

Notes

Introduction

1. See Maley (1994). For a far more sophisticated and appreciative account of Eagleton's style, see Connor (1994).

1 Marxism, Culture and English Studies

1. The best brief introduction to Marx is Eagleton's own (Eagleton, 1997), an elaboration of Marx which has one eye on the poststructuralists. Contrast it, for instance, with the rather different emphases in his still invaluable account of Marxist literary criticism (Eagleton, 1976). See also, in this series, Moyra Haslett's *Marxist Literary and Cultural Theories*, which provides an account of debates in the past quarter of a century since Eagleton's was first published. For discussions of Marxist economics, Fine (1989) is probably still the best starting point, but Harvey (1999) must be regarded as the definitive version for our times.
2. England's lack of a thoroughgoing bourgeois revolution has produced important debates between Marxists about the significance of this. For Perry Anderson, for instance, the absence of such a revolution has meant that the values of England's hegemonic bloc have been characterised by a 'comprehensive conservatism ... covering society with a pall of simultaneous philistinism (towards ideas) and mystagogy (towards institutions), for which [it] has justly won an international reputation' (Anderson, 1992, 31). Ellen Meiksins Wood (1991), however, considers that England has been more thoroughly marked by the logic of capitalism than any other country.
3. See John Saville's magnificent study, *1848: The British State and the Chartist Movement* (1987), which revises the long-standing, manifestly ideological view that Chartism was a victim of its own incompetence and of the indifference of working class people towards it.
4. On this, see Sinfield, 39–42.
5. See, for instance, Bennett, 1979, 106–10.
6. Whilst it is clear that Eagleton's later work departs from the approach outlined in *Criticism and Ideology*, I disagree with Warren Montag's view that Eagleton simply turned his back on an Althusser whom he had misread (Montag, 2003, 6–8). Montag attributes a structuralism to the book which is absent from it in order to convict Eagleton of a reductively structuralist reading of Althusser. This suits Montag's own purposes, but *Criticism and Ideology* is not in any meaningful sense structuralist: the

categories for materialist analysis Eagleton provides are not essentialist and demand an attention to historical change, as well as to the historically contingent relations between them, whilst the ultimately determining force of the GMP merely bears witness to Eagleton's Marxist orthodoxy. Eagleton was always more judiciously critical of Althusser than many others who were influenced by him.

7. One instance of such a reading is Geoffrey Bennington's 'Demanding History' in Attridge *et al.*, 1987.

2 Culture and Postmodernism

1. It should be noted however that Lacan himself makes a comparison between the imaginary/symbolic relation and the nature/culture one, at least as the latter is articulated by Lévi-Strauss (Lacan, 1992, 274).

3 Marxism, Culture and Irish Studies

1. For a fairly brief account of this, see Alderson, 1998, 112–19. Discussion of the racialisation of the Irish, though, has been a feature of Irish Studies since at least Curtis (1968). Sheridan Gilley (1978) rejects Curtis's claims in a thoroughly unconvincing fashion which has nonetheless managed to persuade some. Gilley does not take account of the increasing influence of polygenism detailed in Nancy Steppan (1980) and, more recently, by Robert J. C. Young (1995).
2. Howe's observation is polemical, without registering the complexity of the situation. I quote it here merely as an example of the ways in which politico-philosophical conceptions of history are complicated by reference to Ireland.
3. Though there have been other accounts of the revisionist controversy, the most complete record of the origins of revisionism and of the debates to which it has given rise is provided in Brady, 1994.
4. I am drawing on what I think are the most valuable aspects of Ahmad's arguments here. However, *In Theory* has received some of its most highly – certainly its most perceptively – critical reviews from other Marxists on account of its historical errors and egregious treatment of Edward Said in particular. The general sense was that the book's polemic misfired, not least because its targets were badly chosen. See, in particular, Brennan (1994), Lazarus (1993), Parry (1993) and Sprinker (1993). Later comments by some of these writers have been more sympathetic to his general purpose, and Brennan notes crucially that, in contrast to many of Ahmad's academicist critics, 'no one reading his work can miss that he breathes the air of men and women who planned strikes, went to prison, risked their lives, and studied not simply Marxist theory but the history of the labour movement' (Brennan, 1997, 86). The irony is that one might say similar things about Said.
5. A similar point has been made in analogous terms – that Eagleton effectively 'colonises' forms of dissent – by Showalter (Showalter, 1989) in relation to feminism. For some, where it is not simply regarded as arrogance on Eagleton's part, this is no

doubt symptomatic of the inattentiveness of dialectical engagement to the particulars of those movements/academic fields of study with which it engages. The problem with such an objection is that its logic tends to disarm any critical relation to such movements, as I suggest in the rest of this discussion of Lloyd.

