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Fernando Aparecido Poiana

“A nearness felt as far”: the Tensions Between Literature and History in
Seamus Deane’s Poetic Oeuvre

São José do Rio Preto

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Fernando Aparecido Poiana

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Seamus Deane’s Poetic Oeuvre

Tese apresentada como parte dos requisitos para
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Dedicated to Isildinha, Euclides and Karina

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“If there were a language
That could not say ‘leave’

And had no word for ‘stay’,
That would be the tongue

For this strange country”

“Strange Country”
(from *Rumours*)

RESUMO

O presente estudo investiga como a obra poética de Seamus Deane lida com as tensões e incertezas do período histórico no qual ela foi publicada. Para isso, investigo a atmosfera geral daquele contexto, examino a recepção crítica da obra poética de Deane, analiso os aspectos formais dos seus poemas e busco oferecer uma interpretação da sua obra poética que leve em consideração todas essas questões. Minha tese é que sua poesia é governada por uma dialética entre estética e história. Para fundamentar a minha tese, recorro aos estudos da relação entre literatura (poesia) e sociedade de Antonio Candido (2011), Theodor Adorno (1991), Stan Smith (1982) e Thurston e Alderman (2014).

Palavras-chave: Seamus Deane. Poesia Norte-irlandesa. Poesia e história.

ABSTRACT

The present study investigates how Seamus Deane's poetic oeuvre addresses the tensions and uncertainties of the historical period in which it was published. To do so, I investigate the general atmosphere of that context, examine the critical reception of Deane's poetic work, look into the formal traits of his poems, and try to offer an interpretation of his poetic work that takes into account all these questions. My thesis is that his poetry is governed by the dialectics between aesthetics and history. To back up my thesis I refer to studies of the relationship between literature (poetry) and society by Antonio Candido (2011), Theodor Adorno (1991), Stan Smith (1982) and Thurston and Alderman (2014).

Keywords: Seamus Deane. Northern Irish Poetry. Poetry and History.

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1. Introduction

The present study is an attempt to draw critical attention to Seamus Deane's poetry. Even though his work as a poet has not been entirely ignored, we can safely argue that it has been overshadowed by his massive output as a literary critic and academic in the field of Irish Studies. His poetry has been largely absent from anthologies of Irish contemporary verse, and critical companions on this general topic hardly ever feature essays analysing Deane's poetic work, even superficially.¹

It would be correct to say that the critic has somehow outshone the poet in the case of Deane's work. Although the work of the poet is hardly mentioned in critical companions, the same is not true for Deane's critical writings. In fact, many books on Irish literature quote passages from his essays and books verbatim or revisit some of his main arguments. Indeed, since he has written critical essays on many of the main modern and contemporary Irish writers, such as James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, Sean O'Casey, Thomas Kinsella, John Montague, Brian Friel, Derek Mahon, Seamus Heaney, Samuel Beckett and J. M. Synge, as well as on the thought of authors like Alexis de Tocqueville and Edmund Burke, Deane's critical output is hard to overlook.²

Deane published his books of poems between 1972 and 1983, a period of just over a decade. If we include in this list of publications his *Selected Poems*, published in 1988, we end up with a slightly longer time span. In Dawe's brief intellectual biography of Seamus Deane³ in this 16-year period, the critic argues that,

¹ A notable exception, however, is Gerald Dawe's *The Wrong Country: Essays on Modern Irish Writing* (2018), whose seventh chapter, "History Lessons: Derek Mahon & Seamus Deane" discusses general aspects of Deane's verse. I shall be commenting on specific passages of Dawe's essay later.

² For a collection of essays on the authors mentioned, please refer to *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature* (1985).

