

Thomas Davis' "The Sack of Baltimore": A Literary-Historical Perspective

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Abstract—This article is an attempt to read Thomas Davis' poem "The Sack of Baltimore" (1845) from a literary-historical perspective. It explores Davis' representation of the sack of Baltimore village, West Cork, Ireland as a historical event depicted from a literary angle. A typical nineteenth-century historical Irish ballad, "The Sack of Baltimore" has not only remained at the margins of literary studies, but even where it has received attention, it has mainly been treated as a historical source material on an Algerian piratical raid that has come to be called "the sack of Baltimore". This paper proposes that we need to reread the Irish poet's narrative poem with a stronger interest both in its literary composition and historical contexts. Only in this way would it be possible to do justice and draw more sustained attention to this hitherto understudied lyrical narrative poem.

Index Terms—Thomas Davis, "The Sack of Baltimore", Algerine corsairs, historical ballad

I. INTRODUCTION

The sack of the seaport village of Baltimore in southwestern Ireland was perhaps the most catastrophic invasion ever mounted by Algerian corsairs on Ireland or England. In 1631 the village of Baltimore was sacked when "a joint force consisting of 230 elite troops of the Turkish Ottoman Empire and pirates from the Barbary Coast of North Africa stormed ashore at the little port of Baltimore ... and spirited almost all the villagers away to a life of slavery in Algiers" (Ekin, 2012, p. 10). The group was led by the Dutch sailor and pirate Morat (or Murat) Rais, formerly known as Jan Jansen or "Janszoon van Haarlem". The pirates abducted around 107 Baltimore inhabitants, men, women, and children and took them to the port of Algiers. It is unknown what happened to the victims, but many of them are believed to have ended their life in the slave market of Algiers. Memories of the raid have been kept alive by poems such as Thomas Davis' (1814–1845) "The Sack of Baltimore", the subject of this study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the years, the exotic Baltimore raid has captured the imagination of many writers of screenplays, songs, and historical fiction. Nevertheless; there is hardly any study that discusses Davis' poem as a literary work in its own right. All we have are general references to the poet's life and works or to the ballad itself, scattered in the introductions to some anthologies of Davis' poems or in historical works dealing with the Baltimore raid ranging from general references to the event to short articles and full-length books.

An early reference to Thomas Davis and his poem occurs in Mitford's (1852) memoirs where the author praises the literary merits of Davis' poems and in particular his poem "The sack of Baltimore". In her brief introduction to the poem, she only makes general comments without giving any specific details.

Wallis (1846) passionately praises Davis as a "genuine poet", statesman, thinker, and writer. Tracing the development of Davis' life from early childhood through his education, his role in Irish politics, and his contribution to *the Nation*, an Irish national weekly newspaper, and to Irish literature, Wallis highlights the poet's merits and diversified talents.

Barnby's (1969) article is a comprehensive account of the events of the Baltimore raid as well as its historical origins and consequences. In his other article, Barnby (1970) focuses on the reasons for the delay of "a King's ship lying at anchor in Kinsale harbour only 40 miles away to the east" at the time of the raid on Baltimore to respond to the Baltimore attack. Both articles make useful references to Davis' poem.

Moody (1966) surveys in some detail Davis' personal and public life, his career as a politician, writer, and journalist, underscoring Davis's patriotism, nationalism, and interest in history. His article also contains some passing remarks on Davis' prose and poetry.

Brown's (1973) study examines the history of Irish literature from Davis to Yeats. Brown maintains that Davis' political leadership and nationalistic verse contributions made him perhaps the most significant Irish literary figure in the 1840s. Although he gives a comprehensive survey of the poetry published in *the Nation*, Brown does not make any particular reference to "The Sack of Baltimore".

In her article, Murray (2006) traces the journey of Morat Rais from Algerine to Baltimore and his return with the Baltimore captives to the slave market of the Barbary Coast. Besides providing a comprehensive account of the raid, she mulls over the probable events that happened aboard the two ships carrying the captives and the different fates awaiting them in Algiers.

Bekkaoui (2010, p. 276) refers specifically to the Baltimore raid as part of the long series of Algerine piratical operations in Europe. Additionally, he provides a few historical sources for an insightful study of the Baltimore raid, including “The Sack of Baltimore”.

A thorough account of the sack of Baltimore can be found in Ekin’s (2012) *The Stolen Village* which provides wide historical, political, and social contexts at the time of the raid and what followed thereof. Ekin tries to recapture the reactions and feelings of the Baltimore villagers during the attack, on their journey to Algiers, and in their new country. He also refers to Davis’ ballad several times and lists it as one of his historical sources.

Brown (2019) explores slavery as a moral and theological issue in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions. He further explicates how Islam has viewed slavery in theory and practice across Islamic history, including the Ottoman period during which slavery flourished.

