

# Catholicism and Alcoholism: The Irish Diaspora lived ethics of the Dropkick Murphys punk band

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the contemporary Irish-American punk band, the Dropkick Murphys, and in particular the band's most recent studio album 2007s *The Meanest of Times*. We find that the band's resurgent Irish nationalism is both uniquely a product of the Irish Diaspora, and, although the band might be unwilling to admit it, American culture and its self-confident jingoistic patriotism. The band's attitude to Roman Catholicism is, in Sartre's (2003) words, a unique synthesis of facticity and transcendence in that they acknowledge its reality as a shadow overhanging both their pasts and their presents. However, the band seems to go beyond simply acknowledging its spectre by adopting, expressing, and/or reflecting some degree of religious faith themselves without going so far as to be clearly a 'Catholic band' like, for example, the Priests.

The shadow of a religious culture, and some degree of actual religious belief set the backdrop for and indeed inspire the band's world-weary tales of urban alienation, family breakdown, and brotherly affection; complex, metaphysical accounts of a culture imbedded in Diaspora. Yet, due to their status as a punk band, the Dropkick Murphys render this attendant religious metaphysic eminently graspable by de-mythologising it. In particular, the band explores what 1970s punk journalist Caroline Coon described as 'personal politics' sharing this with other 'postmodern' contemporary punk bands NOFX (see James 2010) and the Offspring as well as their predecessors such as the Sex Pistols. Through our ethnomusicological reading of *The Meanest of Times* (2007) they remind us that it is equally important to understand the experience of migrant security, Diasporic or otherwise, as oscillating between what Giddens (1991) termed 'ontological security' and 'existential anxiety' alongside geo-political readings of the same phenomenon.

## Keywords

Existential anxiety, Existentialism; Irish Diaspora; Irish Nationalism; ontological security; punk music; Roman Catholicism

## A POSTMODERN IRISH NATIONALISM

The Dropkick Murphys (hereafter DMs) have unabashedly adopted an image and worldview of a resurgent and triumphalist Irish nationalism grounded in singing of Irish traditions, festivities, towns and places, and use traditional Irish instrumentation in some of their music. Fictitious characters in songs invariably are given Irish names, such as 'Flannigan's Ball' and 'Fairmount Hill'. However, what emerges is as obviously a product of the USA as it is of Ireland. Although Dublin is referenced in songs (e.g. the cover of 'Rocky Road to Dublin'), Boston, America's 'Irish city', is referenced more frequently. We thus have a uniquely Diasporic Irishness created, which is in a sense genuine and in a sense romanticised and even fabricated. The Irishness is extremely self-conscious and pushes the barrier between authenticity and inauthenticity without becoming wholly unbelievable.

Whilst the history of Ireland is frequently portrayed as merely sectarian and violent in popular media (the films *Bloody Sunday*, directed by Paul Greengrass and *In the Name of the Father*, directed by Jim Sheridan, as well as the political and religious content of U2's earlier albums *Boy* (1980) *October* (1981) and *War* (1983)) the DMs infer a romanticised, a-historical Ireland which is a pleasure to visit and easy to identify with. Theirs is a postmodern nationalism that assimilates disparate cultural products to form a narrative of national identity. The DM's nationalism caters for Irish emigrants, those who have Irish ancestors in the long distant past, and those who are simply attracted to aspects of the culture (Ireland's vibrancy being preferred over England's dourness and austerity). If we have an Irish parent or grandparent we can choose the DMs' Irish narrative without guilt (or even if we have no Irish ancestry at all). We are never forced to choose sides politically or in war.

