

# Introduction

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Their alleged allergy to ideas notwithstanding, it appears that the Irish were enthusiastic participants in the ideological strife which characterised the economic, social, political and cultural domains of the nineteenth century. In the essays collected in this volume we see some of this activity in a variety of fields – moving from the controversies over aesthetics and representation in art and literature; to the contests associated with the public discourses of science, popular culture, state policy, economics and philosophy; to the contribution made by Irish writers and thinkers to international debates about nationality, race and identity.

In many cases, Ireland appears to have functioned as an testing-ground for those ideologies developed within and utilised by metropolitan imperial cultures such as Great Britain. The aesthetics of classicism, the economics of *laissez-faire*, the gender ideology of 'separate spheres', and the discourse of Aryanism, to name but a few ideological discourses which feature in the following pages, were all challenged, modified or deconstructed when exposed to the conditions of nineteenth-century Ireland. The reasons for this are various, but have much to do with the inescapable effects of the 'unfinished business' of colonialism and imperialism in nineteenth-century Irish culture. The unresolved contests between Gaelic and English cultural values, between modernity and tradition, between peasantry and gentry, between Protestant and Catholic – all were such highly visible conflicts in nineteenth-century Ireland that ideology found itself continually in a state of exposure and confrontation, unable to 'naturalise' itself and achieve hegemonic invisibility. The failure or crisis in Ireland of those ideas and practices which had become hegemonic or at least dominant in the metropolitan imperial culture of Britain could in fact be understood in quite diametrically-opposed ways. Such failures were, from an imperial point of view, a mark of Ireland's hopelessly recalcitrant primitivism. On the other hand, from an anti-imperial position one might see such 'failures' quite differently, as positive evidence of the ideological and self-interested character of those supposedly 'natural' or 'progressive' imperial values.

Yet the picture is not a simple one of polarised conflict between competing British and Irish, or imperial and nationalist ideologies. Some of these essays demonstrate that the relations between Irish culture and metropolitan ideologies were occasionally more collusive than confrontational. Bourgeois Irish nationalism, for instance, adopted wholeheartedly the ideological forms of

public commemoration, the discourses on gender and the theories of national identity which originated in the metropolitan imperial 'centres' of European culture. Even more intriguingly, there is evidence that at certain moments the discourses of Gaelic popular culture and British state policy overlapped quite comfortably, as Niall Ó Ciosáin's paper suggests. Peter Gray too reminds us that personal and historical circumstances were often as influential as ideological debates in shaping the political and cultural relationships between Britain and Ireland in the nineteenth century.

The essays in the volume are arranged in three general categories. The first five papers, under the rubric of 'Ideology, Art and Representation', show how the literary and artistic representations of Ireland often complicated those ideological assumptions about the nature of art which imperialism (and purist forms of nationalism) tended to take for granted. Terry Eagleton, in his paper on 'Fr Prout' (Francis Sylvester Mahony), sees in the carnivalesque discourse of Mahony, Maginn and Mangan a form of subversion and resistance to the ideologically-saturated discourses of metropolitan imperialist culture. The plagiaristic, inbred, fragmentary, frequently hilarious writing produced by these nineteenth-century Hibernian *bricoleurs* was 'so doggedly, brilliantly peripheral', argues Eagleton, that it had the potential to deconstruct the very distinction between the 'peripheral' and the 'central'. For Eagleton, this mirrors a similar deconstructive process at work in O'Connellite politics. Yet all is not necessarily a matter of joyful discursive play under such conditions. Eagleton draws attention to the fact that such positions of resistance may have oppressive aspects too, as they did for Mahony and Wilde, where the 'pains of exile' became a kind of counterweight to the 'pleasures of the polyglottic'. In a general sense, it appears that the 'directionless', 'self-involved' and sectarian society produced by colonialism leaves its destructive marks upon even its most brilliant talents.

