

A Flexible Foundation: Constructing a Postcolonial Dialogue

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Even as Postcolonial Studies is gaining ground in the academy, the critical dialogue is threatened by an identity crisis. On the one hand, a rigidity, a vying for territorial critical rights, traps the dialogue in old constructional notions of race and political governance. Scholars argue about who has legitimate right to a voice in the dialogue, bordering such rights with the use of continental or color arguments and indicating a continued colonial structure mindset with such terms as "First World" and "Third World." Giving into these notions is paramount to allowing those participating in the postcolonial dialogue to have their terms defined externally, forcing the internal reality to match borders mapped by old ideologies that have ceased to represent reality (if indeed they ever did). The threat of such rigidity has become all too apparent to many within the dialogue. On the other hand, members of the academic community who do not participate in the dialogue but criticize what they observe accuse the postcolonial dialogue of being simultaneously about everything and nothing. Without coherence, and according to these critics without clarity in the writing of postcolonial scholarship, the dialogue has become a babbling brook, eroding any definition and, thus, meaningless. In an effort to address both these threats to the postcolonial dialogue, I have attempted to build a flexible foundation in my approach to postcolonialism. Bart Moore-Gilbert (1997, p. 188) also calls for "as broad and flexible a conception of the cultures of (neo-)colonialism as is possible." Moore-Gilbert recognizes that "there has been increasingly heated, even bitter, contestation of the legitimacy of seeing certain regions, periods, sociopolitical formations and cultural practices as 'genuinely' postcolonial" (ibid, p. 11). Yet he prefers to examine the conflict between postcolonial theory and criticism. As a postcolonial critic who is attempting to create a theoretical base for the work I do, I appreciate

Moore-Gilbert's analysis of the situation and encouragement of a dialogue that includes the voices of theoreticians and critics alike, as well as those of us who attempt to mediate that space. In order to practice criticism from a theoretical base that provides some integrity, I would like to create a foundation that is not so rigid that it will crack under the pressure of global realities, nor so fluid that it cannot provide a basis for the participants who share in the dialogue. Like the houses built on the sands of Galveston Bay, the fault lines of the San Andreas, or the clay of the Red River Valley, the dialogue we construct requires a floating slab. To build under these conditions, pylons are driven more deeply into such ground, then the floating slab provides a base that is flexible enough to adjust to the shifting conditions yet sustain the integrity of the structure. However, before turning our attention to constructing such a flexible foundation, we must address the pitfalls that have called for this reconstruction. We must also keep in mind the many parties involved in the building of the dialogue, for dialogue takes place between the stories, between the critics, and between the critics and the stories. As I address the pitfalls, I turn my attention to the dialogue between the critics, because it is the critics who have framed the space into which they fit the stories, and it is this framing that stands now on shaky ground. When I move to the flexible foundation that I propose, I will be speaking of the dialogue between stories and how the suggested basis makes room for more inclusion; the critics belong here, too, by implication, such a space becoming the place where all parties rejoin the dialogue.

Critical Pitfalls of Rigidity: Race and Place

I first referred to this threat to narrow and possess the dialogic space in an essay I published on the work of Brian Friel, Irish playwright, as clearly postcolonial. In that essay (Duncan 1994) I termed the tendencies *continentalization* and *colorization*, referring to the prevalent definition of postcolonial as writing that emerges from non-European cultures once colonized by white Europeans. While certainly the particular form of postcolonial cultures so indicated may represent the majority postcolonial condition, the definition fails to give voice to cultures that do not squarely fit the continental and color parameters. Unfortunately, rather than shaping a responsive and respectful transformation of those parameters, the dialogue has, if anything, heated into a debate which may well determine the vibrancy and validity of postcolonial studies. In the interest of opening the dialogue to include all people, regardless of place or skin color, who have lived under colonial constructs and who emerge from a postcolonial condition, we must rethink the danger embedded in the constricting racial definition that has been too easily accepted or assumed by postcolonial scholars.