Webb (2020) traces the history of slavery in Europe, arguing that vast numbers of Europeans were taken by Turkish corsairs to Africa where they were often treated cruelly. One such incident was the notorious sack of Baltimore.

The above literature survey shows that the wealth of historical/biographical material contrasts sharply with the paucity of critical interpretations of Davis’ ballad. Hence, the current paper aims at exploring this largely under-researched work from a literary-historical perspective.

III. DISCUSSION

Thomas Davis’ narrative poem, or rather, historical ballad, “The Sack of Baltimore” (1845) tells the story of the tragic pirate raid against the Irish village of Baltimore and the consequent abduction and slavery of its inhabitants. It is a narrative wherein kidnapping, captivity, and slavery become closely interrelated concepts. In literature, a captivity narrative is a fictional or real story often featuring a moment of capture, the hardships endured, and the ultimate attainment of freedom and happy return. Traditional captivity narratives are usually autobiographical and often contain value judgments and fanciful fictional events. By contrast, this poem’s narrative is about the actual kidnapping of whole village inhabitants who are forced into indefinite slavery and is fairly anchored in some plausible statements of fact. None of the captives survived to tell the story and “not one of those who escaped capture that night at Baltimore wrote an account of his experiences” (Barnby, 1969, p. 102).

Davis starts his poem by painting a serene and placid picture of Baltimore, apparently making sure to open with a stanza that sets the scene for the story to unfold. In the opening few lines, he presents a vivid and an accurate description of the tragedy’s place. The sun is shining brightly on the cluster of small islands along the coast of Carbery and is gleaming across the narrow passages of mount Gabriel’s cliffs, while the ancient ruins of Inisherkin Island’s friary/temple look like a bird’s worn-out feathers:

The summer sun is falling soft on Carbery’s hundred isles,
The summer sun is gleaming still through Gabriel’s rough defiles,—
Old Inisherkin’s crumbled fane looks like a moulting bird.

(Davis; qtd. in Wallis, 1846, II, 1-3)

Later in the evening and after a long summer-day labour, the villagers begin to enjoy a relaxed and tranquil atmosphere in their peaceful and fear-free town. The June sunset is beautiful and mild; the ocean tide is quiet while the fishing-boats lie upon the beach, perhaps waiting for the ebb tides. The children have stopped their play; the town’s gossips have ceased their talk and the households begin their prayers:

And in a calm and sleepy swell the ocean tide is heard:
The hookers lie upon the beach; the children cease their play;
The gossips leave the little inn; the households kneel to pray;
And full of love and peace and rest,—its daily labor o’er,—
Upon that cosy creek there lay the town of Baltimore. (II. 4-8)

In the first stanza, Davis makes specific references to particular places (i.e. Carbery, Gabriel, Inisherkin), in addition to Baltimore, the basic locale of the story where the narrated events occur and develop. This minute and accurate portrayal discloses the poet’s intimate knowledge of the place, its scenery, natural setting, and artificial and physical features. Actually, Davis seems to be acting on the advice he himself gives to balladists, especially those writing historical ballads. In “A Ballad History of Ireland”, Davis (qtd. in Mitchel, 1879, p. 239) gives some hints on the properties of historical ballads and enjoins that a balladist should have good knowledge of “topographical and scenic descriptions” of the places he describes. Undoubtedly, the detailed and unmistakable descriptions in the stanza indicate that the poet must have been to the place and had scrutinized it closely before composing his poem.

As in the first, so in the second stanza, Davis seems to be embarking on building up an appropriate background for his poem as a way of setting the stage for the core story by continuing to delineate an even quieter atmosphere than that in stanza one. Around midnight, a deeper calm and a profound sleeplike state prevails, lulled by a throbbing wave that

can be heard everywhere in the temporary stillness, producing a characteristically mild and temperate atmosphere. Meanwhile, the fibrous turf and fragrant trees breathe out their balmy smell, giving a feeling of comfort.

