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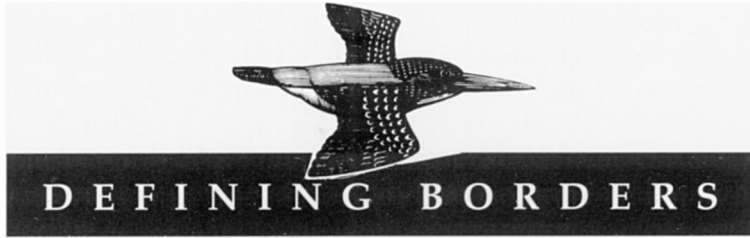
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'Liminal Spaces': Post-Colonial Theories and Irish Culture

COLIN GRAHAM

'... Ireland's putatively 'post-colonial' culture'¹

The phrase which ends David Lloyd's *Anomalous States* in many ways belies what precedes it. The certainty and complexity of Lloyd's post-colonial assumptions could be seen to render spurious the 'putative' in his closure. Yet Lloyd is surely recognising here at least two problematic areas for a post-colonial theorisation of Irish culture: firstly, the unsystematic, *ad hoc* and tendentious ways in which the theories of post-colonial criticism have been applied to Ireland; and secondly, the need for any post-colonial reading to take account of the 'atypicality'² of Ireland's (post-)colonial cultural configurations.

Post-colonial criticism has been one of the most vital and energetic areas of cultural research in recent decades. While it became thoroughly institutionalised as an object of study relatively recently (Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* [1978] being seminal to this process³), post-colonial criticism can trace a history outside the academy which, looking back, currently tapers off in the 1950's, but may eventually push further back into the early twentieth and late nineteenth centuries. Post-colonialism is a theory which is grounded in the historical events of imperialism, colonialism and the aftermath of empire. In its most basic forms it has tended to focus on what one group of writers calls 'the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day'⁴. It has emphasised the loss of identity, language, culture, sense of place and integrity which post-colonial peoples have suffered

during the process of colonisation. These losses it sees as continually and persistently registered in the post-colonial societies and cultures which arose out of the dissolution of the European Empires in the first half of the twentieth century.

Two important and intertwined aspects of this essential form of post-colonialism have become critically important as the discipline has developed. Firstly, post-colonial criticism evolves as an ethical criticism. It is diagnostic of a political and historical situation, in that it identifies who is the coloniser and who the colonised – but it also morally evaluates this colonial relationship as one in which a wrong is done to the colonised, whose integrity, space and identity is taken over and controlled against his/her will. This ethical consideration has caused problems which have been sadly unexamined as post-colonial criticism has evolved new ways of thinking on other subjects, and it is a problem particularly relevant to a discussion aimed at rethinking post-coloniality in a contemporary Irish context.

The second characteristic of post-colonialism in its more basic forms which is important in an Irish context is the extent to which post-colonial criticism appears to be tied to a narrative which celebrates the entity of the nation as the logical and correct outcome of the process of anti-colonial struggle. One of post-colonialism's earliest and still most useful texts, Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), describes this procession towards the nation thus:

The immobility to which the native is condemned can only be called into question if the native decides to put an end to the history of colonization – the history of pillage – and to bring into existence the history of the nation – the history of decolonisation.⁵

The progression here is obvious: colonisation > resurgence > nationalism > liberation > the nation. This narrative has continued to underpin much post-colonial critical thinking from Fanon onward, being continually drawn into defending the post-colonial nation as an ethically and politically proper readjustment of the wrong of colonisation.

However, in recent years the teleology of nationality which seemed so crucial to post-colonialism has been challenged by a building critique of the ideology and praxis of nationality in the post-colonial world. And while ideological wariness of the nation is already apparent in Fanon, despite what is quoted above from *The Wretched of the Earth*, this critique of nationalism has found its most succinct and effective expression in the Subaltern Studies Group in India, publishing under the editorial auspices of Ranajit Guha. Guha describes post-colonial India as an 'historic failure of the nation to come into its own'⁶.

