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Shanty-Singing and the Irish Atlantic Identity and Hybridity in the Musical Imagination of Stan Hugill

Introduction

In about the year 2008, soon after I became interested in the history of shanty-singing, I was intrigued to learn that I had a loose connection with one of the most internationally renowned names in the field. Stan Hugill was born on 19 November 1906 in the old coastguard station in the small seaside village of Hoylake, about 150 metres from where I currently live. Hoylake is situated between the Rivers Mersey and Dee on the Wirral peninsula, about fifteen miles from Liverpool in the northwest of England. The building in which Hugill was born faces onto the beach front: to the south are the Clwydian Hills of North Wales, to the north, the coastline of Crosby and Formby, and directly west is the shipping lane running up to Liverpool Bay. It was a propitious start for a highly colourful maritime career.

Coincidences aside, I soon learned that after he left Hoylake for sea in 1921, Stan Hugill went on to become a key figure within the international shanty tradition. Regularly cited as the last genuine shantyman working aboard a British ship, Hugill domiciled in the Welsh port of Aberdovey after the Second World War, where he became the centre of a great international research network focused on different aspects of the shanty tradition: sourcing, collecting, explicating, performing, and so on. The principal product of all this work was three books which remain at the heart of both formal shanty research and the living shanty tradition as it is still practised in a variety of musical and folkloric contexts. [1]

My own interest in shanties stems from my academic status as a cultural historian concerned with all aspects of the musical negotiation of identity (in particular, Irish identity) in various historical and geographical contexts. I have been particularly fascinated to discover that in each of his major works, Stan Hugill developed a peculiar understanding of the influence of Ireland and Irish music within the international shanty tradition – in particular, the condition of ‘Irishness’ as manifested in a variety of lyrical, musical and performative practices. In this article I want to explore both the geo-historical provenance and the theoretical trajectory of that connection. I shall be suggesting that the characterisation of Irish musical elements as central to the shanty repertoire has important implications for an understanding of the category of (Irish) identity at a key moment of its modern evolution; and further, that Hugill’s discourse both emerges from and contributes to a

species of modernist ‘imaginary’ which is at odds with ‘realist’ state-sponsored constructions of the Atlantic world.

The Shanty – A Brief History

The shanty tradition with which most people are familiar today emerged at a particular time and from a very particular set of cultural, geopolitical and technological circumstances. This story has been told many times by many people since the practice emerged as an object of academic and folkloric interest towards the end of the nineteenth century. Of course, the ‘folk’ revival (of which the shanty formed a specialist strand) continues to be fraught with all manner of ideological and institutional difficulties. [2] The following account, drawn in large part from existing ones (most centrally those of A.L. Lloyd and Stan Hugill himself), represents another contribution to the ongoing negotiation of a particular form of ‘folk’ music in terms of its authenticity and its contested function within a variety of critical, cultural and political contexts.

Most authorities acknowledge that whereas some form of co-ordinated singing has probably existed since prehistory, [3] the modern shanty tradition only commenced after the end of the Napoleonic Wars (including their extended North American theatre of operations) in 1815. The way was thus open for the expansion of transatlantic trade and travel; this in turn necessitated the development of a particular type of sailing vessel: the large-capacity, high-speed, multi-masted deep-water vessel. All commentators are likewise adamant that the shanty singing which developed soon after the commencement of this commercial opportunity was practiced only aboard merchant vessels; the British and American navies operated according to a different system in which efficiency and discipline were based on the strict observation of a specialised system of signals, codes and protocols. [4]

Lloyd is in no doubt that ‘[the] modern form of capitalism that gave rise to the great shipping lines produced at the same time the striking body of primitive folk songs that we call: sea shanties.’ [5] In a classic instance of reciprocal development, improvements in engineering fed into (and were fed in turn) by the opening of new markets; and having made no significant advances (in terms of size or speed) since the early modern period, ships suddenly became much bigger and much faster. Lloyd pinpoints the moment of ‘take-off’: it was in 1816 – the year after Waterloo – that

Isaac Wright & Co’s Black Ball Line began their regular run between New York

and Liverpool, sailing on the first of each month, irrespective of weather or amount of cargo loaded, twenty-three days for the eastward trip, about forty coming back. [6]

Other 'lines' followed soon after: Swallowtail, Red Cross, Dramatic, Black Cross. [7] Tonnage and yardage increased throughout the middle decades of the century; more ships, more passages, more commerce. One thing that did not necessarily increase, however, was crew size. Fewer men working harder and longer made commercial sense; and this was as much a factor in the later period, when steam power began to dominate transatlantic travel, as it was in the earlier part of the century when the various 'lines' first entered into direct competition with each other.