A deeper rest, a starry trance, has come with midnight there;
 No sound, except that throbbing wave, in earth or sea or air.
 The massive capes and ruined towers seem conscious of the calm.
 The fibrous sod and stunted trees are breathing heavy balm. (ll. 9-12)

The quietness of the evening is followed by the calm of the night. As Darkness is just falling, two ships gliding round the Dunashad castle drop anchors near the entrance to Baltimore harbour. Perhaps they are bringing a lover to his beloved, who has been long waiting for him in Baltimore:

So still the night, these two long barks round Dunashad that glide
 Must trust their oars—methinks not few—against the ebbing tide.
 O, some sweet mission of true love must urge them to the shore,—
 They bring some lover to his bride, who sighs in Baltimore! (ll. 13-16)

While the inhabitants are fast asleep under the thatched roofs of their cottages along the shoreline, an ironic turn of events takes place. Suddenly, noise and confusion disrupt the peace of the summer night. The two ships anchoring off the harbour, instead of bringing “a lover to his bride”, as initially surmised, turn out to be bringing something completely different: imminent danger. Some obscure raiders abruptly launch their surprise attack, and the whole village is in tumult. The inhabitants, who have been completely taken by surprise and have no time to defend themselves, wake up screaming as the flimsy doors of their houses are smashed by the invaders’ iron bars and the thatched roofs of the houses are torched. Wearing their “crimson shawl[s]” and yelling “Allah”, two clear sign of Turkish Janissaries, the Barbary pirates attack the armless villagers with their muskets and scimitars. Spreading fear and panic everywhere, they overwhelm the victims’ prayers and shrieks and instantly seize control of Baltimore:

All, all asleep within each roof along that rocky street,
 And these must be the lover’s friends, with gently gliding feet.
 A stifled gasp, a dreamy noise! ‘The roof is in a flame!’
 From out their beds and to their doors rush maid and sire and dame
 And meet upon the threshold stone, the gleaming sabre’s fall,
 And o’er each black and bearded face the white or crimson shawl.
 The yell of “Allah!” breaks above the prayer and shriek and roar—
 O bless ð God! the Algerine is lord of Baltimore! (17-24)

Despite the minute and accurate descriptive and narrative details given, the speaker/narrator is apparently not telling everything, a traditional technique that characterises a typical historical ballad. As Prudchenko (2022, np.) notes, a ballad tends to focus on a single dramatic event, unlike other types of narrative poems. Davis’ ballad does not deviate from its main storyline and seems to have little exposition, presenting only a minimal amount of external information, such as setting, necessary to understanding the story. For instance, Davis does not give any details about Morat Rais’ motives, his earlier seizing of a few French and English ships, his capture of ten or so Dungarvan fishermen before his arrival at Baltimore, his preliminary reconnaissance of the area, or Hackett’s alleged advice to make him change his target from Kinsale to Baltimore. For Davis, it seems that this is not the place to tell the whole story of Baltimore; his main objective is to focus on the atrocity of the raid, the cruelty of the raiders, and the valiancy of Irish young men and women.

A hypothetical contrast between the poet’s literary account of the events and a typical historical account of the same incidents can be exemplified as follows. Whereas the poem’s text seeks to enlighten and elicit some emotional impact through a creative use of language and literary structure, a historical narrative would endeavour to inform through the use of facts and accurate information. Unlike the poem’s text which starts by providing background information, a historian’s narrative often begins by immediately introducing the main ideas. Though a historical account tends to provide some specific days and dates, Davis’ poetic composition is not primarily interested in such details nor does it give the exact number of the captives or of those who died during the onslaught, thus allowing for chroniclers, historians, and readers to complete the task. More importantly, it delineates the main story by gradually preparing the scene for a dramatic situation: the moment when an entire remote village falls victim to the brutal pirate onslaught.

With this dramatic moment, the action seems to have reached its climax and the events of the Baltimore raid appear to be presented in the context of Islam-Christianity polarity and east-west conflict. When the invading “Algerines” scream “Allah” in the midst of the foray, it becomes obvious that Islam is here depicted as a violent power. The invocation of Allah, the Arabic word for God, coincides with the moment the whole village is in utter confusion and the people are shouting and screaming in great panic as they are wrested from their sleep by strangers speaking a different language. Indignant at the harrowing destruction, the poet expresses those apparently anti-Muslim sentiments even though he is known, as Moody (1966, p. 17) points out, for “having his emotions well under control” and despite the usually traditional balladist’s impersonal style of narration characterizing the poem.

Nevertheless, one may argue that the reference made to the Algerine “yell of ‘Allah!’” comes more as part of a broader discussion of imperial oppression as well as political and economic hegemony than an exclusively isolated aggressive Islamist attack. As Ibrahim (2015, p. 30) argues, Davis’ “commemoration of the Sack of Baltimore served as

an allegory of British and Anglican oppression over Irish religious and national identity, a fate shared by many territories under the British Empire". Davis' poem, therefore, can be read not just as a historical narrative about a past destructive piratic Muslim raid on Irish territory but more as a reflection of the poet's moral standpoint on the issues of slavery, oppression, colonialism, and nationalism.

