



***Ireland and Postcolonial Theory.* Edited by Clare Carroll and Patricia King. University of Notre Dame Press, 2003. Paperback, 280 pages. ISBN 0268022860. \$47.50.**

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The question at the heart of *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* - was Ireland a colony? - is a simple one. How it is answered, however, has enormous repercussions for understanding just about every aspect of Irish history and society: culture, economics, politics, demographics and a whole array of everyday rituals, ranging from patterns of speech through the inhabiting of physical space to daily prayer. Accepting the fact of British colonization (a premise that this book recognizes, pursues and complicates) amounts to possessing a way of seeing, a master narrative of sorts that can explain all manner of economic and epiphenomenal events. Most obviously, from such a vantage point, the Irish famine - from the immediate fact of starvation to the legacies of emigration, cultural memory, language decline and social reorganization - was a catastrophe produced primarily by the colonial system, with its landlordism, laissez-faire economics and artificial land holding patterns. Similarly, to acknowledge that the driving contradiction of Irish history has been the struggle between foreign rule and independence is to have a grid onto which just about everything can be mapped. It is precisely this all-encompassing explanatory power that makes postcolonial theory so appealing - and so simple, so reductive, so biased for its opponents. We have known at least since Freud that the past never goes away, and that debates over history are an attempt to understand and grapple with the present. The issues addressed by postcolonial theory are about how that past, shaped by the structures of colonialism and the personalities of its agents, lives on and continues to shape the psychology and culture of the nation. And it is here, in the present, where the real intensity and stakes of the above question - was Ireland a colony? - is felt. If colonialism was real, then nationalism and resistance to imperialism are legitimated. It may be redundant to assert that definitions matter, but if one accepts that Ireland was colonial, then not only was undoing partition legitimate, but so were attendant critiques of, even attacks on, the British state in Ireland and the institutions that propped it up. This question obviously did not begin with the emergence of what we now call postcolonial theory on the academic scene, circa 1980, or as Joe Cleary puts it in the first essay of this collection, roughly at the start of the 1980s, when postcolonial studies emerged "within the Irish academy as a distinct mode of critical analysis." Many of the themes of this book - how we define colonialism (Joe Cleary), who narrates history (David Lloyd), the connection between Ireland and European ideas (Luke Gibbons), spiritualism and national identity (Gauri Viswanathan) - have seen earlier

incarnations. The historiographical debate now labeled as "the revisionist controversy" (essentially an argument about the dialectic between nationalism and colonialism) has raged since the founding of Irish Historical Studies in the 1930s, but found renewed energy in the 1970s and '80s, largely on account of the Troubles in the north of the country and the economic crisis in the south. Before revisionism, of course, a whole slew of writers from Yeats to Fintan Lalor, and earlier from Burke to Swift, engaged questions about the representations of the Irish and their culture in literature and history. The question then becomes how contemporary postcolonial theory, or rather the version of postcolonial theory offered in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, reconceptualizes the problems, tensions and possibilities that have grown out of the clash between colonizer and colonized, tradition and modernity.