Work on board the typical 'packet' ship following the routes between Britain and the Americas consisted in large part of a variety of hauling and heaving tasks – raising the anchor, raising and adjusting sails, pumping bilge water, and so forth. It was soon observed that sailors operated more efficiently when working to a rhythm that was sympathetic to the task in hand; and it was in this context that the benefits of the call-and-response, co-ordinated work song was recognised. These songs were 'performed not for fun or feeling but as an aid to muscular effort.' [8] The shantyman who organised this activity took on a recognised role; a strong voice and an ability to improvise content could earn a sailor a bonus on top of his normal pay. [9]

Thus, a series of song forms emerged, each designed to expedite one or other of the onboard chores necessary for the efficient running of these bigger, faster vessels. Hugill describes two main types and their sub-divisions:

The capstan song and the halyard song. The capstan song was subdivided into: a) the windlass, or anchor capstan shanty, b) the capstan song, sung when doing a job-o-work other than heaving the anchor ... The halyard shanty, used for hoisting sails, was subdivided into: a) long pulls; b) foresheeters; c) bunt-stowers ... For pumping it was considered any old sea-song would do, so long as it had a good grand chorus. [10]

Although Lloyd (referencing Hugill) points out that 'tight categories are misleading' (usually evidence of academic pedantry), he acknowledges that

in the earlier, formative years of the modern shanty, the nature of the job in hand and the gestures needed to fulfil it were important, even decisive, in shaping the melody, rhythm, metre and tempo of the songs. [11]

There are, as one might expect, many forms of maritime music. [12] Besides the extensive canon of onboard work-songs, nineteenth-century merchant seamen were also evidently fond, for example, of singing when off duty. These songs (ballads and other popular forms) are sometimes referred to as ‘forebitters’ (or ‘mainhatch’ songs on American vessels), with reference to the part of the ship where such sessions took place; and a great deal of time and thought has been devoted to defining the relationship between the forebitter and the shanty proper. The principle remains, however: the shanty was specifically a work song, identified (in terms of structure, length and other characteristic features) with the task for which it had been developed.

‘So’, Lloyd writes, ‘the practice of shanty-singing as we know it best emerged during the American-dominated packet-ships of, roughly, 1830-50, and it reached its peak in the British-dominated clipper-ship era of 1855-70.’ [13] As a living reproductive tradition it was all but dead by about 1875 in the face of competition from steam. As soon as its demise was imminent, however, shanty-singing began to attract the attention of folklorists and their twin obsessions with accuracy and loss. The spectre of authenticity has haunted shanty research ever since – the conviction that these songs could not truly exist outside the context within which they had first developed, and that even the most sympathetic attempt to reproduce the shanty outwith its natural environment was in some sense complicit with the modernising forces working to render the form obsolete. [14] At the same time, shanty research was implicated in a widespread revival which was concerned to commemorate a lost folk culture, and to define that culture in terms of its canonical scope (what it was), its constituent features (how it worked), and its ideological impact (what it represented in relation to various politico-cultural narratives). [15]

In terms of the characteristic themes of the shanty, it is difficult to generalise, as lyrics were often occasional and improvised. The more physically difficult the onboard task, the less sense required; ‘songs’ could descend into a series of grunts and nonsense images (some of them borrowed from ‘foreign’ languages such as Gaelic). Longer, more tedious tasks, on the other hand, could afford to be more expansive (both in structural and in lyrical terms) in order to engage the sailor’s attention as well as his effort. There is plenty of evidence, for example, of some of the heartier narrative folk songs (forebitters) being adapted specifically for work gang purposes. There was also a stock of ‘floating’ formulations (references

to particular ports, officer types, food quality, women’s names, and so on) which could be readily adapted for any task at any time, all of which makes the task of identification and categorisation extremely challenging.

More damagingly still from a scholarly perspective is the fact that most of the shanty lyrics were so sexually explicit that the earliest collectors could not see their way clear to committing them to paper. Even an old salt such as Stan Hugill danced around innuendo and refrained from citing words that he feared might offend his more delicate readers. Colourful characters coping with difficult circumstances was one thing, it seems; obscenity and indecency (as defined by late Victorian and early twentieth-century publishers) was something else again. [16] Editorial intervention thus played as important a role in the emergence of a shanty canon as it did in the formation of other elements of the ‘folk revival’. [17]

Authenticity is mitigated further still by the radical discrepancy between the original singing context (and the prevailing stylistic practices thus generated) and the various performance and stylistic contexts within which the shanty subsequently fetched up – everything from ‘authentic’ folk treatments to art song settings. ‘Some shantymen were bawlers’, according to Lloyd, ‘others used a delicate intimate voice. Some sang their solo lines in strict tempo, others preferred a rubato that at times ... was quite elaborate.’ [18] Harmony and ornamentation were unusual but not entirely unknown. Such considerations were somewhat beside the point, however – as Hugill complained: ‘[shore] singers of shanties rarely manage to get the right “atmosphere” into their offerings; they are not raucous or strident enough.’ [19] To which the frustrated singer / collector might respond: ‘*How* raucous? *How* strident?’ Attempting to define the original style with reference to particular qualities or techniques is ultimately unviable: it was the context of imminent gang work that generated the specific aesthetics of the shanty, and that context was less and less available after the advent of steam. [20]