That said, recent writings on the Baltimore attack tend to take on a more anti-Islamic stand. Apparently capitalizing on Davis' verse "The yell of 'Allah!' breaks above the prayer and shriek and roar--" (l. 23), Ekin (2012, p. 60) reads the Baltimore raid legacy as an example of what he considers an "Islamist invasion". In his somewhat rhetorical and inflammatory preface to his book, he enthusiastically links what he views as modern Muslim terrorism to the sacking of Baltimore, which, he asserts, "would go down in history as the most devastating invasion ever carried out by the forces of the Islamist *jihad* on Britain or Ireland" (2012, p. 10). For him, the raid was not an isolated incident but "part of the endless *jihad* or holy war waged against the Christian nations of northern Europe" (ibid.). He also regards Morat Rais as a zealous convert who "had become a sword of the *jihad*, the holy war ... a man who had reached new heights of evil inventiveness in a bid to bring the war to the very doorsteps of the enemies of his new faith" (p. 38). Ekin further maintains that the raid was conducted by Algerian pirates supported by the Ottoman Janissaries who "originally formed as a celibate order of religious warriors" (p. 12).

Definitely, Ekin is not alone in this anti-Muslim trend. For instance, Davis (2004, p. xxv) had argued that the Islamic societies of the North African coast, in reaction to the expulsion of the Moors from Spain, soon set out to settle accounts with Christendom by attacking European merchant shipping, raiding coastal areas, and taking slaves. He further opines that slavery in the Barbary Coast was at its inception a matter of passion and greed:

In Barbary, those who hunted and traded slaves certainly hoped to make a profit, but in their traffic in Christians there was also always an element of revenge, almost of *jihad* -- for the wrongs of 1492, for the centuries of crusading violence that had preceded them, and for the ongoing religious struggle between Christian and Muslim that has continued to roil the Mediterranean world well into modern times. (Davis, 2004, p. xxv)

Davis (2004, p. 17) later subsumes the captives of the Baltimore raid into the category of ideologically- and revenge-motivated slavery in the Barbary Coast states. For him, it is this insistence on vengeance that spurred and characterised Muslim slavery in the Barbary Coast.

Apparently basing their arguments in popular contemporary anti-Muslim views and writings about Islam which have come to the fore since the tragic attack of September 11, 2001, both Ekin (2012) and Davis (2004) view the Baltimore onslaught as part of an age-old systematic Islamist war against Christendom. Since its occurrence, the attack has often been seen in the western world in terms of a long ongoing holy war between the east and the west, Islam and Christianity. Davis (2004) and Ekin (2012) seem to have been impacted by the event and its anti-Muslimism representations in the media. Rather than anchoring their discourse about the Baltimore pirate narrative in the European-Ottoman seventeenth-century background, both authors primarily place it in the context of present-day west and Islam dichotomy in which the raid is conceived as an old example of a long sequence of what they consider Islamic *jihad* or terrorist attacks against the west.

Significant counterarguments to those of Davis (2004) and Ekin (2012) and, more generally, to the prevailing western discourse on old Islamic piracy and slavery, can be seen in Matar (1999) and Murray (2006). Matar provides a different perspective about the realities of exchange between England and the Islamic Mediterranean in the early seventeenth century, maintaining that during this period, the rhetoric of a "holy war" was not restricted to Muslims. In their wars with the Muslim peoples, he argues, the English enacted a discourse of a "holy war" against what they stereotyped as the "infidels" (pp. 12, 13, 16, 153). Nor was the practice of taking slaves confined to Barbary Corsairs for both Christians and Muslims took each other captive and "Britons were involved not only in piracy, but in the slave trade too" (p. 57). Similarly, Murray (2006, p. 15) argues that "slave-raiding as an economic and ideological weapon was not confined to the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire and North Africa. European seafaring powers engaged equally in the taking of Islamic ships and the use of their crews as slave labour".

However, in his poem, Davis does not use the term "*jihad*" or "holy war" as Davis (2004) and Ekin (2012) do. At the time the poem was written, British imperialism had begun to establish its international hegemony and the power of Islam had been declining. So, the poet was perhaps more concerned about an English ferocious colonialism on the rise than an Ottoman power in decline. He was more interested in inspiring his fellow countrymen with the hatred of English rule than in evoking anti-Muslim sentiments. As Moody (1966, p. 21) observes: "The existing connection of Ireland with Britain Davis regarded as fundamentally evil and degrading. He saw England as an egregious example of overbearing imperialism". Apparently reflecting the poet's viewpoint underlying "The Sack of Baltimore", Wallis (1846, p. 115) considers Baltimore an English settlement on native Irish soil as it "grew up round a Castle of O'Driscoll's, and was, after his ruin, colonized by the English". One would, therefore, assume that the moving passion behind the poem was a deep hatred for the English colonisation of Ireland than an anti-Muslim grudge.

