"* (Falc'her-Poyroux). Sometimes, the landlord was killed on the eviction of peasants, as it is narrated in *The Shooting of Lord Leitrim. Lough Sheelin* narrates the mass eviction of small cottiers and their families in Tonagh, Co. Meath. Falc'her-Poyroux points out that there are different versions of the event, but all describe how 700 people were thrown out of their houses:

But our good dreams were too good to last
The landlord came our home to blast
And he no mercy on us did show
As he turned us out in the blinding snow

Emigration has "undeniably been one of the most important sources of inspiration for songs of the Irish repertoire during the 20th century, and has even led to some of the most famous "pseudo-Irish" songs" (Falc'her-Poyroux). For example, *I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen*, written in 1875 by Thomas P. Westendorf, is still one of the most favourite songs for Irish descendants all over the world and it is "used on almost every possible Irish nostalgic occasion" (Falc'her-Poyroux). Quite often, in emigration songs "the land of Ireland or a particular locality is simply praised, but in others the love of a place left behind is closely tied to the love of a man or woman" (Long, 2005:126). Other songs deal with the injustice of landlords and the effects of the system of land tenure, as in the songs "*The Shamrock Shore"* or *Lone Shanakyle"*. The most famous emigration song is, perhaps, *Skibbereen*, which refers to a town with the same name in Co. Cork where "between 1845 and 1850, 9000 men, women and children were buried in the nearby common graveyard at Abbeystrewery during the Great Famine" (Falc'her-Poyroux). The structure is a discussion between a father and a son and is thought to be "set in America" (Long 164). Some of the lyrics are:

Father, dear, I often hear you speak of Erin's Isle.
It seems so bright and beautiful, so rich and rare the soil.
You say it is a bounteous land wherein a prince might dwell.
Then why did you abandon it? The reason to me tell.
…

It's well I do remember the year of forty-eight,
When we arose with Erin's boys to fight against our fate;
I was hunted through the mountains as a traitor to the Queen,
And that's another reason that I left Old Skibbereen.

The different luck of the Irish in America was recorded in songs like *Drill Ye Tarriers, Drill*" or "*We´ Re Bound for San Diego"* about "migrant Irish workers on the canals and railroads"; *Green Grow the Laurel*, about the Mexican-American War of 1845-1847, in

which many Irish soldiers died; and *Paddy´s Lamentation*, which is a testimony of "the false promises that many Irish soldiers were given during the Civil War when they fought on the Union side." It was during this time that "the archetypal "Paddy", began to evolve" (Ó Súilleabháin 82).

1916-1920s: Easter Rising, Independence and Civil War.

In 1914, the world experienced the beginning of the First World War. In the initial moments, many had forecast a quick end of the conflict, announcing that by the Christmas of 1914 or in 1915 the war would have ended However, it lasted eight dramatic years. Great Britain started a campaign in order to recruit new soldiers throughout the country and Ireland, provoking an anti-recruit campaign by the Irish nationalists, contrary to joining the British Army. There were, nevertheless, volunteers from Ireland in the British Army, like those of the 36th Ulster Division. Bartlett (379) points out that "tens of thousands of Irishmen, north and south, swiftly answered the calls of Carson and Redmond and marched off to war."

It was during this Great War that members of Irish nationalism took advantage of the political context and prepared a new rising. As Bartlett (383) point out:

> For members of the IRB, such as Patrick Pearse, Tom Clarke, Joseph Plunkett and Thomas MacDonagh, all of whom occupied key positions in the IV, the outbreak of war offered a perfect -indeed probably the only- opportunity in their lifetime for an insurrection.