4 A Picture of Oscar Wilde?

1. My account of the discourse of luxury here, as well as of the influence of Hellenistic ideals on Wilde below, differs in emphasis in significant respects from Linda Dowling's more detailed *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, which nonetheless suffers, in my view, from its almost exclusive focus on – and, at times, idealisation of – Oxford University. Such are some of the problems attendant on micropolitical analyses.
2. Numerous quotations from Symonds in Wilde's *Oxford Notebooks* (1989) have been identified both by the editors and by Horst Schroeder (Schroeder, 1993, 52–3 and 53–4), and Wilde reviewed Symonds's work extensively (Wellens, 1994, 364). The editors of the *Notebooks* also emphasise the Hellenistic perspective of the novel, but suggest in contrast to the interpretation here that Wilde privileges an Hegelian idealism over Paterian materialism.
3. For an account of the influence of psychological and biological science on aesthetics via figures such as Grant Allen and Walter Pater, see Small (1991, 64–88).

Annotated Bibliography

Shakespeare and Society: Critical Studies in Shakespearean Drama. London: Chatto & Windus, 1967

Even stylistically this early text is indebted to Raymond Williams, and this represents Eagleton in pre-Marxist mode. The humanist emphasis of the book focuses on the relationship between individual and society in Shakespeare as a means of reflecting on that relationship today. The final chapter treats this theme, and the role of art, in relation to industrial society, but appears to be tagged on to the discussion of Shakespeare and, ending with Lawrence, hardly appears to bridge the gap between Elizabethan and post-war England. Perhaps that, though, is a reflection of the Oxbridge syllabus at that time.

The Body as Language. London: Sheed & Ward, 1970

This is an important early work. Though concerned principally with Marxism and theology – a product of Eagleton's involvement in the Catholic left – it establishes his interest in both the body and tragedy and pre-empts the later, Lacan-inflected perspective of *Sweet Violence*. The final chapters – including a Leninist revision of the role of the priesthood – may sound faintly absurd, though given the politicised role which the Catholic clergy have played at certain times in certain parts of the world, such an impression perhaps represents a rather parochial perspective.

Exiles and Émigrés: Studies in Modern Literature. London: Chatto & Windus, 1970

Still very much under the humanist socialist influence of Raymond Williams – the introduction even refers to 'the shape of a complete culture' (12) – and committed to a notion of 'great art', these are nonetheless insightful discussions of the established canon of modernist authors, all of whom, though subsumed under the rubric 'English literature', were from outside England. The central thesis is that English culture was so impoverished as to be unable to produce serious literature, but one oversight which may be said to be constitutive of this pre-feminist work is its non-consideration of women writers of the period (Woolf is discussed, but doesn't merit a chapter of her own, grouped as she is straightforwardly in class terms along with Forster, Huxley and Waugh).

Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës. London: Macmillan, 1975

Eagleton's first explicitly Marxist study, one which points towards but does not fully realise the analysis he pioneers in *Criticism and Ideology*. I have rehearsed above much of the detail of the argument, though mostly as it relates to *Wuthering Heights*, and it is important to note that the 2nd edition includes an introduction (1988) in which Eagleton subjects to criticism the limitations of the original.

Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory. London: Verso, 1976

I have rehearsed at great length in Chapter 1 the details of the argument in this work. Despite its qualified tendencies to take for granted the category of 'literature', and to assume that criticism itself can rise to the status of a science which transcends history, this remains an important book in its grasp of what a materialist criticism of the 'relatively autonomous' sphere of literature needs to engage with. It would be pointless however to make a start on this without some prior knowledge of Marxist criticism, and the best place to start would be with the book which was conceived as the counterpart to this, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*.

Marxism and Literary Criticism. London: Methuen, 1976

An introduction to some of the problems of attempting to elaborate a marxist literary criticism, this is also a valuable introduction to Marxism itself. It suffers, though, from the limitations of *Criticism and Ideology*, and will probably seem something of a blast from the past to students acquainted with poststructuralism.

Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism. London: Verso, 1981

A book which is impossible to summarise, but which marks a crucial transformation in Eagleton's approach, marking as it does a rejection of his earlier 'scientific' Marxism and a commitment to a more engaged style of criticism which entails a greater awareness of the ideological features of critical practice as well as those of the text. Whereas scientific Marxism took for granted, indeed reproduced, the technocratic ideology of capitalism as well as its characteristic intellectual division of labour, this book began to take seriously the material relations which determine critical practice and exhibits a sceptical attitude towards academia – one which many of us feel, but typically tend only to express privately, thus colluding with the ideology of 'professionalisation'. Eagleton initially notes for instance the process by which Benjamin is being assimilated by an academia which has little sympathy for his Marxism. This is not an introduction to Benjamin's thought, but a reflection on key Benjaminian themes which attempts to profit from his example. It is also a major critical engagement with poststructuralist theory.

The Rape of Clarissa. Oxford: Blackwell, 1982

This is Eagleton's most extended engagement with a single text. Beginning with an account of Richardson himself – his class background, ideological perspective (including his relation to the ideology of femininity) and, bound up with both, the complex processes of textual production which culminated in *Clarissa* – the book goes on to provide a detailed reading of the text informed by feminism, deconstruction and psychoanalysis as well as Marxism. Rather than merely bringing those theoretical perspectives to bear on the text, though, it also uses the novel's history to interrogate the theory. In a way characteristic of his later criticism, it treats dialectically the values embodied in *Clarissa* and *Lovelace*: if there are aporias in the text, then, they result from historically unresolved ideological conflicts. The book received a hostile response from some feminists. Elaine Showalter claims that it represents another instance of 'the appropriation of the tide of

feminist feeling in the interests of patriarchy, the production of a new kind of (critical) hero' (Showalter, 1989, 129), not least in its lack of engagement with previous feminist criticism of *Clarissa* by women and in Eagleton's own apparent lack of self-reflexiveness. It seems to me that she somewhat misses the point of Engleton's response – in many ways a concession of her criticisms – contained in the same volume.

Literary Theory: An Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983

Literary Theory is most students' first encounter with Eagleton. It does contain valuable syntheses of major trends in literary theory, but it is far from being a disinterested account (and for this reason, some academics are unhappy with its 'slanted' exegeses). The conclusion, with its call for the death of literature, makes the agenda explicit.

The Function of Criticism: From The Spectator to Poststructuralism. London and New York: Verso, 1984

This is in many ways Eagleton's most engaging discussion of the evolution of literary criticism and an unaccountably neglected book, more accessible and less idiosyncratic than *Walter Benjamin* and more sophisticated than *Literary Theory* (though it might be read in conjunction with the latter). Taking up Jürgen Habermas's notion of the 'public sphere' – that ideal space in which debate between equals should be free and unconstrained – Eagleton traces the disintegration of that sphere from its partial realisation in the eighteenth century, under pressures exerted by industrialisation, 'democratisation', the professionalisation of criticism and the emergence of 'mass culture'. It ends by noting – and implicitly partially identifying with – the situation of Raymond Williams, from a working class background at Cambridge and with no access to a counter-public sphere such as was available to, say, Brecht, and by reasserting the need for socialist and feminist criticism to engage critically with that parody of the public sphere which is the culture industry.

Against the Grain: Selected Essays. London and New York: Verso, 1986

This collection of important essays, many from *New Left Review*, in many ways also provides an overview of Eagleton's transition from scientific Marxism – evident in the dense account of the ways in which Conrad's *The Secret Agent* produces its ideological determinants – to a more self-reflexive critical exercise (and, indeed, the Preface charts this change). Many of the chapters are therefore more or less polemical forms of engagement, whereas others, including 'Marxism, Structuralism and Poststructuralism' and the often quoted 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', provide penetrating analyses of the relations between cultural and theoretical movements. Eagleton himself notes in the final sections 'a gradual abandonment of theoretical seriousness'. And why not?

William Shakespeare. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986a

This short book considers a variety, though not all, of the plays, grouping them under the headings 'Language', 'Desire', 'Law', '“Nothing”', 'Value' and 'Nature' rather than genres. In this way, Eagleton foregrounds his engagement with the plays in terms of current theoretical concerns, though the instabilities he discerns in the plays are ultimately related to the instabilities of the period in which they were written. It is possibly the best and most compelling of Eagleton's more philosophical criticism.