Many of the shanties also evidence a growing meta-discursive element in which the sailor reflects upon his own experience and practices (including the practice of singing itself). In this way, a discourse of marine-pastoralism was gradually overtaken by one of ironic realism. According to Lloyd, the later shanty material (ca. 1850-1875) reveals the seaman’s increasing awareness that he represented ‘an exploited floating proletarian rather than a proud if battered seadog.’ [21] The onboard songs tell of ‘bully’ seamen and ‘bucko’ mates, the rigours of work and weather, the prowess of the ship and /

or the line, and so forth; the port songs tell of pubs and drinking sessions, women (invariably false), and ‘crimping’ – the elaborate system developed worldwide to part the sailor from his pay and get him back to sea as quickly as possible. [22]

With regard to the derivation of these onboard work songs, Lloyd points out that

the musical accents of [many places] went into the composition of the shanties ... The melodies are a fine jumble of pentatonic phrases that may have derived originally from Gaelic or African culture, modal formulas from the English countryside, and modern commonplaces from stage hits of the first half of Victoria’s reign. Similarly the poetic improvisations of the shantymen are incrustated with bits of traditional imagery that first sparkled in the Anglo-Saxon, Celtic and Negro mind, along with tags invented by the yelping comedians of the time on both sides of the Atlantic. [23]

Hugill concurs, describing an eclectic range of sources and influences, including long-established hauling cries, dance tunes, folk songs and ballads (American and European as well as British), adapted art music, including custom-composed martial music of varying kinds; hymns, and popular songs. [24] By far the two most important influences on the development of the shanty (and indeed the forebitter), however, were African-American sources (including work songs associated with the southern American Gulf Ports, as well as West Indian and Latin American contributions), and, most consistently from Hugill’s perspective, Ireland. This leads us on to a consideration of Hugill’s conceptualisation of the role of Ireland and Irishness in mid-nineteenth-century maritime culture in general, and in relation to the evolution of the modern shanty form in particular. The place to start such a task is in Liverpool.

Liverpool, Irish, Liverpool-Irish

As we shall observe at greater length in a later section, history reveals that the notion of an authentic national identity is simultaneously underpinned and undermined by emigration. Those forced to leave can develop a strong investment in the ‘mother’ country, often (as in the case of Irish America) developing into some of the most sentimental and intransigent of nationalists. At the same time, the emigrant’s ‘original’ identity starts to erode immediately in the face of their spatial and psychosocial displacement. The emigrant embodies the paradoxical condition of modernity, strung out between past and present, there and here, absence and presence. Especially

for the first generation of exiles, life is a constant negotiation between two equally pressing realities: one fully alive in memory, the other demanding of the here and now. Such a condition, I would suggest, also characterises the experience of the Liverpool Irish.

There was a significant amount of traffic (both in goods and people) between Ireland and Liverpool since the latter received its charter from King John in 1207. That movement developed in size and significance during the period of the Atlantic archipelago's increasingly fraught relations – including the Elizabethan plantations, the Cromwellian ‘settlement’, and the insidious colonial oppression which occurred in the wake of the so-called ‘Glorious Revolution’. As Britain's imperial fortunes grew throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (a process in which Liverpool played a key role), the neighbouring island languished in political and economic stagnation – a provincial backwater populated by a benighted race whose image in the British cultural and political imagination oscillated between harmless childishness and bestial backwardness. [25]

Either as a transit port or as a final destination, Liverpool continued to loom large in the Irish imagination throughout the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries. In 1841 (which is to say, *before* the Great Famine commencing in 1847) the city was already home to 49,639 Irish-born people – roughly one-seventh of the population. That figure was soon to rocket. The historian John Belchem quotes a local stipendiary magistrate who calculated that ‘296,331 persons landed at Liverpool from Ireland between 13 January and 13 December 1847, of whom 116,000 were “half naked and starving”’. [26] Many more were to follow, as *an Gorta Mór* – the ‘Great Hunger’ – extended to the end of the decade and beyond. [27] The majority of those fleeing the horror back in Ireland were passing through in search of better chances in a variety of far-flung destinations; exhausted and traumatised, however, many stayed where they fetched up – in the warren of streets that grew up around the docking sites, before slowly moving out into the burgeoning city itself.

