“Who Talks of My Nation?” The Role of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland in Constructing “Englishness”

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INTRODUCTION

“Who talks of my nation?” The question that the stage Irishman, Captain Macmorris, puts indignantly to the Welshman Fluellen in King Henry V (3.2.127) serves as a reminder that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the concept of the nation was in a process of redefinition. In his book on nationalism, Eric Hobsbawm asks the question, “Why and how could a concept so remote from the real experience of most human beings as national patriotism become such a powerful political force so quickly?” (1992, 46). Like many modern movements, the rise of English nationalism in the seventeenth century was not based on a strong ethnic consciousness, since the English were already a highly mixed breed. Instead, a sense of “Englishness” had to be improvised from the materials at hand. The simplest means was to emphasize the literal “outlandishness” of the Irish, Scottish, and Welsh.

The construction of Englishness was not the project of either the royal bureaucracy or the Parliament in the seventeenth century. The state-centered nationalism of Great Britain was a creation of the eighteenth century. In 1660 there was no “high culture” of the sort we take for granted in the form of public concerts, art galleries, professional authors, or newspaper reviews. Instead, it was popular cultural forms such as ballads that set in place the tenets of protonationalism, as Hobsbawm calls it (1992, 75). Since this nationalism could not be based on blood, it was defined negatively as difference. This process is very close to the development of protofascism in the twentieth century: “To people who feel deprived of a clear social identity, Ur-Fascism says that their only privilege is the most common one, to be born in the same country. Besides, the only one[s] who can provide an identity to the nation are its enemies” (Eco 1995, 14). A sense of ethnicity only arises when two or more different groups or societies come into contact with each other, and is strongly linked to coercive practices and attempts to dominate and establish superiority (Bacal 1994, 10). This was undoubtedly one of England’s aims in gradually setting up the union of four nations on its own terms in the early modern period. A former Plaid Cymru (Welsh Nationalist) MP, Dafydd Elis Thomas, has written, in some exasperation,
The national question of England is so taken as read it is not asked. This means that the whole construction of the British state as a multinational state, whose multiness has been suppressed by a mainly English ruling class, is not perceived. . . . The fact that English nationalism does not specify itself as such, but applies the adjective nationalist only to those nationalisms which conflict with it (that is, Irish, Welsh, Scottish) is not an indication of the absence of such English nationalism, but is rather a tribute to its over-domination of the whole scene. (Thomas 1982, 34)

In other words, the historical creation of Great Britain was the establishment of a Greater England.

The construction of national identity is above all a cultural project. Edward Said writes that “Culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state: this differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them,’ almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that” (1994, xiii–xiv). Furthermore, as Benedict Anderson remarks, “those active in nationalist movements are usually those whose professions are concerned with the handling of language” (1991, 74).

The idea of the nation is characteristically appealed to as a unifying force where ideologies are in conflict. The nation state in the sense of a constructed identity of economic and ideological interests is a feature of nineteenth-century Europe. In seventeenth-century England, on the other hand, there was no single voice of central authority, and what we would now call the creation of hegemony was a struggle that continued throughout the century. The Puritans attempted to capture this ground by associating their ideology with patriotism rather than by presenting it as universal (as religious fundamentalism, for instance). National and religious goals were presumed to coincide. Because Puritanism was presented as a state, rather than a fundamentalist, doctrine, the occupation of large areas of Ireland was not accompanied by the forced conversion of Catholics, but millennia movements like the Diggers that resisted state power were put down by force. The attempt to establish Puritanism as the state ideology by insurrection eventually failed because of its too close association with the interests of a single class.¹ English nationalism, on the other hand, had potentially universal support within the country.

Broadsides and Hegemony in Wales

The rise of nationalism depends on its not being itself regarded as an ideology, and in England this demanded the creation of an other who could stand for the antitype of the Englishman or woman. Selves and texts are defined by their relation to hostile or diminished outsiders. The Welsh fitted the bill perfectly. Wales
and England had been united in 1535, when Wales still lacked a national political identity. It therefore had a “cultural” rather than a “national” existence (Thomas 1982, 34). After the Act of Union, which was never presented as a union of equals, a polarization between the cultural territories of the dominant and the dominated was noticeable not only in areas where it might be expected, as in the relative official status of the two languages, but also in fields that have been regarded as relatively autonomous, like broadsides and street ballads. The pressure on the writers of broadside texts to articulate establishment values was overwhelming, and frequently enforced by law. Control was exercised quite specifically by a system of licensing ballads introduced soon after the Union as a section of the Act for the Advancement of True Religion (1543) and strengthened by the founding of the Stationers Company in 1557. Between that time and the removal of the last restrictions in 1696, all printed ephemera had to be registered and approved. Since only presses in London, Oxford, and Cambridge were licensed, it was illegal to print broadsides in Wales. The broadside trade was never, of course, simply a mouthpiece for establishment views, but the effect of these restrictions on the popular press was considerable.

This section considers seventeen surviving London broadside ballads from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries which have Welsh men or women as the leading figures. They are to be found in Samuel Pepys’s collection of broadsides in Magdalene College, Cambridge, England, and they correspond very closely to other popular songs of the time, for example, the six songs for the theater collected and printed in Thomas D’Urfey’s Wit and Mirth, or, Pills to Purge Melancholy (1719–20). None are news or occasional songs in the sense of being linked directly to current events. Wales was not an especially topical issue in the Stuart seventeenth century in the way that it was in the Tudor period, and these ballads represent only about 1 percent of the total in the Pepys collection. This compares with more than five times as many songs about Ireland, which was three times invaded by England during the century. However, as we shall see, the Welsh often had representative status in ballads such as “The London Lasses Folly” or “The Female Frolick” featuring people from several nations or occupations (Day 1987, 3: 236, 246).

Welsh figures in the popular press draw on, and help to construct, the same stereotypes as the character of Fluellen in Henry V. Despite its evident praise of the monarchy, the play is not the univocal piece of English propaganda it has occasionally been presented as. King Henry himself cuts off the soldier Pistol’s bluff English complacency at one point with the remark, “I am a Welshman” (4.1.51). However, Shakespeare is preoccupied in the play with questions of national identity. There is a famous comic exchange where Fluellen forces Pistol to eat a leek, the Welsh national food (5.1). Nationalism is a central arena of male display and combat, temporarily concealing an anxiety about self and identity, and the comedy
derives from the incongruity of the leek being a symbol of power and prestige in this way. Many, of course, would today consider the image of the British bulldog, dating from the 1850s, an even more absurd symbol of manly strength.

The leek continued to be the central icon of Welshness for the broadside ballad printers of the seventeenth century. The standard woodcut, used in five of the broadsides, all from different printers, shows Cadwallader, the last of the kings of Britain, with a leek in his hat. He is heavily armed, with a pike, a sword in his belt, and a dagger in one hand. His implied enemy is absent, an imagined “us” against a representative “them,” and his threatening appearance is deconstructed by his action: his dagger is spearing a piece of toasted cheese (a joke going back to A Hundred Mery Tales in 1527). He is tending goats in a mountainous landscape (figure 1); goats were frequently associated with the Welsh in insulting contexts (see Henry V, 5.1.29). This parodic representation is found extensively in English popular culture later than the seventeenth century as well. An early eighteenth-century chapbook relates how on 1 March (St. David’s Day) a bundle of rags would be hung out of a window, representing a Welshman mounted on a red herring with a leek in his hat (Opie and Opie 1951, 401).

In addition to the woodcuts, more than half of the broadside texts refer to leeks, and it acts as a defamatory index of the Welsh even in ballads which make no other reference to Wales. The refrain of “Every Man’s Condition,” for example, runs,

If you will shunne shame,
Then love your own fame,
as a Welchman his lake [leek] or his Onion.

(1: 220, lines 71–73)

In contrast, other ethnic signifiers such as dress and music play a very insignificant role. Welsh costume is the subject of one of the woodcuts (4: 320; figure 1, herein), and “Hugh the harper” appears in “The Welch Wedding” (4: 109), but I have traced no other references. This contrasts with the prominence in Scottish oral tradition at this time of the “kings owne sonne,” the Welsh harper Glas Keraint (Child [1882–98] 1965, 2: 136–42, no. 67, “Glasgerion”). The popular association of the Welsh with music (and particularly song) came only in the nineteenth century in England.