IRB and IV stand for Irish Republican Brotherhood (*Bráithreachas Phoblacht na hÉireann*), an organisation founded in 1858 and dissolved in 1924 by Irish nationalists; and Irish Volunteers (*Óglaigh na hÉireann)*, a military organisation created in 1913 also by Irish nationalists. The leaders of the rising, "a mixture of poets, playwrights, socialists, educationalists, mystics and professional revolutionaries" (Bartlett 386), had one thing clear: "they had to have a rising before the war ended" (386). The most well-known of them were Patrick Pearse (*Pádraig Anraí Mac Piarais)*, James Connolly (*Séamas Ó*

Conghaile), Thomas Clarke (*Tomás Séamus Ó Cléirigh*), Seán MacDermott, Joseph Plunkett (*Seosamh Máire Pluincéid)*, Éamonn Ceannt, and Thomas MacDonagh (*Tomás Anéislis Mac Donnchadha).* These men were the same who signed the Proclamation of Independence.

In April 1916, during the Easter Week, the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Citizen Army and the Fianna Eireann rose against the British. They took the Four Courts in Dublin, among other places, and the British Army started to siege them with heavy artillery. The rebels proclaimed the Republic of Ireland with the famous document that starts with *Poblacht na hEireann…*. Although it was a rising all over the country, the main points of conflict were Dublin (mainly) and some areas of Cork, Galway, Meath, Louth and Wexford. In the beginning, the rising was not supported by the entire population, but the execution of the leaders changed the opinion of the mass. Bartlett (396) says that "virulent anti-British feeling had been aroused by the execution of Pearse and his comrades, by the shooting of Sheehy Skeffington and others and by the mass arrest of 'sympathisers' […]".

In 1917, the Irish nationalist party Sinn Féinn "defeated the Irish Parliamentary Party at the by-elections" (Ó Súilleabháin 90). The next year, the *Dáil Eireann* was formed and the leaders "refused to take their seats at Westminster" (90). On 21st January, the Sinn Féinn declared the independence, and the Irish War of Independence (*Cogadh na Saoirse*) began. Besides, Bartlett (400-401) points out that "on the same day, at Soloheadbeg, County Tipperary, two members of the Royal Irish Constabulary guarding gelignite were shot dead by a group of IV, soon to be known as the Irish Republican Army (IRA)". The Irish War of Independence lasted until 1921 when the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed. It recognised the independence of the Free State of Ireland (*Saorstát Éireann)* with a status similar to Australia or Canada (that is, still as part of the Commonwealth) and six counties of Ulster as part of the United Kingdom. Some Irish leaders accepted the treaty, but there

were members of the IRA and of the Government that did not. This led the country to continue being at war, this time, a civil war. It lasted until 1923, with the establishment of the Free State, completely separated from Britain, but with the counties of Northern Ireland still as part of the United Kingdom. Two Irelands were established, and the ambitions of the IRA for a unique Ireland-Island led to a long period of conflict that lasted until recent years. In 1937, a new constitution was approved, and the office of President of Ireland replaced the office of Governor-General that worked from 1922 to 1937. The Gaelic language, *Gaeilge*, was established as the official language and the state was named *Éire*, the Irish name of the island.

There are several songs about the Easter Rising and the rebel leaders. However, not all of them are from the time the events occurred. Bands like *The Wolfe Tones,* for example, play many songs about the rising since 1963. Even very recent songs, like *Zombie,* by the Cranberries, have references to these events: *It's the same old theme/ Since nineteen-sixteen/ In your head, in your head, they're still fighting*

Perhaps, the most famous song about the events of the Easter Rising is *The Foggy Dew*. This song has been attributed to two authors. On the one hand, some sources give the authorship to Peadar Kearney, who is also the author of *Amhran na bhFiann,* the current anthem of the Republic of Ireland. On the other hand, the song is most often attributed to Rev. P. O'Neill, from Rostrevor. He attended the first meeting of Dáil Eireann in 1918 and there he witnesses that "as the roll was being called the expression "Faoi ghlas ag na nGall" (*Locked up by the foreigner*) was exclaimed when the name of members who had been imprisoned were mentioned. He returned home and penned what has become the iconic song of the Easter Rising" (An Góilín 16). This song, with its different versions, is like a hymn to those who died during the rising of 1916 and in the later executions. However, in the lyrics it is also possible to see references to other battles of World War I

