



PROJECT MUSE®

Edward Said and Irish Criticism

Conor McCarthy

Éire-Ireland, Volume 42:1&2, Earrach/Samhradh / Spring/Summer 2007,
pp. 311-335 (Article)

Published by Irish-American Cultural Institute

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.2007.0021>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/216058>

The work of Edward Said has been influential on a global scale, in a manner that very few scholars can ever hope to match. It can safely be asserted that no anti-imperialist writer since Frantz Fanon has successfully addressed so many audiences. This essay traces the response to Said's work, including but not only his most famous work, *Orientalism*, in Irish criticism and debates over the last three decades. We will see, in the work of Said's allies and emulators, and that of his detractors, a number of variations, turns, adaptations, and inflections on Said's own books and essays. Surveying the archive of responses to Said is valuable in itself, but it also provides a barometer of Irish intellectual engagement with wider international geo-political issues and historical shifts.

BEGINNINGS: *WRITING IRELAND*

Said published *Orientalism* in 1978, but it is difficult to judge his influence in Irish debates for nearly a decade after. As Joe Cleary points out, the problematic of language, power, territory, and knowledge brooded over by the various initiatives of the Field Day Theatre Company—from Brian Friel's *Translations* to Seamus Deane's and Declan Kiberd's Field Day pamphlets—is one that has been important for later more explicit postcolonial studies, but one can also recognize the similarities between this work and the matters

explored in *Orientalism*.¹ Nevertheless, it was not until after Said himself had spoken at the Yeats Summer School in 1986, at Kiberd's invitation, that the issue began to be pressed with clarity and force. Accordingly, 1988 was an important year in the genealogy of Said's work in Ireland. This year witnessed not only the publication of David Cairns and Shaun Richards's *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture*, but also Said's own Field Day pamphlet, *Yeats and Decolonization*.

Cairns and Richards's book is notable in a number of respects. Of all the work influenced by Said in the context of Irish cultural and literary studies, it is the most explicit and the most striking in its emulation. It is also the most ambitious: in a tightly written 178 pages, Cairns and Richards examine literature representing Ireland and Irish Anglophone literature from Shakespeare and Spenser right up to the Northern crisis and writers such as Seamus Heaney and Brian Friel. *Writing Ireland* appeared in a series edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, entitled "Cultural Politics," and can be seen as representative of the post-Williamsite "Cultural Materialism" that emerged in Britain in parallel and collaboration with the American "New Historicism." Merely this attachment of Irish materials and of Irish criticism to wider international currents of scholarship and criticism makes *Writing Ireland* a landmark work.

Cairns and Richards begin their book with a straight acknowledgment of the problematic with which they are working: ". . . the reality of the historic relationship of Ireland with England: a relationship of the colonized and the colonizer." They move on immediately to declare that "[I]n this study, our foremost concern is with the ways in which the making and re-making of the identities of colonized and colonizer have been inflected by this relationship; a process that has taken place through discourse."²

Already, then, Cairns and Richards have set up a framework and indicated a theoretical allegiance. That fidelity is to Foucault and the concept of discourse, but shortly afterward, they invoke Antonio

1. Joe Cleary, "'Misplaced Ideas'?: Colonialism, Location and Dislocation in Clare Carroll and Patricia King, eds., *Irish Studies*" in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), 16.

2. David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 1.

Gramsci, and his analyses of hegemony and intellectuals: at this point, one recognizes the Saidian combination of Foucault and Gramsci in *Orientalism*. To this mix, Cairns and Richards also add Louis Althusser and his conception of ideology and the interpellation of the subject. Briefly, Cairns and Richards argue with Gramsci that political struggle, particularly anticolonial struggle, takes place in the realm of ideas and ideological leadership as much as it does in the realm of material or physical combat or production. What is necessary for colonial power to be overthrown is the creation of a “counter-hegemony,” to block, thwart, and replace the ideological domination of the colonizer. The elaboration of such a counter-hegemony is the task of organic intellectuals. This work takes place in, among other places, the discourses of culture: Cairns and Richards marry the Althusserian idea of interpellation with the Foucauldian concept of discourse. Accordingly, they conclude that discourses constitute subjects, and that “cultural politics” consists in a constant Homeric struggle between discursive formations that seek to create new forms of subjectivity and thereby to exercise hegemony over socio-political blocs.

Cairns and Richards go on to offer an extremely interesting narrative of Irish cultural history that necessarily concentrates on intellectuals, both “creative” and critical. The strength of their approach lies in this stress on intellectuals, which usefully promotes a de-Romanticized model of literary history, pointing up the linkages between writers and political and social movements, and opening up the ways that critical-analytical writing so often prepares the grounds for aesthetic work. However, it is important to note ways that Cairns’s and Richards’s work is similar to and different from Said’s. If *Orientalism* was, for Said, the modes of knowledge-production and writing by which Europe came to know the Middle East, then it is also a truism to point out how Said in his book never deals with how “Orientals” have replied to such work. Said’s understandable answer to this charge is that this was never his concern, which was rather the regularities and variations with which the West took on this activity—of course, his book was itself just such a reply. By comparison, Cairns and Richards take relatively little interest in the welter of British writing from the early modern period to the present concerned with understanding, ruling, regulating, and devel-

oping Ireland, as expressed in high literature, mass culture, or socio-political documents, though they steal a march over Said in tackling precisely the matter of colonized subjects “writing back” against the metropolis.

The other point that needs to be made here is that Cairns and Richards appear to adapt, either without reflection or without concern, the combination of humanism and anti-humanism evident in Said’s *Orientalism*. This can be figured in a number of ways, but the most obvious is the deployment of the ideas of both Gramsci and Foucault. Said himself says straightforwardly that, “unlike Michel Foucault,” he believes “in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism.”³ However, Cairns and Richards do not make any such clarifying statement (leaving aside the complications this position makes for Said himself) but make extensive use of Gramsci’s ideas about intellectuals, and their work in elaborating hegemonies and counter-hegemonies. This is predicated on a model of the subject, of agency and history sharply at variance either with Foucault, or indeed Althusser, whom Cairns and Richards also deploy.