For many critics, race functions as one of the border elements currently defining the postcolonial realm. Indeed, the race issue lies at the heart of a

question that led to a heated debate on the postcolonial list serve moderated through the University of Virginia. In February 1997 Lynnette Kissoon of the University of Toronto asked "do Irish writers count as postcolonial writers? And if so, does that change the way we perceive postcoloniality?" Eugene O'Brien of the University of Limerick replied:

This is a cogent question, and one which has been the subject of some debate. If by postcolonial one means writing from a place that was colonized by another government, then yes it must be. Ireland is an unusual case in that it is a first world country (some might question aspects of this) and white in racial composition. As such, it does not fit comfortably in the paradigm of the third world/racial other dimension of the postcolonial. One need only observe the paucity of references to Ireland in *The Empire Writes Back* where the issue of Ireland can be seen to destabilize the whole theoretical dimension of the book. I think that the case of Ireland, as a colonized country which fought a war of independence to free itself from British rule, is obviously broadly similar to other post-colonial cultures, but I reckon a lot depends on the definition of the postcolonial that is used. (postcolonial listserv 2/4/97)

Certainly within Irish studies a number of scholars quite reasonably assume that Ireland should take its place in the postcolonial dialogue. In his introduction to *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, Seamus Deane describes Ireland as "the only Western European country that has both an early and late colonial experience" (Deane 1990, p. 4), referring to pre-independence for the Republic and the ongoing situation in Northern Ireland. One of the founders of Field Day, the effort in the 1980s of Irish artists and scholars to respond to the "nature and genesis of the present impasse," Deane emphatically states, "Field Day's analysis of the situation derives from the conviction that it is, above all, a colonial crisis" (ibid, p. 6). Even before the foundation of Field Day, linguists dedicated to the revival of Irish located the root of the problem in the colonial effort of England to kill the native language. The work of sociolinguists such as Hilary Tovey, Damian Hannan, and Hal Abramson in *Why Irish? Irish Identity and the Irish Language* and Reg Hindley in *The Death of the Irish Language: A Qualified Obituary* contributes greatly to an understanding of the complexity of the language issue. Other Irish scholars have followed on the heels of Deane and his colleagues to illuminate more fully the Irish post-colonial condition beyond the language issue. David Lloyd focuses on the obsession with the question of identity, a theme which he says "saturates the discursive field, drowning out other social and cultural possibilities" (Lloyd 1993, p. 3). Lloyd points out the danger of attempting to define an Irish identity when he argues "one principal and consistent dynamic of identity formation has been the negation of recalcitrant or inassimilable elements in Irish society" (ibid, p. 5). While Lloyd is quite right in calling into question any essentialist definition of national/cultural identity, his critique should not move us away from an examination of how identity is formed, of the multitude of postcolonial pressures brought to bear on the individuals who are heirs to the

postcolonial condition, and the resulting difficulty of identity formation. Lecturing at the 1993 Yeats Summer School in Sligo, the same year as the publication of Lloyd's study, Declan Kiberd declared, "Ireland is, for me, a supreme postcolonial instance." Kiberd has continued to provide one of the most clear and thorough analyses of Ireland's postcolonial condition with the publication of *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*. While Kiberd's overview and close analysis of Irish literature and culture provides the kind of breadth and depth to which all scholars should aspire, he still seems to identify the starting point of postcolonial Irish writing as following decolonization of most of the island in the 1920s. His analysis of "the expected wrong-turning" that the Irish made on the heels of decolonization is brilliant, and his comparison of Daniel Corkery's view of independent Ireland with Ngugi's commentary on Kenya illustrates Ireland's deep connectedness to the postcolonial dialogue. However, we need that same kind of attention to brilliantly illuminate the postcolonial situation of the Irish from the point of colonization forward.

As I consider my own work as a postcolonial critic, I attempt to address three gaps in the current dialogue. First, while Irish postcolonial scholars are speaking out strongly, these voices are most often heard chiefly within Irish studies rather than in the wider postcolonial dialogue, a situation I wish to rectify. Second, while sociolinguists recognize the evolutionary nature of language use, Irish postcolonial critics have not taken into account the evolutionary nature of oppositional writing from the point of colonization and thus too narrowly define the authors and texts considered postcolonial. In my own work, I am increasing my investigation of oppositional strategies, to date reading back as far as the 1800 Act of Union. Finally, rather than continuing to privilege the novel as the literary location of the postcolonial voice, I particularly turn attention to Irish drama and its ability to more fully engage public perceptions of identity and responses to postcolonial struggles.