such as Sud-el-Bar, which refers to the Dardanelles fort, a British position during the Gallipoli campaign of 1915-1916, and it also has an anti-recruit reference " **'***twas better to die 'neath an Irish sky than at Suvla or Sud-El-Bar*". The song narrates in an epic way the rising of the rebels over Dublin, as can be seen in "*but the Angelus bell o'er the Liffey 's swell rang out in the Foggy Dew/ Right proudly high over Dublin town they hung out the flag of war*"**.** The song has references to some of the rebel leaders, like in **"***Oh, had they died by Pearse's side or fought with Cathal Brugha/ Their graves we'd keep where the Fenians sleep, 'neath the shroud of the Foggy Dew*". Cathal Brugha (Charles William St. John Burgess) was jailed for his participation in the rising. Once he was released, he was the Minister for Defence during the first Government of the Republic with Eamon De Valera. He was a strong opponent to the Treaty and fought against the Free State during the Irish Civil War.

The leaders of the Rising are remembered and honoured in different songs. Not all of them have specific songs talking about them. Among the most famous are Padraig Pearse and James Connolly. Pearse is remembered as a hero in *Padraig Pearse*, by the Wolfe Tones.

Kilmainham Jail in 1916, they brought young Pearse
To his death cell and they tried him as a traitor to shoot this man who dared to rebel
He only tried to free his country of the shackles of 800 years
When dawn did break on that May morning, they shot our Leader Padraic Pearse.

Pearse himself wrote new lyrics for a song sung by the rebels during the Easter Rising, *Oró Sé do Bheatha 'Bhaile,* that will be analysed in the section of *Songs in History*, since it became a sort of hymn or anthem for Irish nationalism.

James Connolly´s execution was a shock for many people. He was gravely wounded in the siege of Dublin. He was tied to a chair to be executed because he was unable to stand up. The song *James Conolly* narrates the execution and gives an account of the

atmosphere outside Kilmainham Gaol, the prison where the rebels were jailed, while he was shot.

They brought him from the prison hospital
and to see him in that chair
I swear his smile would, would far more
quickly call a man to prayer
Maybe, maybe I don't understand this
thing that makes these rebels die […]
A great crowd had gathered outside of Kilmeinhem,
With their heads uncovered they knelt on the ground.
From inside that grim prison lay a brave Irish soldier,
His life for his country about to lay down.

The song shows a striking narrative of the events from the perspective of one of the executors who is nervous for what he is about to do.

Ready, Present, and him just smiling, Christ I felt my rifle shake
His wounds all open and around his chair a pool of blood
And I swear his lips said, "fire" before my rifle shot that cursed lead
And I, I was picked to kill a man like that, James Connolly

Joseph Plunkett talks with his recent wife, Grace Grifford, in *Grace* before his execution. In the song, he reflects on the result of the rising. He married Grace in the prison´s chapel.

As we gather in the chapel here in old Kilmainham Jail

I think about these past few weeks, oh will they say we've failed...

Oh, Grace just hold me in your arms ad let this moment linger

They'll take me out at dawn and I will die.

Michael John Collins (*Mícheál Seán Ó Coileáin*) was one of the most famous leaders of Ireland. He was sent to Frongoch, in Wales, after his participation in the rising, more concretely he assisted Plunkett in Dublin. When he was in Wales, he was recognised as a "natural leader" by other prisoners. He was released on 23rd December 1916 along with 600 rebels. After the Rising, he became the captain of the IRA, and he organized the escape from the prison of Eamon De Valera in 1919. He was named Chairman of the Provisional Government of the Irish Free State in January 1922. During the Irish Civil War, Michael Collins was a supporter of the Treaty. In 1922, when he was in *Béal na*

mBláth, in his natal County Cork, he was killed in an ambush by anti-treaty forces. Irish-American rock band Black 47 composed *The Big Fellah,* which was Michael Collins´ nickname) about him. The song shows a lot of respect to Collins, even though some Irish did not agree with his position on the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

And they sent you off to London to negotiate a deal
And to gain us a republic, united, boys, and real

But the women and the drink ,Mick, they must have got to you
'cause you came back with a country divided up in two
We had to turn against you, mick, there was nothing' we could do [...]