It would be difficult to over-estimate the enduring influence of the Great Famine on subsequent Irish history. Amongst the many negative effects that historians and cultural commentators have discerned, perhaps the most enduringly damaging was the final loss (after a century and more of decline) of Gaelic as a viable national language, and the concomitant consolidation of English (or rather, a particular form of Hiberno-English) as the language of

their stirring choruses. [36]

Many of these songs incorporated macaronic Gaelic terms left over from their original language, and this underpinned another claim: that the shanties associated with traffic between Liverpool and the eastern American seaboard were, irrespective of their provenance or of the singer's ethnicity, usually sung in 'an imitative Irish brogue'. [37] Most tellingly, Hugill claims that Irish songs and melodies were subject to an ongoing 'folk' process in which they were adapted for use by different agents in a wide range of contexts.

What might be described as the 'Irishification' of the Atlantic trade routes commenced in earnest after the Famine, with crews culled from expatriate Irish communities on either side of the ocean. And with these crews came a particular repertoire of music, songs and performance styles – many of the shanties and forebitters that were to become canonical, well-known pieces such as

'The Liverpool Judies', 'Paddy Lay Back', 'Paddy West', 'The Banks of Newfoundland', 'The Liverpool Packet' and so on, many of which were used as capstan shanties. They were responsible too for the following windlass, halyard, pumping and sheet shanties: 'Leave Her, Johnny, Leave Her' (first sung as 'Across the Rocky Mountains' and 'Across the Western Ocean'), 'Blow the Man Down', 'The Blackball Line', 'Time for Us to Go' or 'A Hundred Years Ago', and many others. Some of these forebitters and shanties have airs reminiscent of those of Erin's Isle, and 'Can't Ye Dance the Polka?' ... unmistakably has the air of 'Larry Doolan', a well-known Irish song. [38]

Hugill discerns two processes simultaneously at work, then: a growing Irish influence (in terms of repertoire and singing style), especially in the period after the Great Famine; and the hybridisation of that influence in the context of increasingly speedy, highly mobile, transatlantic trade.

The former process may be observed in relation to a song such as 'The Irish Emigrant' – also known as 'We're All Bound to Go', described by Hugill as an outward-bound windlass shanty. With its jig tune and its story of a young Irish emigrant (sometimes male, sometimes female) in Liverpool looking for passage to the New World, this song, he avers, 'is Irish to its very bones':

As I walked out one morning down by the Clarence Dock,
I heard a bully Irish boy conversing with Tapscott;
'Good morning, Mister Tapscott, would ye be arter telling me,
If ye've got a ship bound for New York in the state of Amerikee?'

[39]

This is a song of a particular type – a narrative ‘come-all-ye’, identified in this instance by its characteristic opening line: ‘As I walked out ...’. A.L. Lloyd suggests that this form emerged in Ireland in the eighteenth century, but came to prominence across Britain in the wake of the Great Famine, with the influx of Irish people into the great industrial centres. [40] ‘The Irish Emigrant’ represents a typical adaptation of the form within a British – or more precisely, a migrant – context.

In this transcription, Hugill attempts to reproduce the sounds and locutions of an Irish accent. We find the word ‘Amerikee’, for example, scattered throughout the Anglophone shanty canon; along with the equally popular ‘Amerikay’, it was used for rhyming purposes, but also in hopeful imitation of an Irish pronunciation of the word ‘America’. Hugill also points out that the Irish pronunciation of the word ‘meal’ was responsible for the common misapprehension that emigrants travelled on ‘mail’ ships. (Terry makes the same point in *The Way of the Sea*, 13.) Such words represent a particular form of language (Hiberno-Irish) that was at this time itself undergoing rapid change by language users who were negotiating the profoundly traumatic experience of alienation – both from the land of their birth and from the language of their ancestors.

We find a classic use (misuse, as it happens) of one of those locutions in line three of the verse quoted above, with the introduction of the word ‘after’ (or in this case, the more phonetic ‘arter’). Because there is no verb ‘to have’ in Gaelic, the perfect and pluperfect past tenses of ‘to have’ is formed with parts of the verb ‘to be’ in conjunction with the preposition *tar éis* – meaning ‘after’. So, in Gaelic, one might say: *Tá mé tar éis mo dhinnér a ithe* – which in Standard English would mean something like ‘I’ve just eaten my dinner’, but actually translates as ‘I am after eating my dinner’. [41] As Gaelic began to disappear, that particular locution became widely used in Hiberno-Irish; and as it did so, it becomes an easily reproducible way of invoking an Irish identity. Such is the manner, I believe, in which it is employed in this instance.