Still, Davis appears to be viewing the raiders of Baltimore as Muslim "Algerine" pirates unfairly targeting the peaceful Baltimore community. From a historical viewpoint, Barbary pirates operated from Algiers and owed allegiance to the Dey of Algiers, a ruling official of the Ottoman Empire. Davis does not directly mention either the Ottoman Janissaries, the elite infantry units that formed the Ottoman Sultan's household troops, or the pirates' leader Morat Rais,

“a Dutch convert to Islam with extensive experience in the North Sea” (Murray, 2006, p. 15). But the poem as a whole underlines the devastating role of the Algerian pirates operating under the banner of a Muslim Barbary State that owed a loose allegiance to the Ottoman Empire, thus making the Barbary State of Algiers bear the brunt of responsibility for the destructive attack, a view that has continued since the publication of the poem to the present.

Despite the ferocity of the attack, some of Baltimore’s defenseless inhabitants seem to have put up bold resistance. One man is reported to have forcefully thrown his hand against a shearing sword, while another youth was pierced, and apparently both were slain. Also depicted are a woman defending her child, an old man protecting his grandsons, and a moaning mother embracing her baby:

Then flung the youth his naked hand against the shearing sword
 Then sprung the mother on the brand with which her son was gored;
 Then sunk the grandsire on the floor, his grand-babes clutching wild;
 Then fled the maiden moaning faint, and nestled with the child. (ll. 25-28)

Indeed, the above two acts of heroic resistance may be taken as an allusion to an actual event that happened during the corsairs’ onslaught. Historically speaking, two villagers showed strong resistance and both were killed (Ekin, 2012, p. 17).

A yet more heroic scene is portrayed when a pirate is seen strangled and crushed with blood-splashing heels by a valiant Irish fighter using the assailant’s sword. Amid the great havoc wreaked on Baltimore and its population, when virtue sinks into despair, courage is faltering, and misers are ready to give up their hoardings, this unique incident comes as an appropriate act of vengeance, an impressive display of heroic resistance, and an emblem of national pride. Thus, virtue, courage, pride, and justice are interrelated and work together as basic moral principles where revenge becomes morally justifiable:

But see, yon pirate strangling lies, and crushed with splashing heel,
 While o’er him in an Irish hand there sweeps his Syrian steel;
 Though virtue sink, and courage fail, and misers yield their store,
 There’s one hearth well avenged in the sack of Baltimore! (ll. 29-32)

Undoubtedly, the speaker is keen on evoking strong nationalistic feelings by drawing on a memorable event in Irish history. For Davis, such incident as the sack of Baltimore, sorrowful and regretful though it is, would stir deep passions that can be conducive to various virtues. As he maintains: “To rouse, and soften, and strengthen, and enlarge us with the passions of great periods; to lead us into love of self-denial, of justice, of beauty, of valour, of generous life and proud death ... these are the highest duties of history, and these are best taught by a Ballad History” (qtd. in Mitchel, 1879, pp. 231-232). A man with a passion for truth and justice, Davis contends that the ultimate objective behind a historical ballad is to tell the truth: “One of the essential qualities of a good historical ballad is truth. ... He who goes to write a historical ballad should master the main facts of the time, and state them truly” (qtd. in Mitchel, 1879, p. 236).

Whether the incident of a valiant Irish youth killing an aggressor is factual or not is open for debate. According to Barnby (1969, p. 103), there is no mention in the historical evidence of the Baltimore actual attack that any of the pirates “were killed or even injured”. Thus, Davis’s picture of such incident is “mere poetic licence” (Barnby, 1969, p. 104). However, the question is whether the details of the historical evidence “contained in a letter written from Kinsale within three days of the event” upon which Barnby (1969, p. 102) bases his argument are necessarily true. Regardless of the validity of such evidence, there is no doubt that Davis’ departure from historical facts is intended to make the story more interesting and the poem more effective by rousing Irish nationalistic sentiments. Davis does not take this poetic licence too far and uses it with a minimal amount and it only occurs within the zealous and patriotic style of the whole poem without causing any serious controversy. In fact, Davis’ departure from historical fact is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s frequent utilisation of numerous cases of poetic licence by his intentional departure from his sources to fit a dramatic narrative.

“The Sack of Baltimore” makes no reference to the second phase of the attack. Factually, after capturing most of the inhabitants of the Cove, the fishermen’s residential area, the raiders moved on to the main Baltimore settlement (Barnby, 1969, pp. 118-119; Murray, 2006, pp. 16-17). Ten more captives were taken before the corsairs returned to their anchored ships spiriting with them their booty of more than one hundred men, women, and children. That Davis does not include in the poem a representation of the second phase of the attack should not be surprising. As mentioned earlier, Davis, being a ballad writer and theorist, favoured concentrating on one main dramatic incident. Consequently, it is likely that he wanted the story at the Cove to be the main focus of his interest so as to secure a greater emotional effect.