We fought against each other, two brothers steeped in blood
But I never doubted that your heart was broken in the flood
And though we had to shoot you down in golden Bal na Blath
I always knew that Ireland lost her greatest son of all.

Johnny McEvoy, in *Michael,* misses him for his death. "*Michael in their hour of need you had to go/ Michael in our hour of need why did you go*". The Wolfe Tones also sang to Collins remembering his life from the age of sixteen "*when barely sixteen to England crossed o'er/ For to work as a boy in a government store*", to his death.

Alas that a split in our ranks 'ere we saw
Mick Collins stretched lifeless in lone Beal na Bla
Oh, long will old Ireland be seeking in vain
Ere we find a new leader to match the man slain
A true son of Grainne his name long will shine
O gallant Mick Collins cut off in his prime

The first rebel executed by the British Army after the Easter Rising leaders was Kevin Barry, an 18-year-old student of Medicine. He was sentenced to die in the gallows instead of being shot by a firing squad. He belongs to what was called the Forgotten Ten: Patrick Moran, Frank Flood, Thomas Whelan, Thomas Traynor, Patrick Doyle, Edmond Foley, Thomas Bryan, Bernard Ryan, and Patrick Maher. *Kevin Barry*, by The Wolfe Tones, remembers him as a hero: "*Kevin turned to her in silence saying, "Mother, do not weep/*

For it's all for dear old Ireland/ And it's all for freedom's sake". These lyrics give an account of the strong conviction of Barry with "the cause".

An event that could have changed the result of the Rising was the capture of Roger Casement's ship in Kerry. This ship was supposed to bring "German rifles and ammunition" (Bartlett 385) to the rebels. The song *Banna Strand* remembers the event, carrying in the title the place where Casement was captured, Banna Strand. In the lyrics, we have a narrative of the events and the fate of Roger Casement. Finally, his body was repatriated to Ireland in 1965 and laid in Arbour Hill, in Dublin, with other leaders of the rising. A State Funeral was arranged, with the attendance of Eamon De Valera, and then he was buried in Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin.

'Twas on Good Friday morning,
All in the month of May,
A German Ship was signalling,
Beyond out in the Bay,
We had twenty thousand rifles
All ready for to land,
But no answering signal did come
From the lonely Banna Strand

'Twas in an English prison
That they led him to his death,
"I'm dying for my country"
He said with his last breath,
They buried him in British soil
Far from his native land,
And the wild waves sing his requiem
On the lonely Banna Strand.

They took Sir Roger home again
In the year of '65,
And with his comrades of '16
In peace and tranquil lies

After the rising, the Black and Tans (*Dúchrónaigh*), named after the colour of the uniforms, were deployed in Ireland to fight the Sinn Féinn and the IRA. They are represented in different songs like one of the best known Irish Republican songs written by Dominic Behan, *Come out Ye Black and Tans".* The song is quite direct against this military force.

Come out ye Black and Tans, come out and fight me like a man

Show your wives how you won medals down in Flanders
Tell them how the IRA made you run like hell away
From the green and lovely lanes of Killeshandra.