Though this is a contradiction that Cairns and Richards do not address explicitly, the evidence of their book is of their favoring the Gramscian conception of human history. Repeatedly, whether dealing with early modern Ireland, or with Sir Samuel Ferguson, or with the Young Ireland writers, or with the Literary Revivalists, they stress the agency of writers and activists in making and shaping discourses, with a view to influencing the subjectivity, and hence the political and aesthetic ideas, of others. Much like Said as he writes about Orientalism and Orientalists, Cairns and Richards wish to stress the discursive politics of Irish writers and writing. The idea of discourse also powerfully allows them to discuss literary and non-literary texts side by side, and to provide a thick description of cultural context. The Gramscian model allows Cairns and Richards to reformulate the Irish literary tradition not as a long line of conventional writerly influence, but as a proliferating series of literary-ideological struggles for hegemony, where movements do not simply supersede

3. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 23.

each other but are pushed aside, countermanded, or assimilated, and where literary movements are always closely integrated with wider socio-political trends. Furthermore, Cairns and Richards's use of the Saidian Gramsci moves them into the realm of William-site (and Saidian) "cultural materialism," or a materialist culturalism, which results in a much stronger sense of the true historicity of the texts they discuss.⁴

The result overall is a resolutely and impressively de-idealized version of Irish literary history, where writers come into the greatest relief in the context of their activism and proximity to the major Irish cultural-political struggles of the day. More problematically, figures whose principal contributions were conducted beyond Ireland, such as Swift, Burke, Edgeworth, Moore, Shaw, Wilde, and Beckett, fall outside the purview of the book. Equally worryingly, the novelistic tradition from Morgan to Banville is scarcely discussed at all. The aesthetic heroics of Modernism can be assimilated to the narrative in the case of Yeats, but markedly less so with the tenaciously independent and exiled Joyce. The focus on intellectuals weaves criticism and literature together in a refreshing and unusual way, but it gives a hidden emphasis to writers who reflected explicitly on their work and their positions.

Writing Ireland is a very important book, one whose ambition and reach has still rarely been matched. It is one of a cluster of notable critical studies on Irish culture and literary history that appeared in the late 1980s that were significant for their theoretical power and self-consciousness: Seamus Deane's *Celtic Revivals* (1985), WJ McCormack's *Ascendancy and Tradition in Anglo-Irish Literary History from 1789 to 1939* (1985), David Lloyd's *Nationalism and Minor Literature* (1987), and Richard Kearney's *Transitions* (1988). And yet the explicit theoretical model espoused by Cairns and Richards has not been much emulated by later critics and scholars.

4. "Cultural materialism" is not a term usually associated with Said, but see his essay "Reflections on American 'Left' Literary Criticism," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London: Faber, 1984), 177.

SAID AND YEATS

Said's pamphlet *Yeats and Decolonization* is representative of the work that Said had begun to do on culture and imperialism in the wake of the publication and reception of *Orientalism*. It partakes of a number of changes and adjustments in Said's work since the earlier book. At the time, along with Cairns and Richards's work, it constituted the most forceful and explicit incorporation yet of Irish literary and cultural debates into the contemporary postcolonial trend. After Said's pamphlet and his talk in Sligo, it became much harder for Irish scholars to ignore the postcolonial challenge to Irish literary history.

Said discusses Yeats as a poet not only of Modernism but of decolonization, and accordingly locates Yeats in a pantheon where many Irish and Anglo-American scholars would not recognize him: along with Pablo Neruda, Aime Cesaire, Mahmoud Darwish, Rabindrinath Tagore. An important part of Said's argument is about Yeats's relationship to territory, and this is notable in relation to his critical interests.

Geography and space have long been important elements in Said's work. From his earliest sense of Conrad's writing as a dramatization of intellectual and writerly consciousness as an event, to late work on the landscape of Palestine, Said has been interested in the relationship of culture to space. Through this long trajectory, Said's conception of cultural geography became more materialist, though oddly he did not engage substantially with the major flowering of Marxist and neo-Marxist political-cultural geography of the last quarter century. Nevertheless, it is this more materialist geography that is at play in *Yeats and Decolonization*, and that would appear subsequently in *Culture and Imperialism*. Working on the premise that "the imagination of anti-imperialism" is distinguished by "the primacy of the geographical," Said deploys the work of Alfred Crosby, Ranajit Guha, and Neil Smith to show how colonialism transforms the territory it acquires—ecologically, legally, and via "the differentiation of national space according to the territorial division of labour." Resistance to empire requires the mapping or invention of a new space or nature, neither mythical nor overshadowed by the "*morte main*" of colonialism, "which derives historically

and abductively from the deprivations of the present.”⁵ For Said, this is a *cartographic* impulse, and he argues that much of Yeats’s early poetry is involved in this re-imagining of the national territory.

In his pamphlet, Said also enters a dialogue with Seamus Deane, specifically with Deane’s important essay, “Yeats and the Idea of Revolution.” In his essay, published originally in 1982, Deane argued that Yeats’s work could be reckoned revolutionary precisely because he saw in Ireland a repository of tradition resistant to the rush of capitalist modernity. As Deane put it, “[W]ith Yeats, to be traditionalist in the modern world was to be revolutionary.”⁶ Said adds to this by suggesting that Yeats’s attitude to tradition can be categorized as “nativism,” and he compares Yeats therefore to such figures as Leopold Senghor and Wole Soyinka, and their work to disinter an apparently precolonial and therefore unsullied past with which to equip their decolonizing peoples. Said is keen to use the Yeatsian example as a fulcrum around which to construct a critique of nativism. Concerned that Deane is too inclined to construe Yeats’s traditionalism as actually revolutionary and leave the matter there, Said wishes to remind his reader that “nativism is not the only alternative”:

[T]o accept nativism is to accept the consequences of imperialism too willingly; to accept the very radical religious and political divisions imposed on Ireland, India, Lebanon and Palestine by imperialism itself. To leave the historical world for the metaphysics of essences like negritude, Irishness, Islam and Catholicism is, in a word, to abandon history.⁷

Rather, Said wishes to affiliate Yeats with what he calls the “liberationist” phase—following on the nationalist phase—of anti-imperial resistance. Said is here taking his vocabulary from Frantz Fanon, who in *The Wretched of the Earth* argued powerfully that national independence in the decolonizing countries that was not immediately followed by social and economic liberation would not have

5. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature: Yeats and Decolonization* (Derry: Field Day, 1988), 10–12.