The Subaltern Studies' critique of post-colonial nationalism has two important aspects. Firstly, as the Gramscian term 'subaltern' suggests, it aligns itself with groups inside society which it sees as excluded, dominated, elided and oppressed by the State (effectively, women, peasants, the working classes and other minority and marginalised ethnic and social groups). Subaltern Studies sets out to write what Gramsci called the 'fragmented and episodic' histories of subaltern social groups⁷, and what Guha refers to as the 'politics of the people'⁸, which he suggests have been previously omitted from Indian history. To effect this Subaltern Studies utilise the historical methodology laid out in Gramsci's six-point plan in 'Notes on Italian History'⁹. Secondly, and as something of a necessary by-product of this mission, Subaltern Studies understands the post-colonial nation in a new way – no longer can the nation be regarded as the glorious achievement and fruition of the labours of an oppressed people; the post-colonial nation can now be figured as 'the ideological product of British rule in India'¹⁰, repeating and aping the colonial structures which it displaced. Indeed it is now arguable, though this is not a notion specifically ascribed to by Subaltern Studies, that the very idea of nationality which was used by decolonising peoples to coalesce themselves into a coherent political force was itself transferred to the colonies by imperialist ideology. In other words, imperialism justified itself by an ideology of hegemonic nationalism in which the national people think of themselves, in the words of Jacques Derrida, as 'the best representatives of mankind'¹¹, thus being burdened with a 'duty' to civilise. This ideology was adopted and turned back upon the imperialiser by the colonised in order to conceptually justify their own anti-colonial struggle. The result is a post-colonial world of nation states which structurally and practically imitate Western nations. This is a powerful, though as yet not fully explored view – however research into India education systems and uses of nationality in post-colonial African states provide substantial contextual evidence¹².

Broadly speaking, the Subaltern Studies critique of the ideology of nationalism, as a restrictive, totalising and unsupportable political force, has gained widespread currency in post-colonial studies. However, the strength of the ethically-embedded nation-narrative, and the security of origin, identity and affiliation it offers, have meant that the post-colonial nation remains an entity continually reverted to, even in those who explicitly recognise the ideology of nationalism to be a replaying of imperialist structures. The nation as an object of sentimental attachment, cultural pride and communal fixity combines with the ethics of post-coloniality, referred to earlier, to maintain the

teleological aura which the idea of the nation can glean from post-colonialism. The post-colonial nation as a moral and political triumph is often ruefully given up, while its sense of its own destiny and inevitability conspires to produce images of moral void, political vacuum, and a sense of the loss of all that has been gained, should the 'nation' be even contemplatively relinquished. This dilemma is played out, for example, in Edward Said's *Culture & Imperialism* (1993), in which Said both criticizes the nation in a pseudo-Subaltern Studies way, and yet reads colonial literature and texts of resistance with a continually celebratory tone when referring to the nation (his writing on Yeats, whom he calls 'Ireland's national poet', is one glaring example¹³). For Said the dilemma is at least compounded by, if it does not have its origins in, his advocacy of Palestinian nationalism. I will argue later that recent writings by Seamus Deane on the post-colonial status of Ireland evince the same dilemma: recognising the paucity of nationalism while lacking a substantial position to replace the certainties nationalism offers. That Deane turned to Said, Jameson and Eagleton, and the banner 'Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature' is a significant point in the debate on post-coloniality and Ireland.

The post-colonial critique of nationalism, which sees the nation as an entity derived from and imitative of the imperial centre, leads towards another aspect of current post-colonial theorising which has liberated the discipline from a moribund reliance on what Said refers to as 'the binary oppositions dear to the nationalist and imperialist enterprise'¹⁴. Post-colonial criticism has increasingly turned its attention to areas of colonial discourse where the apparently monolithic, stifling and dis-articulating presence of the coloniser is refuted by evidence of the colonised speaking back; by imperialist ideology being figured as neurotic and uncertain rather than bombastic and unshakeable; and by focusing on cross-cultural movements rather than on the simple cultural dichotomy of the colonial situation.