While possibly objectionable in the sense that it reconstitutes the history of sectarian Ireland (see, for example, MacDonagh, 1992; O'Leary, 1995) so as to render it politically benign, we argue that the DMs retain sufficient sincerity and lived ethics to make their project viable. In the same way a Croatian Diasporic band could authentically focus on Croatian-Catholic national identity whilst not involving itself in the reality of recent war in the Balkans. In a postmodern world of shifting unstable identities and mass immigration, many feel attracted to and comforted by nationalist messages of various sorts. Being associated with the political left rather than the political right makes the DM's project less problematic (unlike, for example, white-British nationalist punk band Skrewdriver referred to in Bill Buford's ethnographic study of English football hooligans *Among the Thugs* (1993)). Being rooted in a romanticised a-historical past and a largely self-created diasporic present, the DMs' world of Irishness seems largely unassailable. In effect, they are implicitly asserting that it is the Irishness that we choose that counts; as such its authenticity is guaranteed. The DMs allow this lived Irishness and lived Catholicism to gel with more traditional and mainstream punk rock concerns such as integrity and falsehood; corporate greed and the greed of the small businessperson; the emptiness of pre-marital sexual relations and the single person's 'meat-market'; whiskey- and war-related early deaths (as on 'Virtues and Vices' where, significantly, the war death portrayed is in Vietnam rather than Northern Ireland); child abuse and marital breakdown (as on 'The State of Massachusetts' and 'Walk Away' respectively). A loosely quasi-Catholic position is combined with a postmodern existentialist worldview similar to that of Nick Hornby's 30-something single male characters in his novels *High Fidelity* (2005) and *About a Boy* (1998), so that pre-marital sex is despised because the *experience* of waking up in a stranger's bed is unpleasant, as opposed to it being morally wrong *ex-ante* from the perspective of the Church. Likewise, an unnamed male friend is urged to reconsider leaving his family in pursuit of the idol of presumed freedom (in 'Walk Away'). These moral positions can be viewed as being vaguely or loosely Catholic in the sense that family unity and loyalty are given pride of place, or valorised, rather than the stark individualism of the postmodern consumer.

On another song ('Echoes on A Street') a friend is reminded of his wife's devotion ('she promised to honour, cherish and keep you/ she took your problems and took your name') that might annoy feminists (not because women are treated as sex objects but because they are assigned a traditional role as waiting for the

man to come home in silent devotion). However the rough world-weary sounds of the two singers of the DMs (who exchange lines rapid-fire with each other, in the manner of Californian punks Rancid), makes this message come across as sincere and the product of lived experiences, that is authentic, working-class and Catholic, as opposed to middle-class, Anglican, and conservative. There are similarities here with the veiled moral and religious messages of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky (see Tolstoy, 2003) which arguably only works successfully in cultures such as the Russian and the Irish, where religion, or at least the external trappings of a very visual religious tradition, is woven into the fabric of national life. The DMs would agree with Tolstoy that it is 'better to be a Levin than a Vronsky', i.e. better to maintain one's personal freedom, integrity, and self-respect rather than forsake conscience and society to engage in cynical and self-centred extra-marital relations which ultimately hinder one's own honest personal journey of self creation rather than assist it.

The rest of the paper discusses songs from the DMs' most recent studio album *The Meanest of Times* in order of the track listing on the album.

### 'FAMOUS FOR NOTHING'

The opening song is a super-fast DMs song in the classic 1990s punk mould characterised by rapid-fire exchange of vocal parts between the singers. Lyrically the band is at its least moralistic here which is appropriate for an album-opener (certain to become a regular feature of the band's live set) so that no listener is shocked by the band's religiously influenced morality early on. The song begins with the sound of a classroom bell and children's playground noises, complementing the cheerful Irish Catholic schoolyard photograph on the album cover. We are immediately brought back to the primary school playgrounds of Ireland (or at least Boston). The song verses include some reference to the courts filling up after a 'long night on the town', at once giving the song a contemporary context but also reminding us of our own unruly youth. First we have as follows:

There's two little shits/  
Selling joints on the hill/  
And the kids down the lot/  
Are burning cruisers for a thrill.

And again:

The courts are filling up/  
All the kids are coming down/

For a head start on the troubles/  
Of a long night on the town.

The use of first-person singular throughout is somewhat odd. As in the case of Rancid (on classic tracks such as 'Roots Radicals' (on 1995 album *...And Out Come the Wolves*), 'Ruby Soho' (on *...And Out Come the Wolves*) and 'Otherside' (on 2003 *Indestructible* album)), the use of the two vocalists, in combination with the first-person singular pronoun, conveys the unspoken impression of lads growing up together and in fact of shared childhood experiences or at the very least of childhood experiences in common. To mentally and emotionally fight this aural impact is difficult: we are drawn into the DMs' world and convinced of its authenticity through the medium of the 'two witnesses'. The DMs use this technique as skilfully as Rancid did a decade earlier.