Luke Gibbons, in his discussion of Lady Morgan, Thomas Moore and Daniel Maclise, also focuses on the inescapability of politics and ideology in considering aesthetic problems in nineteenth-century Ireland. Gibbons shows how, when it came to the subject of Ireland, artistic representation was inevitably imagined and mobilised in terms of politics, even at the most fundamental level of aesthetic form: 'the difficulties in establishing a framing narrative, ordering the disparate elements in a story or picture and subjecting them to a unifying point of view, presented itself not simply as an aesthetic difficulty but as an intractable political problem'. Thus, certain works of art, like Maclise's *The Installation of Captain Rock* (1834), become politically subversive through their 'formal instability', particularly where such formal strategies 'disturb the composure of the viewer' rather than conform to the controlled aesthetic distance demanded by imperialist ideology. Like Eagleton's Bakhtinian revellers, an Irish artist like Maclise, in attempting to represent the 'truth', makes visible

the ideological nature of representation itself. The problems of truth and transparency, and their effects on the political culture of Ireland, is a theme addressed also by Willa Murphy, whose discussion of Maria Edgeworth shows how the latter's writings deconstruct the Enlightenment opposition between openness and secrecy. In a fascinating account of Edgeworth's double-sided discourse, Murphy argues that in a colonial society, 'there is at once too much secrecy and not enough – too much among Irish tenants for Ascendancy rulers to unmask; and not enough for the Ascendancy itself to hide behind. To an anxious and exposed Ascendancy, Ireland is at once a deeply opaque and painfully transparent place'. Judith Hill's essay turns to the commemorative monument as a form of representation, and sees it as a means of very explicitly 'putting culture to political use', in accordance with the theories of Thomas Davis as much as those of Victorian imperialism. The questions again of what (or who) is to be represented, and whose interests are being served by such representations, are shown to be central to the ideologically-inflected debates over the subjects, style and siting of Ireland's public urban monuments. Yet behind these factional disputes over whether to commemorate O'Connell or Prince Albert, Fr Mathew or Lord Gough, lies a deeper ideological unity, where all sides appear to share certain basic ideological assumptions – assumptions about the value of these specific forms of representative art, for instance, or shared assumptions about the nature of history (something propelled by a series of 'great men'). Irish art of this type challenges the values of the ruling ideology at one level (choosing an Irish hero rather than an English one, for example), while embracing those ruling values at another level. In this way, ironically, such nationalist art seems less challenging than the work of Mahony, Maclise, or even Edgeworth. Finally in this section, Sandra Siegel, in arguing against the simplistic view of Wilde as an apolitical dandy, shows how the material circuits of exchange, donation and reception of a literary work (in this case Wilde's *Poems*) can in fact reflect something of the imperial relation between Ireland and Britain – and show up the discrepancy between ideology as professed and ideology as practiced.

The second group of essays, under the rubric 'Ideology and Public Discourse' examines a variety of discourses, and considers their relation to ideological conflicts in nineteenth-century Ireland. Angela Bourke and Niall Ó Ciosáin both consider Gaelic popular culture and its relation to ideologies associated with modernisation and British political administration. The two writers show very different aspects to these relations: Bourke argues that Gaelic folklore constituted a 'vernacular cognitive system', the value of which was unrecognised by the 'modernising' linear ideology of the nineteenth century, an ideology associated with science, with English culture and with the official discourse of the state. In this case the English and Gaelic cultures represent radically alternative methods of understanding, with the latter being gradually

undermined by the former throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ó Ciosáin's discussion of the Poor Law Commission, on the other hand, shows that when it came to specific areas of knowledge and ideology, such as making discriminations between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, 'the gap between official and popular views was not as complete as the commissioners themselves imagined or as a historian might assume'. Margaret Preston, like Ó Ciosáin, looks at attitudes to the Irish poor – in this case the world of Dublin charities – but finds that in this particular arena the state's ideological discourse on poverty, intertwined with discourses on gender, race and class, did indeed serve a hegemonic function, whereby philanthropy for the most part reflected the interests of the ruling class.

In a very wide-ranging essay, Thomas Boylan and Terrence McDonough consider the ways in which the economic condition of Ireland was understood in the nineteenth century itself, but also show how certain types of twentieth-century analysis, such as dependency theory, were foreshadowed by Irish political economy in the post-Famine period. The work of Irish political economists such as John Kells Ingram (author of 'The Memory of the Dead'!), T.E. Cliffe Leslie, and Hancock and Richey demonstrated that English economic analysis based on liberal classical political economy was inappropriate when applied to Irish conditions, particularly in the wake of the Famine. In fact Irish political economists were 'disproportionately' central to the development of various alternative forms of economic analysis, such as institutionalism. Yet again, Ireland proved a location where the authority of dominant metropolitan or imperial ideologies was difficult to maintain. At the same time, Peter Gray's detailed account of the thinking of Nassau Senior during the Great Famine provides a salutary reminder to scholars that theory is not everything, and that the concrete political and social effects of ideology cannot be read from a set of historical circumstances in a simple or mechanistic way. 'In the complex relationship between economic thinking and public policy', he argues, 'it is inadequate and distracting to turn primarily to the most theoretically sophisticated and articulate statements of economic theory to account for governing practice. Rather it is vital to turn to a broader range of sources – the press and popular pamphlets, sermons and private correspondence – to build up a picture that ... more accurately reflects the gamut of conflicting forces operating on political protagonists'. Thomas Duddy, in his intriguing and thought-provoking essay on Thomas Maguire, similarly presents a complicated picture of the relations between the personal, the professional and the ideological in the case of a nineteenth-century Irish academic. The apparent contradiction between Maguire's intellectual 'high-mindedness' (he was an idealist philosopher), and his involvement in the sordid Pigott forgeries affair, which was intended to discredit Parnell, was, according to Duddy, less the result of a moral flaw than of 'the pressure that historical developments can place on individuals who hap-

