

13.13 Irish Diaspora in Song

Instructions: The five songs that follow tell the story of the Irish diaspora and a displaced peoples longing for home. Compare the lyrics to these songs for common themes.

A) Paddy Works on the Railway

This traditional Irish American folk song has many versions and verses.

Source: E. Fowke and J. Glazer, *Songs of Work and Protest* (Dover, 1973).

In eighteen hundred and forty one, I put my corduroy breeches on, I put my corduroy breeches on, to work upon the railway. Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, to work upon the railway.
In eighteen hundred and forty two, I left the old world for the new, bad cess (luck) to the luck that brought me through, to work upon the railway. Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, to work upon the railway.
In eighteen hundred and forty three, 'twas then I met sweet Biddy McGee, an elegant wife she's been to me, while working upon the railway. Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, to work upon the railway.
In eighteen hundred and forty four, I landed on America's shore, I landed on America's shore, to work upon the railway. Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, to work upon the railway.
In eighteen hundred and forty five, I found myself more dead than alive, I found myself more dead than alive, from working on the railway. Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, to work upon the railway.
In eighteen hundred and forty six, they pelted me with stones and sticks, and I was in one hell of a fix, from working on the railway. Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, to work upon the railway.
In eighteen hundred and forty seven, Sweet Biddy she died and went to heaven, if she left one child, she left eleven, to work upon the railway. Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, to work upon the railway.
In eighteen hundred and forty eight, I found myself at heaven's gate, I found myself at heaven's gate, from working on the railway. Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, to work upon the railway.
It's "Pat, do this!" and "Pat, do that!", without a stocking or cravat (scarf), and nothing but an old straw hat, to work upon the railway. Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, to work upon the railway.

B) No Irish Need Apply

The earliest written version of this popular song is from 1865. It was part of the oral tradition in both the United States and Canada. Ballyfadd is a small town in southeastern Ireland. The Tribune was a New York City newspaper. "Milia murther" is a Gaelic phrase that means "a thousand murders."

Source: E. Fowke and J. Glazer, *Songs of Work and Protest* (Dover, 1973).

I'm a decent boy just landed from the town of Ballyfadd; I want a situation and I want it very bad.
I have seen employment advertised, "It's just the thing," says I,
But the dirty spalpeen (rascal) ended with "No Irish Need Apply."
"Whoa," says I, that is an insult, but to get the place I'll, try,"
So I went to see the blackguard with his "No Irish Need Apply."
Some do think it a misfortune to be christened Pat or Dan, but to me it is an honor to be born an Irishman.

I started out to find the house; I got there mighty soon.
I found the old chap seated; he was reading the Tribune.
I told him what I came for, when he in a rage did fly.
"No!" he says, "You are a Paddy, and no Irish need apply."
Then I gets my dander rising, and I'd like to black his eye
For to tell an Irish gentleman "No Irish Need Apply."

I couldn't stand it longer so a-hold of him I took,
And I gave him such a beating as he'd get at Donnybrook,
He hollered "Milia Murther," and to get away did try,
And swore he'd never write again "No Irish Need Apply."
Well, he made a big apology; I told him then goodbye,
Saying, "When next you want a beating, write 'No Irish Need Apply.'"

C) The Irish brought a great love of music with them to America. Many ballads refer to their hopes and dreams for life in the United States. In this ballad, the author remembers the life he left behind in Ireland.

Source: Robert L. Wright, ed., *Irish Emigrant Ballads and Songs*, Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1973, p. 354.

Oh I'm sitting on the stile (step) , Mary, where we sat side by side,
On a bright May morning long ago when first you were my bride;
The corn was springing fresh and green and the lark sang loud and high,
And the red was on your lips, Mary, and the love lay in your eye.
The place is little changed, Mary, the day is right as then,
The lark's loud song is in my ear and the corn is green again;
But I miss the softness of your hand and your breath warm on my cheek,
And I still keep listening for the words, you never more will speak.
'Tis but a step down yonder lane, the little church stands near,
The place where we were wed, Mary, I see the spire from here;
And the grave-yard stands between us both where you took your final rest,
Where I laid you, darling, down to sleep with your babe all on your breast.
I'm very lonely now, Mary, for the poor make no new friends,
But oh they love the better still the few our Father sends;
And you were all I had, Mary, my blessing and my pride,
There's nothing else to care for now since my poor Mary died.
I'm bidding you a long farewell, my Mary kind and true,
But I'll not forget you, darling, in that land I'm going to;
For they say there's bread and work for all and the sun shines always there,
But I'll ne'er forget my Mary were it fifty times as fair.

