Sri Lankan Literature in English and the Changing Phases/Faces of Nationalism

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"Nationalism is a response to a wound inflicted upon piety."
--Isaiah Berlin

In considering nationalism, one should perhaps begin with a consideration of patriotism.

Patriotism is a human feeling which has been articulated from ancient times. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (Sweet and beautiful is death for the homeland) is a widely known classical dictum, whose original source in Horace’s *Odes* (3.2) has been long forgotten. In English literature, patriotism has been expressed in stirring, poetic lines such as Sir Walter Scott’s *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805): “Breathes there the man, with soul so dead, / Who never to himself hath said, / This my own, my native land.”

But there has been criticism of such sentiments, increasingly prominent in this century. Dr. Johnson in his *Remarks* (1775) noted: “Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel,” while Wilfred Owen, in his poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" called Horace’s maxim "the old lie" on the basis of his firsthand experience of the horrors of World War I. Edward W. Said, in an interview entitled “The Old Lie” published in *New Statesman and Society*, takes today’s sweeping and fashionable stance: “Patriotism is best thought of as an