³ In his interview with John Brown, published in *In the Chair, Interviews with Poets from the North of Ireland* (2002), Deane speaks briefly about his childhood in Derry and the historical and social context of his upbringing: "I grew up in the working-class area now called the Bogside. It was a Catholic, Nationalist, Republican area. The police were hated; and with good reason. The priests were respected, but without good reason; one of the fatalities of the Education Act of 1947-1948 was not only the Unionist one-party police state but also the impregnable position of the clerical RC state-within-a-state. For the last thing the church needed was that its priests be exposed on a wide front to the vagaries of teaching; the clumsy or vicious violence or injustice that accompanied it was ultimately harmful to a church whose priests had hitherto been revered.

The family life was essentially a happy one, but tense in a very profound way; my father and mother were embodiments of the male/female stereotypes of the strong, silent man and the voluble emotional woman; although they were actually very different from those roles in which they were nevertheless cast. But then, everybody in Northern Ireland was more obviously from Central Casting, as men or women, Catholics or Protestants, than is usually the case." (BROWN, 2002, p. 97).

At thirty-two years of age, in contrast to his contemporaries Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley, Deane's was a slightly later entry into the public world of publishing a *book* of poems. For instance, Heaney had already published three volumes – *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door into the Dark* (1969) and *Wintering Out* (1972) – and Mahon's *Night-Crossing* (1968) and *Lives* (1972) had appeared to critical acclaim. *Gradual Wars* received the prestigious *AE* Memorial Award for Literature in Ireland and was followed by *Rumours*, published by Dolmen Press in 1977; six years later *History Lessons* appeared with The Gallery Press in 1983 and five years after that, a volume of *Selected Poems*, including a section of new poems and translations, was published in 1988. After that – on the poetry front, silence.

Deane's scholarly, critical and editorial work, however, took off, producing seminal studies of Irish writing and its European contexts in book after book. The 1980s saw publication of the highly influential collection *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980*, *A Short History of Irish Literature* and *The French Enlightenment and Revolution in England*. He had also been an inspirational presence in establishing *The Crane Bag* journal (1977-1985) edited by philosophers Mark Patrick Hederman and Richard Kearney. (DAWE, 2018, p. 92)⁴

Be that as it may, of interest for my analysis, though, is that the whole body of Deane's poetry came out during the generalized violence of the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland. In other words, this is the historical framework within which his poetic work is inscribed, and it is against this turbulent background, or rather, in close connection with it, that the present study reads Deane's poetic oeuvre.

A central concern of the study is an attempt to understand the literary mechanisms Deane often uses to write his poems, the themes he addresses, and the poetic effects his verse achieves. Of interest also is how Deane's poetry addresses the pressing questions of the historical context in which it was written. It is important to examine how Deane's

⁴ In his book, Dawe also speaks about Deane's education and academic career: Deane "attended [Derry's] well-known Catholic grammar school, St Columb's (...), [then] Queen's University in Belfast (1957-61) (...), [then] Seamus Deane came up to Pembroke College in 1963 and was approved for a doctorate in May 1968, graduating in Easter of that year. The title of his PhD was 'The Reception and Reputation of Some Thinkers of the French Enlightenment in England between 1789 and 1824'.

After a few years teaching in Berkeley, California, Deane returned to Dublin, first as a lecturer in University College Dublin, before being appointed Professor of Modern English and American Literature, a position he held until 1993 and his appointment as Professor of Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, from which he retired some years ago." (DAWE, 2018, p 89).

poetical subjects negotiate the conflicts they encounter in their experience of their world. By their world I mean the Northern Ireland of the second half of the twentieth century, plagued by the sectarianism and paramilitary violence of “The Troubles”.

One of the predominant themes in Deane’s first book of poems, *Gradual Wars*,⁵ “published in 1972, when he was a lecturer in UCD” (DAWE, 2018, p. 91), is death.⁶ Indeed, death is not only a motif in poems like “Avalanche” – “He crossed to his death before me/Over the *black lake* of a dream” (DEANE, 1972, p. 47, *my emphasis*)⁷ – , “Chanson” – “Death alone can put an end/To my pain and your law” (DEANE, 1972, p. 40) – , “Dead Relations” – “Your death weighs/Like a ton” (DEANE, 1972, p. 50) – , “Departure” – “This was the oldest sorrow/Only beginning, the cry/Of the siren bleeding to the hospital,/The stanced death tomorrow” (DEANE, 1972, p. 38) – , “Fourteen Elegies”⁸ and “On the Mimicry of Unnatural Objects”,⁹ - “the acorn/Death plants in the brain” (DEANE, 1972, p. 41) – , but also the central theme in several other poems in this book, like “Roots”, for instance. Indeed, Deane’s work in *Gradual Wars* features poetic subjects struggling with themselves in the face of personal loss, grieving,¹⁰ mourning and