In fact, the locution is mis-applied by Hugill (or by his source) in this particular example. The Irish emigrant who is conversing with Mr Tapscott (an actual agent based in Liverpool in the years after the Famine) means to say something like: ‘Could you tell me if you’ve got a ship bound for New York’. There’s no meaningful sense in which the locution ‘after’ (or ‘arter’)

Hugill cites the well-known shanty ‘Clear the Track, Let the Bulgine Run’:

Oooh the smartest packet ye can find
Ah ho! way-ho! are you mos’ done?
Is the ol’ ‘Wild Cat’ of the Swallowtail Line
Sooo, clear the track, let the bulgine run!

To me high rig-a-jig in a jaunтин’ car
Ah ho! way-ho! are you mos’ done?
Wid Eliza Lee all on my knee
Sooo, clear the track, let the bulgine run!

The lyric of the most popular version cited by Hugill moves the action from Liverpool to New York and back again, finishing with a proposal of marriage to ‘Eliza Lee’. This shanty, he writes,

was a capstan song ... a favourite in the Yankee packets. It has almost the same tune as an Irish folk-song *Shule Agra* but the refrains have wording showing Negro influence. It was another typical mixture of Irish and Negro sentiments and is one of the many shanties that passed through the shanty mart of Mobile, in this case I should think the tune came from Ireland to Mobile, where the Negroes took it in hand and then at a later date it returned to sea with a few more alterations.
[42]

The ‘folk’ process Hugill proposes goes something like this: the ancient Irish song ‘Siubhail A Gradh’ (translating as something like ‘Walk On, My Love’) fetched up in Mobile, Alabama sometime during the Famine emigration of the 1840s and 1850s. As with the process described in the previous section, the song may have been sung as a forebitter on the westward passage by expatriate Irish sailors, or the crew may have heard it being sung by the emigrants in steerage. In any event, the melody was adapted by African-American and Irish work gangs on the railroad network that was springing up in the great hinterlands in the years before the American Civil War. (‘Bulgine’ was a slang term for a railway engine.) These versions made their way back to the (fortuitously named) port of Mobile where one such version was picked up by American and British crews plying the Atlantic trade routes. This version was in turn adapted for a variation on the ‘flash packet’ genre, celebrating the speed and prowess of the ships operating under one or another of the transatlantic Packet lines – in this case, Swallowtail. From ancient Gaelic love song to modern work shanty in a few easy moves! [43]

‘Clear the Track’ is not Irish, English, American or African-American; it is,

according to Hugill, best described as ‘transatlantic’. [44] His work is testament to the fact that the process described here in relation to this particular example operates at large throughout the shanty canon, as different aspects (melody, language, accent, lyric, structure, performance, and so on) of one (Irish) musical tradition mutate when confronted with new circumstances. But what does this mean? How may we begin to map the significance of songs which only emerged as a ‘[freak] products of capitalism’, [45] and only managed to survive as an academic curiosity – a ‘quoted’ folk form far removed from its original performance contexts? Most importantly from my perspective here, what are the implications of all this for a theorisation of modern Irish identity?

Theorising the Irish Atlantic

There are a number of methodological / theoretical perspectives from which the image of an Irish Atlantic (and in particular the role of the shanty in realising such an image) might be approached. One obvious such perspective concerns emigration, in all its political, historical, geographical, social and cultural contours. Especially since the Famine, the Irish represent one of the world’s great migrant races, discoverable in some or other form in various places across the globe. A related concept is that of ‘diaspora’ which, according to one authority, is ‘an interpretive frame for analysing the economic, political and cultural modalities of historically specific forms of migrancy’, offering ‘a critique of discourses of fixed origins while taking account of a homing desire, as distinct from a desire for a “homeland”’. [46] Seen from this perspective, Irishness worldwide represents a classic ‘diasporic’ identity, located along a continuum running between strong affiliation (characterised, for example, by domicile in the ‘homeland’ and close identification with its ‘essential’ attributes, however conceived) to weak, multi-generational removal from the original migrant experience. [47]

The shanty might be regarded as a typical product of the diasporic imagination – a riposte to the powerful conceptual framework which maintains ‘a homology between a culture, a people, or a nation and its particular terrain’. [48] But the sea is not a ‘terrain’, or, at least, only problematically so. Especially in its classic post-Famine phase, the shanty embodies experiences of displacement and alienation, of longing and loss, that are in themselves reflective of an Irish cultural tradition (inherited and remade by each generation) of large-scale, enforced economic migration. Which is to say: the perennial pattern of leaving and arriving that we noted in relation to the shanty may itself be a reflection of the diasporic

imagination, in which experience is organised in relation to specific spatial co-ordinates identified as ‘home’ and ‘not-home’.