From O'Brien's response and the work of Irish scholars, it is clear that a group of us believe the way in which we define postcolonialism must provide room for the Irish; yet the Irish do not readily fit the racial and geographic borders assumed by a great many postcolonial scholars. The definition of post-colonial that still seems to hold sway was voiced by Helen Tiffin in a 1988 essay. Tiffin, notably, is one of the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*. Tiffin's summary definition reads: "writing and reading practices grounded in some form of colonial experience occurring outside Europe but as a consequence of European expansion into and exploitation of 'the other' worlds" (Tiffin 1988, p. 170). If we continue to operate under the definition of postcolonialism established by Helen Tiffin over a decade ago, then we remain blind to our own cooperation in racial bigotry.

A critic who has done much to address notions of racial bigotry and whose own work speaks of pitfalls, my mirror here acknowledging my admiration of her work, is Anne McClintock. McClintock has written cogently about how during the nineteenth century the "imperial race" used the concept of race to

define "groups as 'natural' and 'biological' rather than social." Those in power were interested in establishing what McClintock refers to as "'contagious' classes," in which the Irish were included, to indicate the superiority of those in power over inferior groups of people supposedly delineated by biology and given genetically to degeneration (McClintock 1988, p. 158). While McClintock includes the Irish among the "contagious" groups in the hierarchy that she describes as established by the imperial mindset, the Irish are still included among the white race, though at the low end, "with the (Irish) working-class female in the lower depths of the white race" (ibid, p. 163). Perhaps McClintock is unaware that a popular representation of the Irish by those in power clearly placed the Irish among the black race. A December 9, 1876 illustration in *Harper's Weekly: Journal of Civilization* shows the likeness of the Irish to the Negro. The caption explains that Africans "came to Ireland, and mixed with the natives of the South and West, who themselves are supposed to have been of low type and descendants of savages of the Stone Age." Even if a bit shortsighted, McClintock is right in pointing out how imperialists use the race card. However, it is time that we remove race as a way to line up our enemy in our sights. By now, we should comprehend that biology has long since proven such racial theories to be ridiculous, to lack a basis, and to reveal bias. When San Juan (1998, p. 119) declares, "Race is the mask of class, in the ultimate analysis," he draws attention to the fictional construct of race (mask) and how it functions to purposely create an underclass. San Juan's understanding of race as "a property of dominance relations between groups" (ibid, p. 129) rather than anything to do with biology can accurately move us away from committing the error of colorization and toward the clear need to illuminate and refute the way in which those in power use race as a tool to undermine the other.

The real issue is not race but how the one in power superscribes an image for the oppressed. Edward Said certainly recognizes that the issues of race and place are imaginative creations of those in power. Though Said has been accused of setting up binary oppositions between East and West, this is an oversimplification of his view unless one imagines that Ireland has been geographically relocated in the East. Or perhaps that is exactly what Said imagines when he places Ireland outside of Britain and even Europe, designating it as one of the "distant or peripheral worlds, conceived of as desirable but subordinate" to the imperialist mindset of British culture (Said 1993, pp. 52, 106). If we are to legitimately include the Irish as postcolonial people, then we must either imagine them to be black and in the East or scrap Tiffin's definition. As Eugene O'Brien notes, those who have adopted the notion of colonizers as always white Europeans and the colonized as always non-white races "run into the danger of perpetuating, in an inverted form, the racialist essentialisms that they sought to overcome and displace" (postcolonial listserv 2/4/97). Racialist essentialism led to apartheid in South Africa. But I do not think that most postcolonial theorists would want to be guilty of exercising apartheid of any sort. Jacques Derrida writes: "Racism always betrays the perversion of a

man. . . . It institutes, declares, writes, inscribes, prescribes. A system of marks, it outlines space in order to assign forced residence or to close off borders. It does not discern, it discriminates" (Derrida 1985, p. 290). As we attempt to describe the postcolonial space, we should be more discerning and less discriminating. What ever borders we reconstruct should be flexible enough to support all peoples who have suffered colonization and emerged into a post-colonial condition. If race is no longer used as a determining factor in who can have a voice in a postcolonial dialogue, then we will finally have a symphonic blend of voices that includes the Irish, Koreans, Native Americans, and a multitude of others whose skin color, geographic location, or same-race connection to their colonizers has left them standing outside the borders. Because of his concentration on real life struggles with "inequality of power and control over resources" (San Juan 1998, p. 13), San Juan is able to escape the false constructs of continentalization and colorization, including in his citation of those "being subjected to unconscionable treatment such as systematic brutalization and genocide" the people of Northern Ireland and Hawaii (ibid). In fact, San Juan suggests "a 'Third World' domain of subjects-in-process that is not so much geographical as political and social" (ibid, p. 16). Under San Juan's definition, "Third World" ceases to be a physical concept and becomes instead what he refers to as "a trope as well as the site of dissent and insurgency . . . that anticipates change and renewal" (ibid, p. 17).