⁵ Technically speaking, though, *Gradual Wars* is not the first collection of poems published by Deane. John Brown (2002) and Gerald Dawe (2018) mention a volume called *While Jewels Rot*, published in 1966, “in the famous Festival Publications series at Queen’s” (DAWE, 2018, p. 91). Brown also calls the volume a “poetry pamphlet” (2002, p. 101) without giving any further information on its content. As Dawe explains, “Deane rejected the poems and at £699 or more per copy on AbeBooks it might be just as well!” (DAWE, 2018, p. 91-92). As is the case with other poetry collections of Deane’s, *While Jewels Rot* is out of print, and highly likely to remain so if we take into consideration what Deane himself has to say about its content: “That pamphlet; I destroy any copies I can find. There was a mix-up there; the poems I meant to have published were returned to me, the ones I wanted returned, were published. Not that the difference in quality would have been great.” (BROWN, 2002, p. 101)

⁶ One of the endnotes in Dawe’s “History Lessons: Derek Mahon & Seamus Deane”, in *The Wrong Country: Essays on Modern Irish Writing* (2018), quotes a Seamus Heaney’s review that encapsulates some of the main thematic concerns of Deane’s first collection of poems: “‘The tone is typically nervous, highly-strung, on the edge of violence or catastrophe, in the face or the aftermath of some climax... Love and death in a violent time, a time of killing, a time of terror and exhilaration, are the preoccupations of many of the poems.’ (‘Violence and Repose’, *Hibernia Fortnightly Review*, 19 January 1973), p. 13.” (DAWE, 2018, p. 255).

⁷ A slight variation of the highlighted image appears in the poem “Nella Gloria delle Finestre”, from *Selected Poems*, which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three.

⁸ In one of the most dramatic and desperate moments of elegy “Seven”, for instance, the speaker says: “Death,/O sudden death, nothing/Is as instant as immortality. (DEANE, 1972, p. 17). The image of “the furnished room of death” (DEANE, 1972, p. 18), in elegy “Eight” also reinforces this argument.

⁹ Dawe claims that this poem is “Wallace Stevens-sounding” (DAWE, 2018, p. 96). Nevertheless, the critic never expands on this idea nor does he provide any detailed commentary to support his claim.

¹⁰ “Grief” is, indeed, a recurrent word in Deane’s poetic lexicon, especially in *Gradual Wars*. It appears, for instance, in elegy “Five” – “In a bright sheet your skin is woven/Intershot with grief” (DEANE, 1972, p. 14) – , in elegy “Nine” – “the knuckled cinemas/of grief.” (DEANE, 1972, p. 20) – , in elegy “Thirteen” – “the purpureal waters/of grief (...)” (DEANE, 1972, p. 24), in “Derry”, in “Departure” – “Grief throws up its arms/And the shadow rises/To murder me in our room.” (DEANE, 1972, p. 38), in “Northern Ireland: Two Comments”, in “Promise to my Daughter” – “Until the slackening of death/Shall come to whiten/With a simple grief/This dark and complicated heart/That shudders like a leaf” (DEANE, 1972, p. 52). In