These changes have, ironically enough, come about partly as a reaction to that founding moment of post-colonial studies, Said's *Orientalism*. Said was immediately, and has been continually, criticised because his scheme of East-West cultural construction seemed to perpetuate that which he diagnosed¹⁵. Nowhere in Said's construction of the notion of Orientalism could the East effectively speak to the West, or subvert the notions of the East which the West was in the continuous process of forming. Such ideological deadlock frustrated those who saw the colonized as more active agents in the colonial process. The result has been a diverse but nevertheless identifiable movement into what might be called the 'liminal spaces'¹⁶ of colonial

discourse; marginal areas, where the ultimate opposition of coloniser and colonised breaks down through irony, imitation and subversion. Perhaps the most eminent example of the examination of these liminal spaces comes in the often opaque and tortuous work of Homi K. Bhabha whose notions of colonial mimicry, imitation and agency prise a gap in the Saidian colonial configuration through which the colonised can begin to be seen working against colonial ideology¹⁷ One commentator describes Bhabha's work:

[as a contestation of the notion which Bhabha] considers to be implicit in Said's *Orientalism*, that 'power and discourse [are] possessed entirely by the coloniser' [. . . Because Bhabha] maintains that relations of power and knowledge function ambivalently, he argues that a discursive system split in enunciation, constitutes a dispersed and variously positioned native who by (mis)appropriating the terms of the dominant ideology, is able to intercede against and resist this mode of construction [sic]¹⁸.

Similarly working in these new areas is Mary Louise Pratt who, in her *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), describes what I have called liminal spaces as 'contact zones' – where coloniser and colonised meet directly¹⁹. Pratt utilises the ethnographic notion of 'transculturation', studying the meeting of cultures as an uneven dynamic in which concepts and texts from one culture can be transmitted across the contact zone into another. The results, as Pratt describes them, often confirm the tropes of irony, subversion, imitation and hybridity which Bhabha emphasises. A related phenomenon here is the notion, referred to earlier, of the transference of the idea of the nation across the empire, where it is eventually turned back upon the imperial centre as a decolonising force. (As Benedict Anderson says: 'the nation proved an invention on which it was impossible to secure a patent'²⁰).

It is important to emphasise these aspects of current post-colonial theorizing in order to indicate how the discipline is moving into a new phase in which the ethically-loaded dichotomy of coloniser/colonised is becoming less fixating, while the ambiguities and cultural dislodgments of imperialism are becoming more attractive. And central to this has been the recognition of post-colonial nationalism as a totalising ideology and practice.

How, then, could post-colonial theory be of use in the context of Irish culture? The dangers of the application of a politically-orientated cultural theory in an Irish context are perhaps more immediately apparent than the possibilities. While post-colonial theory is moving rapidly into the new areas mentioned above, it leaves behind a legacy

of popular political discourse which continually reverts to the more basic assumptions of what colonialism, politically and culturally, entails. For the situation in Ireland there are particular inadequacies in the use of the politicised heritage of post-colonial thought. An example is Mitchel McLaughlin, northern chairman of Sinn Féin, writing in *The Guardian* (5 April 1993). The immediate function of this piece was to limit damage to Sinn Féin after the Warrington bomb and to follow an opinion poll which suggested that 49% of people living in mainland Britain said that the British government should have talks with Sinn Féin. McLaughlin wrote:

The history of the British-Irish relationship is one of colonial domination, violence, racism and repression, which in turn has nurtured Irish nationalist resistance²¹.

I cite this usage of the colonial model not to undermine post-colonial criticism by linking it indelibly with Irish Republican ideology. Indeed I would argue that such a linkage relies on a crude and outmoded version of the ethics and implications of colonial discourse. What is more interesting here is the rhetorical, strategic purpose which post-colonial assumptions are being made to serve. McLaughlin's analysis is underwritten by two assertions: firstly, he repeats Fanon's delineation of the post-colonial narrative (colonialism 'nurtures' anti-colonial nationalism); and secondly, McLaughlin feels his analysis of what he calls 'the British-Irish relationship' (a phrase meant to be read as a dispassionate view of the situation) will appeal to and be understood by his specific and particular audience in sympathetic terms. The post-colonial narrative here works primarily as a rhetorical strategy in justifying militant Irish Republicanism to a liberal British audience.