Critical Pitfalls of Rigidity: Time and Governance

Scholars continue to argue about what the *post* in postcolonial means. For many, the overly rigid interpretation of *post* as after the departure of the colonizers still holds sway. Certainly *post* contains the notion of *after*. However, would many of us be willing to argue that the identity crisis, the resistance to a prescribed identity coming from the empire, the need to reformulate and voice an identity which is now partly shaped because of the entrance of empire, only comes after the departure of the colonizer? The *after* reference for *post*-colonial more fittingly applies to after the onset of colonization, when the identity conflicts originate and shape the contributing cultural identities for years to come. Texts that emerge after the point of colonization and up to a stabilizing in the construction of identity can contribute much to the voicing of and understanding of the postcolonial condition. It is actually rather amazing that scholars who trace the origins of postcolonial theory to Frantz Fanon and Edward Said would see *post* in any other light. When *The Wretched of the Earth* was published in 1967, to use only one glaring African example, South Africa still lay under the colonial construct of apartheid regardless of the legal independence from the former empire. Palestine continues to struggle with colonization, and Said writes freely about subjection of any culture, including his own, as well as others such as the Irish, for whom the time construct needs negotiation.

Regardless of these realities some scholars have mounted an argument against the notion of *post* with which I hold, but it is time to reevaluate such arguments. McClintock takes issue with associating the *post* with "everything that has happened from the very *beginning* of colonialism" (McClintock 1994, p. 293). She calls to mind what seems to be an unsettling image for her, Henry James and Charles Brockden Brown in conversation with "more regular members" Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Salman Rushdie. McClintock makes a surprising mistake here that seems at odds with her concern that postcolonial scholars too often fail "to denote *multiplicity* . . . [and] run the risk of telescoping crucial geopolitical distinctions into invisibility" (ibid). McClintock avoids oversimplifying the roles of place and governance but falls into the time trap even while struggling, which she admits in her introduction to her essay, to avoid that linear construct as well. The postcolonial dialogue does not and should not sound like a monologue, not with regard to place, nor power structures, nor time. While McClintock's conversational comparison may be unsettling for many good reasons, time should not be one of these. If we are going to take up McClintock's challenge to see the multiple perspectives, hear the multiple voices in the postcolonial dialogue, then we must recognize that the postcolonial voices who are speaking from close to the point of colonization will necessarily sound a different note than those speaking after independence; yet all of these are concerned with a similar problem – how to achieve an identity that is not prescribed by the colonizer. Do we really want, as McClintock suggests, to leave the Northern Irish, the Palestinians, the Native Americans out of the postcolonial dialogue because they are still within the colonial experience? Do they have nothing to contribute, no share in the voicing of the identity struggles that have emerged since the point of colonization? For one who has struggled mightily to get us to recognize that postcolonialism has much more to do with power constructs than linear time, McClintock ironically supports the linear time trap herself.

San Juan rightly recognizes "the failure of national liberation struggles to achieve a complete radical break with the past of shame and invisibility" (San Juan 1998, p. 3), and so does not fall into the linear time trap. Yet he does commit another kind of governance flaw. His commitment to address injustice and inequalities suffered by those under the colonizing efforts of international capitalism is admirable, particularly in his specificity, his attention to the details of places, people, and events. However, what might happen if San Juan would as carefully focus on Marxist states involved in colonization? It seems to me that his commitment to upholding self-determination "for all communities and peoples tyrannized by capital and other irrational forces" (ibid, p. 17) would gain credence if it did not bracket away Marxist regimes. Secondly, there indeed may be grounds for San Juan's criticism of postcolonial discourse as a product of capitalism arising out of "First World" academies, but to insist that academicians working in such institutions must necessarily be suspect seems overly essentialist and somewhat disingenuous when we recall that San Juan earned both of his upper graduate degrees at Harvard and has taught in

numerous such academies, as have many historical materialists who challenge the ability of postcolonial critics to work within power structures while calling into question the legacy of empires. If we are to turn our theory into praxis and our critics into agents for social change, then we must cease turning on one another and present a more unified front, create within our field a real solidarity.