If Fluellen can barely be parted from his leek, he is, at least, a distinctive personality: he is a captain who is well read in Latin writers on warfare. The broadsides, on the other hand, suggest that “Welshness” is a very narrow concept indeed. The union of the English and Scottish crowns in 1603 effectively extinguished Wales as a nation. The Red Dragon of Wales was removed from the royal coat-of-arms and James I (James VI of Scotland) declared that the
union between Wales and England had been so successful that there were no distinctions between them (Ellis 1968, 48). Thereafter, the differences were cultural rather than political or national, and cultural difference was expressed in terms of personal, not group, attributes. In the broadsides considered here, the Welsh appear largely as isolated but unindividualized figures. As Peter Lord writes in his study of visual images of the Welsh at this time, “after the end of the Civil War, comment on Welsh individuals and events was almost non-existent in London prints for nearly a century [1650–1750], reflecting a period in which the nation itself all but ceased to exist in the English mind except as the most generalized stereotype” (1995, 43). This stereotype was based on isolated figures who were supposedly representative of their suppressed nationhood. Wales is only once represented by more than a single individual, and of those individuals, all but one are represented comically. Deprived of the context and the company that gives them their identity, they are not even personalized in the role-play type of “self-presentation” (“I’m a rover”), with its particularization in situation and episode, which Natascha Würzbach describes as being characteristic of the street ballad (Würzbach 1990, 185).

No single Welsh temperament is offered by the broadsides. Homogeneity in the other would draw attention to the lack of it in oneself. At a time when the concept of “Englishness” was a fiercely contested site, it would have given Wales a certain authority to suggest that there was a national character, however comical. Instead, the generally parodic treatment of Welsh language, dress, and temperament conceals a preoccupation with difference. The broadsides represent the Welsh, in the name of political modernity, as historically obsolete figures, living off past glory. This was a common representation of Welshness at the time, appearing in Fluellen’s quaint pedantry and in the proverbial seventeenth-century saying “as long as a Welsh pedigree” (Wilson 1970, 479). They present an uninterrupted series of images of degradation. The Welsh are typically represented as bumpkins, examples of that standard urban broadside theme, ignorant country people unable to cope with city ways. Yet the list is full of contradictions. The Welsh are easily fooled but sharp at business. They are simpleminded yet sometimes called on to predict the future.

This last broadside, “The Welsh Fortune-Teller, or, Sheffery Morgan’s Observation of the Stars, as he sat upon a Mountain in Wales” (figure 1), is one of only two broadsides to be set in Wales itself. It refers to the association between the Welsh and magic that goes back to Merlin and Owain Glyndwr’s reputed ability to “call spirits from the vasty deep” (Shakespeare, King Henry IV Part 1, 3.1.50). However, in the great majority of the sheets, the protagonists are not only seen out of context but struggling within the power structures of another culture, England. In such a world, these national territories belong exclusively to the natives, who keep strangers in their place (Hobsbawm 1992, 35).
In the broadside system, this means comic humiliation. So one of the most popular, and strangest, broadsides of this period, “The Maidens Frolicksome Undertaking To Press Fourteen Taylors,” describes how six London women, all under twenty, punished some tailors who had been stealing pieces of cloth from the garments they were making. However, this potentially feminist project is soon drawn into the familiar parameters of English nationalism. The comedy derives not only from the way members of this traditionally mocked trade are pressed into the navy, but from the fact that they include French, Welsh, and Irish tailors, who are not described as such but given the usual nicknames “Monsieur,” “Shon-a-Morgan,” and “Teague” (4: 277, line 54). True to type, Shon-a-Morgan starts spluttering “by St Taffy” (Answer, line 46), and refuses to change his thieving ways. In “The Country Squire Deceiv’d,” a Welsh family servant is promised a new suit of clothes if he should bring news that his mistress has been delivered of a boy to his master in London. When a girl is born instead, he journeys to London with the desired news that it is a boy, hoping to get the new suit anyway. On the master’s return, of course, the truth is revealed, and the servant defends himself by saying

let her but stay
Till her grow to her fifteen or sixteen years prime,
And if her han’t got her a Cock by that time,
E’ne take her and Hang her. (4: 361, lines 68–71)

By broadside standards, this is fairly sophisticated verbal quibbling. However, once again, the convention that all Welshmen are provincial clods, reinforced by the inevitable woodcut of Cadwallader, overrides any questioning of the principle of prenatal preference.

The charge of provincialism was also brought by contemporary broadsides against the Scottish and Irish, men and women from the English north and west, and even a girl from Chelsea, which was then a village some way outside London. However, the Welsh were the almost unvarying targets in this respect. It is true that in the accepted sense of the word, they could not help being provincial, because the Renaissance was a culture entirely preoccupied with urban values. It needed a capital city to make sense at all; and the only capital Wales had was London (Conran 1967, 65). However, Wales was not, and never has been, a province of England, and it maintained strong independent contacts at that time with countries like Spain and France. The radical English singer Billy Bragg knew what he was doing when, in the 1980s, he recorded the Internationale with a Welsh brass band and choir.

It is significant that the Welsh gentry is not attacked in any of these broadsides. After the Act of Union, members of the Welsh gentry came to England in considerable numbers to improve their fortunes. Jesus College, Oxford, was set
up in 1571 to educate the Welsh, in English, in a way that had nothing to do with
their native learning. They gave up their language and became rapidly assimilated. This is possibly the reason why their presence in London does not come in for ridicule in the street ballads. They acquiesced in the marginalization of their own people, although occasional attempts to suggest Welsh connivance in the construction of their own parodic identity, such as the “Ll. Morg.” who signs the ballad “Every Man’s Condition” (1: 220), must be regarded as bogus.

The stupidity of the Welsh had already been made proverbial in England: from at least the beginning of the century, the cuckoo was referred to as the “Welsh ambassador” (Wilson 1970, 879–80). However, instead of the assimilated gentry, those targeted are mostly skilled workers. For example, a Welsh miller is robbed by a “Female Frollick,” who adds further humiliation by parodying his speech (3: 246, lines 33–36). Even though skilled workers were typical of the broadside readership and must have formed only a tiny proportion of the Welsh in London at that time, they were clearly perceived as a threat (Porter 1992, 33–34). In “The Trappan’d Welsh-man,” the comedy derives from the kidnapping, with robbery, of a Welshman who has come to the capital “some pretty fashions for to see.” In the 1660s, the word “trepanned” appeared in a large number of broadside titles to describe visitors to the capital who were the victims of practical jokes (it is not recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary with this sense before 1715). The full title runs, “The Trappan’d Welsh-man, Sold to Virginia. Showing how a Welsh man came to London, and went to see the Royal Exchange, where he met a Handsom Lass, with whom he was Enamoured; who pretending to shew him the Ships, Carried him aboard a Virginia Man [of War] and Sold him, having first got the Welsh-mans Gold, to his great grief and sorrow. To the Tune of, Monsieur Misfortune” (4: 31).

Sometimes, an attempt was made to justify these assaults by giving them a context of alcoholic excess. So the “Jolly Welsh-Woman,” drinking at the Crown Inn in London, is deceived by the tapster into believing that her mug of ale is bottomless, “for Joy of which hur sung the praise of Old England, resolving never to return to Wales again” (3: 75). In this way the only individualized woman in this broadside group is fooled and humiliated by a barman.

Where national pride is undermined, it must be reasserted in a new territory. The humiliation of the Jolly Welsh-Woman is an example of the way power is experienced and exercised both socially and discursively. The women incorporate racial and gender meanings simultaneously. Their bodies “speak” subordination (Porter 1996, 49). This is seen in a joke at the expense of the bride in “The Welch Wedding” (4: 109). For more than a century, public or ritual life in Wales, such as weddings, was only described in the broadsides in terms of drunkenness and “mad merriment.” In “The Welch Wedding,” the guests at first enjoy the spread of food, which includes “A good Welsh Pudding” (line 39), but
the limited nature of the feast soon becomes evident. The guests start brawling and stripping off the bride’s clothes:

Her Welsh friends they were soon her foes,
For, as we very well may suppose,
What was the reason of Ripping and Stripping,
The Bride had borrow’d her Wedding Close. (lines 65–68)

Here the poverty of the Welsh people is regarded as comical: the jocular expression “Welsh rabbit” was coined at about this time for the (meatless) dish of melted cheese on buttered toast,10 and to give your horse “Welsh bait” on reaching the top of a hill was a seventeenth century saying for giving it a rest but no food (Wilson 1970, 880). “The Unfortunate Welch–Man,” whose visit to England results in a brawl in which a Scot is murdered, is regarded as “so vile and ragged a rascal” that a gentleman highwayman refuses to be hanged next to him (2: 173).