The Ideology of the Aesthetic. Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990

Many regard this as Eagleton's finest work, the one which explicitly re-establishes his interest in the relations between body, subjectivity and ideology, and explores these in relation to the philosophical category of the aesthetic. It is, as we have seen, a theme which is present in Eagleton's work in his early theological writings, through his critical engagement with Althusser and down to the present. Each of the essays represents a dialectical engagement with a particular thinker and can be read discretely, though it would be best to read them in conjunction with the first and final chapters.

The Significance of Theory. Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990a

Includes two lectures given by Eagleton at Bucknell University, an immensely valuable introduction to his work by M. A. R. Habib and an interesting interview with him in which he reflects on both theoretical and stylistic shifts in his work (and which contains a line which will no doubt serve as his epitaph: 'I've spent several years trying to stop writing books, but it seems to be unavailing' (86)). The first of the lectures is a reflection on 'theory' itself which ends with a familiar claim by Eagleton that its value is that of 'keeping (radical) energies warm' in the absence of any revolutionary political practice. The second is an account of Adorno's aesthetics pretty much the same as that to be found in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, cheekily published the same year.

Ideology: An Introduction. London and New York: Verso, 1991

Ideology is one of the trickiest concepts in Marxist thought, and is considered by some non-, ex- or post-Marxists to be incoherent. Partly this is because of its complex history and the various ways in which it has been defined. This book is both a defence of the term and a critical account of the history of it, alert to the implications and problems of certain theorisations of it. Ultimately, Eagleton argues for a non-essentialist understanding, recognising that ideology is best understood in terms of its function rather than in any specific forms it takes since the latter are likely to vary historically. The book is still the most readable introduction to the concept. Some have found the conclusion rather thin, but it is in keeping with Eagleton's shift away from theoreticism after his earlier Althusserianism.

Heathcliff and the Great Hunger. London and New York: Verso, 1995

The first volume in the trilogy of works on Irish culture, *Heathcliff* is a fairly eclectic collection, though there are overlapping themes. The book was controversial partly for reasons considered in some detail in Chapter 3 above. The title chapter is as far from the 'scientific' Eagleton as you can get, and has been taken both far too seriously and not seriously enough: its gambit is self-consciously provocative, but its reflections on the different significance of 'culture' in England and Ireland and on narrative and history are the important matters. 'Homage to Francis Hutcheson' both seeks to rescue Hutcheson from relative obscurity and is an instance of that increasing concern with ethics evident principally in both *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* and *Sweet Violence*. 'Ascendancy and Hegemony', which (re-)introduces Gramsci to Lacan via Edmund Burke, and 'Changing the Question', on the status of Ireland as colony and member of the Union, are the book's most important politico-historical essays.

The Illusions of Postmodernism. Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996

It is arguable that this book relies too heavily on generalisations about postmodernism rather than the kinds of specific engagement we find in, say, *Ideology: An Introduction*. It succeeds, though, in being one of the most lucid critiques of the main philosophical features of postmodernism available, bringing together many of the arguments on this topic Eagleton has rehearsed elsewhere.

Marx and Freedom. London: Phoenix, 1997

One of the best short introductions to Marx, more philosophical in orientation than *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, and clearly written to address postmodern objections to Marxism.

Crazy John and the Bishop and Other Essays on Irish Culture. Cork: Cork University Press, 1998b.

This is arguably Eagleton's most consistently impressive set of essays on Irish culture. Its contents are diverse, including the essay on Yeats and another which attempts to rescue a positive value from Beckett's apparently relentless negativity (implicitly this is directed at Adorno). Other essays focus on neglected Irish figures such as the eighteenth-century poet William Dunkin and the republican socialist Frank Ryan, whom Eagleton upholds as a figure whose criticisms of liberal pluralism, apologists for imperialism and cultural nationalists retain their relevance down to the present. 'The Good Natured Gael' extends Eagleton's concern with the relations between body, subjectivity and ideology through an extended discussion of the eighteenth-century discourse of sentiment and why this discourse was especially prominent in the writings of influential Irish and Scottish writers. The collection as a whole evinces a more rigorous engagement with the detail of Irish culture and history than the earlier *Heathcliff* without sacrificing a sense of larger historical processes.