Migration and diaspora feature strongly also in one of the most powerful and most successful discourses to appear within the western academy in recent years: postcolonialism. Researchers working under the auspices of postcolonial theory have reflected on the extent to which the dynamics of large-scale people movement has contributed to the ordering of the modern era, in particular its organisation into ‘regions’ or ‘worlds’ characterised by uneven cultural and economic development. [49]

One powerful concept which features strongly throughout postcolonial studies, and which bears closely on our concerns here, is ‘hybridity’. As theorised by Homi K. Bhabha, hybridity represents a way of evading traditional approaches to culture which, he claims, have always functioned in relation to a mode of enunciation whereby specific forms of unified discourse give rise to specific forms of unified subjectivity. Cultural analysis, he claims, has always been based on the fallacious assumption that meaning emerges as a function of the stable, transparent Self communicating with a stable, transparent Other through the medium of a stable, transparent language. Informed by a range of poststructuralist writers (such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida), however, Bhabha advances an alternative notion of cultural enunciation – a ‘Third Space’ characterised by a discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference:

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. [50]

Hybridity is the condition of all cultural production – for Derrida, it is embedded within the phenomenon of communication itself; but the hybrid status of the cultural text emerges most obviously in the context of enforced human intercourse – environments (such as those produced under colonialism and migration) in which apparently fixed, unified identities clash up against each other in a context of mutual exchange and influence.

The Irish Atlantic represents in this regard a classic ‘Third Space’ – an

perspective of this essay, I discern many suggestive parallels and points of contact (and indeed contrast) between the street ballad and the shanty as products of a hybridised Irish culture. Each represents a highly contingent form of textuality in which traditional subject positions and narrative patterns are unavailable; each speaks to an identity strung about between centripetal and centrifugal forces; each is the product to some degree of a colonial history in which, despite a longing for plenitude and belonging, the abiding cultural forces are in fact fracture, displacement and alienation.

All the ideas broached in this final section – diaspora, hybridity, the politics of popular music – come together in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1994), an influential book which proposed an alternative model of modern western history based on the experience of the African diaspora. Gilroy's radical strategy was to refuse 'the unthinking assumption that cultures always flow into patterns congruent with the borders of essentially homogenous nation states', [55] and to develop an alternative approach which would consider 'the Atlantic as one complex unit of analysis – an explicitly transnational and intercultural [space].' [56] Such a perspective provided him with a means to re-examine the problems of nationality, location, identity, power and historical memory which have beset the Atlantic world since the nineteenth century, and which have fed so disastrously into what passes for the experience of modernity.

Crucially, Gilroy identifies the ship as the presiding symbol of this alternative history. Ships enabled people to move 'to and fro between nations, crossing borders in modern machines that were themselves micro-systems of linguistic and political hybridity.' [57] 'Ships', he suggests,

were the living means by which the points within the Atlantic world were joined. They were mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected ... The ship provides a chance to explore the articulations between the discontinuous histories of England's ports, its interfaces with the wider world ... the ship is the first of the novel chronotopes presupposed by my attempts to rethink modernity via the history of the black Atlantic and the African diaspora into the western hemisphere. [58]

Regarded in this way, the ship also links to one of the book's key theoretical strategies: the differentiation between 'roots' and 'routes'. For Gilroy, the 'rooted' imagination has its bases in the European Enlightenment (including its American variation). In the realms of science and culture, it points towards a particular form of disciplinary knowledge, the force of which is

commercial, contingent, divergent, multiform, radically unfinished: a shipboard music born in the interstices of capitalism and diaspora, the shanty exemplifies a form of hybrid textuality that specifically expresses a form of hybrid subjectivity. This ‘routed’ process sets itself against the epic rootedness of the nation-state and its heroic mission to establish, and subsequently to police, the borders between things (places, times, experiences, identities).

The imaginary space of the ‘Irish Atlantic’ overlaps significantly with Gilroy’s ‘Black Atlantic’; each inheres within the other, each forms part of the cultural and experiential matrix from which the other emerges as a theoretical possibility. [62] The significance of this possibility here lies in its resistance to a kind of narrow-gauge nationalism which came to define Irish identity in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and its location of modern Irish identity within a wider, transnational cultural space – one answering equally readily to the ocean and to the land; one alive to the risks of travelling as well to the pleasures of inhabiting; and one which understands the necessary dialectic formed in relation to the images of home and not-home. With its endlessly adaptive hybridity and its willingness to hear the voice of the Other, the shanty provides us with an alternative genealogy of modernity – in short, a different narrative of the (Irish) history within which we are still caught up.

