

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 first-hand 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