6. Seamus Deane, “Yeats and the Idea of Revolution,” in *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880–1980* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 49.

7. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, 15.

been worth the struggle.⁸ As Said writes, liberation involves a transformation of social consciousness beyond national consciousness. Underlying Said's critical conversation with Deane, however, is the ongoing argument about Yeats's fascism. Said, and to a rather lesser extent Deane, scour Yeats's work—populated by heroes (mythical, artistic, political), contemptuous of the masses, freighted with an essentialist idea of national character, hostile to modernity—for a redemptive political reading. In this they are debating the work of a number of critics, most notably Conor Cruise O'Brien.⁹ It may not be merely reductive to see in this quarrel a local eddy of wider currents of debate stemming from 1960s radical politics and anti-imperialism: Deane and Said have clashed with O'Brien on a number of occasions and on a number of topics, mostly connected with national liberation movements and empire. It is noteworthy that O'Brien published his critique of Yeats *before* his own disenchantment with Third World liberation movements and his move toward the political Right, and that left-wing critics like Deane and Said argue strenuously to recuperate the authoritarian Yeats. In 1985, in an essay on Edmund Burke, Deane had compared O'Brien's ambivalences on the Northern Ireland war to those of Burke in regard to Ireland and those of Camus in regard to Algeria.¹⁰ In 1986, at a symposium on "Intellectuals in the Postcolonial World" at Swarthmore College, Said and O'Brien clashed bitterly over the putative critiques of colonialism offered by Conrad, Camus and Naipaul.¹¹ Said critiqued

8. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 163–65.

9. Conor Cruise O'Brien, "Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W.B. Yeats," in A.N. Jeffares and K.G.W. Cross, eds., *In Excited Reverie: A Centenary Tribute to William Butler Yeats 1865–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1965), 207–78; see also Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (London: Macmillan, 1981). For more recent contributions to this debate, see David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Postcolonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993); W.J. McCormack, *From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy, Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994); and W.J. McCormack, *Blood Kindred: The Politics of WB Yeats and his Death* (London: Pimlico, 2005).

10. Seamus Deane, "Edmund Burke and the Ideology of Irish Liberalism," in Richard Kearney, ed., *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1985), 149.

11. See Said, "Intellectuals in the Postcolonial World," *Salmagundi* 70/71 (Spring–Summer 1986): 44–81.

O'Brien's reading of Camus in his Raymond Williams Memorial Lecture in 1989, and again in *Culture and Imperialism*.

For Said, the crucial problematic pondered by Yeats is that figured in "Leda and the Swan": the question "did she put on his knowledge with his power/Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?" For Said, this relationship of authority, violence, power, and knowledge is the crucial characteristic of Yeats's poetry, while also prefiguring matters treated of by Fanon. In this poem, Said reads a metaphor of the colonial relationship, and the questions it provokes: did the colonized benefit from colonization, no matter how violent the structure of the relationship? What kind of knowledge came with this relationship? What are its legacies in the future? Although it may be clear that "Yeats's poetry joins his people to its history," one also notes the fact that in Said's formulation, agency is with the national poet, not the people, and they are yoked to "their history" whether they wish it or not. Even as Said wishes to find in Yeats a resource for anti-imperialism, his language is still couched in a somewhat authoritarian mode. Said's case, that it is this theoretical aspect of Yeats that makes the Irish poet a figure of global decolonizing significance, is not quite free of the politics it wishes to disavow.

THE CRITIQUE OF NATIONALISM: COLIN GRAHAM

The Irish reaction to Said's work became much stronger by the time he published the book of which *Yeats and Decolonization* was a part, *Culture and Imperialism*. One notable response was that of Colin Graham, who through the 1990s, produced a series of articles and reviews, mostly in the *Irish Review*, where he took the pressure of postcolonial theory but tried to reinflect it in new directions. Graham's work represents the most formidable Irish effort yet both to appropriate the work of Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, although also to domesticate it and neutralize its perceived political charge.

Reviewing *Culture and Imperialism* in 1994, Graham welcomes Said's attempts to move beyond the binary opposition of nationalism and imperialism, his rejection of national "essences," and his desire to avoid the "politics of blame." But Graham argues that Said, in his use of Irish material, ultimately fails in these laudable projects: "And yet it is in the area of Irish literature that Said's book

falls flat and denies itself the forward-looking possibilities it initially establishes.”¹² For Graham, the fundamental problem with Said’s view of Ireland is as follows:

Basic to the problems inherent in Said’s notion of Ireland’s place in the post-colonial world is his unquestioned assumption that Ireland was colonised and decolonised *in the same way* as all other nations which have been formed from the demise of the British Empire (and those other nations too may find Said’s all-embracing model problematic) [emphasis in original].¹³

Repeatedly, according to Graham, Said betrays his early wish to repudiate binarisms, and, crucially for Graham, binary nationalities, such as Irish and English. Graham notes with irritation Said’s description of Yeats as Ireland’s “indisputably great *national* poet” (Graham’s emphasis), and sees Said’s description of Joyce as “the Irish writer colonised by the British” while portraying *Ulysses* as a European novel able to admit of the presence of the “Other” as “paradoxical.” The problem for Graham, then, is that “Said’s basic cultural unit of understanding, despite his book’s early distanced stance from the concept of nationhood as culturally defining, turns out to be the nation.”¹⁴

Graham’s preoccupations here are with the nation and its discontents. It is apparent that “postcolonial theory,” for him, is adequate chiefly to the extent that it offers a strong critique of the nation. Even in terms of the nation and its cognates—nationality, nationalism, nationhood—Graham does not seem to be willing to concede that these terms or categories might be internally complex. Accordingly, he bristles at the idea of Yeats being described as Ireland’s “indisputably great national poet,” since for Graham all nations and nationalisms are essentialist, and to that extent regressive, formations. Yet this elides distinctions made in the modern scholarship between ethnic and civic nationalisms, or cultural nationalism and political nationalism.