Finally, The Dubliners with the song *Take It Down from The Mast*, show the two Irelands that the Civil War put face to face. The song is very clear in its position: "*Take it down from the mast, Irish traitors/ The flag we Republicans claim/ It can never belong to Free Staters/ You brought on it nothing but shame*." The song was originally written in 1923 by James Ryan under the title "Lines Written by an Irish Soldier in 1923", and another version in 1950 by Dominic Behan refers to the execution of Liam Mellows, Rory O´Connor, Joseph McKelvey and Richard Barrett "*You have murdered our brave Liam and Rory/ You have butchered young Richard and Joe/ And your hands with their blood are still gory/ Fulfilling the work of the foe.*"

4. Songs in History

So far, I have dealt with songs that were related with historical events. Some of them are quite famous around the world. The previous section was based on the historical background, allowing me to deal with the songs that narrate the events. However, in this section, I will cover three songs that are connected with history in two ways. On the one hand, some of them give an account of historical events, as the previous ones. On the other hand, these songs deserve special treatment because they are somehow distinguished among other songs. These are pieces of (historical and musical) history. Some of them even jumped out of the "only-Ireland" context into an international one becoming the window through which, the world could see (and listen to) Ireland.

Óró, sé do bheatha bhaile

This song was used by the Irish rebels of the Easter Rising as a marching tune. However, the origins of the song remain a mystery. According to Joyce (131) the name

of the song was “ancient clan march” in George Petrie´s *Collection of Irish Music*, and it is related with the *hauling home*, which

> was bringing home the bride to her husband's house after marriage. It was usually a month or so after the wedding, and was celebrated as an occasion next only in importance to the wedding itself. As they enter the house the bridegroom is supposed to speak or sing: *Oro, sé do bheatha a bhaile, is fearr liom tu ná céad bo bainne/ Oro, sé do bheatha a bhaile, thá tu maith le rátha.* [Oro, welcome home, I would rather have you than a hundred milch cows/ Oro, welcome home, ’tis you are happy with prosperity (in store for you)].(Joyce 131)

In early versions of the song *Séarlas Óg* (Young Charles, another name for the Bonnie Prince) is mentioned, dating the song back to the third Jacobite Rebellion, between 1745 and 1746. In fact, in George Petries´ *Collection of Irish Music* it also appears as “*Welcome home Prince Charley”*. The song, back then, was meant to welcome Prince Charles to Ireland, since he was catholic, whereas the current English monarch was protestant.

In the 20th century, a new version of the song was made. Patrick Pearse, one of the martyrs of the Easter Rising, changed the lyrics of the traditional song in order to banish Prince Charles´s figure. The Bonnie Prince was replaced in Pearse´s version by Gráinne Ní Mhaille, known as *Sea Queen* of Connaught, who lived in the 16th century and fought against the occupation of Ireland. The fact of banishing Prince Charles is believed to be related with an indigenous leadership, for it made no sense support the independence and sing for an English Monarch, no matter how catholic he was.

Another change Pearse made was the replacement of the verses “*Béidh siad leis-sean Franncaigh is Spáinnigh”* [They will be with him, French and Spanish], since these countries were supposed to help Prince Charles. Instead, the new verses were “*Gaeil féin's ní Francaigh ná Spáinnigh”* ('Gaels they, and neither French nor Spaniard'). The song was sung by members of the IV during the Easter Rising and it was used as a fast march in the Irish War of Independence. Souchon states that “it's obvious that Pearse knew both the history and use of this tune as a metaphor for Welcoming Ireland Home as a bride, to a free Ireland”. Pearse´s version of the song became very popular among the nationalists

before and after the rising of 1916, and even nowadays is a very popular and well-known song in Ireland. After the rising the song was also known as *Dord na bhFiann,* which means Call of the fighters.

The relation with the Easter Rising can be seen in one of the most iconic scenes of the film *The Wind that Shakes the Barrel* by Ken Loach, where Irish rebels sing the song on their way to an ambush over British troops. The melody of the song is often associated with the sea shanty "*What Shall We Do with a/the Drunken Sailor?"* or just "*Drunken Sailor*". Both songs share the melody, but it seems that "*Óró, sé do bheatha bhaile"* was the first to have it, since the earliest sources for the *Drunken Sailor* song date the it to around the 1820s.