In general, however, the ballads of the time still stop short of equating Welshness with criminal activity in the way Nancy Cock’s Pretty Book for all Little Misters and Masters does in 1780. In the west of England, the Welsh (known generically as “Taffy”) were accused of border raids to steal cattle. One rhyme in the book is a classic expression of mistrust between two nations with unequal economic development:

Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a cheat,
Taffy came to my house and stole a piece of meat;
I went to Taffy’s house, Taffy was away,
I stuffed his socks with sawdust and filled his shoes with clay.
(Opie and Opie 1985, 400)

While the broadsides do not associate a single trait of character with the Welsh in this way, they do assert a single voice. Language, and specifically the spoken language, is the most important signifier of Welshness in the broadsides studied here. Today Welsh is the most viable Celtic language in terms of mother tongue speakers. Although it had no official status in the country for four hundred years, between the Act of Union and the Welsh Language Act of 1967, it was the language of the great majority of the population until the nineteenth century, still spoken by 90 percent of the population in 1870 (Ellis 1968, 49). Language is featured to some extent as a marker of Welsh national identity in all fifteen ballads, but as a distorted way of speaking English rather than a mother tongue. Only two of the ballads use any Welsh words. One, from a London printer like the others, is a parallel text in English and Welsh, and the other has a Welsh refrain (“Byd y Bigail,” 1: 457; “Two Welsh Lovers,” 1: 270). Significantly, both present positive images of Wales and the Welsh.
“Welsh English,” on the other hand, was the language of a tiny minority. In the sense of a mother tongue, it barely existed before the nineteenth century, when the first influx of migrant workers arrived in the steel towns and mining valleys. Nevertheless, all the ballads offer grotesque specimens of English spoken in Wales:

Splutera-nails; hur will fetch her weights and scales;
Hur will not do, hur will not go, hur will not take hur else . . .
Do not take hur for a V ool, by Saint Taffys three leg’d stool
Her too light money wants a penny of her weight in full.
(“Conscience by Scruples,” 4: 307, lines 19–20, 23–24)

This is “stage Welsh,” a manufactured speech that stood in for the real thing in the same way that stage Irish constructed a nation exclaiming “begorrah!” and “top o’ the morning” for the amusement of audiences from Elizabethan to Victorian times (Bliss 1978, 550–52). A case in point is the phrase “splutera-nails” (God’s blood and nails) in the passage quoted above. For a hundred years it was the standard example of Welsh speech in popular culture. It appears in various forms in almost every one of the ballads studied: cots-plot (Day 4: 31, line 7); cots plutter (4: 109, line 3); Cottes plues (3: 236); cud’s plutter-a-nails (4: 66, line 46); cuts plutter (3: 75, line 3); Cuts-plutter-a-nails (4: 245, line 85); Odsplutter (4: 361, line 13); plutter a nails (4: 31, line 19); splutter a-nels (4: 368, line 45); and splutter’d (3: 246, line 35). The Oxford English Dictionary says that the phrase was “a form of oath, usually attributed to Welshmen” (1991, 1860), but no empirical evidence of this has ever been produced. In fact, the earliest citation, “by cottes blut and her nayle,” is found in an English jest book dating from 1526 (OED 1991, 344). The first association of the phrase with Wales appears more than a century later, in a popular chapbook The Welch Traveller, published in London in 1671, and since the earliest example in the Pepys collection is from the 1670s, it seems possible that the broadsides derived their authority from that. The latest use of the phrase I have found is in “The Valiant Welshman,” a street ballad in the Madden collection in Cambridge which can be dated from its woodcut to the 1770s at the earliest (Holloway and Black 1975, 271–73). Then there is silence, perhaps because its manufactured nature became too evident. The phrase was in fact literary shorthand for Welshness, an intertext constructed within another system that did not have any necessary basis in contemporary usage. To my knowledge, no study of representations of Welsh speech of the period has taken account of the street ballads.

The tendency for parodic texts to imitate each other may apply equally to other forms, such as sh for j (“Shack wore not born a Shentleman,” Day 1987, 4: 31, line 16), hur for all forms of he—“hur will not take hur else” (4: 307, line 20)—and others. They do not correspond to known modern features of the
Figure 1. Illustration of “The Welsh Fortune-Teller, or, Sheffery Morgan’s Observation of the Stars, as he sat upon a Mountain in Wales.” By kind permission of the Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge, England (Ballads IV/320).
Figure 2. Illustration of “The Fortunate Scotchman,” a London broadside ballad, ca. 1707, now in the Madden Collection, Cambridge University Library, Cambridge, England.
Figure 3. Illustration of “The Protestants Great Misery in Ireland.” By kind permission of the Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge, England (Ballads II/332).
dialect, but they were convenient linguistic marks of the other, which by their very bizarreness strengthened the power of the center.11

One must admire the sheer intricacy and inevitability of these exchanges between culture and power in the Anglo-Welsh broadsides. Beyond the Welsh stereotypes, English identity is seen as a gap, a lacuna that only exists by being the negation of the crude simplicity of others. This could only be achieved through reductionism of the kind found in an unnamed ballad of the later seventeenth century, which unites most of the key signifiers of dialect, drunkenness, and faded gentility. “Being partly vex,” a Welshman draws his dagger in a tavern argument, boasting,

Cuts-plutter-a-nails . . .
A Welshman is a Shentleman,
Come Hostis fill’s the other Can. (4: 245, lines 85–87)

The project of the broadsides at this time was not to contest such parodies (as they contested the hegemony of Puritanism, for example) but to reinforce them—an example of the ambivalent relations between popular culture and power.

Sawney, Moggy, and All the Crew:
Representations of Scotland

Although sometimes hostile to democracy, nationalist movements invariably have been populist in outlook and have sought to induct lower classes into political life. This is because a plurality of aspirations is presumed to coincide with the goal of nationhood. Like class and gender, race is one of the categories by which we attempt to erase our social differences. The attempt depends, of course, on race being perceived as a self-defining category, not as the ideological fingerprint of a particular class within the ethnic group that it invariably is. Thus, in its most typical version, Scottish nationalism has assumed the form of a restless middle-class and intellectual leadership trying to channel popular class energies into support for a new state (Nairn 1977, 41). This section’s true subject though, is, once again, English, not Scottish, nationalism. In this respect the following discussion aligns with recent attempts to turn the telescope around, to “observe the observer” and “re-define the definer” (Bacal 1994, 1).

I have studied the fifty-three broadsides in the Euing Ballads (1971), Pepys, and Roxburghe (Chappell 1871–80) collections that have Scottish themes.12 Most are narratives, although only four gained admission to Child’s collection.13 They all have the tragic and heroic qualities characteristic of his view of the traditional ballad. Only four of the broadsides are news, or occasional, ballads in the sense of being linked directly to current events.14 Street ballads on
Scottish subjects were quite common at this time: they are much more numerous than the songs about Wales, for example. This compares, however, with more than twice as many ballads about Ireland, which was invaded by English troops on at least three occasions during the century. The accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne in 1603 naturally made Scotland a topical issue. However, with the exception of two Child ballads and one other, “Jockie’s Lamentation” (4: 345), that alludes to military defeats during the Civil War, I have not found any ballads on Scotland from the first half of the seventeenth century. A contemporary describes the prolific ballad maker Martin Parker (d. 1656?) as one “who made many base ballads against the Scots,” but no ballads of his that fit this description appear to survive.15

With these few exceptions, therefore, the broadsides that dealt with Scottish subjects appeared between 1675 and the end of the century, a period when fake “Scotch songs” in dialect were very popular in London. My reading of the broadsides and other songs does not assume the identity of the geopolitical entity with the textual one. On the contrary, “Scotland” in the ballads is a construct that should perhaps be left in quotation marks throughout. All the broadsides were printed in London,16 and therefore, even though there is a likelihood that some of the ballad sheets were distributed in Scotland itself, they are in every sense examples of English popular culture. Street ballads, like other popular texts, have an ambivalent relation to the forces of the dominant and the dominated. On the one hand, they were produced to make money for their publishers and were subject to surveillance by the authorities. In this respect, they stood for “top-down” power. The effect of the licensing restrictions on the popular press was considerable. For example, the seventy surviving London broadsides on the Irish campaign of 1689–92 are all without exception anti-Catholic and anti-Irish, making use of every available racial stereotype and abusive epithet. On the other hand, street ballads also acted as the voice of “bottom-up” power that was resisting or evading such authority. Their estimated market of twenty thousand buyers (Williams 1965, 182) and much larger readership included supporters of the popular movements that contested with the new voice, or rather voices, of central authority. The results of this conflict of interest are to be found in the ballads themselves.