Critical Pitfall of Vagueness: Dealing with Critics of Postcolonial Criticism

Russell Jacoby accuses postcolonial theorists of providing "few political insights or conclusions" (Jacoby 1995, p. 36). While I am not willing to reach hard-drawn conclusions that would essentialize the postcolonial condition and postcolonial writing, there are some conclusions I am willing to draw about the nature of our dialogue.

Most postcolonial scholars seem to understand power as the ability to wield control over an other. Even the part of the debate about postcolonialism that defines the *post* as after colonization has begun or after independence gained from the colonizer has to do with who is in power when. For my part, since I believe the postcolonial story is rooted in an identity conflict that begins from the time of colonization, I conclude that the *post* must mean after colonization has begun. Defining *post* in this way broadens the dialogue but in no way weakens it. There is, however, a more important debate raging with regard to power. Some postcolonial theorists see the native in the postcolonial condition as powerless, always being done unto, always being spoken for and never able to speak. Gayatri Spivak has created quite a flurry with her insistence that the subaltern cannot speak. A correlate to this position is the idea that the one who speaks for the subaltern can never speak truthfully. Certainly this concept of power as external and repressive owes much to Michel Foucault. However, if there is more than one kind of power, if power can be an internal state of being, then the postcolonial person may maintain power even under oppression. It is the internal power of being which has helped many an oppressed individual to survive, even to create under such conditions. Kyle Pasewark (1993) provides illumination of this very kind of power. The perceptive postcolonial scholar should recognize that both kinds of power, the external use of power over an other and the internal power of being, are revealed in the postcolonial condition.

In his criticism of postcolonial scholars Jacoby declares "most postcolonial theorists cannot write a sentence" (Jacoby 1995, p. 36). Unfortunately, this piece of criticism is too often warranted. Yes, there are many reasons the postcolonial critic might choose to write in a manner less than clearly understandable. Postcolonial story writers certainly employ such a strategy as part of their subversion of the colonizing language. Coded language indicates that the speaker wants only a select few, those as counted inside the group, to

understand what is being said. If there is danger to the speaker, this practice is a commonsense survival technique. However, what danger lurks for the postcolonial critic? Does the critic fear that clarity will open his or her argument up to attack? Jacoby notes that postcolonial scholars particularly like to play the one-upmanship game, and he seems to believe that we are more prone to this than other academics. Perhaps Jacoby needs to join us as we look in the mirror, for academia itself has trained us to the one-up game. For my part, I think academia in general and postcolonial scholarship in particular would benefit from a less aggressive debate style. However, if we are to risk an open dialogue, then we must risk making ourselves understood. If we want our message to reach beyond the select few with whom we group ourselves, then we must remove the code. Clarity does not equate with simplicity; complexity does not equate with obfuscation. And it is at this juncture that I now attempt a clear articulation of what I see as a basis for postcolonial study.

A Flexible Foundation

The flexible foundation I suggest may best be conceived as a shape able to shift but maintaining certain points of intersection. The first point of intersection takes the form of a series of open-ended questions. These questions reveal how the postcolonial condition cuts across boundaries. The three central questions all deal with identity: Who am I? How did I come to be who I am? To whom am I connected? Now these questions are not unique to the postcolonial condition, so while they are the basis of concern they cannot alone set apart postcolonial writing. It is true that many a non-postcolonial text might well deal with such identity issues. However, explorations of these questions permeate postcolonial literature with a ferocity of need and complexity of depth.

The second point of intersection in the postcolonial dialogue is the sociopolitical domination of a native people by an encroaching alien power. This is the level of the postcolonial realm – the context. The postcolonial person who asks the initial identity questions is emerging from a struggle that has established conflicting identities. On the one hand, the historical identity of this individual is linked to the native land and a familial identity; on the other, like it or not, to a state-imposed identity. Eventually those who descend from the colonizers and those who descend from the natives both may consider themselves “native” to the contested space. Note that this two-part historical conflict in identity works to explain the struggle of those who emerge from the native colonized and those who emerge from the buffer colonials (i.e., the two Northern Ireland communities). Certainly Mishra and Hodge (1994) moved toward such a constructional notion with their description of the oppositional and the complicit postcolonial. However, their suggestion that the native is always oppositional and the settler always complicit remains problematic. Within many a postcolonial story we may find the complicit native or the

settler who has become so immersed in the native culture that he or she becomes oppositional to the imperial power. The struggle for the individual is to achieve an identity that is his or her story rather than merely history.