12. Colin Graham, “Anomalous Theory,” *The Irish Review* 15 (Spring 1994): 117–123, 118.

13. *Ibid.*, 118.

14. *Ibid.*, 119.

Graham's own preferences are more apparent when he discusses Said's writing on Joyce and also on Kipling's *Kim*. He is interested in Said's definition of Kim as a "liminal" character, and this allows him to deploy a vocabulary of "ambiguity," "paradox," and "flexibility." This is the critical language of Homi Bhabha, who, along with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Graham describes as "post-Saidian." Graham concludes that

There is something vaguely nostalgic about Said's book, stuck as it is with arguments that have since been refuted, made more complex or left behind. And the most depressing aspect of *Culture and Imperialism* is Said's final willingness to unhitch his attachment to the concept of the nation as a saving, rather than constricting, entity.¹⁵

There are several elements in this paragraph worth noting. First is the implicit Whig narrative of postcolonial theorizing it assumes. Second is the negative value automatically attached to "nostalgia." Third is the unargued assumption, here as elsewhere, that the nation is a "constricting" entity. Graham does not allow that Said was uninterested in pursuing critical avant-gardism for its own sake, and that therefore there might be purpose to the "nostalgic" tone of *Culture and Imperialism*. Though Said rarely describes what he is doing in this book as "postcolonial criticism"—the term he prefers is "contrapuntal criticism"—Graham does not pause to think that perhaps *Culture and Imperialism* is *not* a work of "postcolonial criticism," conventionally defined. Here, it seems, Graham's own reluctance to prize apart what he means by "postcolonial criticism" catches up on him, as he appears to have little to say about Said's methods, or his relationship to philology or comparative literature, or his interest in geography, to mention only a couple of points of interest in the book.

In an essay published in the same year as the review referred to above, "'Liminal Spaces': Post-Colonial Theories and Irish Culture," Graham discusses the broad applicability of "postcolonial theory" to the Irish context. He distinguishes between writers such as Fanon and Said, on the one hand, who are held to have retained a loyalty to nationalism, and those such as Bhabha and the Subaltern

15. Ibid., 120.

Studies group, who he reckons have moved analysis beyond the antinomies of nationalism and imperialism, and toward the ambivalences, neuroses, and interstitial spaces at the heart of imperial power. However, he still finds time to criticize Said for the “glaring” description of Yeats as “Ireland’s national poet” in *Culture and Imperialism*, and for Said’s alleged tendency to turn “continually to Deane as the best authority on Yeats.”¹⁶ Graham suggests that the weakness in Deane’s position is his tendency, like Said, to offer a critique of nationalism while being unable to put anything in its place. But one might say that Graham’s real purpose is to measure Deane’s work against the possibilities for a harsh critique of nationalism he reckons exists in the work of the Subaltern Studies collective, and other postcolonial critics he suggests have superseded Said. Yet Graham himself reads Guha’s Subaltern manifesto “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India” in a tendentious manner, taking the suggestion that the Indian nation has failed “to come to its own” as an insistence “that nationalism *per se* is restrictive, over-homogenizing and repressive.”¹⁷ This is fundamentally to distort Guha, whose intention was that the stress on the subaltern would function “as a measure of objective assessment of the role of the elite and as a critique of elitist interpretations of that role.”¹⁸ For Guha, the failing of élitist historiography was that it could not recognize a “politics of the people” and “it is the study of this failure which constitutes the central problematic of Indian historiography.”¹⁹ But Graham does not refer to the generational and intellectual shifts that have taken place within the Subaltern Studies project, and elides the early Marxist work (inspired methodologically by Gramsci and EP Thompson but politically also by Fanon) with its critique of the class assumptions of both British colonial and Indian bourgeois-nationalist historiography, and the later poststructuralist work that rejects nations and nationalism wholesale.

16. Colin Graham, “Liminal Spaces’: Post-Colonial Theories and Irish Culture,” *The Irish Review* 16 (Autumn/Winter 1994): 29–43, 32.

17. Graham, “Liminal Spaces,” 37; Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 43.

18. Guha and Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies*, 35.

19. *Ibid.*, 40, 43.

It is easy to see that Graham and Said write from very different geographical, historical, and political positions, and that this inflects their attitudes to nationalism. Said's ambivalence about nationalism stemmed largely from his status as an exiled Palestinian, whose very national existence was denied by his adopted home of the United States, and by the Zionist state of Israel which has erased historical Palestine. Said recognized the risk of an essentialist political project for Palestinian nationalism; the problem was that Zionism opposes the Palestinians on precisely ethnic-national grounds, and this determines the terrain of the anti-Zionist struggle to which Said contributed throughout his career. Graham writes against the background of the Northern Ireland conflict, which can be construed as a struggle between rival Irish and British nationalisms. Graham writes in the context of a slowly but definitely gestating "peace process," which has since issued in a consociational power-sharing political settlement, which will go some way toward institutionalizing nationalist entitlement to political power in Northern Ireland. Said witnessed no such structure in Israel/Palestine in his lifetime. In Graham's context, an intellectual strategy of deconstructing national identities is a radical gesture; Said felt no such freedom to move beyond nationalism.²⁰