The colonial model as a rhetorical device has not been confined to nationalist ideology (indeed it may be that it has a history of swinging wildly between ideological positions in Ireland). Samuel Ferguson, for example, prefigured many contemporary uses of colonial vocabulary when, writing in the *Quarterly Review* (1868) he said that 'the educated classes' in Ireland 'will not be condemned to the condition of colonists in a new country'²². Like McLaughlin, Ferguson was writing for a British audience and using the colonial analogy to gain the attention of a particular constituency within that audience.

Given the strong tendency in post-coloniality to celebrate and uphold resurgent nationalism, it might be thought that in the Irish context post-coloniality would appeal to those who wish to restate Irish nationalism in contemporary, radical terminologies. What has been said above about post-colonial criticism, as it currently exists, should show that

contemporary post-coloniality has the potential to shatter the self-image of nationalism rather than to radicalise it. The Subaltern Studies political and historical attack on the post-colonial Indian nation can to an extent be a model for an Irish cultural criticism which seeks to go beyond the circular return to the sanctity of the nation (this has been central to the recent work of David Lloyd). But that model (whether it be called post-national or anti-national) already partially exists in two separate (and sometimes opposing) intellectual phenomena in contemporary Ireland – Field Day and revisionist historiography. A Subaltern Studies and post-colonial critique of these two formations will take us a considerable distance towards delineating the position which post-colonial criticism can occupy in Irish cultural debate.

It is Field Day, especially through Seamus Deane, which has come closer than revisionism to allowing a post-colonial critique of Ireland of the type towards which I am attempting to move. Deane's partial embracing of post-coloniality can be most succinctly understood in his 'Introduction' to the collected edition of the *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* Field Day pamphlets by Eagleton, Jameson and Said. Here Deane says very simply: 'Field Day's analysis of the situation derives from the conviction that it is, above all, a colonial crisis'²³. The word 'derives' is perhaps the most questionable here: it suggests that Field Day has had a knowledge of, and has been working with post-colonial critiques. Looking back over the Field Day pamphlets before the invitations to Eagleton, Jameson and Said this seems questionable²⁴. What Deane describes is a realisation that certain aspects of Field Day's thinking accord with developments in post-colonial criticism, most significantly the turn against nations and nationalism as repressive, ideological reproductions of the colonial regime. Compare Ranajit Guha in *Subaltern Studies*, who says that the post-colonial Indian nation is 'the ideological product of British rule in India'²⁵, to Deane, who says that 'Irish nationalism is, in its foundational moments, a derivative of its British counterpart'²⁶. Guha talks of the 'historic failure'²⁷ of the Indian nation: Deane talks of the 'ultimate failure'²⁸ of the project of Irish cultural nationalism. Guha's critique of Indian history leads him to follow Gramsci's six point plan for restoring the history of the Subaltern, reversing the nation's exclusion of minority groups; Deane says:

Almost all nationalist movements have been derided as provincial, actually or potentially racist, given to exclusivist and doctrinaire positions and rhetoric.²⁹

This comparison of the Gramscian Subaltern Studies critique of na-

tionalism and Deane's is even more revealing when they part company than when they appear parallel.

Where the post-colonial Subaltern position is able to ideologically reject nationalism and replace it with a neo-Marxist commitment to groups oppressed by the workings of nationalism, Deane's problem is that he falters at the conceptual leap from the nation into whatever comes next. His 'Introduction' to *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, while it sets out this post-colonial agenda of 'anti-nationalism', is simultaneously drawn back to the formation of the nation in apparent disbelief that it can ever be intellectually jettisoned. What he attempts to salvage from the nation-narrative can take the form of an aestheticisation of national achievement. For example in the same 'Introduction' he writes that, out of its colonial experience:

Ireland produced, in the first three decades of this century, a remarkable literature in which the attempt to overcome and replace the colonial experience by something other, something that would be 'native' and yet not provincial, was a dynamic and central energy. The ultimate failure of that attempt to imagine a truly liberating cultural alternative is as well known as the brilliance of the initial effort.³⁰

Falling back here on the *quality* of national literature, rather than its ability to *be culturally national*, Deane reveals that the necessary post-colonial denigration of the nation as a political ideology is intensely problematic for him. This leads him to the most unsatisfactory of all resolutions of the post-national post-colonial dilemma – a re-indulgence in the ethics of the colonial dichotomy – in this case simply blaming the English. When Deane points out that *all* nationalisms can be seen as potentially racist, exclusivist and doctrinaire he goes on:

These descriptions fit British nationalism perfectly, as the commentaries of any of its exponents on Ireland – Edmund Spenser, Sir John Davies, Sir William Temple, Coleridge, Carlyle, Arnold, Enoch Powell, Ian Paisley – will prove. The point about Irish nationalism, the features within it that have prevented it from being a movement toward liberation, is that it is, *mutatis mutandis*, a copy of that by which it felt itself to be oppressed.³¹

While Subaltern Studies are able to produce a critique of post-colonial nationalism as an imitative, repressive entity and to focus on those groups within society for whom nationalism has been a continuity of oppression, Deane inverts post-colonial dissent against nationalism to the point where it is forced to return to the ethical origins of post-colonialism. 'British nationalism', because Irish nationalism copied it, is to blame. Deane's implication is that Irish nationalism, without the

pernicious influence of Britain, would have been liberating – the Subaltern Studies critique, in my view, insists that nationalism *per se* is restrictive, over-homogenising and repressive³². Deane balances uneasily on the apex of the conceptual progression out of reliance upon the nation as the essential unit of culture – when he wavers it is to save what baggage he can from the crisis, to retain nationality as a liberating aspiration rather than fully concede nationalism to be a monolithic elision of multiplicity.

Deane, and to an extent Field Day, do nevertheless provide an interesting path towards a post-colonial reading of Irish culture; the ultimate dilemma Deane faces when confronted with the intellectual abandonment of nationality certainly makes the invited interventions by Eagleton, Jameson and Said read more interestingly. The irony of this attempt to further the debate with outside input was that it was Eagleton who wrote of nationality in the most critical and constructive ways – while Said, caught in the same circle of reluctance to sacrifice the nation as Deane, turns continually to Deane as the best authority on Yeats. Here the dilemma of the 'nation' was confirmed rather than resolved.

Deane's hesitancy at the point where the 'nation' becomes restrictive rather than glorious or even aspirational, allows us to turn to Irish historical revisionism, which has been based on a long goodbye to the sanctified centrality of the nation. That revisionism is relatively unblinking in its loosening of the grip of the nation on the intellectual parameters of thought in and about Ireland initially seems to afford the final step Deane was unable to take. Revisionism would presumably agree with Frantz Fanon's statement: 'The makers of the future nation's history trample unconcernedly over small local disputes'³³. However, these common anti-national beginnings hide a deeper and perhaps irresolvable conflict between a projected post-colonial critique of Irish culture and the methodological assumptions of revisionism.

Revisionism's critique of Irish national history is well known. It is interestingly expressed, for present purposes, in an essay by R.V. Comerford which illustrates forcefully how revisionism has approached the dominant, hagiographical, national history of Ireland:

The teleological myth tends to bestow the status of finality on contemporary arrangements and in particular on the nation state.³⁴

This accords to a large degree with the implicit criticism post-colonialism has made of itself, disrupting its own complacent reliance on the teleology of anti-colonial nationalism, and as such Comerford here raises interesting possibilities of concurrence and interchange across

revisionism and post-colonialism. But from this point revisionism and post-colonialism diverge in important ways. To continue with Comerford as an example, in the piece quoted from above he goes on to say:

The understanding of national identity as a platonic essence, transcendent and indefeasible, now enjoys a much reduced currency among Irish historians, but some practitioners of other humanist disciplines who venture into the field of Irish history come with a preconceived ideal of Irishness that belongs to the realm of well-worn myth.³⁵

Inherent in this piece is the disagreement which revisionism will have with a cultural criticism derived from post-colonialism. Revisionism shares with Subaltern Studies a recognition that the 'nation' has become a restricting force. But their emphases immediately differ in diagnosing the nature of this restriction. For revisionism the nation-narrative had become *the* macro-narrative, denying the plurality and complication of history – this is essentially an historiographic, intellectual turn away from the nation – any political implications tend to follow on from this rather than inspire it. Subaltern Studies have a specifically political critique of the 'nation', and put this into effect by using historiography. Comerford encapsulates the way in which this potential disagreement will be played out in an Irish context when he says that 'practitioners' from other disciplines remain in the sway of these now-refuted myths. Crucial here will be the way in which post-colonialism regards the nation and its concomitant ideologies once it has moved outside its teleology. Should post-colonialism follow revisionism in refuting the ideological blocks which it identifies in the Irish context?