Before moving further with that investigation, it is worth thinking briefly about what this book means in terms of the current state of Irish Studies. The dust jacket refers to the collection of essays within it as "the first book of its kind; a collection that gathers together twelve new essays by leading Irish intellectuals and international postcolonial critics as they debate Ireland's past and present." While it is true that this book does include essays by several of the heavy hitters in contemporary Irish Studies (which itself speaks to a certain "canonicity" and exclusivity within the field of Irish postcolonial studies - Irish postcolonial theory has its "go-to" intellectuals), this is not the first collection to reflect on the uses and applications of postcolonial theory within the Irish context. One thinks of *Irish and Postcolonial Writing: History, Theory, Practice* (Hooper and Graham 2002). The section in Volume 3 of the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Deane 1991) entitled "Challenging the Canon; Revisionism and Cultural Criticism" contains theoretical essays by many of the figures in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, including Gibbons, Lloyd, and Deane. Many other collections of essays, such as *Reconsideration of Irish History and Culture* (O Ceallaigh 1994) and *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (McBride 2001), while more empirically historical or polemical in tone, do not shy away from deploying theory; that is, reflecting critically upon the structures, language and concepts that the essays themselves employ. Further undermining the claim that *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* is "the first of a kind" are many single-authored books that, previous to this one, challenged traditional ways of narrating and framing Irish cultural history. I am thinking of Colin Graham's *Deconstructing Ireland* (2001), Stephen Howe's *Ireland and Empire* (2000), and Geraldine Moane's *Gender and Colonialism* (1999). The fact that earlier books tackle many of the same issues as in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* does not diminish the excellent content of the articles collected in this volume, but they do allow us room to contextualize the appearance of the later book. Rather than claiming *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* as the "first of its kind," it might be more appropriate to think of it as representing a certain kind of maturity of postcolonial theory within Irish Studies. Postcolonial theory has largely cornered the market in Irish Studies, while revisionism has lost the argument - though there are few who still refuse to accept some aspects of the colonial model for Irish history. This book, with its major figures, and published by Notre Dame Press, representing the university with the wealthiest (and most thriving) Irish Studies program in the U.S., looks back confidently over the previous two decades, reflecting not just on historical and cultural problems, but also offering accounts of postcolonial theory's own origins, trajectory, and ultimate victory. The volume marks the plateau of theory, and in some senses lacks the cutting edge that its promoters claim. A further example of this is the introductory chapter, a large section of which is dedicated to summarizing the positions of various central players in postcolonial theory - Anne McLintock, Ella Shohat, Pheng Cheah, and Aijaz Ahmad. While the

motivation behind such a chapter is obviously to ground the reader in a long and complex intellectual history, the effect is a bit hasty, and leaves the reader with the sense of having read a cursory survey of big league theorists. Moreover, and especially when we are told that the essays in "this volume draw upon these critical strengths," one is left with the impression that Irish postcolonial theory is a largely derivative discourse, rather than one that developed simultaneously and in conjunction with theory from elsewhere.

Supporting the critique of *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* as less innovative than it would like to think it is, is the fact that the majority of the essays collected here have appeared elsewhere, at times more than once. While a newcomer looking for illumination as to how Ireland fits into the cosmopolitan world of postcolonial discourse will find a lot to stimulate the imagination here, anyone who is at all involved with Irish Studies will surely have encountered, if not the actual essays, then the ideas contained in them. David Lloyd's lucid and, as always, quite brilliant critique of bourgeois historiography is taken from his own book, *Ireland after History* (1999). Joe Cleary's stocktaking of the various indigenous and foreign theoretical strands that have shaped contemporary Irish postcolonial discourse is, for the most part, a reworking of his essay in *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* (2002, Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (eds)). It then reappears in altered form in his own book *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine* (2002). Claire Carol's essay, "Barbarous Slaves and Civil Cannibals: Translating Civility in Early Modern Ireland," is extracted, in large measure, from her *Circe's Cup: Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Ireland* (2001). Many of the remaining essays have a similar lineage.

Criticisms of *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* based upon larger contexts (inherited disputes such as revisionism, the current ascendance or waning of postcolonial theory) aside, however, the primary plea and purpose of this book is twofold: to interrogate the ways in which Ireland was or was not a colony, and to investigate that claim via cultural and historical comparison. Each of the essays essentially attempts to illustrate and to prove Joe Cleary's statement towards the end of his piece that if colonialism works to differentially integrate societies of different kinds "into a world capitalist system, then it is on the basis of comparative conjunctural analyses ... that debate must ultimately be developed." As a thematic essay that seeks to understand different definitions of the term "colonialism," Cleary doesn't examine any particular comparative scenario in detail, but lists various pivotal moments in time when the structure of the Irish economy was transformed via reference to other colonial and postcolonial discourses: the "Celtic Tiger" of the 1990s; the formation of the Irish Free State and the invented community of "the white dominion" in New Zealand and Canada; the outburst of civil strife in Northern Ireland at the end of the 1960s and the conscious referencing to African-American demands in the southern United States. In this comparative vein, a number of the essays pick up on the endlessly fascinating connections between Ireland, Britain and Native Americans. Claire Connolly's essay "Barbarous Slaves and Civil Cannibals" treats of the common malign and ignorant representations of the Irish and "Indians" as savages, incapable of reform, childish and "evil by custom." While the essay takes us through many twists and turns - outlining differences in the colonial policy and the representation of both populations - one comes away armed with conclusive evidence that an English sense of "cultural superiority...legitimized their colonial subjugation [of the Irish] under both republic and monarchy." Again, QED, Ireland was a colony, and imperial tactics and lessons moved easily back and forth across the Atlantic. Likewise, in