Zombie, by the Cranberries

One of the most famous Irish songs in rock history is *Zombie* by the Cranberries. It was released in 1994 and written by the leader and singer of the band, Dolores O´Riordan. Perhaps, not everyone can understand the lyrics at first, but when one takes a little time to investigate the history of the song, it becomes clearer. According to an article from *Independent,* by Ilana Kaplan, "the ferocity of the song made sense: O'Riordan was singing about the violence happening in Northern Ireland that were [sic] making constant headlines."

On March 20 1993, the IRA planted a bomb in a trash bin in Warrington, Cheshire, England. This, in fact, was the second attack of what is known as the Warrington bombing. The first bomb was on February 26, with no injuries. In this second attack, 56 people were injured, and two children were killed. An article in *The Telegraph*, by Ed Power, says that "Three-year-old Johnathan Ball was killed at the scene; five days later 12-year-old Tim Parry died from injuries sustained in the assault". The song, therefore,

was the response of O´Riordan (and a great majority of Irish society) to the death of these two children, and it also shows the feelings of the broken families.

Another head hangs lowly
Child is slowly taken
And the violence, caused such silence
Who are we mistaken?

Another mother's breaking
Heart is taking over
When the violence causes silence
We must be mistaken

The atmosphere in Northern Ireland was similar to a war, with troops in the streets, tanks, shooting and bombs: "*With their tanks, and their bombs/And their bombs, and their guns/ In your head, in your head, they are dying*". As the lyrics show, the song is asking for the end of violence, a violence that goes back in time to the Easter Rising, that lead to a civil war and the situation of the two Irelands we saw in the previous section. For the singer, "*It's the same old theme/ Since nineteen-sixteen/ In your head, in your head, they're still fighting*". About the IRA, O´ Riordan felt herself offended for the fact that terrorist "

> claimed to have carried out these acts in the name of Ireland. The IRA are not me. I'm not the IRA" she said. "The Cranberries are not the IRA. My family are not." "When it says in the song, 'It's not me, it's not my family,' that's what I'm saying. It's not Ireland, it's some idiots living in the past (Savage)

But why *Zombie*? Perhaps, the singer uses the term to refer to those that are blind on their ideology, criticising and attacking without thinking, therefore, acting like *zombies*. In fact, given the relation of the song with the death of the two children, one can imagine a person asking to "zombies":

What's in your head?

In your head, in your head

Zombie, zombie, zombie-ie-ie

What's in your head, in your head

Zombie, zombie, zombie-ie-ie, oh

The song became one of the most covered song ever. Its videoclip was also target by critics for it showed some children playing as soldiers while the British Army is patrolling Belfast. Even nowadays, *Zombie* is one of the most iconic songs about Irish History and one of the most famous anti-violence songs. Through this song, Ireland issued a cry to stop the violence, with other songs like *Sunday*, *Bloody Sunday* by U2, because these two songs were known around the world, whereas other folk-songs remained known only in Ireland or the British Isles. An important fact about songs like *Zombie*, and even *Sunday*, *Bloody Sunday,* is that they seem to be impartial in the conflict. For them, violence had to stop from both sides: “It doesn't name terrorist groups or organisations [...] It doesn't take sides. It's a very human song” according to the singer in an interview in *Vox Magazine*, in which she added: I don't care whether it's Protestant or Catholic, I care about the fact that innocent people are being harmed” (Savage)

Amhram na Fianna or The Soldier´s Song

Today, the official anthem of Ireland is the *Soldier´s Song,* or *Amhram na Fianna,* since it has two versions, one in English and one in Irish, although “the original text was in English” (Sherry 39). Both, the lyrics and the melody “may well have been written as early as 1907” (39). The authorship of the lyrics belongs to Peadar Kearney and Patrick Heeney is responsible for the melody. Liam Ó Rinn, “later the Chief Translator to the Oireachtas” (42), translated it into Irish, possibly in 1917. He was not the first to do so since several versions of the song in Irish appeared after 1916. However, his version was eventually known and used. The song was, of course, strongly related with the Army, and it was even “played routinely as a ceremonial closing at army meetings and festivities, much as 'God Save the King' was used by the British” (40). This author (40) also says that

> By general account it was in the internment camps after the Easter Rising that The Soldier's Song came to be widely used. Before independence the song and music were published on a number of

> occasions, in Ireland and in the United States, with the consent of Peadar Kearney (Patrick Heeney died in 1911).