Conclusion

It may seem a long way from Hugill to Homi – from the modest pleasures of shanty folklore to the political pressures of high postcolonial theory. And yet I believe that the one comes most sharply into focus in relation to the other. Hugill’s work is testament to the thoroughly hybridised nature of the emerging Atlantic world, and to the comprehensive infusion of Irish diasporic culture throughout that world. In one sense, the ambivalent space of the Irish Atlantic is produced as an effect of the rooted imagination itself – a kind of ‘supplement’ which, driven by the logic of international capitalism, must always exceed the places designed to contain it. In another sense, it speaks to a recurring possibility within cultural history itself, one that, although revealed and opened up by the recourse to critical theory, has profound implications for our practical political response to the modern world. As Bhabha writes:

[The] theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism or multi-

culturalism of the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the inbetween space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves. [63]

Notes

- 1 Stan Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas: Shipboard Work-Songs and Songs Used as Work-Songs from the Great Days of Sail* (1961; Mystic CT, 1994); *Sailortown* (London, 1967); *Shanties and Sailors' Songs* (London, 1969).
- 2 For a scathing account of the ideological deceptions from which the English Folk Revival emerged see *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (1993; Leeds, 2010) by Georgina Boyes.
- 3 In *Folk Song in England* (1967; London, 1969) Lloyd writes of the 'ancient and universal' (289) nature of the call-and-response work song. Lloyd's extended description of the shanty tradition (288-316) remains probably the most informative in technical terms.
- 4 In *The Way of the Ship: Sailors, Shanties and Shantymen* (1921, 1926; Tuscon, AZ, 2008), Richard Runciman Terry writes that shanties 'were never used aboard men-o'-war, where all orders were carried out in silence to the pipe of the bo'sun's whistle' (1).
- 5 Lloyd, *Folk Song*, 288. The derivation of the word 'shanty' (which is beyond my remit here) has been the source of some contention; for a discussion of the various theories see Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, 20-3.
- 6 Lloyd, *Folk Song*, 293.
- 7 Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, 63.
- 8 Lloyd, *Folk Song*, 288.
- 9 Terry writes: 'The importance of the shantyman could not be overestimated. A good shantyman with a pretty wit was worth his weight in gold. He was a privileged person, and was excused all work save light or odd jobs' (*The Way of the Ship*, 8).
- 10 Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, 12.
- 11 Lloyd, *Folk Song*, 298. A description of the precise correspondence between

musical structure (in terms of line and stanza length, for example) and specific work task (hauling as opposed to heaving, for example) is beyond the scope of this article.

12 In *Music of the Sea* (London, 1992) David Proctor describes a wide variety of maritime musical practices, including ceremonial drum-and-trumpet bands, music for dancing and other forms of entertainment. He also alludes to the recurring image of the sea in late Romantic art music.

13 Lloyd, *Folk Song*, 297.

14 Richard Runciman Terry represents perhaps the most intransigent of the commentators, frequently upbraiding various agents – ‘late’ participants in the shanty tradition, fellow collectors and ignorant landlubbers, for example – for their ‘perversions’ of the original practice (*Way of the Sea*, 6).

15 ‘[The] packets are all gone,’ wrote W.B. Whall in *Sea Songs and Shanties*, (5th edn. Glasgow, 1926), ‘and so are the roaring, brutal dogs who sailed them ... The real thing has gone for ever’ (vii, xi). The inclusion of elaborate musical accompaniment for his ‘versions’ does not seem to have concerned him. In *The Imagined Village Boyes* argues that ‘without the notional existence of the rapidly disappearing Folk, there would be no rationale for a Folk Revival’ (18). Hugill is unusual insofar as he by and large refuses to sentimentalise or eulogise the ‘original’ practice, celebrating instead the survival of the songs in new contexts.

16 The tone was set by Laura Alexandrine Smith, an early contributor to shanty literature, who observed that ‘not a few of the songs ... were highly objectionable on the score of morality’ (*The Music of the Waters: A Collection of the Sailors’ Chanties, or Working Songs of the Sea, of All Maritime Nations; Boatmen’s, Fishermen’s, and Rowing Songs, and Water Legends* (1887; London, 2015), 77). Thereafter every commentator has had occasion to reference the ‘colourful’ content of the shanty.

17 In *The Horn Book: Studies in Erotic Folklore and Bibliography* (London, 1970), the American scholar Gershon Legman deplored the ‘pitifully expurgated’ (389) condition of printed shanty material. He also offered an explanation of sexual-emotional energies informing shanty discourse: ‘The psychological point is also very clear that the riotous obscenity of these songs also gives expression to the anger – in psycho-analytic terms the “anal sadism” – of these men, deprived of all possibility of natural sex lives for long periods, during the fullest years of their virile strength: very hard-worked and in continuous danger and fear’ (389-90).

18 Lloyd, *Folk Song*, 314.

19 Stan Hugill, *The Bosun’s Locker: Collected Articles 1962-1973* (Todmorden, Yorkshire, 2006), 50.

20 In his ‘Foreword’ to *The Seven Seas Shanty Book* (London, 1927), John Masefield

offers advice as to a more authentic performance style (with soloist and chorus overlapping) whilst at the same time commending the author's willingness to 'soften' the words 'where necessary, as to fit them for the ears of ladies' (n.p.). In his own 'Preface' to the volume, the author (John Sampson) reveals that he preferred to sing the shanties with piano accompaniment.