To answer this, and to make clearer post-colonialism's dissension from revisionism, I wish to look briefly at one broadly 'revisionist' attack on the post-colonial model for Ireland. In *The Irish Review* (13) Liam Kennedy's article 'Modern Ireland: Post-Colonial Society or Post-Colonial Pretensions?' set out to refute the use of the post-colonial model for Ireland. This article was aimed by Kennedy specifically at literary and cultural critics rather than at fellow economic historians – indeed the tenor of the article suggests that economic historians would never be duped by post-colonialism. (Another of the article's straw men is the CRD conference book *Is Ireland a Third World Country?*, certainly a worthy target³⁶). Since cultural and literary critics appear to be the designated audience of the essay, it is useful to explore Kennedy's way of arguing, if tangentially, about culture, rather than disputing his statistical analysis, which I am not equipped to do.

Kennedy's conclusion when he examines the statistical evidence for Ireland's post-colonial status is simply that the theory does not hold. This forces him to speculate on why, if the theory is so obviously irrelevant, it is used by what he refers to as '*homo academicus* on the make'³⁷. Some of his suggestions accord with ground already covered above – post-colonial theory can, in Kennedy's view, be used to 'modernise' the 'threadbare quality of traditional [ultra-nationalist] rhetoric'³⁸; it can also, Kennedy asserts, justify Anglophobia and, concomitantly, anti-Unionism. However, Kennedy's reading of Field Day's forays into post-colonialism as 'emotional satisfaction, even inspiration, in the exploitation of loose images and metaphors'³⁹ is deeply flawed and misunderstands Field Day's, and Seamus Deane's, serious and troubled relationship with post-colonialism.

The main conflict between Kennedy's type of analysis and the version of post-colonialism which I am attempting to construct is encapsulated in the following sentence (and in a wider sense this affects post-colonialism's relationship with revisionism in general):

There are a number of reasons why, when subjected to empirical inquiry, the colonial and post-colonial notions fit the Irish experience so poorly.⁴⁰

Here, in a specific instance, an historical discourse rubs uncomfortably against a cultural critical discourse in the phrase 'empirical inquiry'. Kennedy's article, like revisionism in general, sets out to refute ideology, myth and theory with fact, statistics and specific and supposedly 'true' knowledge. Post-colonial criticism functions in the cultural realm of ideological histories which revisionism at once disdains and tries to transform. As such, post-colonialism cannot reject ideology as delusion *in the same way as* revisionism – because post-colonialism will not replace a demolished nationalist ideology with a rational, empirical, 'scientific' methodology which has a belief in its own ability to 'know' history. Indeed it would naturally befall post-colonialism to identify such an historical methodology, grounded in an 'anti-ideological' empiricism, as an ideology in itself. The knowledge that these accusations will inevitably flow to and fro between revisionism and cultural theory, has meant that revisionists have not read theory with enough attention (the reverse, of course, may also be true).

In his 'Introduction' to *Paddy and Mr Punch* R.F. Foster writes about the sort of theoretical disagreement between cultural criticism and revisionism which has been outlined above. Foster says:

It is significant that some of these denunciations [of revisionism] come from literary critics, because the effect of critical theory on historical

discourse is worth noting – in Ireland as in America, in the age of Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur. Some accompanying concepts have added much enlightenment to Irish history, notably the analysis of colonial collusions elsewhere in the Empire. But the recently fashionable idea that the historian/writer is in corrupt and unconscious collusion with the text, and that reference to an ascertainable body of fact is a delusion of the late bourgeois world, leads quickly to the useful position that all history is suspect and all readings questionable. By an elision, this sanctions a turning back to the old verities and the old, atavistic antipathies.⁴¹

Post-colonialism, as it currently exists, would similarly refuse the ability of history to be unquestionable – indeed it could only find it methodologically puzzling how revisionism, which so accurately identifies ideology in ‘old’ Irish history, cannot then accept that it similarly works within an ideological discourse, or how it imagines that it has the ability to be non-ideological – Foster notably prioritises the word ‘enlightenment’ over ‘theory’.