It is in this song that we get a fairly direct introduction to the DMs' complicated Irish world of 'Catholicism and Alcoholism'. Clearly the band members chose the second path (to the extent that the two paths oppose one another) but they are not shut out to the other ('God willing', of course, to cite the title of the album's second song). We hear that 'the big one's on the way', being the Sunday morning problem hangover, and that 'I'm a God damned travesty'. The chorus switches over half way through the song so that we get the band spelling out a clear demarcation: 'Their gang went my way for basketball/ my gang went their way for alcohol'. This appears to be past tense, describing school days. In fact we are 'famous for nothing' and 'nothing was our world'. It is this self-deprecating honesty that saves the DMs, as it saved Rancid in the 1990s and Joe Strummer in the 1970s. We can identify with 'nothing' as 'our world'. The vocals are hard to understand at times but the band makes sure that we can hear clearly the most important lines: 'it was us against the world' of course appeals to the punk audience, as does its 'rhyming' (to use the term loosely) line, 'nothing was our world'. The DMs do nothing as successfully as trading on the 'underdog spirit' of punk rock and the Irish nationalist factor helps immensely here. The juxtaposition of past and present is handled well and is vital to the existentialist approach. It reminds the authors of the Clash successfully juxtaposing past and present in the haunting 'Something about England', where Strummer, as narrator, meets an aging war veteran who takes him back in flashback narrative through the major events of the twentieth century. We then return in the last verse, after the old man has shifted off home, to the London world of 1980 with its bars, gangs, bedsits, and police sirens. The following DMs' quasi-chorus is sung with

extra gusto and a conviction borne of bitter experience:

Well these lies won't save me/  
Don't you know, don't you know/  
From the time that made me/  
Here we go, here we go.

These lines remain difficult to interpret. The 'lies' must refer to drunkenness and teenage anarchy but the choice of the word 'lies' here, with its religious overtones, is revealing. We then hear the contradiction that has always been a feature of the best humanist punk rock and the best of classic literature, including Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky: although my past experiences were 'lies', existentially they are what I have become; indeed 'they were the times that made me'. We are reminded of Dostoyevsky's characters Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoyevsky, 1991) who re-creates himself after murder of the pawnbroker by financially assisting Sonya's family despite his mental turmoil, and the narrator in *The House of the Dead* (Dostoyevsky, 1985) whose fear and cynicism in being sent to a Siberian prison camp slowly and unexpectedly metamorphoses into hope and a fresh desire for living through such small events as the prisoners' shared happiness in participating in a Christmas play. As Sartre (2003) argues in *Being and Nothingness*, although self re-creation in the manner of the deed is always possible for the existentialist, our personal journey can have no *starting point* other than our actual past.

The Roman Catholic aspect is emphasised only in the second half of the song as if the Catholic tradition of Ireland operates as a kind of *echo* or *repressed memory* that takes some time to be dredged up from the subconscious. First we hear that 'the good Lord was calling me, 9-to-3 on weekdays, and on the hour on Sundays', which then later on becomes 'Jesus Christ was calling me, 9-to-3 on weekdays, and on the hour on Sundays'. The '9 to 3 on weekdays' is a reference to the ritualistic nature of Catholic education propaganda which can only operate during the times of the day set down for it. 'On the hour on Sundays' suggests living within earshot of the local Catholic parish church and indeed that is confirmed with the song's last repeated refrain 'still the bells of St Mary's kept ringing', which might (or might not) contain a reference to the 1944 Hollywood film *The Bells of St Mary's* starring Bob Hope. As the song closes out, we recall the opening lines of the song about youth having a 'long night on the town' and the singers' own alcoholic tendencies. The last line then speaks to our inner soul or conscience, even in the religious sense: how did we respond to the church bells, and how are we responding now? There is a complexity