21 Lloyd, *Folk Song*, 284.

22 Hugill, *Sailortown*, 82ff and *passim*.

23 Lloyd, *Folk Song*, 298.

24 Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, 19.

25 L. Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (1971; 2nd rev.edn. Washington D.C., 1996).

26 John Belchem, *Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism* (Liverpool, 2000), 132.

27 In her book *Decline, Renewal and the City in Popular Music Culture: Beyond the Beatles* (Farnham, 2007) Sara Cohen cites data from the national census which shows that Liverpool's 'population increased from 165,175 in 1821 to 375,955 in 1851, by which time the number of Irish residents amounted to 22 per cent of the total population' (16).

28 Belchem, *Merseypride*, 180.

29 Paul du Noyer, *Liverpool – Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture* (London, 2007), 55. Belchem concurs: 'The Irish have contributed much to the local music scene ... but they are only one voice within a wider mixture' (*Merseypride*, 60).

30 Cohen, *Decline, Renewal and the City*, 16.

31 Cohen, *Decline, Renewal and the City*, 62. Belchem argues that '[as] with dialect, there is no indigenous "folk" tradition in Liverpool – other than the sea-shanties of transient seamen' (*Merseypride*, 60).

32 John Belchem's *Irish, Catholic and Scouse: The History of the Liverpool Irish 1800-1939* (Liverpool, 2007), 22.

33 See Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory* (Princeton NJ, 2000).

34 Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, 36.

- 35 Hugill, *Sailortown*, 95-113.
- 36 Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, 18.
- 37 Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, 18. He employs the same phrase in *Shanties and Sailors' Songs*, 122.
- 38 Hugill, *Shanties and Sailors' Songs*, 47.
- 39 Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, 221. Terry writes that '[whenever] I heard ['We're All Bound to Go'] it was given with an attempt at Irish pronunciation throughout' (*Way of the Sea*, 13).
- 40 Lloyd, *Folk Song in England*, 356.
- 41 See the entry for 'after' in Terence Patrick Dolan (ed.), *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English* 2nd edn. (Dublin, 1998), 2.
- 42 Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, 258. That James Joyce was familiar with a version of this shanty is apparent from a reference in his novel *Ulysses*: '...gave three times three, let the bullgine run, pushed off in their bumboat and put to sea to recover the main of America' (1922; Oxford, 1993, 524).
- 43 In *Sea Songs and Shanties* (105-6), Whall gives a minstrel version of this song, 'straight from the music hall' complete with 'darkie' idioms and vocabulary.
- 44 Hugill, *The Bosun's Locker*, 91.
- 45 Lloyd, *Folk Song in England*, 316.
- 46 Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contested Identities* (London, 1996), 16.
- 47 As a study of 'how, when and why Catholic migrants and their descendants in Liverpool made Irishness their own' (xii), John Belchem's *Irish, Catholic and Scouse* represents the fullest consideration of the historical contexts informing the present article.
- 48 Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg (eds), *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity* (London, 1996), 1.
- 49 The literature is vast, but for representative examples see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1978; London, 1985) and Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; Oxford, 2004).
- 50 Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory', in *Location of Culture*, 54.

51 David Lloyd, 'Adulteration and the Nation', in *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin, 1993), 88-124.

52 Lloyd, 'Adulteration and the Nation', 95.

53 Lloyd, 'Adulteration and the Nation', 99.

54 It is interesting to note that Stan Hugill includes two references to the work of James Joyce in his contributions to the folk magazine *Spin*: the first (vol. 1, no. 9) to Joyce's inclusion of a bawdy shanty entitled 'First Came the Bosun's Wife' in *Ulysses* (*The Bosun's Locker*, 23); the second (vol. 9, no. 2) to a letter from one of Joyce's acquaintances inquiring about a bawdy American version of the shanty 'Sacramento' (206). At the time of writing I can find no reference to either of these shanties in Joyce's work, although see note 42 above regarding his familiarity with 'Clear the Track', as evidenced by a quotation from *Ulysses*.

55 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London, 1994), 5.

56 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 15.

57 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 12.

58 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 16-17.

59 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 28-9.

60 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 90.

61 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 36.

62 On the 'broader, growing interest in examining the crosscurrents between Black and Irish (sometimes problematically called "Green") Atlantic' see Alison Garden and Muireann Crowley, 'Introduction: The Irish Atlantic and Transatlantic Literary Studies', *Symbiosis: A Journal of Transatlantic Literary and Cultural Relations*, 19.2 (2015), 117-36; 123-4. Besides tracing the institutional and disciplinary evolution of 'Irish Atlantic' studies, this special number of *Symbiosis* also explores issues relating to emigration, diasporic identity, famine memory and transnational poetics.

63 Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory', 56, original emphases.