My major disagreement with Foster here is a sublimation of all that has been said so far – it is not necessarily the case that the application of theory and post-colonialism to Irish culture will or need be intended to ‘[sanction] a turning back to the old verities and the old, atavistic antipathies’. Post-colonialism, through its most contemporary theorising, has the ability to act as a critique upon, rather than insist on, the ideology of nationalism. Post-colonialism now functions as a force in cultural studies which continually turns its attention to gender, class, ethnicity, race and, ironically enough, localised history – all of which it can employ to fracture the homogeneity of nationalist discourse. For post-colonialism to be seen to reverse revisionism it must either be used or conceived in outmoded and uninformed ways.

So far then post-colonialism has been discussed in Irish culture by placing it in the context of intellectual formations, in Ireland and beyond, already in existence. In conclusion, I will suggest briefly how this material can be coalesced to produce a criticism of Irish culture in post-colonial terms.

Post-colonialism will inevitably read Irish culture at least partially through its inherited theoretical dichotomy of coloniser and colonised, identifying competitive cultural formations held within an empowering and disempowering system. But the Subaltern Studies’ critique of post-colonial nationalism allows post-colonialism to side-step a persistent positioning with the colonised against the coloniser. Instead, post-colonial criticism is increasingly able to discuss the ideological restrictions which a culture imposes upon itself by fetishising its ‘other’

– and this without a necessary privileging of the colonised, but with a retention of the knowledge that empowered discourses constitute the colonial situation.

In identifying ideological, monolithic blocks, post-colonialism is also able to undermine the rhetorical strategies of those ideologies as they seek approval within the power structures of colonialism (for example, Samuel Ferguson's appeal to English public opinion, which becomes historically reversed to the post-colonial appeal to 'the same' audience by Mitchel McLaughlin). A post-colonial critique thus follows revisionism in its disdain for the impositions of ideology – but it would see a continual turn away from ideology as a process which would set up a new teleology in which the disintegration of ideological thought would become supposedly inevitable. Post-colonial Irish cultural criticism would attempt to deconstruct the ideologies arising from colonialism and post-colonialism while believing that ideology inevitably constitutes culture.

But an Irish post-colonial criticism would not only understand its subject as the meeting of miscomprehending cultural affiliations. Post-colonialism's movement into the 'liminal spaces' of colonial discourse, described earlier, must be superimposed upon the model which sees colonial structures purely in terms of division. It is this newly developed ability to identify transcultural movements and interactions which makes post-colonial theory a necessary intervention in understanding Irish culture. Because the ideological blocks of colonialism are less easily pinned down and dichotomised in the Irish situation than in other post-colonial societies, the interchange which takes place within the conceptual restrictions of colonial discourse is more extensive. Rethinking the concepts of irony, hybridity, mimicry, the contact zone and transculturation in the Irish context will produce readings of Irish culture which arise out of a recognition of the claustrophobic intensity of the relationship between Ireland and Britain. It can also allow for the fractured range of complex cross-colonial affiliations which have existed within the British-Irish cultural axis by acknowledging and adapting the critical methodologies which post-colonialism has employed to disintegrate and fragment the monologism of cultural affiliation.

It is these abilities to read culture as ideological, while criticising the homogeneity of ideology, and to prioritise cultural interchange within a colonial structure, which makes post-colonial theory an essential critical tool for understanding Irish culture. Edna Longley has said, regarding the intervention of critical, and particularly post-colonial, theory into Irish culture:

Our impulse should be not only to decolonise, to criticise *English* canons and *English* ideologies of Ireland, but to subvert indigenous canons and ideologies. Actually, unionism and nationalism afford opportunities for *mutual* deconstruction unrivalled in any other country.⁴²

Post-colonial criticism, as it currently exists, has the capacity to undertake exactly this critical project – to produce readings of Irish culture which stress its dependency on Englishness, on rhetorical formations, on defining its ‘other’, and which will simultaneously comprehend the ironies of cultural interchange in a theoretical framework which is both rigorous and precise.