The third point of intersection is, of course, the storytelling. This is the portion that rises out of the postcolonial context and depends on the identity questions that are deeply rooted in the contextual land and history. While non-postcolonial scholars may not recognize fully the postcolonial context in which the identity questions are rooted, even these readers will note the form of the storytelling. And here I simply put in my own words what many of my colleagues have already said in other ways. Because of the struggle that always has at least three sides – the native history, the state construct, and the individual – we will hear a story that is layered, made of fragments attempting a whole. The language will often cut in two or more directions, distancing one group and reaching out to another or interrogating all groups in favor of the individual story. To see more clearly, the author will place history under a lens, studying the mutations in earlier tellings. And the new telling will be less about the questionable facts and more about the image experienced. Irony and metaphor, as language that doubles, will be the tools of speaking the conflict itself to a new level of understanding that accommodates the disparate parts.

Testing the Construct

If we recognize that the onset of the postcolonial condition begins after the point of colonization and does not necessarily adhere to constraints of place or race, continent or color, then we are called to look again at the work of some writers we have too easily dismissed. I will test the foundation I have suggested by briefly surveying the struggle with identity as illustrated by four Irish dramatists (a broadening of the usual privileging of the novel) over four generations. For the illustration, I choose 1800, which marked the Act of Union between Ireland and Great Britain, as the point of departure. In 1812 Alicia LeFanu, sister of more widely known Richard Brinsley Sheridan, wrote *Sons of Erin; or, Modern Sentiment*. At this point in the postcolonial experience the Irish were under thorough domination, asked to assimilate to the dominant identity construct yet continually treated as inferiors. LeFanu must move cautiously, raise her voice gently to make her point of equal value. Accordingly, she writes a play in which her Irish protagonist goes to England (reverse invasion of a sort), passes himself off as the most intelligent and worthy man ever encountered by the English nobility with whom he acquaints himself and who wrongly supposes he is English, then reveals his Irishness, stripping the English of their ignorance and prejudice. The conflict is easy to see – an Irishman who can be more English than the English yet is thoroughly and proudly Irish, forced to play the game in order to win realization of his worth. This comedy of manners could easily be overlooked if one does not note the context in

which the text is written as postcolonial, or likewise if one does not understand the necessity of the strategy, masking the message under the guise of romantic comedy.

I think also of the Irish melodramas of Dion Boucicault written in the 1860s and 1870s, works scorned by Yeats and other members of the Celtic Revival as making a mockery of the Irish for the sake of pandering to the English. However, Boucicault was working on the heels of the famine and various unsuccessful uprisings, an inflammatory time to say the least. Using the popular melodrama form, he could deal with murder based on ethnic identity but turn the tale to his advantage, as he did in his 1860 *The Colleen Bawn*. Dramatizing a widely known murder case that had already been fictionalized in Gerald Griffin's 1829 novel *The Collegians*, Boucicault changes the ending, allowing the heroine to escape with her life and teach the complicit Anglo-Irish gentry (and perhaps his English audiences, which included Queen Victoria on four occasions for this play alone) a lesson in identity. Eily, the heroine, is secretly married to Hardress, the Anglo-Irish gentleman who keeps the marriage secret because of his shame of Eily's thoroughly Irish nature and way of speaking (both Irish phrases and Irish-English pronunciations). Unbeknownst to him, his servant-henchman sets out to rid his master of this burden, seemingly killing Eily (who actually survives a drowning). At the end, when all is revealed and Eily's nobility of spirit is well-established above and beyond any nobility of birth, her husband's mother and his Anglo-Irish intended fiancée declare that from now on everyone will speak with Eily's noble tongue. The irony is apparent in that actually the identity embraced, the Irish ethnicity, is still being told in the dominant English, but now quite an Irish-English. The English audiences delighted in the romantic turn to the melodrama, never noting the message to the Irish audiences, many of whom had immigrated to England and sat in the same theater. The Irish of Boucicault's time could hardly fail to note the message, however, especially when he began handing out his tract, *The Fireside History of Ireland*, prior to performances. Certainly Boucicault was not engaged in the same project as the Celtic Revivalists, leaping back to a point in history that precedes English colonization in order to reaffirm Irish identity, but in his own way he was indeed resisting English control of the Irish identity.