Edward Said contends that understanding and working to change the ideological process of misrepresentation are the main tasks of the “oppositional critic” (1994, 53). This process of misrepresentation is crucially tied up with the construction of national identity, a complex concept not to be confused with the modern category of nationality. Such identity is by definition collective and shared. The union of the English and Scottish crowns in 1603 did not bring assimilation into such a shared identity. The Scottish parliament ceased to exist, but in other respects, little changed. Scotland’s language and culture remained distinct.
She kept her separate *kirk* (church), legal system, and educational system. Although the union of the crowns increased the Scottish presence in London and the Act of Union completed the political integration of the two countries a century later, union with England did not bring Scotland prosperity or increased influence but rapid economic decline. The seventeenth century, with its continual religious conflicts, was a period of growing poverty and cultural stagnation there. As a result, despite the lack of an uncontested power center, Scots repeatedly showed their powers of concerted action during the period just preceding that of the ballads, above all in a national revolt against English rule in 1638 and an invasion of England in 1648. Yet, since racism operates by reducing the frame of the subordinated, the Scots appear in the broadsides as isolated, often comical figures. Scotland is only represented by more than a single individual in those ballads featuring a love relationship. Rather than in Scots as a group, the broadsides’ concentration on the outlandishness of Scottish language, dress, and temperament shows a preoccupation with difference from the English.

Scots are portrayed variously in the broadsides as stupid, lecherous, cowardly, and quarrelsome. However, unlike the Welsh, who are presented in an uninterrupted series of images of degradation, Scots may also appear in a positive light, but in a severely simplified way which makes no reference to the complexity of Scottish social organization and *habitus*, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s term. In almost every case, a single signifier stands for all. With few exceptions, Edinburgh is the only setting. A clumsy parody of Scottish speech is achieved by the liberal use of *gang* and *muckle*.

Scottishness is frequently marked with various stereotypes in the fifty-three broadsides with Scottish themes. A quarter of the ballads refer to Scottish men as “loons,” a northern dialect word for men which had already acquired pejorative associations in England by Shakespeare’s time. Typically, men are given the status of representative examples of the other with the name, “Sawney,” “Jockey,” or “Jemmy,” the last a familiar version of James, the name of the Scottish king. Scottish women are generally called “Jenny” or “Moggy” but are not otherwise described. Virtually all the street ballads mentioning Scotland include one or more of these names. The title of a broadside from the 1690s offers four of the five together:

*Coy Moggy:*

*or,*

The Scotch Lass’s Lamentation

for the

Loss of her Three Lovers,

Jemmy, Jocky and Sawny,

Whom she lost by her Cruel Frowns. (5: 265)
Ethnic signifiers such as dress and music play a significant role in the broadsides. In particular, the broadsides continually refer to the Scottish bonnet and represent it in woodcuts. For over two hundred years, until the bringing to prominence of the kilt, the “blew-cap” was the badge of Scottish male identity: “I was wounded by a Laddie, and his bonnet was blue” (Holloway and Black 1979, 23). This song, “Bonnet so Blue,” became popular in the eighteenth century and has remained so to this day. In “A Blew Cap for me” (Hindley 1873, 100–106), a Scottish girl from Falkland rejects in turn suitors from England, Wales, France, Ireland, Spain, Germany, and Holland. Each one is described in terms of racial stereotypes, including the by now overfamiliar vain Welshman:

A Welchman, that had a long sword by her [sic] side,
red pritches, red Tublet, red Coat and red Peard,
Was make a creat shew with a creat deal of pride. (lines 25–27)

The girl rejects them all in favor of her Scottish lad, suitably attired in his blue cap. However, the earlier broadsides generally used the wearing of the bonnet for comic effect, the comedy deriving from the supposed incongruity of its being, like the Welsh leek, a symbol of power and prestige.

One of the few aspects of Scottish life to be presented seriously and with any attempt at fullness is the music. One broadsheet reproduces a “new Scotch Jigg” (4: 37), while another has a description of a wedding, accompanied by a woodcut:

Fu’s me, what a muckle ado was there,
When they for the wedding did thus prepare,
Her Daddy and Mummy and Sister Sue,
With Sawny and Moggy, and all the Crew:
Was blith upon his wedding-day,
The Lads and Lasses they were gay,
The Pipers and Fidlers they did play
The Scottish Jigg and the Irish Hay.
(4: 9, closing stanza)

As with the Welsh, no single Scottish temperament is offered by the broadsides. Above all, the popular association of Scots with stinginess is nowhere found, and it is likely a modern racial fabrication. Only one broadside attempts to suggest a national trait for the whole “breed”—unfaithfulness—and even this is a case of bluff. When the courtship of (inevitably) Jockey and Jenny starts to founder, Jockey declares:
Talk not of Wedding, fair Sweet,
for I must have Charms that are softer,
I’m of the Northernly (sic) breed,
and never shall love thee well after. (5: Loose 56)

However, Jenny offers determined resistance:

Although you tickle my knees,
my Maiden-head still I’ll save it. (lines 41–42)

Jockey capitulates immediately and promises to go “unto a geud Kirk, and be Wed” (line 63).

The arbitrariness of attempts to delineate the Scots as foolish, stubborn, carnal, or argumentative is shown by the fact that they differ significantly from the characterizations in contemporary proverbs, which emphasize deception and hardheartedness (Wilson 1970, 243, 353). Not only are such stereotypes highly unstable but they also have unclear borders: the character traits of Cumbrians and Northumbrians are often very similar.

As in the broadsides with a Welsh theme, the way of speaking is a key indicator of Scottishness, and Scots words appear on nearly every broadside. This anticipates more recent attempts to treat nation and language community as synonymous. Ironically, neither Gaelic nor Lowland Scots are indigenous to Scotland, but both had developed to the point of being distinctive Scottish languages long before the seventeenth century. As early as 1512, in the prologue to his great translation of the Aeneid, Gavin Douglas had insisted that his language was Scottis rather than Inglis.

Language is featured as a marker of Scottish national identity in eight out of ten broadsides with Scottish themes, but again in almost every case it is as a distorted way of speaking English rather than a mother tongue. In all but a handful of cases, dialogues are constructed around the same handful of Scots words, such as gang, muckle, guid, and lass. Here is the opening of “Coy Moggy”:

Gid faith Ise was a blith and bonny Lass,
Before Ise o’re the twenty Year did pass,
Ise then had mickle Suiters fine and gay,
Who gang’d with Moggy, ev’ry Holiday. (5: 265)

This, like stage Welsh, is a manufactured speech. It contains only token elements of Scots. In addition to the use of words drawn from the tiny store of Scots expressions known to Londoners, the printer has made an attempt to reproduce Scots speech phonetically. However, such an attempt, like
Dickens’s representation of Sam Weller’s Cockney speech in *The Pickwick Papers*, is still far from the known features of the dialect. It is not consistent: *guid* (good) is spelt *geud* and *gued* as well as *gid*, none of which correspond to the standardized modern spelling. It is a convenient linguistic mark of the other, which by its very strangeness and plenitude strengthens the power of the normative center.

At the same time, inconsistencies like these suggest that the stereotypes were more in oral than in written circulation. Orthography was not standardized until the eighteenth century. However, broadsides, chapbooks, and other ephemeral literature often use forms unknown elsewhere, and given the known association between street ballads and popular song, it is fair to infer that many of these are attempts to render the spoken language. “Wae’s me,” for example—equivalent to standard English “Woe is me!”—appears in seven of the broadsides (reflecting the generally tragic subject matter of the love ballads) with six different spellings:

Ah waes me! way’s me, waa is me, wa is me, Au’s me, wey’s me.

Some words are found for the first time in the broadsides. On the other hand, none of the ballads uses any Gaelic words, and even though Scots varied enormously from region to region—in proportion, broadly speaking, to the local importance of either Norse or Gaelic—no attempt is made to distinguish between varieties.

There are a few exceptions to the minimal use of Scots referred to above. Two are historical, a woman’s lament on the execution of the outlaw Gilderoy (Day 1987, 5: 354) and the remarkable “reply and challenge of King Robert the second . . . unto Henry the fourth [read Edward the third] King of England” (5: supp. 2), which moves confidently between Scots and English in representing the dialogue of the two medieval kings. Its imaginative reconstruction of a dispute between the countries three centuries earlier (1371–77), lays bare the contemporary dialectic of the union of the Scottish and English crowns:

But Scotland yet I dare well say,
Is ever free unto this day;
And never brought in subjection
Exceptin man-sworn of your crown. (lines 123–26)

This is the only one of the broadsides to mention the union of the crowns, albeit in a historically displaced form.