desolation, in a context where “all the signs of war/World and local/Lay around the natural/Landscape” (DEANE, 1972, p. 22) that is often personified, as in “[t]he room heard my breath./The flowers on the wallpaper/Mourned unflinchingly” (DEANE, 1972, p. 17)¹¹ and “[t]he moon watches the moulded/Clouds like an eye.” (DEANE, 1972, p. 23).¹² It breathes life into the landscape and, as such, intensifies the speaker’s existential plights. These feelings result not only from the physical death of the body, normally brought about by a “violence [that] denatures/What once was fidelity” (DEANE, 1972, p. 22), but also from what we could call symbolic forms of death, as in “A Genealogy”. The situations portrayed and enacted in these poems pose an ultimate existential question for their speakers, who have to deal with the fact that the individual is so deeply entangled in real-life circumstances that he/she cannot escape their consequences. According to Dawe, “the overriding mood of the volume is of a distinct and present danger embedded in the home place” (DAWE, 2018, p. 96) understood as both the family environment and the geopolitical context from which Deane’s poetic subjects speak.

In *Rumours*, Deane explores the uncertainties, tensions, and embedded paradoxes that this discursive notion implies. The poems in this collection address matters of truth,¹³ perspective, discourse and the issues that arise when the individual is aware that he/she only apprehends the world through language. The title poem, for instance, deals with failure of communication. More precisely, it focuses on the very communicative short circuit represented by the notion of rumour, and the impact of the consequent chain of uncertainties on people’s lives. Thus, lyricism and politics, invention and truth, memory and history are intertwined in the language of “Rumours”, as they are in other poems in

Rumours, it appears in “Summer Letter”, in “The Pleasure Principle” – “I could twist the coils/From any dried-out grief” (DEANE, 1977, p. 41) and in “Flash Points” – “The fawning tempos of grief!” (DEANE, 1977, p. 52). In *History Lessons*, it appears in “Daystar” – “We went to sleep through long/Reaches of glittering river,/Down a swanmarked passage, reconnoitered,/Not for staying in, streaked/By wet lightnings, our eyes eaten/By grief and exhaustion.” (DEANE, 1983, p. 26).

¹¹ See elegy “Seven” in the Appendix.

¹² See elegy “Eleven” in the Appendix.

¹³ In “Middle Kingdom”, for instance, we hear the speaker mention that “[b]esieged and besiegers are tasting/Truth’s vinegar, treason, heart’s gall” (DEANE, 1977, p. 47), a passage in which veracity walks hand in hand with rancour and betrayal.

the collection, such as “Bonfire”, “The Victim”,¹⁴ “The Brethren”,¹⁵ “A Fable”, “Epiphany”,¹⁶ “Taking the Rap” and “A Deeper Exile”. In each of them, poetic subjectivity (and its particularly individual reading of the world) emerges as part of an equation of which the other half is a series of pressing historical, political, and, for that matter, ideological questions, which were dominating the public sphere when the poems were published (and which, as we shall see, still linger in subtle yet piercing ways). This way, the speaker of “Migration”, for instance, states his determination “(...) to seek his parents,/Looking in the history of their bodies/For what he inherited.” (DEANE, 1977, p. 9), while the speaker in “Unsung” describes someone who “(...) was the very Idea of a father,/Oddly proximate to daughter and to son,/Not fully himself to any one.” (DEANE, 1977, p. 16). *Rumours* is permeated by the angst in the face of extreme situations, and poems like “Going Northward”, about death and mourning, exhibit that in passages like “[m]y anxiety like a radar/Scanning the landscape/For the distance between feelings,/Across death, Northward.” (DEANE, 1977, p. 17), while poems like “The Brethren” depict an individual “[a]rraigned by silence” (DEANE, 1977, p. 26) and immersed in his nostalgia.¹⁷

History Lessons (1983) revisits some of the themes in the previous books from a slightly different, yet still personal and lyrical perspective. The individual and the collective ethos merge in this book under the basic premise that “History is personal; the age, our age” (DEANE, 1983, p. 12). On the one hand, the subjectivity of the speaker is partially shaped by the conflicts taking place in the public arena, while these conflicts are

¹⁴ In this poem, the personal memories of the speaker intersect with his memories of “[t]he history of backlanes that altered/From the geography of childhood fields” (DEANE, 1977, p. 24), when “(...) all was fixed and objects stared/At older people who were part of there.” (DEANE, 1977, p. 24). The fickleness of his memories becomes more evident in “[b]ut though I knew them both, they would dissolve/Out of their shapes and lose their cowed/Assumptions. Their world was as a cloud/That changed each time I turned to look” (DEANE, 1977, p. 24), which creates a sense of lost stability that prepares for the scene of lynching that closes the poem.