For those like W. B. Yeats and his colleagues in the Celtic Revival who were writing in a crucible that contained the end of colonization and the seeds of independence, rediscovering what Stuart Hall calls "cultural identity" by looking back to a common history that preceded colonization was a natural move. Thus, Yeats would write his nation's story in his dramatic recreation of the life and death of Cuchulain. The character of Cuchulain as dramatized can be seen to personify the postcolonial moments through which Yeats lived: the dangerous forming of tribal allegiances and how to yoke might with wisdom in the battle for Irish unity (1904, pre-independence, *On Baile Strand*), questioning if the hero is dead and if not what sacrifice must be made to bring Ireland's heroic self back to life (1919, post-failed Easter Uprising and pre-

independence, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*), and seeing the dream of total unity dying (1939, post-independence minus Northern Ireland, *The Death of Cuchulain*). While Yeats and the other Celtic Revival writers revived ancient Irish images to construct their national identity, they were still working with masks, though of a different making from earlier generations.

In the current postcolonial dialogue, when empire-building is no longer glorified but vilified, writers are free to take off the masks and practice, again as Hall notes, "the production of identity" through "the retelling of the past" (Hall 1994, p. 393). In this retelling the writers refuse to give into a nostalgia, matching Spivak's test of how postcolonialists must deal with the archives. Certainly we can see such critical reconstruction in Brian Friel's 1980 *Translations*. Looking back to the British Ordnance Survey that remapped Ireland, translating Irish place names to Anglicized versions, and to the emergence of the national schools in the 1830s that finally allowed for Irish Catholics to be educated but at the price of their language and religion, Friel does not glorify old Irish ways nor totally vilify the English soldiers involved in the survey. Instead he shows the impact of this crossroads on the Irish and on at least one of the English soldiers. We recognize the damage done, the difficulty of blending unlike ways of life, and we recognize the irony of voices silenced for too long now given voice in Friel's reconstruction.

At different moments in the struggle for identity among those who have emerged from colonialism, different ways of speaking are necessitated by the power structures and cultural context of their times. Hall rightly recognizes that

we cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about "one experience, one identity." . . . Cultural identity . . . is a matter of "becoming" to as well as of "to being." It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (Hall 1994, p. 394)

Because of the work of J. A. Laponce (1987) I've become increasingly aware of the need to recognize the postcolonial condition as an evolutionary one. While Laponce is a linguist who deals with the strategies of cultural groups whose primary language becomes dominated by another language, the native tongue giving ground to the colonizer's tongue, her recognition that strategies must change from the onset, to completion of domination, to attempted revitalization of the native tongue, should make postcolonialists sit up and take notice. After all, the linguistic shifts in identity with which she is dealing are integrally linked to colonialism and postcolonialism. If the linguistic strategies evolve, then literature that treats the identity shift should reflect a similar evolution. It is this evolution in Irish writing that lies at the heart of my study *Language and Identity in Post-1800 Irish Drama*. I am indebted to Laponce for helping me comprehend that the postcolonial dialogue is of greater range and

depth than many of us have been willing to recognize, even while it is engaged in an ongoing thematic struggle.

An Epilogue?

Just as there are some who might prefer a rigidly structured postcolonial space, there may be some who are looking for an answer to what kind of story is emerging from the postcolonial condition, what does the identity look and sound like toward which the postcolonial author speaks. Is there a positive outcome on the other side of postcolonialism? However, just as my notion of the postcolonial dialogue begins with a series of questions, I am more comfortable with a dialogue that "ends" with more open-ended questions than narrowly construed answers. The cure to the conflicted identity probably cannot be a shared one, or we are back to that which is a reflex to empire – entrenched tribalism in the form of nationalism. For the postcolonial to achieve identity that is genuinely new, old tools must not be used for the shaping. So while I cannot guess what shape any given identity will take, I confess that I optimistically hope the direction will be a post-national identity, and then we will be called upon once again to rethink basic structures.

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