"ANTICIPATORY ILLUMINATION": DECLAN KIBERD

In 1995, Declan Kiberd published his massive *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*.²¹ This major book heralded the arrival of postcolonial literary analysis in the Irish public sphere, for Kiberd published with a commercial press, and his book has been a bestseller ever since. More substantially, the book marked a shift in Kiberd's own thought, one that can be almost certainly attributed in

20. Graham elaborated further on his views of nationalism in debate with Gerry Smyth: see Graham, "Post-Nationalism/Post-Colonialism: Reading Irish Culture," *Irish Studies Review* 8 (Autumn 1994): 35–37; Gerry Smyth, "The Past, the Post, and the Utterly Changed: Intellectual Responsibility and Irish Cultural Criticism," *Irish Studies Review* 10 (Spring 1995): 25–29; and Graham, "Rejoinder: The Irish 'Post-?' A reply to Gerry Smyth," *Irish Studies Review* 13 (Winter 1995/96): 33–36.

21. Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995).

part to Said's pamphlet. Although working with the framework of postcoloniality, Kiberd had been associated during the 1980s with a severe critique of the legacy of Yeats in Irish literature and society. In *The Crane Bag* in 1984, he had argued that the theory of history and society implicit in Yeats had set up a mythical and authoritarian template for Irish self-understanding—"a kind of tourist's film set."²² In his 1988 essay "The War Against the Past," he had charged Yeats with seeing "in sacrifice not the highest price a man may pay to assert his self, but an end in itself." The wider point was that Yeats had both created and endorsed an "abusable" tradition that was ultimately stifling.²³ This view of Yeats's historiography was comparable to that of Seamus Deane, when he argued that Yeats had created a mythology of the Anglo-Irish, with their great houses and great intellectuals, into which he could insert himself; and also his excoriating critique of Yeats's "pathology of literary unionism."²⁴

With *Inventing Ireland*, however, Kiberd had changed his attitude, and it is reasonable to suggest that Yeats, along with J.M. Synge, is the artistic-intellectual hero of this book. In accordance with Said's positions in *Yeats and Decolonization*, Kiberd now sees Yeats and Synge as writers capable of mobilizing a progressive dialectic between past and present, with a view to moving into a better future. Like Said, Kiberd affiliates Yeats with the Fanonian idea of liberation. Shaun Richards, reviewing *Inventing Ireland* with intelligence and sympathy in 1997, shrewdly makes a linkage here between Kiberd's Fanon-inflected postcolonialism, and his emerging interest in Walter Benjamin and also Ernst Bloch. Noting that Kiberd's discussions of the contemporary scene appear to be somewhat thin and rushed, Richards suggests that this is partly because for Kiberd, Yeats and Synge are still *the* exemplars of artistic practice, creating a version of the past that is "endlessly open" to the future.²⁵ Kiberd detects in

22. Kiberd, "Inventing Irelands," *The Crane Bag* 8:1 (1984): 11–25, 11–12.

23. Kiberd, "The War Against the Past," in his *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 158–90.

24. Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880–1980* (London: Faber, 1985), 28–37; and Deane's "Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea," in Field Day Theatre Company, *Ireland's Field Day* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 50.

25. Shaun Richards, "Starting Bloch," *Bullán* 3:1 (Spring 1997): 93–96.

Yeats the potential for “anticipatory illumination,” an unattributed term from the vocabulary of Bloch which leads to a utopian reading. Overall, Kiberd’s point is that the great writers of the Revival offer hope for the future in a way that the mediocre national bourgeoisie has failed to achieve.

Kiberd, then, may be said not only to pick up the positive decolonizing reading of Yeats from Said, but actually to push that reading further. In Kiberd’s hands, Yeats not only partakes of the decolonizing moment of his own lifetime but, also, in a somewhat Benjaminian manner, offers a past freighted with the potential for liberation in the future.

ELECTIVE AFFINITIES: SAID AND DEANE

The most powerful and nuanced Irish response to Said’s work has come, in fact, latest. Since the 1990s, Seamus Deane has published three substantial essays on Said that constitute the most considered and subtle Irish confrontation with his work. Notably, Deane does not restrict his reading of Said to a strictly “postcolonial” one. More than most of Said’s Irish readers, Deane takes a full measure of the *oeuvre*—Said’s humanism, his relationship to the Western Marxist tradition, his interest in music, his interest in intellectuals, and his Palestinian background.

In “The Pathos of Distance: Edward Said and the Intellectual Class,” Deane begins with Said’s essay on Swift as intellectual—one of two essays on Swift mostly neglected by Irish critics.²⁶ Deane is interested in the patterns of both proximity and distance that he reckons, and Said argues, constitute the terrain of operation of the intellectual. In Swift, Burke, Joyce, and in Yeats, Deane finds elaborated the antinomian drama of distance and intimacy that Said named *filiation* and *affiliation*.²⁷ Noting that this problematic received a formidable working-out in Burke’s attack on Rousseau and the

26. Seamus Deane, “The Pathos of Distance: Edward Said and the Intellectual Class,” *Suitcase: A Journal of Transcultural Traffic* 2:1 and 2 (1997): 44–55; Declan Kiberd in his *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000) is an exception to this neglect.