here, the Catholic Church being dealt with subtly and in a nuanced fashion: it is not demonised, if anything it is presented as akin to Hamlet's ghost or the 'spectres of Marx' in the post-modern sense (Derrida 1994). The Church is not presented simplistically as either the cause of, or the solution to, Ireland's or Boston's problems. It is *simply there*, in the background, casting a shadow (as indeed Lennon and McCartney understood as well, as indicated by the lyrics to 1966 Beatles' song 'Eleanor Rigby', from the *Revolver* album, featuring the 'oh-so-ordinary', hence the oh-so-significant, Father Mackenzie). The DMs makes it clear that it is the *shadow* or the *spectre* of the Catholic Church, if nothing else, that remains an integral part of Irishness and indeed it cannot be otherwise. It may take an expatriate overseas Irishwoman or Irishman to see this, as she or he sees the Church forced to compete with a variety of other religious traditions, some of which appear on the surface at least to be much more logical, reasonable and up-to-date than the religion of the Pope. The ambiguous and complex relationship of the band to the Church in this song gives way to the later songs of the album where the Church is not mentioned directly but a clear moral position on a wide variety of social and economic issues is carefully presented and argued for. The Church continues to hang over the album like a shadow; it influences proceedings much more than we can ever know.

We get no advocating of violence on DM's albums, nor do we even get swearing. We are left with a very wholesome and moral album that walks the fine line between morality and moralism; usually it is the morality of bitter life experiences that talks. We are clearly not in Rancid territory where the band celebrates the wounding of 30 police in Oakland riots connected to the poll tax in the song 'Brixton' re-released on the 2008 compilation album *B Sides and C Sides*. Similarly, we are not in Clash territory where the small-time thief Jimmy Jazz is romanticised (in the 1979 song 'Jimmy Jazz' on the *London Calling* album) and the blacks of Ladbroke Grove and Notting Hill are lionised for their willingness to take up arms against the reactionary London police force of the era in the 1977 song 'White Riot' on the self-titled debut album. However, clearly there are similarities between the approaches: the *existentialism* of the validity of lived experiences is the key to the philosophies of all three bands and the male drinking culture is important for the DMs as well as for the other two bands. However, clearly, the DMs also understand and present the negative side of male alcohol consumption. All three bands exhibit a refreshing humanism which gallantly aims to protect women, ethnic minorities, children, the weak and the poor

from exploitation at the hands of Multi-National Corporations, the police force or local drug lords (for Rancid songs on these topics see 'Rwanda' (on self-titled 2000 album), 'Radio Havana' (on self-titled 2000 album) and 'Stand Your Ground' (on 2003 *Indestructible* album)). All three bands embrace notions of the 'proletariat', the 'outsiders', the 'ruling class', institutional power, alienation, and the importance of working-class brotherhood and collective action. All three bands' relationships with orthodox Marxism remain unclear. The DMs simply take *both* the humanism and the Political Correctness (PC) a step further than the other two bands as is appropriate for the 2000s (although Mick Jones of the Clash was always much more PC, even in the 1970s, than his bandmate Joe Strummer, as Pat Gilbert's (2004) Clash biography *Passion is a Fashion* points out). The Catholicism factor is an important element in this. Whilst the 1970s produced entertaining radicals JG Ballard and the Clash, the 2000s produced the tamer and more PC, but nonetheless interesting and enjoyable, Nick Hornby and Dropkick Murphys.

Another issue presents itself for us postmoderns. Do the DMs believe in Catholic teachings in the literal religious sense? As the Slovenian post-communist philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2003, 2008) points out, this question is unacceptable and archaic from a position of postmodern ethical fluidity, but it is worth asking here. It seems that the Church is presented as being more than simply a human cultural institution: its links to the divine are never denied by the band. To deny the divine origins of the Church outright would surely take away the mystique of the Church and much of its power (even today). Clearly Catholicism is important for the DMs' worldview and hence the band does not cast doubts upon its divine connections directly. Nevertheless, the possibility remains that the DMs actually do literally believe, at least to some extent. This then represents a powerful challenge to the assumptions of modernity. It may be better to see religious belief as a continuum rather than as a 0/1 binary dichotomy. Then the DMs surely have at least some faith in the divine. They sing 'Jesus Christ was calling me', not 'The Church was calling me' or 'the priests and nuns were calling me'; or even the more ambiguous and PC 'a higher power was calling me'. The DMs are not concerned about offending anyone's sensibilities here. In fact, the DMs' possible religious faith here increases the drama quality and the urgency of the band's message (and their moralism): if Jesus Christ is *literally* calling me then this is a much more significant than if the Church is calling me in the purely cultural sense. So we are left with an important

postmodern message: we can dare to have religious faith and allow it to influence our worldviews. This faith is best seen as the socially radical left-wing Catholicism of the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II, and Polish Solidarity. Whilst the DMs romanticise an a-historical Ireland their approach remains nonetheless contemporary and a product of the contemporary world.