The remainder of the poem is devoted to the portrayal of the aftermath of the devastating raid. Writing in a typically Victorian poetic style, Davis initially invokes nature as a basic constituent of the thematic structure of his ballad. In the opening lines of the fifth stanza, the natural world is represented as being unwittingly indifferent to human life, an obvious contrast with the conventionally idealistic and benevolent nature of the Romantic age. Unaware of the human tragedy that has occurred overnight, the birds are happily signing their traditional songs: “Midsummer morn, in woodland nigh, the birds begin to sing; / They see not now the milking-maids, deserted is the spring!” (ll. 33-34). It is a desolate and human-deserted post-tragedy place, giving an impression of bleakness that contrasts sharply with the joyfulness of the pre-tragedy atmosphere.

After sacking the seaport settlement and taking captive almost all its population with them, the crews of the two Algerine galleys sailed off Baltimore harbour to Algiers. Following this, a young man from Brandon together with boat hookers from Skull and a skiff from Affadown arrive at the scene, but they find only “smoking walls” sprinkled with the people’s blood. They first walk wildly on the untidy and heavily trodden beach and soon dash to the sea and spot the vanishing pirate galleys five leagues away:

Midsummer morn, this gallant rides from the distant Bandon’s town,
 These hookers crossed from stormy Skull, that skiff from Affadown.
 They only found the smoking walls with neighbors’ blood besprent,
 And on the strewed and trampled beach awhile they wildly went,
 Then dashed to sea, and passed Cape Clear, and saw, five leagues before,
 The pirate-galleys vanishing that ravaged Baltimore. (ll. 35-40)

The excerpt above and the two lines preceding it shed light on Davis’s endeavour to generate deep passions and sympathetic feelings following the sacking of the village and the kidnapping of its populace, thus making the reader more aware of the grievous tragedy that has taken place. Together, they offer a good example of an impassioned text imbued with profound thought. In this respect, it complies with Davis’ own assertion that a ballad must have “strong passions, daring invention, [and] vivid sympathy for great acts” (qtd. in Mitchel, 1879, p. 239).

Speculating in the first half of the fifth stanza on the many fates awaiting the captives, Davis presumes that some of the men would become galley slaves, stable boys, a Bey’s servants / pages to bear their Turkish tobacco pipes and their long javelins. Others might serve in military arsenals or join the caravans across the Arabian deserts.

Oh, some must tug the galley’s oar, and some must tend the steed;
 This boy will bear a Scheik’s chibouk, and that a Bey’s jerreed.
 Oh, some are for the arsenals by beauteous Dardanelles;
 And some are in the caravan to Mecca’s sandy dells. (ll. 41-44)

Exactly what happened to the Baltimore captives after leaving Ireland is still shrouded in mystery and a matter of postulation. In Davis’ poetical narrative, there is no detailed explanation either of the way the abductees were treated on board after the pirates began their long voyage to Algiers or the destiny of the captives and the O’Driscoll’s maid in Algeria. As there are no direct records left of the return journey and its aftermath, several historians including Barnby (1969), Murray (2006), and Ekin (2012), have tried to speculate on the conditions with which the captives had to contend on board ship and on their lot in Algiers.

Drawing upon the accounts left by the Icelandic captivity narratives and contemporary descriptions of similar voyages on Algerine ships, Barnby (1969, pp. 119-120) speculates that only the men captives on board might have been fettered and that there would not have been any cases of molestation (p. 120). Following their arrival in Algiers, the captives would be brought to the *Pasha’s* palace to get his share of the booty before the rest would be exposed for sale on the open market (p. 121). By the same token, Murray (2006, p. 17) reckons a similar view of the captives’ treatment. Ekin, on the other hand, envisions a horrid picture of what life must have been like for the Baltimore captives aboard (p. 12) but he would not imagine any of the women to have been molested during the voyage “(p. 109).

Stating that “no one actually knows the fate of any of the Baltimore captives”, Barnby (1969, p. 122) proceeds to “speculate with some confidence on their fate”. He postulates that the captives would fall under four categories: First, male labourers and women fit for domestic drudgery; second, pages selected as companions to their owners or young women filling the role of concubines; third, rich or skillful captives kept with the hope of being ransomed; and fourth, young boys “purchased as a tribute to Allah” to convert to Islam. Similarly, Murray (2006, pp. 17-18) expects men to have been destined to a brutal life as galley slaves or labourers while most women would have ended up as concubines and the children to be raised as Muslims and ultimately join the slave corps within the Ottoman army.