The Eagleton Reader. Ed. Stephen Regan, Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998

This is a valuable collection of material which fully recognises that Eagleton's important writings are not limited to his book-length work. It includes not only judiciously selected excerpts from his major writings, but lectures, essays and reviews not reproduced in the other collections of his work listed here, providing both a valuable record and an ideal overview of his career.

Scholars and Rebels in Nineteenth-Century Ireland. Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999

To my mind, Eagleton's most disappointing work. Analysing the Irish 'national' intellectuals of the mid-late nineteenth century in terms of Gramsci's distinction between organic and traditional intellectuals – those, that is, who emerge from and represent their own class as distinguished from those who regard themselves as a class apart – it fails to come to any particularly arresting conclusions and tends too much towards summary and anecdote. The whole thing feels more rushed (and forced) than any of Eagleton's other work and its sporadic insights are undeveloped.

The Idea of Culture. Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000

The concept of culture overlaps significantly with that of ideology: it may be ideological in its attribution of value to a set of practices, but may also be invoked sociologically or anthropologically to describe the values and practices of given societies. In postmodern times, any notion of a universal culture tends to be challenged by a valorisation of cultural pluralism. Like 'ideology', then, 'culture' also has a complex history and this book attempts to disentangle the different meanings of the term as well as to argue against both culturalist and naturalist reductionism in explaining human societies. The book pre-emptively many of the concerns of *Sweet Violence*. It is also more generous to Raymond Williams than previous work and significantly revises the harsh criticisms of him made in *Criticism and Ideology*.

The Gatekeeper: A Memoir. London: Allen Lane, 2001

Those expecting a confessional biography from Eagleton will be disappointed by this series of reflections on the kinds of figures and doctrines which have dominated his life, all grouped under disparate chapter headings. Despite its humour, it provides some sense of the overlap between theoretical interests and personal experience, and in particular it traces his ambivalence towards most of the institutions with which he has been associated, from the Catholic Church to Oxbridge and the rest of academia. That ambivalence is determined by both his political convictions and class background, and we discover that his theoretical concern with the relations between subjectivity and authority are grounded in lived contradictions. Writing of his tutor and supervisor at Cambridge, Eagleton comments that 'His world was the Law which had brought my father to his ruin, but it was a Law which my father asked me to love' (177).

Figures of Descent: Critical Essays on Fish, Spivak, Zizek and Others. London and New York: Verso, 2003

It is sometimes complained of Eagleton that his academic writing does not engage closely enough with the details of individuals' arguments, but many of his best reviews – and he is an excellent reviewer – are meticulously argued, careful and serious engagements with the work of individual writers. This is a collection of some of his best writings – mostly substantial pieces for the *London Review of Books* which he describes as a kind of remnant of the public sphere – which are by turns witty, polemical and highly informative (there is no finer brief introduction to the Frankfurt School, for instance, than his essay in this collection, and in that respect the collection might act as a partisan dictionary of contemporary thought). Here we are offered the more detailed engagements which inform the larger arguments to be found in his book-length studies.

Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic. Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003a

Represents the culmination of a long-standing interest in tragedy which is bound up with Eagleton's theological concerns, as well as his engagements with Benjamin, Lacan and Raymond Williams, all of whom have written importantly on tragedy. The book traces the development of the idea of the tragic and the ideological values it has upheld through some of its defining features or influential theorists. It ends with an important attempt to retrieve for socialism a certain value to be found in tragedy. There are problems with the

argument at times: an unspecified but nonetheless a priori understanding of tragedy is occasionally invoked to highlight the ideological or inadequate nature of certain versions of it (a problem shared too by his book on ideology itself), but the book stands alongside *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* as one of his most important. One doesn't need to be a Christian to find the final chapter compelling.

