

In this way, her own critical perspective remains indiscriminating of the social and cultural forces at work in women's texts. Her eagerness to revalue women's literature obscures the fact that gender

can certainly be a conflictive arena for women and a place for negotiating identities.

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Cairns CRAIG. *Out of History*. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996. 296 pages.

Cairns Craig, lecturer in English literature at the University of Edinburgh, has been general editor of the Aberdeen University Press *The History of Scottish Literature* (1987-8) and editor of its fourth volume on twentieth-century literature. He is also well-known as one of the leading contributors to the journal *Cencras-tus*: his contributions to its early issues were largely responsible for its success. Both publications shared the common aim of relocating Scottish literature into a contemporary context, a position which discards the restrictions imposed by purely historical scholarship and the limiting paradigm of national or cultural identity.

*Out of History* is a collection of seven closely connected essays, «Prologue», «The Body in the Kit Bag», «Out of History», «Absences», «George Orwell and the English Ideology», «Being Between», and «Epilogue: Posting Towards the Future», which analyse the way in which Scotland has been out of history—outside the major development of UK affairs and outside contemporary theoretical models—in order to propose how it should engage in these issues. Little opposition has been made to the argument that Scottish culture stagnated in a time warp for most of the nineteenth century, however ironical it might be that Walter Scott is widely regarded as the father figure of the historical novel. Scottish culture became parochial because it saw itself as such: provincial to the metropolitan centre, making the high road to London the solution adopted by many gifted writers from Carlyle to Bar-

rie down to the present day. Cairns Craig argues that this situation arises because Scots continually looked to English models, to the kind associated with Arnold, T.S. Eliot and Leavis, only to feel inferior: «At no time in its history could Scotland have been described as an 'organic' or a 'unified' culture: it could never have been envisaged as one 'comprehensive' mind transcending the 'prejudices of politics and fashions of taste' of a particular period therefore it could not qualify as a tradition or as a literature.» (p. 15) T.S. Eliot's blueprint for literary history and tradition exile Scotland to the periphery, which is not, it has to be pointed out, a natural process for a marginalised culture, as the case of Ireland proves without a doubt; a literary tradition based on the creation of a powerful national mythology has led to the boast that Irish authors have written the best modern literature in English. Therefore, if we want to find an analogous situation to Scotland's, we have to look to the experience of writers of the other cultures which made up the British Empire. History «in a terrifying and alienating form» (p. 48) thrust Scottish culture back into a historical continuum in 1914. This is clear from the vast number of Scottish novels and poems which deal with the First World War and its devastating effects. Perhaps the most important of these is L.G. Gibbon's *Sunset Song* (1932) However, the novel ends when its major character turns her back on the historical world and the devastation it has caused to her life and that of the community's, retreating to a location

clearly out of history. This conclusion is explicable in part as a rejection of history being equated with war, and partly because the models of historical metanarrative at her disposition do not suffice.

In the essay from which the book takes its title, Cairns Craig tackles the enigma I referred to some lines back: that of Scott. The *Waverley* Novels do not leave a school behind them in Great Britain, as they do in continental Europe. The enigma can be resolved by separating Scott from his legacy. Scott bequeathed a model of history or historical fiction based on the twin concepts of realism and progressive history. Yet if we attempt to judge Scott by these criteria, the result is dissatisfaction or complete rejection. Cairns Craig's hypothesis is that the *Waverley* Novels are based more on a geographical than a historical axis. Thus, when *Waverley* crosses the highland barrier, he journeys back into past history. As it stands, that is not in itself a novel idea, but, Cairns Craig proceeds: «The novel *Waverley*... can exemplify the inevitable victory of civility over barbarism only by revealing with equal power the possible reversal of civility into barbarism.» (p. 70) This is a crucial distinction, if we look at European historical novels which use a historical narrative to pave the way for a projected national unity, or if we study the novels of the 'American Scott' J. Fenimore Cooper, in which the path to the modern USA is charted; in both cases, no possibility of reversal is conceivable. Moreover, Cairns Craig, in an extremely perceptive analogy, proposes that Scott's reversal links him to Stevenson, arguing that the terrible conclusion of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde* gives out an identical warning: that the horror may lie in the future and is not necessarily confined to the past. I deliberately use the word 'horror' as an allusion to Conrad and *Heart of Darkness* in order to cement the colonial paradigm, as the novella graphically

illustrates 'the possible reversal of civility into barbarism' actually taking place.

The principal merit of Cairns Craig's study lies, for me at least, in his critique of Marxist readings of culture and history. These have their roots in Scottish Enlightenment thought and its belief in progressive history. Lukacs' reinstatement of Scott as an important novelist is based on the former's belief that the latter demonstrates how the historical path towards a world-wide proletarian revolution has begun, illustrated by the way in which Scott debunks the ruling elites he portrays, the kings, princes, dukes and aristocracy in general, turning the bourgeois characters into heroes and predicting that they will in turn give way to the proletarian characters, the servants, 'low-life' characters in general, who are more vital than the middling heroes. This historical pattern allows modern scholars to deconstruct national myths, tartanry and the Highlands in the case of Scott and Scotland, as being purely nostalgic and irrelevant to history. In a highly controversial statement, Cairns Craig argues that the hostility towards national myths theoretically justifies a belief in progressive history but covers up a far deeper reaction, namely 'the profound hatred of the intellectuals for the culture they inhabited, the profound embarrassment they suffered by being unable, any more, to identify themselves with some universalist truth that would redeem them from Scottishness.' (p. 107) While adhering to historical ideological models, their rejection of their national culture tended to be simply geographical. A complete contrast is provided by their counterparts in England, and especially in the case of that most fabricated of literary identities, George Orwell. His distance from his predecessors is explained by his inability 'to take over the mythos of England as defined by Edwardian writers - a mixture of Fabian socialism and ramblers' club naturism.' (p. 132)

His distrust of totalitarianism, whether of 1948 or 1984, is accordingly not an expression of fear about totalitarianism in general, nor a parody of Stalin, but a deep rooted hostility to modernity and the destruction of an essentially ruralist view of England.