### ‘THE STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS’

In ‘The State of Massachusetts’ the band locates its own modern concerns in the State of Massachusetts, USA, which has ‘Irish’ Boston as its capital city. The joyfulness of the band’s music seems incongruous with the serious, somewhat depressing, and clinically ‘social realist’ lyrical message. The complex lyrical theme involves the taking away of two children by the State of Massachusetts. The two children, Billy and Tommy, belong to a couple, friends of the band, who are not able to care for the children properly. The band walks the fine line between compassionate responsible humanism and unreflexive moralism in this song. The upbeat musical sounds are clearly designed to make the moral message more easily digestible to the band’s fans. The band members know the fictional wayward couple, and the mother is referred to throughout in second-person singular. The mother is variously chastised and remonstrated with, the band being convinced that ‘she has had her last chance’ with the children and that the DSS (Department of Social Security) was right to take the children away. The woman is not judged by the band; the band aims simply to help her accept the dictates of reasonableness. The chorus refrain ‘they’ve been taken away’ hangs in the air poignantly but you can easily imagine the line being sung raucously by the crowd in concert, its original meaning being ignored (much like on the 2001 DVD *No Bull*, when AC/DC perform the song ‘Hell’s Bells’ in front of an audience of 18-year-old partying Spanish youth, the song becomes simply another anthem of celebration, its original meaning as an angry and confused response to the death of Bon Scott being forgotten).

The DMs’ social realist position and its humanitarianism make this song a partial success. Clearly the Catholicism referred to in ‘Famous for nothing’ has influenced the worldviews of the band members so that they are willing to take a strong moral stance on issues such as child abuse and neglect. The song does reflect some existential angst to the extent that the woman is clearly well known to the band and they hold affection for her; nonetheless they believe that the DSS was

right to take the children away. The band does not celebrate the taking of the children away; there is a strong sense of regret and anguish as they ponder over what might have been (the ‘paths not taken’) and allow themselves to connect with the women’s feelings of loss, anger and bitterness. Nonetheless, there is also an emotion of relief present as the band members believe that the decision made, now a fait accompli, was in the best interests of the children. The song begins as follows:

She had excuses and she chose to use them/  
She was the victim of unspeakable abuses/  
Her husband was violent, malicious and distant/  
Her kids now belong to the state of Massachusetts.

They've been taken away! Hey!  
They've been taken away!

The very ethical position of the band, that refuses to be swayed by ‘excuses’ and ‘victimhood’, renders the DMs as a (post)modern band that has accepted the wisdoms of many traditional values. The woman’s hard past and difficult present are acknowledged by the band but do not cause the band to change its decision to support the actions of the DSS. Next we are introduced to the children who are well known by the song narrators:

Billy was a bright one, Tommy's off his head/  
Mother loved them both the same, at least that's what she said/  
I don't predict the future, I don't care about the past/  
Send them both to DSS, now you've had your chance.

The line ‘I don't predict the future, I don't care about the past’ reinforces the band’s position that sentimentality will not be allowed to rule their decision-making processes. The mother may claim to have reformed, but the future may well turn out to be just like the past. Clearly, the band believes that now is not the time for a second chance. The next verse, sung in the manner of a chorus, nearly mocks the mother for her unrealistic stance and her appropriation of ‘victimhood’, and then the verse after this one puts the band’s responsible humanism centre-stage by arguing that it is the children’s future that matters the most:

The poison stole your babies/  
The judges took your rights/  
You can have your children or the night.

I suppose you've been a victim, I  
 suspect you may have lied/  
 Have you lost all ambition, won't  
 you give this thing a try/  
 If you can't and you fail, you won't  
 be the only loser/  
 These kids don't stand a chance with  
 you in their future.

The use of the word 'lies' again, as in 'I suspect you may have lied' brings to the forefront again the shadow of Catholic values, but even here the band is not willing to make a direct accusation of 'lying'. Instead, they simply say that the mother is 'suspected' of doing so.