¹⁵ “Peace? What if it were shattered?/Our noise was life and life mattered” (DEANE, 1977, p. 26), says the speaker as he nostalgically goes over worn-out pictures of “friends [who] were now the staffs/Of great bureaucracies.” (DEANE, 1977, p. 26).

¹⁶ This poem brings religion and violence together with the juxtaposition of Catholic rituals and the threat of air attacks, as shown in “The stations of the cross,/Plastered in fourteen friezes on the walls,/Kept their fixed profiles on the full-faced crib/While our heads bowed before the stall/Where Christ took up his five-point-star career/From small beginnings” (DEANE, 1977, p. 31) and “Just a month before/We had untuned his sky with a blaring siren/And run to the stinking air-raid shelter. But nothing came. Fooled by false alarmings.” (DEANE, 1977, p. 31). From this the speaker concludes, with some hesitation, that “Perhaps fake sirens and clear Christmas bells/Bring all to such shelters where the smells/Of gas and incense freely mingle/To give us expectation.” (DEANE, 1977, p. 31).

¹⁷ “I still recall those greasy Belfast flats/Where parties hit upon a steady roar/Of subdued violence and lent/Fury to the Sabbath which we spent/Hung over empty streets where Jimmy Whitherspoon/Sang under the needle old laments/Of careless love (...)” (DEANE, 1977, p. 26).

given shape through a lyrical perception that also becomes a personal reading of these conflicts and their consequences. As in *Gradual Wars* and *Rumours*, a defining trait of Deane's speaker in the poems in *History Lessons* is his profound consciousness of himself as an impotent individual in the face of a reality in which "mouths crabbed/With rancor and wrong, the smooth/Almond of speech burnt" (DEANE, 1983, p. 33), a situation he cannot alter, despite his fervent desire to do so. His internal conflicts arise from his understanding that he is at odds with his reality while fully immersed in it at the same time. The negotiation of this existential cul-de-sac is what gives Deane's poems in this book their lyrical might and imagetic strength. The speaker often perceives himself as an exile at home, feeling both estranged and integrated, as the speaker in "The Party-Givers" wonders in astonishment: "(...) is the party simply over/And we familiars in a foreign life?" (DEANE, 1983, p. 28) . These "(...) scene[s]/Of ruin" (DEANE, 1983, p. 37) and these "moments of long-rued/Silence (...)" (DEANE, 1983, p. 37)¹⁸ create the scenario for discussing themes like death, violence, exile, identity and the possibility of truth and the conditions of its making.

Violence, loneliness, nostalgia, hearsay, memories, individuality and death¹⁹ are therefore major thematic concerns of Deane's poetry. The same is true for loss, bewilderment and the struggle of the individual to come to terms with the often hostile world²⁰ he inhabits. Deane's tone is personal and usually lyrical, but this focus on the individual in contrast with images of civil violence accentuates the traumatic ways in which both realms intersect. In Deane's poems, we see conflict through the eyes of an individual, and the subjective filter through which we gain access to this world already implies that what we see is, first and foremost, a personal interpretation of conflict, or a representation of what might have been the real thing. The critical and personal points of view colour each other's perceptions of this conflicting world, and the result is a form of troubled lyricism that permeates many of Deane's main poems.

If it is true that his poems converse with the historical context in which they were produced, it is quite evident that the emphasis of Deane's tone and diction is on the conflicted individual and on his troubles in negotiating his presence in a barbarous world

¹⁸ See the poem "A Visit" in the appendix.