The other instances of extended Scots usage are both in the context of descriptions of Scottish weddings. In the case of Wales, public or ritual life, such as weddings, was only described in terms of drunkenness and “mad merriment,”
where, characteristically, the poverty of the Welsh people was regarded as comical. Scottish weddings, on the other hand, are described from within, with a recourse to Scots that is far more informed than the scattering of stereotyped expressions in the typical broadside:

Then good sir, Donkin, by your leave,  
a Wadding we mun have;  
Dost see the Skippets [baskets] and Belloons [?],  
with Lads and Lasses brave?  
Ise Jockey take thee Jenny true,  
to be my wadded Wife;  
Forsake my Loons and Lubber-Lowns,  
to please thee all my life. (4:110)

All in all, the higher the proportion of dialect, the more inward and complex the understanding of cultural difference.

From the very beginning, many Scots refused to accept union with England. Some went abroad, such as the financier and adventurer John Law, who established the first bank in France and went on to control a large part of the French economy. In Scotland itself, a continuing sense of cultural loss led to increasing calls for an end to the union. The Highlanders in particular, with their developed clan system, led the resistance. With their powerful and long-established sense of what may be called tribal ethnicity, they did not resist the imposition of the modern state, national or otherwise, but that of any state (Hobsbawm 1992, 64). This included Ireland, whose historic ties with the Highlands were broken at this time (Trevor-Roper 1983, 19).

Although England’s aim was for the Highlands to be assimilated into the new British state, the ballad makers were of two minds about the matter, drawn to the comic possibilities of anything unknown and therefore strange, but conceding the existence of a distinct and homogeneous culture. While they did not, as we have seen, distinguish between individual Scots, the Highlanders were occasionally given special treatment. In exceptional cases, one of the Highlanders was named, or their bravery was commented on. More commonly, however, they were the targets of satire. In “Jockies Lamentation,” which describes the defeats of the Scottish army at the time of the Civil War, the Highlanders were singled out for particular ridicule:

The High-landers having so mickle a Reach,  
Did find that the pellets did lite in their Breech. (4: 345, lines 82–83)

Moreover, the broadsides offer evidence of a divide-and-rule policy of setting Lowlander against Highlander, particularly after the rebellion of Graham of
Claverhouse in 1689. A cross-dressing broadside, describing one of the “maid-en-warriors” who joined the ranks of the army, appeared at the time with a tale of how Moggy joins “her entire love” Jockey to fight the Stuart rebels. As might be expected from the origin of the broadside, her patriotism is clearly of the London rather than the Edinburgh variety:

Hark! Ise hear the Trumpets sound,
We shall be aw with Conquest Crown’d;
Let the Highland Rebels brag and boast,
Death in Triumph shall ride through their Host.
(3: 308, lines 53–56)

Assimilation of the Highlander into lowland Scottish life was not, however, the answer. Those who made an appearance in the cities and affected the manners of the court were derided in the broadsheets. “Coy Moggy” describes how she rejected one such fop in Edinburgh:

Gid faith he was a Laird of mickle geer,
With Sward and Bonnet how he did appear,
Exceeding all the High-land Scottish Race;
Sweet sonnets could he sing, Dance with a grace,
His Service unto me he would devote,
Yet Ise not let him touch my Petticoat.
(5: 265, lines 17–22; italics in original)

Highlanders fare even worse when they attempt to breach the English class system, as in “The Scotch Lover’s Complaint: or, Jockey’s Lamentation for His unkind Usage by his coy Lady, at Epsom-Wells” (5: 356). After spending time at Dorking fair, a Scottish “Lord of muckle high degree” (line 42) makes an attempt to infiltrate the aristocracy at nearby Epsom, a well-known spa. Assuming, with some justification, that the possession of property lies at the heart of success in love in such a place, he boasts to one English lady about his “house and land with muckle geer” (line 27). However, as the title has anticipated, his canny bid meets with “unkind Usage”:

But she reply’d, I need not talk any more,
For my proffers great she vallu’d not,
Nor would she embrace a High-land Scot:
Oh! that killing story
Blasted all my glory,
Never did Ise feal such grief before. (lines 40–45)
Conscious now of his humble social station as a Scot, he returns to his “young Jenny” in Aberdeen. The implication, reinforced by the reference to him in the title as “Jockey,” is that a Scottish laird is a commoner south of the border. This is significant in terms of power relations within the broadsides, since few of the broadsides are set in Scotland. The protagonists are not only seen out of context but, as with the Welsh arrivistes, struggling within the power structures of another culture, England.

The London broadsides dealing with the Highlands go some way towards confirming Hobsbawm’s case that nations are “constructed essentially from above, but . . . cannot be understood unless also analysed from below” (1992, 94). In this respect, Hugh Trevor-Roper’s account of an “invented” tradition of the Highlands is incomplete. He rightly showed that “traditional” Highland dress was an invention of an English iron-smelter seeking a uniform for Highlanders after the Union of 1707 and enthusiastically taken up by Scots again in 1782 when they were again permitted to wear distinctive dress. The tartans came from English weavers and were only assigned to clans by Sir Walter Scott for a royal state visit (1983, 19). However, the broadside evidence of the previous century suggests that this construction of a Highland identity was not primarily a clumsy assertion of nationalism, as he suggests, but an attempt to resist a stereotype that had already been set up by the English popular presses. England’s aim was no less than the assimilation of the Highlands. This was a project that still needed restating two hundred years later, when John Stuart Mill wrote, “[better for the Scottish highlander to be a British citizen] than to sulk on his [sic] own rocks, the half-savage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit” (quoted by Hobsbawm 1992, 34).

As Hobsbawm has pointed out, racial differences have frequently functioned as horizontal dividers as well as vertical ones, territorial as well as social ones (1992, 65). In the case of Scotland, the ancient aristocracy and the clan system both conflicted with the idea of the permanently subordinate Scot. Few upper or middle class Scots, therefore, appear in the broadsides. Even skilled workers, the group that made up an important part of the broadside readership, are largely unrepresented. “Jockey” is socially as well as racially subordinate. As often happens where class is at issue, differences are represented as cultural rather than social and are expressed in terms of personal, not group, attributes.

The most typical kind of love ballad with a Scottish theme is the dialogue. By far the largest group of broadsides, sixteen in all, is cast in the form of a discussion between a pair of Scottish lovers. Debates of this kind are very common in English folk narrative and are found elsewhere in Europe, as in the Italian contrasto. They often involve a debate between the powerful and the disempowered over contested territory which could hardly actually have taken place outside a courtroom. Such dialogues are frequently between men and women, and not only in the form
of amorous exchanges—the protagonists of the nineteenth century “Coal-Owner and the Pitman’s Wife” debate issues arising from a miners’ strike and the coal owner is of course completely routed (Pinto and Rodway 1965, 185–87).

In the case of Scottish lovers, no such unequal exchanges are found: the couples are evenly matched. Those songs where “Slighted Jockey” is complaining about “Coy Moggy’s Unspeakable Cruelty” (5: 274) are almost exactly balanced by those where he is himself on the defensive before “Moggie’s Jealousie” (4: 32). The latter is a bland dialogue of “Moggie” threatening to go to Edinburgh “to spie [look] for a Lad that is true” (line 14). Jockey’s promise of marriage soon reconciles her to him, and the sheet closes with a bland exchange of vows to be faithful to one another. The contrast with the political, religious, and other cross-gender debates in the broadsides is highly significant. The broadsides were printed in London, but many of them were sold in Scotland: Edinburgh and other centers lay on the routes followed by the chapmen who distributed them (Thomson 1974, 94). It is possible to see in these sanitized dialogues an attempt to replace the gender-based roles of dominant and dominated in favor of the larger category of a subordinate Scottishness.

In this context, it is significant that the Scottish ruling class is not generally attacked in the broadsides. After the union of crowns in 1603, members of the Scottish gentry came to England in considerable numbers to improve their fortunes. They gave up their language and became rapidly assimilated, thereby, like the Welsh gentry, accelerating the marginalization of their own people. This is possibly the reason why their presence in court circles does not usually come in for ridicule in the street ballads. The erasing of cultural and social differences once Scots cross the border, as in “The Scotch Lover’s Complaint” above, and their reduction to a single national stereotype also, of course, imply the antithesis, the complexity of English urban codes, which the laird is unable to understand, let alone penetrate.

In the handful of ballads which show an awareness of the Scots’ use of language, there is often a corresponding element of class and gender politics. In a typical dialogue, “The Scotch Wedding,” garnished inexplicably with two woodcuts of the seals of Cambridge University, an egalitarian Scotland is offered. Assuming, like the Epsom laird of “The Scotch Lover’s Complaint,” that the possession of property lies at the heart of success in love, Jockey offers his Jenny “Five Acres of good Lond, / both sheep and muckle Kine” (4: 110, lines 21–22). However, she proudly declares that she has no fortune and that he must take her as she is. In a passage of interesting realism, Jockey then indicates to Jenny with pride the true simplicity of his own possessions:

Ise have a pail to milk the Ews,
   two Dishes and four Spoon,
Besides Cheese-Fats [vats?] the Curds to serve
A Pot and two new Shoon:
A Ladle, Spit and Dripping-Pan,
two Stools and one Straw-Bed,
On which poor Jockey wad full fain
    get Jenny’s Maiden-head. (4:110, stanza 5)

She replies that as far as she is concerned, she is happy “To fry Tripe on the
Wadding-day, / If Jockey be the Man” (lines 47–48). This proves decisive, and
the narrative concludes with the description of the wedding feast (without tripe)
quoted earlier.

