



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Postcolonial Theory in Irish Drama from 1800-2000 by Dawn Duncan

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BOOK REVIEWS

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Peter O' Mahoney, in his chapter on supporting asylum seekers, suggests that the reduction of asylum seeker welfare entitlements to less than of any other group in Irish society may be in conflict with the 1937 Constitution and with the Equal Status Act (2000). Article 40.1 of the Constitution holds that all human persons shall be equal before the law. Of course, the government can change the law and the Irish people can change the Constitution. *Sanctuary in Ireland* was published before the 2004 Referendum that removed the birth right to citizenship to the children of asylum seekers and other non-nationals. Nevertheless, the final chapter on citizenship and the Constitution puts the Referendum in context through an analysis of the relevant case law that preceded it. The 1998 Belfast Agreement resulted in a Constitutional right to citizenship for all children born on the island of Ireland just as asylum and immigrant numbers began to rise. Asylum seekers with Irish-born children were entitled to be given leave to remain for the benefit of their children, as a result an earlier Supreme Court ruling. This, according to Donnocha O'Connell and Ciara Smith, put the government in a bind. It was politically impractical to change the Belfast Agreement but it was too much to allow a carefully constructed asylum system to be undermined by a 'procedural bypass'. Therefore a policy decision was made to begin to refuse leave to remain to asylum seeker families in the knowledge that this would trigger a further test case in the Supreme Court. In February 2003 the Supreme Court ruled that the Irish citizen children of non-citizens could be deported unless the non-citizen parent agrees to be deported without their child. Of course, the government subsequently found it practical to remove the constitutional birthright to citizenship by hitting on a formula that would ensure that those from the North and South whose parents were already 'Irish' could still become citizens. This proved overwhelmingly popular with the electorate. The good people of Wexford need no longer be counselled to lock up their daughters.

Bryan Fanning.

***Postcolonial Theory in Irish Drama from 1800-2000* by Dawn Duncan, Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellon Press, pp.254, (*Studies in Irish Literature, Volume 11*)**

In the introduction to her book, Dawn Duncan argues that 'the most provocative work by Irish postcolonial writers continues to be drama', claiming that drama's immediacy and social context allows it to penetrate

BOOK REVIEWS

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into the psyche of an era with greater socio-/cultural consequences than other literary media can manage. She then traces this development in a chronological application of contemporary postcolonial theory in the work of four dramatists, beginning with Alicia Sheridan LeFanu's early 19th century romances and ending with the grittier, more politically astute work of Brian Friel. In between, the often neglected plays of Dion Boucicault and the rarely overlooked drama of W. B. Yeats are cleverly used to develop her core argument over the role of identity in the effectiveness of Irish drama. This spread of almost two centuries works in Duncan's favour as she credibly and commendably attempts to chart the shifting nature of the debate over Ireland's colonial, linguistic and postcolonial identity.

Duncan's selection of Alicia Sheridan LeFanu as one of her studies provides the book with a very interesting opening chapter. Her relative obscurity when compared to the towering figures of Boucicault, Yeats and Friel allows Duncan not only to identify the putative origins of the dramatic debate over Irish identity, but also to voice what could be termed a literary subaltern. Despite her literary heritage, Alicia Sheridan LeFanu's plays, including *Sons of Erin, or, Modern Sentiment*, have hardly garnered a good deal of critical attention. Duncan argues that the play is an early example of the attempted marking of Irish identity to a largely Anglo-Irish or English audience, paralleling the questioning of the certainties of identity with an examination of emerging gender issues. LeFanu's airing of the thorny issue of mixed-race marriages, for example, typifies the complex nature of the interaction of the coloniser and the colonised. Duncan argues that within her work lie the seeds of concepts of post-colonial hybridity, a subject that was to occupy the thoughts of post-colonial critics many centuries later, exemplified in the work of Homi K. Bhabha.

Indeed, the increasing frustration of colonised writers with the efficacy of the imposed new language is an interesting angle to take on the melodramas of Dion Boucicault and Duncan persuasively seeks to place him at the centre of a subversive theatrical form, all the more dangerous given the popular perception of a dramatist divorced from the *real politik* of the 19th century. Equally, the plays of Yeats, Duncan argues, mark a high point in the Revivalists' cultural canon, developing the dramatic and emerging concerns of LeFanu and Boucicault into a full-blown, unashamedly political national theatre. This obsession with what Duncan

BOOK REVIEWS

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refers to as 'language manipulation' is then nicely dovetailed with the work of Brian Friel, a playwright in whose work the complexities of the post-colonial condition are played out. Duncan notes a shift from an inward obsession with identity to a more pluralist perception of what it is to be Irish in a rapidly changing global context, and her book is a fascinating, well-written and convincing account of some important dramatic developments on that most fraught of journeys.

John McDonagh

***The Jesuit Specter in Imperial Germany*, by Roisin Healy, Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2003, pp. 263**

Imperial Germany consisted of twenty-six states, dominated by Prussia, in an Empire that was founded in 1870 and foundered in 1918. Catholics were an unpopular minority of 36% in the Empire and the 634 Jesuits were the least popular Catholics. This book examines the Jesuits' situation, but is original in being a detailed study of the thinking and policies of their opponents, who succeeded in having them expelled from the Empire in 1872 and prevented their officially sanctioned return until 1917. The importance of German anti-Catholicism in the pre-First World War period has been overlooked by historians, who have also overlooked the exclusionary aspects of German liberalism. Dr. Healy corrects those oversights and states the anti-Catholicism was much more important than anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany.

The Jesuit Law was almost unique in that it came from extra-parliamentary agitation, provoked by the Protestant Association, itself part of the *Kulturkampf*, and was sustained later by the Protestant League, which was founded in 1886 and became a formidable political force, being male, middle class and helped by the Protestant clergy. This meant that parliamentary majorities for repeal, passed four times in the Lower House of Parliament in the 1890s, were almost unanimously rejected in the Upper House. Hundreds of thousands of Germans (and in one case over a million) routinely signed anti-repeal petitions.

German Jesuits, whom the Law took by surprise, responded by moving their schools and houses of formation abroad and benefited from their situation by gaining great sympathy amongst their fellow Catholics. This sympathy was reflected in the increased number of German Jesuits,