Fanon excerpt

Selections from The Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon (1961).

These passages appear in The Postcolonial Studies Reader, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tifflin (New York: Routledge, 1995).

“Because they [writers in the postcolonial nation] realize they are in danger of losing their lives and thus becoming lost to their people, these men, hot-headed and with anger in their hearts, relentlessly determine to renew contact once more with the oldest and most pre-colonial springs of life of their people” (154).

They work from “the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation, and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others” (154).

Colonialism “is not simply content to impose its rules upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it” (154).

Fanon states the native intellectual used to create art to please audiences in the “mother country” (the nation that conquered or colonized his homeland), or audiences in his nation who imitate the mother country, but the nationalistic artist creates art for the people of his nation. Fanon calls this “the literature of combat, in the sense that it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation” (155).

Old narrative forms frequently are revived by the nationalist artist: “The storytellers who used to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental…. The formula ‘This all happened long ago’ is substituted with that of ‘What we are going to speak of happened somewhere else, but it might well have happened here today, and it might happen tomorrow’” (155).