pen to occupy particularly sensitive ideological positions at a crucial moment'. Duddy's argument raises fundamental questions about the position of intellectuals in relation to culture and ideology generally, and the necessity for intellectuals in marginalised or postcolonial situations to maintain critical distance – not only from their local cultures, but also from powerful neighbouring cultures, especially those which may appear at first glance to be attractively 'Other'.

The volume's final five essays deal in different ways with ideological questions of identity and nationality. In a detailed reading of the popular nationalist poetry of Speranza (Lady Wilde), Marjorie Howes shows how, in spite of itself, Young Ireland's bourgeois nationalism sometimes produced 'unsettling versions of national subject constitution', brought on especially by its wildly ambivalent feelings about the Irish 'masses'. Looked at critically, the tensions in Wilde's work seem to imply that 'signs of national feeling are ambiguous, their meanings contingent and shifting', rather than possessed of the transparency demanded by ideology. Howes also connects this aspect of Wilde's work to her gender: 'as a woman writer engaging with a deeply masculinist tradition', she argues, 'Wilde had cause to be particularly sensitive to the impulses in Young Ireland nationalism which emphasized disjunction, distrust and hierarchy'. Eva Stöter, on the other hand, writes of much less fraught ideological links between Young Ireland nationalism and the writings of German romantics, particularly Herder and Lessing, whose secularisation of religious discourse and theories of nationalist pedagogy were important and direct influences on Thomas Davis.

In her disturbing account of women's unappreciated involvement in the Land League, Niamh O'Sullivan draws attention to the way many nineteenth-century Irish women remained resistant to ideological and material pressures to domesticate them. 'At a time when the separation of the spheres was being consolidated in advanced metropolitan countries', she writes, 'women in Ireland were still not fully domesticated within the home, as is clear from the numerous images of women outworkers found in popular illustrations of the period'. The boundaries between political and domestic, between (masculine) activity and (feminine) passivity were clearly difficult to police – literally – in nineteenth-century rural Ireland.

Theories of racial identity and difference were prominent in European culture generally in the nineteenth century, and Edward Hagan and Chris Morash each give particular attention to the impact of Aryanism among Irish intellectuals. For Hagan, the myth of Aryanism is 'a touchstone for seeing the nature of the Protestant-Catholic divide – political, social, and religious – as it played itself out in the nineteenth century'. Focusing on the figure of Standish O'Grady, Hagan argues that the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy's interests in the occult and in Aryan myth are signs of the insecurities of a class under threat: 'it

is not hard to see how these fascinations indicate that the Ascendancy was compensating for its loss of power, purpose, and ideology'. Chris Morash approaches race theory from the opposite perspective of its impact on nationalist, rather than Ascendancy, culture, arguing that 'while it is certainly the case that any sort of axiomatic linking of nationalism and racialism is too crude, it is equally misleading to suggest that race is somehow a disposable accessory in nationalist discourse'. Morash suggests that Irish nationalism's utilisation of race theory produced contradictory effects, deconstructing as much as bolstering up the attempt to establish the nature of Irish identity, 'constitut[ing] a threat to the stability of the national unit, while at the same time helping to make possible the state's existence'. As with other essays in the volume, what becomes clear is that ideology functions in ways which are not always predictable or identical, being in fact closely shaped by differing historical, local and material contexts.

The essays in this volume all represent valuable, and in some cases, pioneering attempts to investigate the nature and impact of ideology in nineteenth-century Ireland. The multidisciplinary work here should help to illuminate aspects of the complex dynamics of Irish culture in ways which have not always, perhaps, been visible to conventional historiography.