By contrast, Ekin (2012, p. 12), using parallel experiences of other Irish, English and European captives in Barbary at around the same time, gives a mixed and somewhat self-contradictory picture of the fates awaiting the prisoners. After their “auction”, some of the men would become galley slaves and some labourers working on State Farms (2012, pp. 158-159). Some lucky enslaved men might be treated well by their owners and if a slave converted to Islam, he could be given his freedom (p. 163). The younger and more attractive women would be destined as concubines/courtesans and the older ones as domestic servants. Some would have ended up in the Pasha’s harem, and some would have been sent to the Ottoman Sultan in Constantinople (2012, pp. 165, 179). The majority of the children would have become page boys and spear carriers and would be highly prized once they converted to Islam (p. 185). The girls could be put to work as maidservants or purchased and raised by investors (p. 187). Ekin eventually proclaims that “it was possible for a child captive in Barbary not only to survive and to live well, but even to rise to the highest positions” (p. 188).

A common denominator among the above mentioned speculations on the fates of the Baltimore captives and those of Davis in the aforementioned sixth stanza is their general agreement on the prospective fates that the captives would have been destined for and not all of them unpleasant. Both sides speculate that some men prisoners were destined for the galleys, as labourers or as pages while women would serve as concubines or domestic servants and those young men who converted to Islam would settle well into their new environment. By and large, major discrepancies are relatively few and are discussed or referred to in due course throughout the discussion.

In the second half of the sixth stanza, Davis postulates that the unfortunate O'Driscoll's maid whom the "gallant" from Brandon desired to marry would be selected by the governing Bey/Dey in Algiers to join his harem. He further imagines that she died a heroic death after stabbing to death the Algerine Dey in the midst of his harem. O'Driscoll, David posits, was not afraid to die a death by fire (an execution method involving exposure to extreme heat) and chose to kill the Algerine Governor, and nobly fell, pleased with her death:

The maid that Bandon gallant sought is chosen for the Dey,
She's safe,—she's dead,—she stabbed him in the midst of his Serai;
And when to die a death of fire that noble maid they bore,
She only smiled, O'Driscoll's child; she thought of Baltimore. (ll. 45-48)

The speculation that O'Driscoll would end up as one of the Dey's harem looks to be true. All historical reports maintain that attractive young women from Baltimore were selected as concubines by rich and powerful men. Supposedly, this Irish girl had the boldness and courage to stab her captor presumably to prevent her ravishment and thereby save her own personal and national dignity. Whether the stabbing incident is real or fictional, it cannot be definitively ascertained. However, according to some historical sources, this story was pure fiction as there is no record of a concubine ever stabbed by an Algiers ruler (Barnby, 1969, p. 104; Ekin, 2012, p. 166).

If the whole story is purely fictional, it can still be argued that Davis is using it as part of his avid attempt to promote Irish nationalism and, with it, Irish heroism and self-sacrifice. The fact that "The Sack of Baltimore" was first published in the *Nation* whose declared objective was to foster Irish national spirit "by all aids, which literary as well as political talent could bring to its advocacy" (Wallis, 1846, p. xii), which indicates that for Davis, poetry was an active means of inspiring and recreating Ireland. As Brooke and Rolleston (1900, p. xi) aptly point out, Davis and other poets of *the Nation* newspaper "united literature to their politics and civic morality to literature". So, Davis is here utilising yet another instance of poetic licence as a means of uniting the people of Ireland for the freedom and national independence of their country.

All through the poem, Davis has been speaking of Irish rather than English or British nationals even though the greatest majority of Baltimore's population at the time was not Irish but English settlers who took over land that was once the property of the Irish O'Driscoll clan. The fact is that a lease for twenty-one years for the town of Baltimore had been sold by the Irish Sir Fineen O'Driscoll to the English colonist Thomas Crooke who used it to establish an English settlement, an act which led most of the local Irish inhabitants of the town to leave (Barnby, 1969, p. 106). To achieve his nationalistic objectives, Davis bypasses this astonishing historical fact while simultaneously keeping his discourse untinted by Irish party politics or Protestant-Catholic sectarianism. Like he did with the aforementioned valiant Irish fighter and the Odriscoll's maid episodes, Davis is employing Irish history to promote his own conception of Irish cultural nationalism. Moody (1966, p. 19) convincingly argues that many of Davis' poems "were written not to express his own soul but to inform and inspire the souls of the people of Ireland". As a revolutionary Irish patriot, politician, and chief founder and editor of *the Nation*, Davis supported nineteenth-century Irish nationalism and independence from Britain, using the newspaper as well as his poems as a vehicle for promoting an Irish cultural identity separate from that of Britain.