As with Wales, the Act of Union between England and Scotland (1707) was
never presented as a union of equals. However, Scotland, while she lost her
political independence, experienced a regeneration of her intellectual, cultural,
and commercial life. With very few exceptions, the London ballads of the new
century treat Scotland as a newly defeated and colonized nation and Scots as
contemptible and boorish fools. “The Fortunate Scotchman” (figure 2), which
may have been published soon after the union, catches the new note of colonial
superiority:

    Sawney, Sawney, wether away,
    A word or two I prithee now stay,
    How came you so bonny and gay,
    And went a begging the t’other day
        Bonny Scot witness can,
    England has made you a Gentleman. (lines 1–6)

The whole song hinges on the contrast between English and Scottish dress.
The woodcut, of a Scottish man and woman, shows the man in what appears to
be a belted plaid and trews, both of tartan. This was the dress that was consid-
ered so inseparable from Highland identity that wearing it after the 1745 rebel-
lion was a political act banned by law. The text of the broadside seems to refer
more to a member of the Lowlands gentry than to a Highlander—a possible
exception to the convention that the Scottish ruling class is not generally
attacked in the broadsides. “Sawney” (a corruption of Alexander always used
derisively) is “fortunate” through now being able to enjoy the lace and frills
of a greater civilization. The extensive detail of the comparison is of interest to
cultural anthropologists, but the connotations are the familiar ones of the dom-
inant and the dominated that were put in place in the seventeenth century:

    The shirt thou wore on thy back,
    Was made of the webb of a coarse hop-sack,
Now ‘tis turn’d to holland [linen] so fine,  
Bought with brave English coin. (lines 11–14)

Each stanza describes some shabby article of Scottish apparel—cuffs “scarce washed three times a year,” a waistcoat “where many a Louse has harboured in,” and shoes “made of the hide of an old Scotch cow”—and replaces it, not with plain English woolsey or felt but with luxury items and expensive imports from the Continent. It is made clear that the way for a Scot to rise socially, or at least to avoid humiliation, is to cross-dress, to ape the manners of the master.

The assumptions that are still implicit in “The Fortunate Scotchman” appear as open racism in “The Curse of Scotland” from the same period:

We have got no dinner, alas! what shall we do,  
For we are all true Englishmen, and cannot eat burgoo [broo, or porridge],  
For Monday that’s a Scotchman’s day, for they have a jovial feast,  
Burgoo is fit for Scotchmen, but for no other beast.

If you should go to Scotland, and leave your native home,  
Be sure you take with you hogs-lard, brimstone and a currycomb,  
For if you chance to catch the itch, as all the Scotchmen have,  
They catch it in their cradle, and carry it to their grave.

When the pig dies of the measles then they may have roast pork,  
But then they are at such a loss for the use of a knife and fork,  
For they have neither knife nor fork, dish, platter, spoon nor pan,  
They gnaw their meat like English dogs, and sup their broth with their hand.

If you should chance to catch the itch, anoint yourselves full well,  
And rub it in, and scrub it in, but you must not mind the smell,  
If you stink worse than an old polecot, and think you are perfum’d,  
They’ll think you’ve been at Edinburgh dance, or grand assembly room.

So God keep me from Scotland, and all that mangy race,  
For it is a nasty, mangy, lousy, itchy, dirty place.26

The professed subject is the difficulty of finding dinner in Scotland, but all the elements of the diminished other are now in place. The Scottish are undifferentiated: the itch is a disease which “all the Scotchmen have” (line 7). They are physically offensive (“that mangy race,” line 17) and threatening to outsiders, who must carry “hogs-lard, brimstone and a currycomb” to protect themselves (line 6). Above all, they are more brute than human, “beast[s]” “worse than an
old polecat” who “gnaw their meat like English dogs” (lines 4, 15, 12). This degraded image of the Scots appears in several contemporary representations. The popular ballads here clearly diverge from popular song of the kind found in D’Urfey’s *Wit and Mirth, or, Pills to Purge Melancholy* (1719–20). The negative stereotypes were largely transferred to the Highlanders, and Scots became partly subsumed into a pre-Romantic type of pastoral bliss.

Both the view we have of another culture and the creation of our own are intimately connected with processes of social and cultural reproduction. What Orvar Löfgren calls “culture building, the constant production and reproduction, negotiation and change of culture” (1993, 8) proceeds very unequally. At the end of the seventeenth century, there was only one broadside printer in Scotland but forty in England. There was also an effective system of licensing. Such an unequal development with its unequal possession and distribution of “cultural capital” creates the conditions for capitalism. Within a few years these Scottish stereotypes had entered the literary system to the point where Samuel Johnson (1709–84) could make the degraded nature of Scots a topos in his conversation.27 However, cultural subordination may also, as Frantz Fanon showed, have a consciousness-raising aspect: in the case of Scotland, it contributed to the evolution of a nationwide sense of common purpose but also led to two major rebellions within thirty years (1715 and 1745).

“POOR TEAGUE IN DISTRESS”:
DOMINATION OF THE RACIAL OTHER IN IRELAND

For Ireland, questions of national identity were irrelevant in the context of the struggle for survival. Even when Mazzini drew up his principle of nationality in the nineteenth century, it only applied to nations of a certain size. His principles did not extend to smaller nations like Ireland, Scotland, or Wales (Hobsbawm 1992, 31). The independence struggles of such nations often had to develop without support from disaffected elements of the center. However, as we shall see, the imposition of colonial power rapidly led to a sense of national identity through a common struggle.

Compared with Scotland and Wales, far more broadsides of the period take Ireland as their subject, and of these, the great majority deal with current events. This is evidently because Ireland was then, as now, a topical news story with a direct relation to power struggles currently raging: England as well as Ireland was being reluctantly brought under the power of the new money lords (Morton 1974, 263). Irish land was still being seized and granted to settlers from Scotland and England, a confiscation whose repercussions can still be seen today. By 1700, at the end of this period, 75 percent of Irish land was in the hands of English and Scottish landlords. These broadsides
have as their background a country permanently at war: there was almost continuous fighting in Ireland from 1534 to 1592 (Morton 1974, 261), and it was invaded by English troops on at least three occasions during the following century. The broadsides were themselves a part of the English war propaganda machine: in the late seventeenth century, there was only one part-time printer of broadsides in Ireland, a Protestant, and forty in England. Here too there was an effective system of licensing, and this accounts for the uniformly hostile position of the London broadsides towards the Irish during the Irish campaign of 1689–92.

George Eliot writes in *Middlemarch* that “prejudices, like odorous bodies, have a double existence both solid and subtle—solid as the pyramids, subtle as the twentieth echo of an echo” (Bk. 5, ch. 43; 1965, 473). In the case of the Irish, solid prejudice focused on matters of appearance and behavior, but without consistency. Any insult, it seemed, would do:

Teague was before a silly Rogue,
Poor and dispised was the Dogg:
But this Make-Kill so much in vogue
Has drown’d him in a Kilmore-Bogg.
(5: 57, stanza 4)

This is a classic expression of mistrust between two nations with unequal economic development. Racism always has an intertextual element, stereotypes being readily transferable. Broadsides stood at the interface of oral and literary production (Porter 1992, 38–39), and when, in another ballad, the Irish protagonist mistakes a windmill for St. Patrick’s coat, it is clear that the balladmaker has taken over the still-recent adventures of Don Quixote, first translated into English (in part) in 1612. Teague goes up to the windmill:

Under this geud Holy Cross will I faul
and say Pater Noster and some of our Creeds.
Teague began with great Devotion
for to adore St. Patrick’s Cross;
The Wind set a blowing and turn’d the Sails going
& gave my Dear-Joy a damnable toss. (5: 270, stanza 4)

The most obvious physical sign of Irishness was the wearing of brogues or stout leather shoes: six ballads mention them. They were used above all for running across the bogs, an activity referred to in nine of the broadsides:

O Teague, O now prepare your Brogs,
To Trot a cross your Irish Bogs (5: 40, lines 29–30)
The term “Bog-trot” came to be used as a generic word for the Irish at this time (e.g. Day 1987, 2: 352). Choosing a practice associated with the poorest members of society as the basis of a deliberately insulting epithet reminds us of the relation, in Marxist terms, between racial oppression and class exploitation, of the horizontal as well as vertical dividers. Thus in behavior the Irish were undifferentiated. They were inclined to thieving (5: 44) and even bloodsucking (2: 70). However, apart from always being unfavorable, these are generally wild shots without a consistent pattern. The modern stereotype of the quarrelsome, hard-drinking Irishman is encountered only once, in a stray ballad dating from the early years of the century (1: 248).29

While the broadsides could not agree on consistent individual traits, they could reduce the Irish to a single collective identity. Most attempt to reproduce the distinctiveness of Irish speech. Whether they spoke Irish or English, their language was coarse and rough and often represented in a way that bears no resemblance to other reproductions of Irish speech of the time (by Swift, for example):

De Boggs dey vill signify little to us,
For being so Loyal to Second Yeamus,
Although dat our Priests and our Shesuits swore,
Dat ve should have Lands and Livings Gillore, etc. etc.
(5: 69, stanza 7)

Usually when they spoke English (which they do in nearly half the broadsides), they confined themselves to a handful of endlessly repeated exclamations: ohone (from the Irish cry of lament ochoi), seven examples; hub bub (from Irish?), five examples; “be Chreest,” nine examples; “begar” (corruption of “By God”), six examples; “(by my) shoul,” nine examples.

This list shows that more than a third of the broadsides have a “begorrah” type expression that was later to be typical of stage Irish. The broadsides made great comedy of Irish attempts to pronounce English, particularly the s- and th-sounds, but the jokes had already been used of others. Shakespeare had a French doctor in The Merry Wives of Windsor, mixing up “third” and “turd” more than a hundred years before the Irish “Catholick Brother” does the same (Merry Wives 3.3.219; D’Urfey 1719–20, 6: 277). This mockery of Irish speech was particularly misplaced as it came at a time when no standard version of the English language existed. The fact that in most cases the parodied word was the same (corruptions of “salvation” three times, “dey” three times, and so on) suggests that the makers of the broadsides were copying from each other rather than describing any known practice. Nevertheless, the ballad makers were thereby conceding the existence, in fact the preexistence, of the Irish nation, since in recent years, in both
the United States and the former Soviet Union, language has been considered the
decisive evidence of nationality and also its guarantee (Isayev 1977, 37–38).

The attempt to give the Irish a single collective identity also appears strongly
in naming practices. Naming brings with it not only power but also an inten-
sified sense of difference. When they were identified, most Irish bore the same
name, “Teague” (a corruption of the Irish name Tadhg), which appears in nearly
half the broadsides. Two other terms for the Irish account for the rest: “dear-
Joys,” an expression which had a brief life between 1688 and 1699 and appears
on fourteen sheets, and “Tory” (from Irish toiridhe, “pursuer”), which also
appears on fourteen sheets but was at this time beginning to be applied in a
political party context.

At a time of war, it is usual to call the enemy proud and boastful, and five of
the ballads do so. Inevitably too, they are characterized as cowards, although
such a charge brings with it the risk of undervaluing one’s own bravery. Six of
the ballads represent the Irish as running away from the field of battle:

Teague shall run away for fear,
Curse his Fate and hang his Ear,
And houle out, Lero, Lero. (2: 343, stanza 5)

Their brogues are said to be made of “running Leather” (5: 54, line 60) so that,
inevitably, they can “fly to the Bogs” (2: 360, stanza 5).

Significantly, there is no trace in the ballads of the traits characteristic of a
subordinate nation. The historians Hayden and Moonan represented the state of
the Irish after fifty years of occupation in this way: “The Catholic population
grew as a serf-population does grow, cringing, shifty, untruthful. They were lazy
because they had nothing to work for. . . .Not such had been the Irish of the old
times, praising truth as the highest of virtues” (quoted in Jackson 1976, 88).

Unlike the Scots and, above all, the Welsh stereotypes, the physical Irish
type was not settled enough for representation. While plaided Highlanders and
Shone ap Morgans with leeks stuck in their caps were standard subjects for
woodcuts, none of the illustrations on the Irish broadsides attempts to represent
an Irish man or woman. It was not until the late nineteenth century that the
broadsides and Punch started developing the stereotype of the “stunted, ill-fed,
low-browed, monkey-muzzled Celts of Connemara.”

Since at this time defense of one’s religion was synonymous with defense of
one’s life, it is surprising that religious differences are not prominent in the
broadsides. Although their titles may refer to the Protestant cause, only nine of
the street ballads (14 percent of the total) even mention it as an issue. Theocracies
have had little success as the basis of nations: the Guelphs in the nineteenth cen-
tury were unable to build the Italian nation around the papacy (Hobsbawm 1992,
72), and the scenario of an English king riding at the head of his army was a more powerful nation-building image than heavenly choirs of angels cheering him on. There are, however, a number of ballads recording atrocities inflicted by one religious group on another. The first, preceding the start of the Irish campaign of King William in 1689, reads very much as if it had been written to whip up a sense of public outrage against Catholics which could be channeled into support for the campaign (“The Protestants Great Misery in Ireland,” Day 1987, 2: 332). It chronicles, and depicts (figure 3) instances of rape, arson, and murder by Catholics, but reassures its readers, “the English army is on their way” (stanza 9). The claim that the arrival of an army would put an end to acts of rape, arson, and murder rather than increasing them is particularly hollow, since other ballads defend acts of sacrilege and genocide committed by the same English army: “England’s Glory” and a “New Song” call on “London boys” to come and help hang Catholics before pulling down their altars and burning their “Virgin Psalters,” whatever they might be (2: 289, stanza 6; 293). “The Protestant Victory” (1690?) celebrates (inaccurately) the killing of five thousand Irish at the Battle of the Boyne (2: 361). It is written in doggerel couplets: the survivors flee crying, “bub bub a boo what shall we do” (1: 23) and there is an uplifting woodcut of a Christian battlefield. “The Soldiers Catch” records with approval the rape of Catholic women (5: 68, stanza 4). “England’s Triumph,” with a woodcut of the English King slaughtering mitred Catholic bishops, describes even St. Patrick as mocking the Irish army and advising them to take to their heels:

By my Shoul then says St Patrick,
you’re a pack of Silly Rogues,
If you do not leave your Shack-Boots
and take you to your Brogues,
When the King to Ireland he comes, he comes,
when the King to Ireland comes. (2: 308, stanza 8)

This ridicule of Catholic religious practices, as in the reference to their “wooden Gods” (2: 363, stanza 8) or the broad dialect humor of the “Irish-Men’s Prayers to St Patrick” (5. 69), is assumed, but only one of the sheets actually deals with the sort of abuses that Martin Luther had targeted. The 1689 ballad “Here, Here, Here is Pig and Pork” is a narrative of how a corrupt priest pursues a shopkeeper’s wife with his “Catholick engine.” As its subtitle expresses it, the ballad describes

How a Lustfull Roman Bore
Made a delicate Piggin Riggin a Catholick Whore;
Whereby you may see, if you are not stark blind,
That the Priests will never Marry while some Wives are so kind.
Giving an account of Father Wisely, the Popish Bishop of Kildare in Ireland,
and a Shop-Keeper’s Wife in High-street, Dublin. (2: 315)

This ballad is the only one to feature a narrative with an individualized Irish man or woman (in this case, both) and one of only two that admit the existence of Irish women. It is also the single surviving example of a seventeenth century broadside printed in Ireland itself. However, in other respects the broadside is true to the anti-Irish stereotype: it is difficult to say which is more corrupt, the church or the ballad.