D) The Wild Colonial Boy

There was a wild colonial boy, Jack Dugan was his name.
He was born and raised in Ireland, In a place called Castlemaine.
He was his father's only son, his mother's pride and joy
And dearly did his parents love The Wild Colonial Boy.

At the age of sixteen he left his native home,
And to Australia's sunny shore he was inclined to roam.
He robbed the rich, he helped the poor, he shot James McAvoy
A terror to Australia was The Wild Colonial Boy.

One morning on the prairie as Jack rode along,
A-listening to the mocking bird a-singing a cheerful song.
Out stepped a band of troopers, Kelly, David and Fitzroy
They all set out to capture him, The Wild Colonial Boy.

"Surrender now, Jack Dugan, for you see we're three to one,
Surrender in the Queen's high name for you're a plundering son."
Jack drew two pistols from his belt and proudly waved them high
"I'll fight, but not surrender," said The Wild Colonial Boy.

He fired a shot at Kelly which brought him to the ground,
And turning 'round to Davis he received a fatal wound.
A bullet pierced his proud young heart from the pistol of Fitzroy
And that was how they captured him, The Wild Colonial Boy.

E) An Emigrant Female

I pray attend and ear now lend to what I'll here relate.
It's of a valiant female's adventure I will state.
Her brave, undaunted courage it will you much delight.
Against a daring robber at the closing hour of night.

This fair maid was a servant to a family, we hear
Who lived in the town of Cavan, but as it does appear
She being inclined to emigrate, her wages did demand
To seek a situation in America's free land.

She traveled without any fear till it was falling night,
When passing through a lonely wood, she trembled
with affright.
Toward her came approaching, a suspicious-looking
man
With his face all covered over and a pistol in his hand.

The robber then stepped up to her and bid her for to
stand
Saying, "Both your goods and money this moment we
demand,
So deliver them up instantly and make no more delay
Or with this loaded pistol I will take your life away."

She begged him then with pity saying, "Sir, please
don't harm me,
For I'm a helpless servant girl that's going o'er the sea.
I have neither goods nor money the truth I will declare,
But you can have these shillings in hopes my life you'll
spare.

She immediately surrendered, but mark now what
befell
For in taking up her bundle, the robber's pistol fell.
The moment that he let it fall, she seized it from the
ground
And with bold undaunted courage to him she turned
around.

She fired the pistol at his heart, his breast was blood
and gore,
Just at the brave girl's feet he fell, the robber was no
more.
Then seeing that she had conquered she made no more
delay
But hastened from the dismal spot where the bleeding
robber lay.

She related then her story unto a farmer's son
And he brought her to his father's house when her tale
was done.

He said, "My valiant Mary, it's for your bravery,
You'll be my bride and we'll both sail to sweet
Amerikay."

Then the couple got married and sailed from Dublin
quay
Aboard a ship that headed west for Amerikay.
Young Mary by her courage got riches in great store,
Her tale will hearten Irish girls until our time's no
more.

F) John Mitchel

I am a true born Irishman, John Mitchel is my name,
To free my own brave countrymen from Newtown I
came.
I struggled hard both night and day to free my native
land,
For which I was transported as you may understand.

When first I joined my countrymen, it was in '42,
And then what followed after I will quickly tell to you.
I raised the standard of Repeal, and gloried in the deed,
And vowed to heaven I'd never rest till Erin it was
freed.

While here in prison close confined, to await the trial
day,
My loving wife she came to me and these brave words
did say:
"O' John, my dear, keep up your heart, and daunted do
not be,
For it's better to die for Erin's right than live in
slavery."

When I received my sentence, it was on a foreign
ground,
Where hundreds of my comrades were assembled all
around:
My liberty was offered me if I would forsake their
cause,
But I'd rather die ten thousand deaths than forsake my
Irish boys!

Farewell, my true-born Irishmen, farewell, my country
small,
But leaving my dear babes behind, it grieves me worse
than all;
There's one request I ask of you, when your liberty you
gain,
Remember Mitchel far away, a convict bound in
chains.