order to demonstrate his concept of a counter-public sphere, a colonial site of representation that worked in the interests of Enlightenment, but against that movement's clarion call of universalism and cultural uniformity, Luke Gibbons draws our attention to personal and rhetorical connections between the United Irishman of the late 1700s and the Iroquois nation. As with all of Gibbons' work, his essay in this collection, "Towards a Postcolonial Enlightenment," strives to recuperate alternative modernities, ways of understanding and seeing forces of history that don't fit within the logic of modern state formation. His essay here abounds with references to older, now marginal, concepts and systems - the Brehon laws, Highland Jacobites, the "man of feeling" - whose presence has not been totally erased and whose echoes we can still hear faintly through the din of the national pursuit of progress.

Continuing the comparative theme, Amitav Gosh and Gauri Viswanathan both provide essays that draw connections between the colonial process in India and Ireland. Gosh continues his long interest in the experience of "native" soldiers in the imperial army, a curiosity spurred in part by his father's membership in the British Indian Army. Gosh, like all the other contributors in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, discovers fascinating geographical associations that were forged from the colonial system. Indian soldiers, we learn, who, having participated in the 1857 mutiny and fled to the United States, created "close links with the Irish resistance in America... it was the Irish who were their mentors and allies, schooling them in their methods of organization; giving them instruction in their techniques of fomenting mutiny among those of their countrymen who served the empire as soldiers." But the precise issue that Gosh seeks to uncover is an intriguing psychological one: Why the rage of the native soldier in the imperial army often turned into incredible violence and cruelty. He cites cases not just from the Indian Mutiny, but from the Singapore Mutiny of 1918 and others. The answer lies in the fact that these men were rejected and jeered by their own people and that every victory they won for the British "would bring yet another kind of defeat." Gosh then develops this argument of perennial defeat for the colonized into a thesis for the eagerness of postcolonial governments to make a mark on the world stage in the wake of independence. Both Ireland under De Valera at the U.N. and India in the non-aligned movement punched far above their weight. Viswanathan's contribution focuses on the intriguing life of James Cousins, a poet from Belfast who was much admired by Tagore, and who settled in India in order to pursue life as a theosophist and committed internationalist. The contradiction he dedicated his life to resolving - how to make nationalism international - has been one of the guiding questions of the last hundred years. Given that Cousins was a far more respected figure in India than in Ireland, Viswanathan's essay grapples with issues of national canon formation, as it does with Cousins' complex theories of race, renaissance and spirituality. In short, Cousins was a bit of an old-fashioned modernist, who looked to myth (and the Orient) to solve the ills of West. The final essay in the book looks different in the wake of Edward Said's death. There is a melancholy tone now to his Afterword, as he gathers up the themes of the preceding articles and connects them passionately, and somewhat polemically, to claims of Zionism and Palestine. As many times before, he shows his astute knowledge of Irish history and culture, saying that what draws him to it is the question of "knowledge and power that I had first studied in *Orientalism* [1978]." In taking us through the central tenets of contemporary revisionist Israeli historians with their attempts to question many of the founding myths of Israel, Said's thesis is simple enough, and is perhaps the one with most power: that controversies over "who owns and is responsible for the collective past" are among the most important battles to fight.

Ireland and Postcolonial Theory gathers together excellent articles. The book would certainly be useful to many who would like to understand the significance of the question of whether Ireland was a colony. The journey, the answer provided here, takes the reader to early modern America, to India, to Palestine, and to Scotland. The themes explored are multifarious, but all, in part, come back to the question of memory and history, to their persistence and their representation. The book is at times theoretically dense, but it is within reach of the average reader. It is a valuable, if not groundbreaking, collection. Importantly, its appearance allows us the opportunity to reflect upon the long history and relevance of postcolonial theory from and in Ireland.

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