### 'TOMORROW'S INDUSTRY'

This is a rather strange song with a somewhat veiled lyrical message. The band is clearly ranting against the song's main protagonist, an old-fashioned ultra-competitive capitalist small businessperson. However, exactly what the person has done wrong and how he can make amends is only hinted at. The band is less successful in conveying one clear moral message here, especially when listening to the song as opposed to studying the lyrics. The opening clever first verse introduces the main protagonist, clearly a driven alienated careerist such as Ivan Ilyich in Tolstoy's famous short story 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich' (see Feldman 2004; James et al., forthcoming). The person aims to pay for 'Catholic school' fees, introducing the Irish dimension, and he adopts the old-fashioned business values of hard work, thrift, sacrifice and tough but fair competition:

Young kids in Catholic schools/  
 Elderly parents living under your  
 roof/  
 You pay the bills and you pay the  
 price/  
 You don't back down and you won't  
 play nice/  
 The disgraced values of the company  
 man/  
 Are why you fight and sacrifice/  
 Don't bend or break for their one-  
 way rules/  
 Or run from battles you know you'll  
 lose.

The song does not succeed in the way it should as one fears that there is no one strong clear and coherent message unlike in 'The State of Massachusetts'. Instead, we have some lovely suggestive phrases thrown together (which is the essence of Žižek's (2010) recent critique of Adorno). Possibly giving a name to our fictional protagonist may have helped matters here. The following chorus also puts together

some lovely turns of phrase but the listener is left to piece them together by herself to form a coherent message. Our preferred interpretation is that 'yesterday's values' are not being presented favourably here so we have no simple romanticisation of the past. The contradiction the band argues for, between 'yesterday's values' and 'tomorrow's industry', suggests that 'tomorrow's industry' will be a more caring, more just, kinder place where social and environmental concerns are placed at centre-stage. This inoffensive PC message seems somewhat naïve and inconsistent with the band's strong support for hardcore trade unionists on earlier albums (such as 'Worker's Song' on 2003 album *Blackout* and 'Which Side Are You On?' and 'Heroes From Our Past' on 2001 album *Sing Loud, Sing Proud!*). The chorus is as follows:

Greed is blinding you/  
 But we can see/  
 He's got yesterday's values/  
 Living in tomorrow's industry.

The shift from second-person to third-person singular halfway through the chorus is confusing also: is it the same person being talked about? We suspect that it is. The band drifts off-topic in the last verse and the song does not end strongly. In the last verse we depart from our lead character and the band makes some social commentary about the rising cost of living and the need for families to have two jobs to pay the bills. Overall, it is hard to be sure whether the lead character is being portrayed as a hero or anti-hero, and, whilst in other songs this complexity works, we argue here that it merely confuses. The last verse is as follows:

The weight falls hard on the stand up  
 guy/  
 The one you can count on you can  
 rely/  
 This is your future it don't seem  
 right/  
 But this is your battle, this is your  
 fight/  
 Something in this country has got to  
 change/  
 If we're ever going to see those days  
 again/  
 Your parents may have done it with  
 just one job/  
 But now we're working for less and  
 twice as hard.

Whilst the song contains many good ideas, its impact is weak, compared to the impact of the other songs discussed here. In the first half of the song the Catholic businessperson is criticised but later on he is praised for his 'principles'. The band, whilst lamenting the present, seem to want to return to the old days

of our leading character where each family's sole breadwinner had to put the children through Catholic schools solely through his own efforts.

### 'ECHOES ON "A" STREET'

In what is, musically speaking at least, an extremely powerful song, 'Echoes on "A" Street' tells the story of a faithful young wife staying at home patiently waiting for her husband to come home in silent devotion. As a listener you presume that the narrator is remonstrating with a young male friend urging him [the friend] to see his own wife's good qualities. This is the impression that the song creates since the narrator addresses all his remarks to an unnamed 'you'. However, the last refrain of 'Shannon I'm coming home' (which is also the song's chorus) introduces some confusion/complexity as here the narrator seems to be acknowledging and praising his own wife. Have we then got a song like the 1976 Kiss ballad 'Beth', on the *Destroyer* album, where the singer-on-the-road addresses his patient faithful wife-at-home (although 'Beth' had at least some sincerity clearly the DMs song has more)? It is probably better to simply view the chorus as a juxtaposition of the Shannon relationship with the other relationship being referred to in the song in the same way that 'Famous for nothing' juxtaposes past and present. We then have a song similar to 'State of Massachusetts' or, on the previous album, 'Walk Away'. The first verse then appears particularly strong and insightful:

Anxious nights give way to daylight/  
She don't cry and she don't complain/  
To honour, cherish, protect and keep you/  
She took your problems and took your name/  
All she wants to do is stroll down the island/  
She don't care if there's wind or there's rain/  
Only a women of her stature/  
Could shield you from the venom of this town's disdain.