¹⁹ The speaker in "Smoke Signals in Oregon", for instance, wonders, halfway through the poem: "Death. Could it be so quiet?" (DEANE, 1972, p. 36)

plagued by sectarianism and fierce ideological rifts. To a certain extent, then, we can argue that his poetry as a whole bears testimony to a diligent search for a seemingly unattainable sensible middle ground in the face of extremism. The critical challenge when we approach *Gradual Wars*, *Rumours* and *History Lessons* is precisely to read these books as a whole without overlooking their aesthetic and thematic peculiarities. Indeed, there are nagging questions which bother Deane repeatedly in his poetry, but the rhetorical devices through which his poetic voice is expressed are not necessarily similar, and locating these differences and highlighting their aesthetic effects is an important part of the critical challenge.

Indeed, Deane's poetry is inhabited by perplexed individuals in their desperate attempts to make sense of their reality through their poetic (and meditative) look at the world. What emerges from this configuration is a kaleidoscopic image of violence, struggle, and death, on the one hand, and of affective loss,²¹ inner conflict and melancholy²² on the other. All this is permeated by the recurrent motives of uncertainty, hesitation, memory and the emotional conflicts which reverberate in the external world and within the poetic subject in different ways. The fact is that Deane's poetry reconfigures the ideas of violence, memory and death through the use of different rhetorical elements and strategies, ranging from messianic images to contained diction, by means of which he pits private perspectives against collective ones, thus creating heightened poetic tension.

In addition, the Irish society that emerges from Deane's poems, especially those with a collectivised "we" as their speaker, is, in many ways, separate yet similar to that which appears in the poems of Seamus Heaney and Derek Mahon, for example. This comparison is important because it locates the problems with which Deane's poetic subjects are concerned within the broader Irish poetic scene. The themes and motives we find in Deane's poetry are not exclusive to his work. The society which emerges from his poems is deeply fragmented, partial, and even limited in its view of things. It is little surprise, then, that his speakers can only partially apprehend the world of grief, carnage,

²¹ In "The Broken Border", for instance, the speaker says that "I wanted to order/You to tell me what it was like/To lose both parents when you were/Twelve. So that I may be prepared/Father, before we get home,/For losing too. Must the stroke of blood/Fall through us all so cleanly/That even reliving it all with you,/I must be still reliving it alone?" (DEANE, 1977, p. 13).

²² The speaker in "Poet's Progress: A Sequence", for instance, says that "[m]y past keeps welling through/Darkening my convalescence./Everything has a sad and roué air." (DEANE, 1972, p. 54)

solitude and individual dead-end in their quest/yearning for what they conceive as the truth, and for a solution to their inner conflicts. Here the battle of the individual against his surroundings becomes more intense and conducive to frustration. In the end, what emerges from this situation is that these speakers are much more fragile than the circumstances with which they contend.

The first chapter of the present study offers a brief panorama of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and the political and economic variables that contributed to the escalation of violence in the region. The focus is on mapping the overall atmosphere of the Troubles rather than trying to reconstruct in great detail the narrative of their key episodes. This chapter also examines how different poets responded to the barbarity in the North in their work. By doing that, I hope to demonstrate that each of those poets tried to come to terms in their work with the barbarous deeds they regularly witnessed as the violence in the North raged. That said, the aim of the chapter is therefore twofold: a) to situate the reader and the discussion of Deane's aesthetics historically, and b) to examine the various poetic strategies/formal devices different poets have employed in order to capture that tense historical context in their verse.

Chapter Two is a survey of the critical reception of Deane's poems throughout the years. Once again, the objective here is twofold: a) to collect book reviews, newspaper articles and academic studies dealing with his poems in order to present what has already been said about Deane's verse, and b) to assess this material and discuss, in detail, its critical strengths and analytical drawbacks in order to map as closely as possible the predominant critical perspectives through which Deane's poetry collections have been approached and interpreted. At the same time, an evaluation of these critical texts on Deane's poetry is relevant because it can help to demarcate some of the key questions, motifs and themes in his poetry.

