

Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, and Isabel Allende. It is a raw and passionate affirmation of Latin-American writing at its best.

Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson, Edward W. Said
NATIONALISM, COLONIALISM, AND LITERATURE
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Reviewed by Axel Knoenagel

Over the past years, the canon of texts discussed in English Departments and the paradigms for this discussion have undergone considerable change. Contemporary literary discourse is opening to texts from Australia, India, the Caribbean, Africa, and other English-speaking areas under the heading "New Literatures in English," thus no longer automatically referring back to colonial power structures. In fact, the term postcolonial is central to the debate now. The literature of Ireland has been one of the losers in this development. Irish literature has been appropriated by the British literary discourse for so long that the colonial and postcolonial nature of the Irish-British political and cultural relationships tends to be overlooked.

Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature attempts to fill this gap. The book contains three essays first published as separate pamphlets by the Field Day Company in (London) Derry, Northern Ireland, an enterprise founded on the conviction that "we need a new discourse for a new relationship between our idea of the human subject and our idea of human communities" (3). As Seamus Deane explains in the introduction, the concept of the Field Day pamphlets is "to analyze the various rhetorics of coercion and liberation that are so evident in modern Irish literature (particularly in Yeats and Joyce), in modern Irish political and legal discourse and practice, as well as in the systems of interpretation that have mediated these" (14).

In the book's first essay, Terry Eagleton examines the nature of nationalism, an unfortunate but seemingly inevitable stage every decolonizing nation experiences. Central to Eagleton's argument is his claim that the paradigms of British academic discourse cannot be applied to Irish culture because "the liberal humanist notion of Culture was constituted, among other things, to marginalize such peoples as the Irish" (33). Consequently, in clear difference to the rest of (colonizing) Europe, "the aesthetic as a totalization of particular and universal is in general absent in Ireland" (34). Eagleton presents the novels of James Joyce as the Irish answer to this situation, particularly *Ulysses* which "celebrates and undermines the Irish national formation at a stroke, deploying the full battery of cosmopolitan modernist techniques to recreate it while suggesting with its every breath just how easily it could have done the same for Bradford or the Bronx" (36). The ironic position of Joyce's writing, simultaneously affirming and undermining Irish nationalism and

colonial modernist aesthetics is, for Eagleton, the epitome of Ireland's (post) colonial culture.

More substantial from the point of view of literary interpretation is Frederic Jameson's essay, "Modernism and Imperialism." Jameson suggests that "the structure of imperialism also makes its mark on the inner forms and structures of that new mutation in literary and artistic language to which the term modernism is loosely applied" (44). Jameson argues convincingly that the colonial system, in which a significant portion of the colonizing nation's economic and social structure is located beyond mere experience, creates such a strong spatial disjunction that "as artistic content it will now henceforth always have something missing about it" (51). From this, Jameson derives his definition of modernism: "It is only that new kind of art which reflexively perceives this problem and lives this formal dilemma that can be called modernism in the first place" (51). Jameson reads Forster's *Howards End* as example of this trait. The counterexample, the book that treats spatial closure as a consequence of the colonial situation, is *Ulysses*. Since Dublin, as a colonial city, experiences not spatial disjunction but cultural confinement, Jameson argues, Joyce's novel necessarily explores not spatial but linguistic gaps: "This essential linguisticity of *Ulysses* . . . is itself a result of imperialism which condemns Ireland to an older rhetorical past and to the survival of oratory" (63). In this respect, Irish literature has more in common with the literatures of other colonized regions than with British literature, and the paradigms of modernism make this connection most evident.

Edward Said's contribution attempts to explain the ideological pressures upon authors in the period of decolonization and focuses on the case of William Butler Yeats. Said explains the controversial political convictions expressed in Yeats's poetry as the consequence of the inevitable logic of decolonization. Said identifies a strong nationalist tendency in all decolonizing nations which finds its echoes also in art: "[The] literature develops quite consciously out of a desire to distance the native African, Indian or Irish individual from the British, French, or (later) American master" (77). The first necessary step in this process is the repossessing of the country's geography by its native artists. For Ireland, Yeats performs this essential task: "Like all the poets of decolonization Yeats struggles to announce the contours of an 'imagined' or ideal community, crystallized not only by its sense of itself but also of its enemy" (86). Using Frantz Fanon's insights into the cultural consequences of colonization for the colonized, Said finds praise for the political dimension of Yeats's art: "He rises from the level of personal experience to that of national archetype, without losing the immediacy of the former or the stature of the latter" (92).

Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature presents thought-provoking articles that will hopefully contribute to an assessment of Irish literature that is more appropriate to this literature's ideological basis. The book's title is, however, rather misleading. At least some reference to the Irish background of the literature in question would have been advisable.