There is an element of juxtaposition of past and present here as well with the last line of the verse suggesting some past event in order to set context. We have a narrative that is similar to a lawyer building up a carefully crafted argument; the goal here is surely to persuade the male friend of his own wife's goodness in the context of the possible temptation to abandon everything and run away. *The citation of the wedding vows adds a clear Catholic presence to the powerful*

*narrative*. This verse is sung slowly and authoritatively and every word can be heard clearly especially in the pivotal first four lines before the song builds up some momentum. The third and fourth lines especially are sung slowly, with conviction and authority, and are clearly audible. The song's message will certainly impact many in the band's audience, although its message may be largely lost on younger fans that have not yet had similar life experiences.

As often happens with DM songs lyrically the first verse is the strongest or at least the most in line with principles of social realism. By the time we reach the second half of many DM songs emotion and pathos take over and careful descriptions and logical argument tend to be put to one side. We can see this happening here later in the song with the following melodramatic verse. For any band other than the DMs we might think that this verse is a send-up (imagine it in the hands of 'Fat Mike' Burkett and his joker buddies from NOFX; James 2010). However, clearly, the DMs are completely serious. They simply prefer the emotional melodramatic approach that the Irish traditionally (and stereotypically) tend to be known for. The second verse is as follows:

As she waits patiently by the window/  
She knows you'll be coming home soon/  
She'll sit quiet there and won't go/  
Her dedication can't be moved/  
She hears the echoes marching down "A" street/  
Like footsteps on the cobblestone/  
A pace too heavy to be her master/  
They pass her by and she's still alone.

The references to her 'master' and the 'cobblestones' will have some laughing in derision, although clearly they do still have cobblestones in Ireland. Without doubt the band is having some fun here; possibly they have given themselves licence to do just that after communicating the very serious message in the first verse. Only an Irish-American nationalist band could 'get away with' words like this but they do not drag down the song as a whole since the first verse has already proved so effective. It is interesting that in some songs the DMs can be so very PC (see 'State of Massachusetts') whereas here they are anything but. It could be that the contexts of the two songs simply warrant different responses – in 'State of Massachusetts', the case has already been decided in a public context involving judges and government departments. Hence a carefully worded response is required. By contrast, in 'Echoes

on A Street', we simply have a friend's private relationship (that is a non-public setting) and the band can be freer in its choice of words. Also the 'State of Massachusetts' had an official YouTube video clip and was for wide public consumption whereas 'Echoes on A Street' is more of an 'in-house' song aimed at dedicated fans. In both songs, however, the moral message is extremely clear and delivered with strident conviction. At the same time the veiled Catholicism is also clearly evident.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE MURPHYS AND MIGRANT SECURITY**

So despite their project as 'merely' a punk band, and despite what we have identified as some of the ambiguities in their moral poise – particularly with respect to Irish nationalism, American jingoism and (more interestingly) their Catholicism – it is indeed a complex imagining that is the DM's Diaspora. This rich texture stands alongside other ethnographic and indeed ethnomusicological accounts of the migrant/Diaspora experience presented at this Symposium (see, for example, in this volume, Baak 2010; James, et al. 2010; Mason 2010) and juxtaposes heavily with both those discourses that are state-centric on the one hand, and indeed rights-centric by way of reply. Arguably, in these latter discourses the experience of migrant security is conveniently simplistic – perhaps for the sake of policy formulation – yet it may indeed be in this convenient rendering that these dominant discourses miss the opportunity of crafting more nuanced prescriptions. For this reason, and for their own complex integrity, the DMs do well and deserve to be taken seriously. Their (very popular) approach and worldview might provide something of a wake-up call to those researchers who see no place for religion in public life and a clarion call for adding complex and conflicting meanings to the lived experiences of migrants.

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