This would explain the deeply patriotic strain throughout both his domestic and imperial writing. Similar conceptual paradoxes mark the thinking of E.P. Thompson, author of the monumental *Making of the English Working Classes*. Thompson's work is both a historical account and 'celebration of England's radical history'. (p.155) What this entails is that for Thompson the heroic nature of the class struggle might form part of a universal history but its Englishness, its national character is far more striking. Similarly, Raymond Williams' work—despite the author's Welsh nationality and due to his belief that Welsh culture is subordinate—shares with Thompson's the belief that the gradual nature of change in England, bereft of revolutions, is the civilised model to follow. What Cairns Craig says of Williams could equally well apply to Thompson or Orwell, namely that: 'Class provides the instrument for attacking the patterns of domination he perceives with English culture, but the instrument which conveys the attack is itself an integral part of a definition of English culture which has suppressed any consciousness of its relations of cultural domination with the other 'cultures' of its boundaries.' (p. 146) What strove to pass for universal, actually turns out be local, or national. Clearly, Cairns Craig's critique of these three thinkers is one of the most coherent and radical to have appeared, questioning the basis of much of the work of post-Marxist critical theory, now so influential in universities and intellectual circles. For what he is proposing is that when, for example, cultural materialists or new historicists launch

their assault on Shakespearean studies under a banner of anti-establishment views, they are simply maintaining, if not strengthening, the foundations of that very same belief in the validity of the national English culture that they are supposedly waging war against; or, take another instance, when feminists take up the challenge of occupying their own literary geography, as Virginia Woolf demands, that space will remain essentially anglocentric however radical it claims to be, for even when it leaves England behind geographically, it is English culture, or to be more precise, a certain view of English culture, that retains its place as the model to follow.

Hopefully, I have given sufficient reasons for readers to want to go out and buy this erudite, thought-provoking volume. Reading through this review, I have become aware that it is dense and not necessarily easy to grasp at first reading. This is the reviewer's fault entirely, and the consequence of trying to summarise what I hope will become a very important book. In the past few years, many articles and books have attacked contemporary critical theory for its avoidance of the question of artistic value and accused it of being hostile to its own discipline and responsible for falling standards. However valid such analysis may or may not be, it replies to one way of thinking, which is aptly labelled progressive, the post-Marxist, the new-left, feminism and so on, by presenting alternative parameters. I would suggest that this is the case of Harold Bloom's intriguing study *The Western Canon: The Books and Scholars of the Ages*: an emphasis on non- or anticanonical literature and criticism is countered by Bloom setting forth the validity of that canon. Unfortunately, until the publication of *Out of History*, very few critics have attempted to analyse contemporary critical theory on its own terms and point to its inherent inconsistencies. Several explanations are possible:

if it has been able to absorb its peripheries, as the incorporation of Williams and Orwell suggests, it is extremely difficult to find a way to begin to dismantle an ideology which is universalist in theory but nationalist in practice; second, Williams is such an important figure within contemporary critical circles that capable but voluntary iconoclasts are few and far between. Cairns Craig calls for a radical

re-orientation of literary studies based on a far more coherent use of historiography and the inclusion of geographical paradigms in critical models. This is clearly an enormous challenge, and one looks forward to the continuation of the exciting debate that *Out of History* has started.

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Declan KIBERD, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1995. 719 pages.

*whatever is given  
Can always be reimagined, however four-square,  
Plank-thick, hull-stupid and out of its time  
It happens to be.*

(Seamus Heaney, 'The Settle Bed', *Seeing Things*)

«If God invented whiskey to prevent the Irish from ruling the world, then who invented Ireland?» Kiberd's answer to that initial question is to be found in his new book, which may be labelled as the first critical history of modern Irish literature written within a postcolonial framework. As such, it fills a large gap in literary studies and will soon become an absolute *must* for those interested in modern Irish writing. Apart from a few helpful 'inter-chapters' that give an overview of the sociopolitical context, the bulk of the book consists of thirty-five chapters in which Kiberd alternates literary-historical analysis centred on a topic (childhood and Ireland, mothers and daughters, deanglicisation, nationality and cosmopolitanism, the Great War and Irish memory, Ireland and the end of the British empire, etc.) with an analysis of the literature and political ideas of the main Irish writers of the 20th century (Wilde, Shaw, Somerville and Ross, Lady Gregory, O'Casey, Synge, Yeats, Joyce, Bowen, Beckett, Flann O'Brien, Seamus Heaney, Brian Friel, etc.). Throughout the book Kiberd makes intelligent connections between past and present and

between Ireland and other postcolonial literatures and countries; the breadth of his scholarship is extraordinary, and his readings of particular texts and periods are often brilliant and innovative. In Edward W. Said's terms (reproduced on the back jacket of the book), Kiberd's is a «dazzling, bravura performance».

According to Kiberd, the postcolonial history of Ireland is a succession of plays in which writers perform different versions of Englishness and Irishness to one another. From the time of the conquest of Ireland by England in the 16th and early 17th centuries, English and Irish authors sought national identity by means of differentiation: while contesting each other's invented images, they created their own national image. The process was reciprocal and went on and on in a vicious circle: in the period of national building each of them (like Caliban and Prospero) badly needed the other in order to assert their own identity. But in fact, at the beginning both English and Irish were more or less alike.

For Kiberd, then, Ireland (and it could be argued that *any* modern nation) is a forged, 'imagined community'