27. Deane, *Pathos*, 48; for Said on filiation and affiliation, see *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London: Faber, 1984), 16–25.

philosophes—for their rationalist distance from the real world of flesh and sentiment—Deane wishes to argue that in Said the matter is made the foundation for a new regime of discursivity.²⁸ For Said, filiation is the natal or originary relationship between a writer or intellectual, and his setting or culture; affiliation is a relationship that is not given but forged by association and work. In Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, in particular, Deane finds a brilliant resolution of this problem, in the manner in which Stephen appropriates from the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity the idea that the Son is “consubstantial” with the Father, and to that extent, self-made. Deane notes that in Yeats’s play *The Words upon the Window-pane*, Swift “is represented as a voice screaming through someone else’s mouth,” and then notes that the “cognate” figure for Swift elsewhere in Yeats’s work is Cu Chulainn. When Cu Chulainn dies, an old man severs his head, and in Yeats’s drama, the hero’s disembodied head is presented, though his voice can still be heard. Deane asks:

Isn’t this an emblem of the fate of the intellectual—a talking head, a severed head, a voice, but always a voice, or a head, or an intelligence, or a distance that involves a lethal and fatal separation from the body, from everything inscribed in the body, from sentiment, from feeling—the kind of thing Burke spoke of as the difference between benevolence and love? In other words, is it possible within the history of intelligentsias—whether we call them organic or traditional, ethical witnesses or parts of a corporate body—ever to negotiate this problem of distance and proximity, the problem of abstraction and actuality?²⁹

Deane goes on to compare this problem in Said to “the relationship between agency and action,” using as an example the moment at the end of Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* when Winne Verloc kills her husband. Deane notes that in the paragraph before the killing, Winnie has suddenly come into self-consciousness: eight sentences begin with “she.” Then, agency disappears in the manner in which the knife comes into her hand: “At that moment, Conrad changes the tense from perfect to pluperfect. Suddenly it had happened. It is sud-

28. Deane, *Pathos*, 46–48.

29. *Ibid.*, 51–52.

denly all over even as it begins. And suddenly, she ceases to be a fully substantial human being—she becomes a shadow on the wall.” For Deane, this moment is one which represents the abrupt shift from agency to action while preserving a distinction between them.

Deane concludes by suggesting that reading Said is “[L]ike listening to Mozart, it is something that is enlightenment—light, bright, and sparkling—and at the same time has that undertow of fatality, a melancholy that is, in fact, what makes the lightness and brightness as sparkling as it is.” Said retains a capacity “to recognize that to be committed involves distance and that to be distanced involves commitment,” that has enabled him to “found a new form of discursivity for intellectuals hereafter.”³⁰

In an essay on Said’s memoir *Out of Place*, Deane later reworked some of these ideas. He thereby provides an unusual and valuable linkage of Said’s autobiographical work and his literary-theoretical writing. Deane first notes the salience of Conrad for Said, suggesting that Conrad was at least as important an influence as critic-intellectuals such as Gramsci, Auerbach, or Foucault. “Eventually we realize that the work is actually constituted by the experience of exile or alienation that cannot ever be rectified”: this is Said writing about Conrad in an essay published while he was working on *Out of Place*, but Deane reckons that Said is here also writing about himself.³¹ Deane sees the Nietzschean element in Said’s thought that enables him to read novelists such as Flaubert and Conrad to argue that

specificity and typicality can be simultaneously represented in a “style,” through a rhetoric, by a number of techniques that . . . can show their alliance with and often their dependence on a version of the world that needs the dissonance of some Other for the assurance of its own internal harmony.³²

Deane is interested in the way that Said in a proximate way uses the weapons or techniques of empire to effect a blistering critique of that system. So he grasps Said’s ambivalent relationship to human-

30. Ibid., 55.

31. Deane, “Under Western and Eastern Eyes,” *Boundary 2* 28:1 (2001): 1–18, 1; Edward Said, “Between Worlds: Edward Said Makes Sense of His Life,” *London Review of Books*, 7 May 1998: 3–7, 3.

32. Deane, “Under Western,” 3.

ism—as he puts it, a move “from humanism-as-history into humanism-as-ideality”—recognizing that it is precisely this apparently contradictory position which enables Said so profoundly to trouble the waters of empire as both a system of political power and of cultural representation. This contradictoriness, which escapes so many of Said’s critics (including, as Deane notes, Aijaz Ahmad) is a difficult position, the attempts to overcome which produce “extraordinarily complex explanations.”³³

Deane argues that the drama portrayed in *Out of Place* is that regarding “the absence within [Said’s] life of certainty, assurance, of an indisputable originary world, community, language or home, to which he might have belonged.” The memoir alerts us to the Conradian sense in Said that the place where knowledge is produced, whether of oneself or of other people, is “both out of place and out of time. Its only inhabitant is a phantom, a ghost, a Conradian ineffable.” The classic illustration of this in Said is his discussion of the representation of imperialism in *Heart of Darkness*—Said notes that the narrative itself is dramatized on the foredeck of the *Nelly*, which is Conrad’s way of acknowledging that there is a space outside the apparently world-conquering efforts of imperialism, though he could not as yet see anyone dwelling in such (critical) space.³⁴ Deane compares Said to V.S. Naipaul, noting that in Naipaul, there is a rejection of the place—India, Trinidad, the Third World generally—which lies at the beginning of his genealogy, and the discovery of a “pedigree” in England; whereas in Said there is an exhilaration in his Eastern genealogy. This reminds us of Tom Nairn’s description of Said as “an intellectual earmarked for escape and successful metropolitan assimilation” who “has turned back and tried to assume the burden of those left behind.”³⁵ At this point, we are clearly back with the problematic of distance and proximity. For Deane, the memoir establishes that for Said “Palestine” was both a natal place and yet, for the coarsest politico-historical reasons, distant or alienated. Accordingly, Said’s “‘distance’

33. *Ibid.*, 4.

34. Said, “Two visions in *Heart of Darkness*,” in *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), 26.

35. Tom Nairn, *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited* (London: Verso, 1997), 168.

grew out of an initial closeness,” and this distance is the distance of criticism.³⁶

In the inaugural issue of the *Field Day Review*, Deane returned to Said’s work, now in the wake of Said’s death in September 2003, in an essay that is at once dense, richly allusive and difficult to summarize.³⁷ But it makes some straightforward points worth noting here. Deane recognizes that “postcolonialism—along with the swarms of those who deride it as a phantom and of those who welcome it as a revelation—is not at the center of his work, though it obviously lies close to it.”³⁸ Deane suggests further that “what made Said a leading exponent of postcolonialism was his vexed, yet loyal adherence to the humanist tradition in which he had been educated and by the limitations of which he so often was dismayed”: “Said wants to find the space for and confidence in an emancipatory project of the kind offered by the great eighteenth-century Italian philosopher, Vico, who imagined a secular and humane world as the ultimate historical creation of mankind.”³⁹ Thus Said fought a battle not against the destruction of humanism but against its ruined remnant as represented by the late twentieth-century global politico-cultural order.