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Index

- Adorno, T. W. 69–70, 85, 128, 168, 169
Ahmad, A. 2, 100, 121–2, 163n
Alderson, D. 163n
Althusser, L. 2, 24, 44, 50–1, 59, 60, 82, 168
Anderson, P. 2, 57, 71, 162n
Armstrong, I. 89
Arnold, M. 40–2, 104
Austen, J. 27, 47
- Baudrillard, J. 70
Beckett, S. 169
Benjamin, W. 6, 56, 83, 101, 119, 166, 170
Bennett, T. 162n
Bennington, G. 58, 72, 76, 163n
Blake, W. 45
Bowie, M. 86
Bowlby, R. 159–60
Bradshaw, B. 116
Brady, C. 163n
Brecht, B. 167
Brennan, T. 121, 122, 163n
Brontë, B. 109
Brontë, C. 28
Brontë, E. 25–38, 108–12
Brontë, P. 110
Burke, E. 36, 38–40, 113, 168
Butler, J. 2, 79
- Callinicos, A. 62, 68–9
Carson, E. 149–50
Cecil, D. 26
Coleridge, S. T. 36
Collins, W. 152
Connolly, J. 105, 120
Connor, S. 64, 162n
Conrad, J. 167
Craig, J. 105
- Dale, P. A. 157
Darwin, C. 21–2, 157
- Davis, M. 68
de Man, P. 74
Deane, S. 117
Debord, G. 70
Derrida, J. 73, 74, 76
Dews, P. 73
Dickens, C. 52
Douglas, A. 153
Dowling, L. 164
Dunkin, W. 169
- Easthope, A. 74
Edwards, R. D. 114
Eichmann, A. 96, 98
Eliot, G. 53–4, 55
Eliot, T. S. 135
Ellmann, R. 142–3
Engels, F. 24
- Fine, B. 162n
Forster, E. M. 165
Foster, R. F. 4, 99, 101–2, 108, 115, 117
Foucault, M. 59–60
Freud, S. 84, 90, 91, 137, 139
Fukuyama, F. 64
- Gaskell, E. 15
Gilley, S. 163n
Gissing, G. 21
Goldmann, L. 27
Gonne, M. 132, 138
Graham, C. 125
Gramsci, A. 89, 168, 169
Gregory, A. 138
Guy, J. 148
- Habermas, J. 57, 167
Habib, M. A. R. 168
Harris, F. 142
Harvey, D. 2, 17, 66–8, 78, 162n
Haslett, M. 162n

- Hegel, G. W. F. 19, 65, 88
 Hollinghurst, A. 153
 Howe, S. 108, 119, 163n
 Hutcheson, F. 168
 Huxley, A. 165

 Jameson, F. 56, 62

 Kettle, A. 26
 Kiberd, D. 147

 Lacan, J. 82, 84–5, 86, 163n, 165,
 168, 170
 Laclau, E. 77–9
 Lazarus, N. 64, 120, 121, 127,
 128, 163n
 Lentricchia, F. 74
 Lévi-Strauss, C. 163n
 Lloyd, D. 102, 122–9, 131, 138
 Longley, E. 99, 130, 134, 149
 Lukács, G. 51
 Lyotard, J.-F. 61, 62, 63, 64, 66

 Macherey, P. 9, 44, 50–1, 54, 55, 56
 Mahaffey, V. 145–7, 154
 Maley, W. 2, 3, 162n
 Markievicz, C. 136
 Marx, K. 5–6, 9–21, 120, 121–2
 McAliskey, B. D. 126
 McQuillan, M. 99–100, 120
 Merleau-Ponty, M. 87–8
 Montag, W. 162–3n
 Moody, T. W. 114
 Morris, W. 144
 Morton, D. 9
 Mouffe, C. 77–9
 Mulhern, F. 55, 108, 130

 O'Duffy, E. 134
 Parry, B. 121, 127, 163n

 Pater, W. 156, 164n
 Pocock, J. G. A. 151–2
 Pope, A. 53
 Pound, E. 135

 Regan, S. 132, 169
 Reni, G. 143
 Repton, H. 35–6
 Richardson, S. 1, 91
 Rousseau, J.-J. 35–6
 Ryan, F. 169
 Ryan, M. 76

 Said, E. 120, 122, 132, 163n
 Saville, J. 162n
 Schroeder, H. 164n
 Shakespeare, W. 1, 55, 92–8, 165, 167
 Showalter, E. 163–4n, 166–7
 Sinfield, A. 153, 162n
 Small, I. 147–8, 164n
 Spivak, G. C. 4
 Sprinker, M. 163n
 Steppan, N. 163n
 Symonds, J. A. 156–7

 Thatcher, M. 78, 100
 Timpanaro, S. 83

 Wade, G. 3–4
 Watt, I. 49
 Waugh, E. 48, 165
 Wellens, O. 164n
 Wilde, O. 8, 142–61, 164n
 Williams, R. 4, 9, 26, 42, 44, 70, 79, 165,
 167, 169
 Wood, E. M. 2, 162n
 Woolf, V. 165

 Yeats, W. B. 132–41, 169
 Young, R. J. C. 58, 163n