NOTES

- 1 David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993), p. 155
- 2 Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, p. 155
- 3 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991)
- 4 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 2
- 5 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 40
- 6 Ranajit Guha, ‘On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India’, *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Vol. 1, ed. by Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 7
- 7 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), p. 55
- 8 Guha, ‘On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India’, p. 4
- 9 Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 52
- 10 Guha, ‘On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India’, p. 1
- 11 Jacques Derrida in conversation with Alan Montefiore in *Talking Liberties*, ed. by Derek Jones and Rod Stoneman (London: Channel Four/BSS, 1992), p. 8
- 12 See Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990) and Basil Davidson, *The Black Man’s Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation State* (London: James Curry, 1993)
- 13 Edward W. Said, *Culture & Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p. 281
- 14 Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, p. xxvii
- 15 See, for example, Dennis Porter, ‘Orientalism and Its Problems’ in *The Politics of Theory*, ed. by Francis Barker and others (Colchester: University of Essex, 1983), 179–183
- 16 The word ‘liminal’ (of the threshold) is adapted here from Edward W. Said’s *Culture & Imperialism* (pp. 159–196) where it is used to describe the character of Kim in Rudyard Kipling’s novel of the same name. Kim is of Irish descent and, as Said usefully notes, has the ability to move with relative freedom (and immense political complication) between the coloniser and the colonised.
- 17 Bhabha’s essays are collected in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994)
- 18 Benita Parry, ‘Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse’, *Oxford Literary Review*, 9: 1–2 (1987), 27–58 (p. 40)

- 19 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 6–7 and passim
- 20 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London: Verso, 1992), p. 67
- 21 Mitchel McLaughlin, 'Talking Through the Troubles', *The Guardian*, 5 April 1993.
- 22 Samuel Ferguson, '[Review of] Lord Romilly's Irish Publications', *Quarterly Review*, 124 (April 1868), 423–445 (p. 444)
- 23 Seamus Deane, 'Introduction' in Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson, Edward W. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1990), 3–19 (p. 6)
- 24 Deane's own pamphlets come closest to a use of the most basic post-colonial terminology, but neither appears to be explicitly informed by post-colonial theory. See 'Civilians and Barbarians' and 'Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea' in Field Day Theatre Company, *Ireland's Field Day* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 33–60
- 25 Guha, 'On Some Aspects of Historiography in Colonial India', p. 1
- 26 Deane, 'Introduction', p. 7
- 27 Guha, 'On Some Aspects of Historiography in Colonial India', p. 17
- 28 Deane, 'Introduction', p. 3
- 29 Deane, 'Introduction', pp. 7–8
- 30 Deane, 'Introduction', pp. 3–4
- 31 Deane, 'Introduction', p. 8
- 32 However, for an alternative reading of the Subaltern Studies' critique of nationalism, see Aijaz Ahmed, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), who says that, as a result of the post-colonial and Subaltern Studies attack on nationalism: 'Colonialism is now held responsible not only for its own cruelties but, conveniently enough, for ours [in the post-colonial world] too' (pp. 196–197), words which might apply to Deane's view of the Irish nation's inheritance from 'British nationalism'.
- 33 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 90
- 34 R.V. Comerford, 'Political Myths in Ireland' in *Irishness in a Changing Society*, ed. by The Princess Grace Library (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988), p. 7
- 35 Comerford, 'Political Myths in Ireland', p. 11
- 36 *Is Ireland a Third World Country?*, ed. by Therese Caherty and others (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1992)
- 37 Liam Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland: Post-Colonial Society or Post-Colonial Pretensions?', *The Irish Review*, No. 13 (Winter 1992/1993), 107–121 (p.119)
- 38 Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland', p. 118
- 39 Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland', p. 118
- 40 Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland', p. 119
- 41 R.F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1993), p. xv
- 42 Edna Longley, 'Writing, Revisionism and Grass Seed: Literary Mythologies in Ireland' in *Styles of Belonging: The Cultural Identities of Ulster*, ed. by Jean Lundy and Aodán Mac Póilin (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1992), 11–21 (p. 21)