Deane locates Said in a tradition stemming from Georg Lukacs, while accepting that Said was not a Marxist. Lukacs helped Said to read Conrad, stressing that linkage of “exile, alienation, and linguistic displacement in the early modernists.” Deane even notes how Said may have learned from Lukacs’s account of detective and thriller fiction, which, produced at the height of the Cold War, highlights “the cults of the abnormal, the perverse, the existence of the world-threatening Evil Enemy, the Other.”⁴⁰

Discussing Said on Foucault and Derrida, Deane puts his finger on a weakness of Said’s work: the failure properly to take account of Derrida’s famous critique of Foucault’s *Folie et Deraison*. In his 1963 essay, Derrida developed his critique of Foucault’s project on the latter’s attempt to write a history of madness using the rhetorics of

36. Deane, “Under Western,” 10.

37. Deane, “Edward Said (1935–2003): A Late Style of Humanism,” *Field Day Review* 1 (2005): 189–202.

38. *Ibid.*, 189

39. *Ibid.*, 190.

40. *Ibid.*, 191.

classical reason.⁴¹ Deane is suggesting that Said's eventual rejection of Foucault and his return to an ever-more clearly enunciated humanism could have been strengthened by Derrida, who was articulating one version of the problematic that, for Deane, Said spent much of his career circling around.⁴²

Deane argues that Said and Adorno both privileged the aesthetic as a realm resistant to commodification, but that they did so for somewhat different reasons. Adorno prioritizes the aesthetic because, in Deane's words, "it has found in the esoteric a resistance and resource against absorption." Said stresses the importance of the aesthetic for his humanism, but goes on to invoke the great humanist *philologen*—Leo Spitzer, Erich Auerbach, Ernst Robert Curtius—and the Vichian power they ascribed to the ability of the human mind to investigate the products of the human mind. Adorno, that is, sees the aesthetic object and aesthetic response have been encompassed by capital—the shriveled audience for art is a tragic sign of the power of the economic system. But Said, in his faith in the heuristic power of humanism, reckons that "the aesthetic can be acknowledged through extreme care and conscientiousness, but it is . . . as a category, emancipated from the logic of Capitalism because . . . the aesthetic can never be reduced to or be identical with the historical conditions that produce it."⁴³ Deane illustrates this point brilliantly by reference to modern novels in which Said and Adorno placed great store:

For Said the great modernist novel was *Nostramo*, in which "material interests," as represented by the silver of the mines, swallow everything individual into an impersonal system of power; for Adorno, the great modern novel was Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1947), in which the musical genius Leverkühn articulates through his art an authoritarian politics that was latent within the humanist tradition that it destroyed.⁴⁴

41. Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness," in his *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

42. Deane, "Edward Said," 192.

43. *Ibid.*, 196.

44. *Ibid.*, 196.

Said could not go so far as Adorno in condemning the invisible worm of corruption at the heart of the humanist tradition—not for Said the famous Adornian idea of “no poetry after Auschwitz.”

As Deane notes, Said was not a Marxist, nor a structuralist, nor a poststructuralist, nor a deconstructionist. The key terms of Said’s analytical vocabulary—molestation, filiation, affiliation, worldliness, counterpoint—all “accentuate the secularity of his ambitions for criticism.” Said neither permitted himself the relativist escape from ethical judgment, nor did he allow ethics to take over from aesthetic appreciation:

He created a conceptual tempo rather than a conceptual structure in his writing; his essays are Goldberg variations on a set of basic themes, ultimately astonishing in their virtuosity but also astonishing in their revelation of the intrinsic richness of the themes themselves.⁴⁵

A different inflection of Adorno appears in Said’s last writings. Firstly, the rejection of Hegelianism and its reconciliatory all-enfolding movement of *aufhebung* or sublation—this had appeared, in fact, as early as the Wellek Lectures delivered in 1989.⁴⁶ But, as Deane says, latterly Said took his cue from Adorno in “bearing witness . . . to irreconcilability, allowing opposed positions to be held in a dialectical tension that was not slackened by any wish to see them coalesce under the impetus of any supposed inner logic of their own or of any borrowed ritual gesture of completion.”⁴⁷ However, Said now also found a way, through Adorno’s writings on “late style”—an eponymous essay from 1937, and a 1959 essay, “Alienated Masterpiece: Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*”—to combine both a version of the Adornian “mandarin-esoteric attitude and stylistic intricacy . . . and the civic democracy of his own essayistic style.”⁴⁸

Deane argues that beginnings and lateness are not just a neat pairing, but rather are Said’s final two critical terms—“within the

45. *Ibid.*, 198.

46. See Edward Said, *Musical Elaborations* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1991), xiv–xv.

47. Deane, “Edward Said,” 198.

48. *Ibid.*, 200; Theodor Adorno, *Essays on Music*, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 564–83.

process of generating their oppositeness, they reveal their own similarity.”⁴⁹ Deane’s point is that, in Said, both beginnings and lateness are secular open concepts or conditions. A Saidian *beginning* is not predicated on a neat originary point, but is worked up from diffuse ideas and positions. In a comparable way, *lateness* for Said has nothing to do with summation, reconciliation, or narrative closure, and everything to do with radical openness, paradox, bristling irresolution. Said reads Freud’s last book, *Moses and Monotheism* in precisely this manner: he uses it to suggest that at the heart of Freud’s work is an effort to open up Judaism to the alterity of its founding moment.⁵⁰ But what Deane does not allude to here is the status of Yeats in Said’s work, both in his debate with Deane, and as a prophetic manifestation of precisely this “late style,” as an aesthetic and as a political position. If the discussion between Said and Deane emerges here at all, it does so obliquely, when Deane describes the “contradiction” of Said’s idea of “late style” as