The Free State did not have an official anthem yet, and, in order to solve this, the *Dublin Evening Mail* announced a competition to find one. This competition was meant to find a proper anthem for Ireland, but two tries were needed, since the first attempt remained without winner. The second one, with the vote of the readers, proclaimed Mrs Mary Farren Thomas of Clontarfs with "God of Our Ireland" winner. However, the song was not regarded as an acceptable anthem. The Army´s publication, *An tÓglach*, proposed "The "Soldier´s Song" as an anthem. For them,

> The Soldiers' Song' is good enough for the present...The note of defeat or sorrow is absent from it. In the songs of the past, sadness, disappointment and failure had too much prominence. The new spirit was caught by the writer of The Soldiers' Song'. (Sherry 40)

After this statement, the song was adopted as the National Anthem of the Free State in 1926 by the Executive Council. In the same year, in the Horse Show in Dublin, with teams from other countries, Sherry(40) points out that *The Irish Times* narrates that "[f]or the first time the tricolour flag of the Free State floated over the Governor General's box on the grandstand", and when he visited the show "The Soldier's Song" was played.

Not the whole text written by Peadar Kearney constitutes the anthem. "Not long after adopting it, the Executive Council embarked upon the practice of regarding only the chorus as the anthem" (Sherry 41). In March 1929, Colonel Fritz Brasé was authorised to write some arrangements. He focused on the refrain, and from this point on only the chorus constituted the anthem. The title had different versions like "A Soldier's Song" or "Soldiers of Erin", until the current title was selected. However, "other verses of the song, and variant titles, are frequently printed by non-official sources" (41).

This anthem had several struggles. For example, the first lines in Irish by Ó Rinn were translated from "*Soldiers are we, whose lives are pledged to Ireland*" into "*Sinne fianna fail ata fá gheall ag Éirinn*", as a reference to the Fianna, the warriors of Fionn ma

Cumhaill, a mythological Irish hero. This name was also adopted by the Irish Volunteers. They even carried an insignia in their uniforms with the letters FF (*Fianna Fail*), and the National Army, in the Free State period, continued to use it.

> Thus Ó Rinn's rendering of Kearney's 'soldiers' as 'fianna fail' is an apt reference to the group which adopted the song, and, in the context of the early publication of his translation in *An tÓglach* in 1923, the first line constitutes a reference to the continuity between the Volunteers and the Free State army. (Sherry 42)

Later, the party of De Valera was also given this name, for "understandably de Valera likewise wished to claim continuity with the Volunteers" (Sherry 42). As a consequence, "this sequence of events is not always apparent to later generations, and more than one commentator has assumed that de Valera got an anthem written to order, giving his political party a special sanction in the opening line" (42). In fact, in 1952, the *Evening Herald* accused Eamon De Valera´s party of changing the text in order to benefit his party. However,

> this editorial misapprehension was corrected by a letter from Aindrias Ó Caoimh published on 15 July, but the newspaper did have some basis for the assumption that a change had been made: an alternative version of the first line had in fact been in circulation, motivated by the desire to avoid associating the anthem with one political party (Sherry 42).

Finally, in 1958, the problem was taken into account by the Secretary to the Department of the Taoiseach, Nicolás Sean Ó Nualláin, who realized that no Irish text was officially adopted and "at the same time it would be possible to substitute 'laochra fail' for the embarrassing 'fianna fail'" (Sherry 43).