In the last stanza, the speaker narrates a historical event revolving around John Hackett, an Irish fisherman who was, two years after the raid, tried for treason, convicted, and hanged on a clifftop overlooking Baltimore bay. Davis depicts a large crowd of people who have gathered on the heavily trodden beach of the deserted village to watch Hackett being hanged for conspiracy. Hackett, he says, died deservedly without any adequate passing prayers for he was a traitor. Davis, perhaps inspired by some popular stories, compares the convict to Diarmuid MacMurrough, the one who brought the Anglo-Norman invasion into Ireland in the twelfth century and Judas Iscariot, the man who betrayed Jesus:

'T is two long years since sunk the town beneath that bloody band,
And all around its trampled hearth a larger concourse stand,
Where high upon a gallows-tree a yelling wretch is seen,—
'T is Hackett of Dungarvan,—he who steered the Algerine!
He fell amid a sullen shout, with scarce a passing prayer,
For he had slain the kith and kin of many a hundred there:
Some muttered of MacMorrogh, who had brought the Norman o'er,
Some cursed him with Iscariot, that day in Baltimore. (ll. 49-56)

The comparison of Hackett to Demot MacMurrough highlights Hackett's notorious image as a treacherous collaborator who piloted the corsairs to Baltimore to save his life. MacMurrough has for long been blamed for facilitating the invasion and subsequent conquest of Ireland by outside powers in the twelfth century. This comparison is further enhanced by the analogy drawn between John Hackett and the biblical Judas Iscariot, a controversial disciple of Jesus who finally betrayed and handed him over to his enemies for material gain.

However, there is no mention here of the motives behind Hackett's alleged betrayal. Historians mention different motives for Hackett. For instance, Webb (2020, p. 73) explains that after Hackett had been captured by the pirates, he was afraid he would be taken captive to Barbary. To save his life, he struck a deal with his captors. In return for his freedom, he would pilot them to a small village where they could capture as many victims as they pleased. Barnby (1967, p. 116), by contrast, opines that "probably the major reason why John Hackett suggested Baltimore was that it

was a comparatively new English Protestant plantation". Barnby's statement is thought-provoking as it would make us wonder whether or not Hackett had some political motives behind his suggestion.

Still, Davis' version of the Hackett story has been partially contested by more than one historical source. Both Barnby (1969, p. 104) and Ekin (2012, p. 191) affirm that Davis' timing of the execution of Hackett was inaccurate for Hackett was hanged within eight months of the raid and not two years later. Ekin (2012) also differs with Davis over his handling of the event. Though Davis, apparently depending on hearsay, sees Hackett as an accomplice to the catastrophic attack, Ekin (2012, p. 191) speaks of a Hackett conspiracy which he deems to have been used as a cover-up for the failure of the British officers in charge of guarding the southern Irish coast to do their duties.

With such departures, together with the aforementioned ones, from the well-established historical versions of the story, it seems likely that Davis might have based his narrative about Hackett's treachery on a largely popularized version or on oral tradition. It may sound tempting, therefore, to concur with Barnby's (1970, p. 27) statement that "Davis composed his poem two hundred years after the raid and few of his facts agree with those preserved in the Public Records" and with Ekin's (2012, p. 192) assertion that Davis was using some "oral history [not historical records] as the basis for the climax of his poem". However, Davis was writing poetry rather than history and each of them has its own unique conventions and rules. Despite any such discrepancies or departures, Davis' stirring ballad has become not only one of the main historical and literary sources on the story of Baltimore but also a poem that has indisputably immortalized this unique event.

IV. CONCLUSION

Davis' "The Sack of Baltimore" is a highly accomplished literary work that utilises an early seventeenth-century historical event in Ireland for its subject and theme/s. Deploying the techniques of ballad writing, the poet delineates a vivid and moving picture of a horrendous pirate attack that resulted in the kidnapping and ultimate enslavement of the whole civil population of the Irish fishing village of Baltimore. The epoch in which the event happened had witnessed antagonistic relations between Christendom and Islamdom when piracy was a common practice from both sides. The raid is explicitly and solely attributed to Muslim pirates operating from the Barbary State of Algiers loosely attached to the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, it was the Dutch Renegado Morat Rais who masterminded and led the piratical expedition which was a composite force of Algerians, Turks, and some European converts to Islam.

Written in the middle of the nineteenth century, Davis' ballad witnessed the birth of a new era in east-west relations when the Muslim Turkey weakened and Europe, particularly Britain, began to rise rapidly. This situation led to the emergence of a robust discourse of Orientalism that seems to have impacted "The Sack of Baltimore". A combination of literary analysis and historical investigation perspective indicates that Davis drew on a medley of historical facts, oral tradition, fiction, and imagination to portray the Baltimore tragic raid on which he takes a moral stance and which he indefatigably utilises as a means of reviving Irish history to bolster the national unity and political independence of Ireland.

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