. . . *Orientalism* replayed as a drama of interiority, but with all the regimes of discourse and control now seriously threatened by an internal rebellion which is native, not foreign, to them. The East, as mortality, faces the West as the system that has to regard that mortality as its Other and must, to that end, create all sorts of countering myths about it that deal with everything but finality.⁵¹

If Deane produces in “Yeats and the Idea of Revolution” an Adornian Yeats, here he is offering a Yeatsian Said. Yeats believed that bourgeois culture had negated the apprehension of death, and that contemplation of death was a crucial element in artistic practice. According to Deane, for Yeats death “renders life meaningless unless life achieves a form which death cannot alter.”⁵² Said, in theorizing “late style,” was capturing

something of the consciousness of lateness . . . that can . . . help concentrate attention on the effect in works of art of the creator’s consciousness of his or her own approaching death and of the link

49. Deane, “Edward Said,” 200.

50. See Edward Said, *Freud and the Non-European* (London: Verso, 2003).

51. Deane, “Edward Said,” 200–1.

52. Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, 42.

between it and the death of an historical era or system which can only at this late moment be glimpsed or seen in retrospect.⁵³

As Deane says, the applicability of this formulation to Said himself—the importance of consciousness of death for *intellectual* practice—was both subtle and obvious.

Deane writes passionately and profoundly about Said, perhaps because of a sense of similar destinies. The parallels between the two are patent and manifold: the critical scope and ambition, the capacity to range over several literatures, the background in partitioned territories, the sense of exile, the sense of a high stake involved in criticism, the non-systematic indebtedness to the Western Marxist tradition, a certain generational melancholy, the love of classical music. When Deane founds much of his more recent work on an argument that Edmund Burke helped to create the idea of English and Irish national character, he is setting Burke up as a “founder of discursivity” in a colonial setting.⁵⁴ In a somewhat similar manner, Said discusses early in *Culture and Imperialism* two narrative conceptions of empire and resistance derived from *Heart of Darkness*.⁵⁵ One might say, crudely, that Burke is to Deane as Conrad was to Said: both Burke and Conrad were capable of the most stringent critiques of empire, while also being deeply implicated in it; each offers the later critic both a radical model and a Tory foil.⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

By way of brief summation, we have found a variety of responses to Said’s work in the Irish context. It has offered methodological stimulus, broader socio-political inspiration, and, on Yeats, a variety of questions as well as answers. Without doubt, the transformation by the theory “wave” of Anglophone literary studies over the last quar-

53. Deane, “A Late Style of Humanism,” 200.

54. See Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), Chapter 1; see also his *Foreign Affections: Essays on Edmund Burke* (Cork: Cork University Press with Field Day, 2005).

55. See Said, “Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*.”

56. See my “Seamus Deane: Between Burke and Adorno,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 35 (2005): 232–48.

ter century has been pushed in Ireland by powerful critics—Deane, Kiberd, and Lloyd chief among them—sympathetic to Said. Yet one would have also to note that the response to the specifics of his work has been narrow and sectional. This is due partly at least to the conservative elements in Said's own writing: in particular, his indebtedness to a mandarin literary-historical humanism has meant that his influence has simultaneously reinforced conservative tendencies in Irish criticism and inspired radical ones.

This is not a fault only of Irish responses to Said. His entire *oeuvre* has been shaped retrospectively in the penumbra of *Orientalism*, so that even books such as *Beginnings*, perhaps his major work of literary criticism, published three years before *Orientalism*, are seen in relation to it or occluded by it. More controversially, there are clear continuities, both thematic and methodological, between his work on Palestine and works such as *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, that are routinely overlooked by the institutions of postcolonial criticism which find situations of contemporary colonization too radioactive to handle.

Even within his work on Yeats, Irish critics have not responded directly to the questions of territory and geography that Said asks. While Said's comparisons of Yeats to Faiz or to Darwish or to other decolonizing writers are only ever telegraphic and allusive, no Irish critic has taken up Said's suggestions to develop sustained and detailed comparisons. Looking further, we find little reaction to Said's comparatism and stress on philology, or his critique of the fate of radical theory in the academy. Said's stress on intellectuals has been mostly scanted by Irish critics.⁵⁷ Said's interest in Ireland and Irish literature has rarely been reciprocated in terms of Irish academic interest in Palestine or the Palestine question.⁵⁸ The Irish Said has been mostly the putatively "postcolonial" one of *Oriental-*

57. Said's stress on intellectuals and criticism was important, albeit in an unsystematic way, for my own *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland 1969–1992* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

58. The notable exception here has been Joe Cleary, chiefly in his *Literature, Partition, and the Nation-State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), a book which engages with comparative partition, territoriality, and state-formation in ways distinctively marked by Said's *The Question of Palestine*.

ism and *Culture and Imperialism*. Further, just as Said was rarely focused in his own work on opening the canon to new postcolonial literatures, so Irish Saidian criticism has tended to reinforce the existing canonical hierarchies, rather than to displace them.

The fullest reaction has been that of Seamus Deane, whose essays reveal in a form both tight and rich a reading of Said that encompasses the full span of his interests. It is notable, however, that what draws Deane's attention is Said's intellectual heritage and position-takings, more than specific readings of this or that literary or theoretical classic. The writers of interest to Said that Deane refers to most are Conrad and Adorno: exiles like Said, who not only made of their exile extraordinary work, but even more *created in exile a certain style of performance as intellectuals*. More than individual critiques or ideas, what Said gave his readers was an exemplum of the intellectual life well-lived. In this, Deane also reveals himself as the Irish critic perhaps truest to Said himself: he moves from Said on Swift and Ireland, to Said's background in Palestine, to Said's status as a figure whose career and interests dramatized shifts and conjunctures of world-historical proportions. Deane, the Irish critic responding to Said, gives him back to the world.