With two countries and two "feelings" in the island, some problems are expected to happen. As a result, the anthem had its problems in Northern Ireland too, more specifically in sport matches. Maguire (121) gives account of the importance of symbols in the island, not only the anthem but the flag too. He says that "since the formation of the Irish Free State, the IRFU, the Irish Rugby Football Union, has been involved in a series of debates over national flags and whether the Irish Tricolour or the Union Flag should be flown at international matches at Lansdowne Road." It is very explicit how

Maguire (122) refers, through Diffley´s words, to the players´ strike before a match against Scotland in Belfast, where

> some of the Southern players held a meeting on the morning of the match and decided that they were not prepared to stand to attention before the game for the British national anthem unless the Irish anthem was also played and the Irish tricolour flown, both of which were illegal north of the border.

Besides, "the existence of two Irish entities, with two different languages spoken in various parts of Ireland, has also created problems in both the selection and rendition of the 'Irish' national anthem" (Maguire 120). In fact, "the national anthem for players from Northern Ireland, themselves Unionists, from predominantly Protestant backgrounds, would be 'God Save The Queen" (122) whereas in Ireland the *Amhram na Fianna,* in Irish, was sung. Maguire, referring to the language, quotes the words of Jimmy, a player from the North who said: "I can't sing the Anthem because I don't know the words … Me being from the North, it's not my Anthem so I don't sing it. I respect it, I stand still for it … but it's in Gaelic … so I don't know it". The problems the IRFU saw with the anthem led to the choice of a new sport anthem. The song that is heard still today outside the Republic is "Ireland's Call", in English. In matches within the Republic, the Irish anthem in Irish is still played. In other words, "Ireland's Call" represents the island of Ireland, and *Amhram na Fianna* does so with the Republic of Ireland.

Finally, Sherry (43), in order to illustrate the problem with this song, point out that the anthem is not mentioned in the constitution. In fact, there are people that question its validity today.

> The adoption of "The Soldiers' Song" as the national anthem took place almost by accident, with no public debate, no consensus, and not without some controversy. As the decade of commemorations unfolds and we reflect of the legacy of Easter 1916, perhaps it is time to reflect on Ireland's 90-year old national anthem and ask how appropriate is it in 2016? Is it time to say goodbye? …
>
> Within the Republic also, there have been periodic calls for a new national anthem. In the 2011 Presidential election, two of the seven candidates admitted that they would be willing to change the anthem. Michael D. Higgins, the eventual winner, when asked if the national anthem was still fit for purpose, responded that if it was written today, it would be different. Nonetheless, in 2016, "Amhrán na bhFiann" remains in place. (Kinealy)

5. Conclusions

Music in Ireland is still a very active part of its culture. From traditional styles in Irish to modern songs in English, Irish music has the purpose of telling the history of Ireland, denouncing its penuries and honouring its heroes. These songs tell us about major and minor events that moulded Irish culture. The Great Famine, emigration, the decline of the Irish language and wars affected the culture of Ireland, and this was expressed by the people through songs. The main aim of this work was to mix both history and music and see how they influence one another. Of course, there is still information that remains to be said, but this work can be the first step to a musical history of Ireland. In a nation divided in two countries, some songs, like anthems, are very important since there are elements that affect the other side of the border, and can even produce political reactions. Language is not a minor question. The mere fact of using Irish or English is also a political matter that brings reactions in different sections of the island. By knowing about songs in Irish and how they were disappearing, we can understand the consequences of a situation in which two languages are fighting: one to survive, the other to prevail.

In addition, this work tried to show that history can be learnt (and taught) by taking a parallel route from history books. In fact, if music can be said an active part of society, it makes approximation to the past much easier. It also brings different views of historical events like the resentment of the anti-treaty forces with Michael Collins, even though they saw him as a great man for Ireland. If we investigate about the story of certain songs, we can learn more about the reasons why some things are nowadays like they are.

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