Only on rare occasions is there any evidence that the broadsides are based on even slight acquaintance with Irish realities. In the late “Teague the Irish Soldier” there is a single stanza which suggests some personal observation:

On a Galloway Tit [pony] I’ll trot it away,
With Bridle and Crupper of Thumbrope of Hay:
In a Cot daub’d with Cow-turd, I’ll lie me down warm,
In my Bed with each Feather as long as my Arm. (5: 72, stanza 8)

Given this distance from, and distortion of, their subject, it is not surprising that these broadsides failed to pass into the repertoire of traditional singers either in London or along the routes followed by the chapmen who sold them in rural England. Robert Thomson, who studied the way broadsides and singers interacted, estimated that of a total of over a hundred thousand broadsides issued by British presses between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, perhaps one in seven passed into the oral tradition (Thomson 1974, 23–24). By this yardstick, we would expect about fourteen of these street ballads to enter the repertoire of traditional singers. Yet only one was taken up, and with such enthusiasm that it made up for the obscurity of all the others. One of the broadsides quoted earlier describes how a soldier runs from the scene of battle crying “O hone O hone” to the tune of “Lilliburlero” (2: 308, stanza 3): “Lilliburlero,” as unpleasant a piece of religious intolerance as one is likely to meet, makes Protestantism, and thus morality, synonymous with Englishness. It probably represents the best justification of Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun’s contemporary claim that whoever controls the repertoire of popular song has no reason to worry about controlling the legal system. This is particularly true in this case since, while the identity of nation and ideology is an impoverished and incoherent philosophical concept, it is powerful as a political concept (Anderson 1991, 5). The song was so successful as propaganda that it is estimated to have driven the Catholic James II from power in three kingdoms (Friedman 1977, 286). Today it survives, a still-potent mark of Protestant supremacy, as the theme music of the BBC’s World Service radio news.
Nationalism, the ideology that proclaims difference as central to politics, is based on a set of largely invented positions relating to history, land, people, and so forth. These positions are fiercely contested, never more so than in the England of the seventeenth century. The identification of an enemy, Ireland, therefore represented an alternative, the creation of a simplified national identity in another that would by default strengthen the power of the center. Its effect was precisely the opposite. As we have seen, while glorifying the field of battle, the ballads did not call for either of the two modern nationalist paradigms, genocide and assimilation, which seek to extinguish ethnic minorities as relics of the past. Instead, the role of otherness in the Irish that was constructed in such texts as the London broadside offered the Irish an ethnicity that had been suppressed since the Statutes of Kilkenny three hundred years before. Ironically, the cultural subordination implied by songs such as “Lilliburlero” coalesced into the solidarity that led to such uprisings as “the ’98,” the rebellion that was itself to become a major source of nationalist songs.

CONCLUSION

A recent (non-English) critic, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, has questioned the way “Black, Asian and Irish Britons are urged constantly to think obsessively about their ancestral and religious identities. But when the English quietly start wondering about themselves they find no understanding” (Alibhai-Brown 1997, 24). This essay has shown how contemporary ideas of English identity are still founded on the negations established in the seventeenth century and greatly augmented during the period of Empire. During the final years of the Raj in India, a version of “Englishness” was created by colonials which was not only incorporated into Indian elite culture but imported into Britain as part of a middle-class culture of exclusion from an increasingly affluent working class (Shurmer-Smith and Hannam 1994, 82). Today, as Alibhai-Brown comments, “hanging on to the idea of Empire when the Empire is gone has become a pathology, most of all for the English, because they do not have other aspirations to invest in, like the Scottish, Irish and Welsh” (Alibhai-Brown 1997, 24).

The role of oral and popular culture in such creations is large. According to Juri Lotman, there is an “aesthetics of identity” in orality similar to that in the modern media, which rests on the assimilation of stereotypes floating in the unstable milieu of lived experience (Zumthor 1990, 202). Stereotypes of the other, such as the Scottish or the Welsh, are not given but constructed, in gestalt terms, as the reverse mirror of the ideal, which gains in complexity from their simplicity. Ultimately, Englishness was the negation of a negation. Identity was confirmed by the discovery of reverse selves.
This was not only achieved through crude reductionism. The broadsides I have studied here have no single voice. They are not part of a conspiracy or an “orchestrated campaign” (to use a favorite media cliché of our time), and they do not suggest that the Scottish, Irish, and Welsh are the same (although they do suggest each nation speaks in the same way). Nevertheless, their portrayal is a simplified and reductionist one, not in the “innocent” sense of ignorance about what is outside everyday experience, but as part of an evident project to belittle the areas of recent English expansion.

Broadsides were never, of course, simply a mouthpiece for establishment views. Ballad singers included supporters of the popular movements which were in conflict with the new voices of central authority, and we have seen that love ballads in particular gave positive images of Scots. However, where print achieved hegemonic status as the medium of commercial and ruling class interests, it transformed popular culture into a safe image, charged with stereotypes, of its own value systems. This was indisputably true of the popular ballads and songs relating to the Irish, Scots and Welsh at this time, and has a continuing resonance today. The force of the sentiments which led groups of “us” to give themselves an ethnic/linguistic identity against a foreign and threatening “them” was part of a project to create an unequally weighted union which still (just) survives. In a world where, in Eric Hobsbawm’s words, “xenophobia has become the most widespread mass ideology” (1992, 170), it is all the more important to recognize its constructed and timebound nature.

Notes
1. Margaret Spufford has shown how Puritan debates made less impact on the subject matter of broadside ballads than on the pamphlets often coming from the same presses, with their slightly different readership (1981: 11–13).
3. D’Urfey 1719–20, 2: 172, 4: 186, 263; 5: 5, 274; 6: 93. “Cambrian Glory” (2: 208) is a significant exception in that it is pro-Welsh.
4. Unless otherwise identified, these broadsides are hereafter referred to by their volume and page number in Day (e.g., 4: 287), which corresponds to Pepys’s own numbering.
5. “The Welsh Wedding” (Day 1987, 4: 109); “The Two Welsh Lovers” (Day 1987, 1: 270). Despite its title, one of the lovers is English.
6. The only exception, “The Two Welsh Lovers” (Day 1987, 1: 270), is a sheet from early in the century (1620?). It describes how a Welsh shepherd is deserted by an English girl, and his cry in Welsh “Due gwin” (“black and white”) forms the refrain.

10. The first citation in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) is from 1724. The word is not a corruption of *rare bit*, as is often claimed.

11. One possible explanation for the use of ‘hur’ for ‘he’ is parodic reversal: the Welsh female pronoun ‘hi’ sounds the same as English ‘he’. However, this seems on the face of it too subtle for a racist parody.

12. The full number is 70 (out of a total of approximately 3,700 in the three collections), of which 17 are duplicates.

13. “A Memorable Song on the lamentable, bloody and unhappy Hunting at Chevychase” (Child 162; Day 1987, 1: 92 and 5; supp. 4); “A True Relation of the Life and Death of Sir Andrew Barton, Pyrate” (Child 167; Day 1987, 1: 484); “John Armstrong’s Last Good-Night” (Child 169; Day 1987 2:133) and “The Life and Death of Sir Hugh of the Grime” (Child 191; Day 1987, 2: 148).


16. Of the more than 3,700 broadsides, only a single example is printed in Scotland—“The Complaint of Scotland” by Robert Sempill, printed in Edinburgh about 1570 (Chappell 1871–80, 3: 49).


18. Bourdieu uses the term to describe the complex of practices and properties developed by people living within a particular economic space (1986, 101). For instance, “The devil damn thee black, thou cream-fac’d loon!” (*Macbeth* 5. 3. 11). There are thirteen instances each of bonnet wearing (including six woodcuts) and the use of the word “loon” in the broadsides studied.

19. The earliest example recorded by the *OED* (under “Scotch”) is from 1906. Only one passage in the broadsides, from “The Crafty Scotch Pedler,” can be read as indicating meanness: “In barns they lye / And scarce spend a tester [small coin], / From Easter to Easter” (Day 1987: 4. 326).

20. In the fifty-three texts studied, three words were found which are not included in the *OED* or *Scots Dictionary* at all—the exclamation *od’s bread*, “God’s bread”; *cragg*, “a jug”; and *belloon*? (Day 1987, 4: 110), one with a new sexual sense (*mow*), and three significant antedatings, two of them more than two hundred years earlier than the previous “first use” references.


22. “Shakum Guie” is the protagonist of “Scotch Moggy’s Misfortune” (Day 1987, 3: 288). For Highland bravery, see “Bonny Dundee” (Day 1987, 5: 262, line 78): “They valiantly fought, as High-landers can.”

23. Edinburgh had only one broadside printer before the nineteenth century.

24. John Lacy’s play *Sauny the Scot*, an adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, was performed in about 1677.

27. Although James Boswell is anxious to underplay this antipathy, the well-known account of their first meeting in 1763 confirms it: “Mr. Johnson, (said I) I do indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it. . . . That, Sir, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help” (Boswell 1965, 277).

28. See Day 1987, 3: 215. The earliest recorded broadside produced in Ireland dates from 1626, but they were not widespread until the end of the eighteenth century (Neilands 1991, 209).

29. A reference to “Irish Teague that silly sot” in a later ballad is inconclusive, since the word “sot” was still used with the meaning “fool” at that time (Day 1987, 2: 321, stanza 2). Quarrelsomeness seems to have been proverbial by 1732: “Like Teague’s cocks that fought one another although they were on the same side” (Wilson 1970, 94).


32. In fact, twelve do so.

33. More than a hundred years later, on a visit to northern Ireland, Keats describes how he heard an old man sing a song on the Battle of the Boyne (Page 1965, 139), but this is unlikely to have been one of the broadside ballads.

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