Chapter Three examines the rhetorical strategies Deane uses most frequently in his verse. The aim here is to break down some of Deane's poems in order to understand their linguistic construction, and how their parts interconnect to produce meaning. It is, therefore, a study of the inner aspects of his poetry, of matters of form and how they give shape to the content of the poems. The premise behind all this close reading²³ is that the

²³ Here I borrow the term from critics often associated with The New Criticism, like I. A. Richards, author of *Practical Criticism* (1929).

historical tensions discussed in chapter one are incorporated by Deane's poetic language; in order to study how the poems negotiate these tensions, we must look at how they are worked out in formal terms.

Finally, Chapter Four offers an interpretation of the extent to which Deane's poetry and the Northern Irish troubles are interrelated. Here is where my thesis is more clearly stated and really defended, and the main argument of this chapter is that Deane's poetic oeuvre responds to the Troubles through the tensions and conflicts its language encapsulates. In order to substantiate this argument, the interpretation offered in the chapter brings together the main ideas in the previous chapters and articulates them with a more theoretical perspective on the possible intersections between poetry and reality. My analysis in this chapter is based on the ideas defended by Antonio Candido (2011), Theodor Adorno (1991), Octavio Paz (1973), Stan Smith (1982), as well as Thurston and Alderman (2014). In common they share the idea that, whatever historical information a poem (or work of literature) might contain, it is observable in the inner rhetorical organisation of its content.

Considering all this, the thesis I defend in this study is that poetry and history converse in Deane's verse because in it both realms work as attempts to formulate subjective impressions and interpretations that are often built on limited and frail perspectives, as well as a fragmented apprehension of the causes and effects of the Troubles on the individual mind. I also defend that his verse is angst-ridden, and permeated by a sense of perplexity and melancholy that arises from his subjects' deep awareness that our real-world experiences are ridden with irreconcilable perspectives. This is the core aesthetic trait that draws his poetry closer to the ever burning political issues of Northern Ireland's Troubles. Deane's verse is dialectical in essence, in that it pits the polar opposites of the individual and the social realms against each other. It is from the self-contained dissonances between its mostly personal tone and the collective matters it addresses that Deane's poetry derives a great deal of its eloquence.

6. Conclusion

“poetry has no less relevance for the intellectual situation of our time than does philosophy, fiction, theater, painting, or music.” (FRIEDRICH, 1974, p. 3)

Based on all this discussion of the rhetorical features of Deane’s poems, their formal peculiarities, and the direct and indirect ways in which they address the Troubles, we can conclude that history inhabits Deane’s poetry as both event and perceived effect. If there are poems that speak more clearly about historical episodes of outright violence in Northern Ireland, registering the memory of carnage, there are others that work out the theme of conflict more insidiously, by focusing on the aftermath of violence manifested in the ways the speaker elaborates on his individual experience. The threat of violence, and its bearing on the individual mind, is felt as a continued traumatic presence.

We can also say that, whereas Deane’s speakers are imbued with a (sometimes unconscious) urge to provide reasonable explanations for the situations they observe, and in which they live, their quest is systematically undermined by their growing awareness that reality and life (and all the ideological and historical intricacies these notions contain) frustrate their rational attempts at a coherent reading of their world. Bewilderment and an inescapable sense of failure in the face of their historical circumstances are frequently voiced by Deane’s speakers, whose perplexity, anguish and sense of delusion result from the clash between individual expectation and the heavy hand of history affecting them in a multitude of traumatic forms.

In his interview with John Brown, Deane mentions, when commenting on the role of the writer, that,

in Ireland there is such an ideological investment in the idea of the artist, the privatisation of writing, the absurd pretensions to a cheap universalisation of feeling and of authority with that, that it is difficult to keep a sense of proportion. Writing that treasures narcissism, writing that is mere propaganda – between these two polarities, there is very little that is worth remembering. And it is difficult to enter into the wider world without denying the inner world. It’s not just an escape from nationality, of the British or the Irish variety; it is an escape into the belief that one is ‘free’, that one is the maker of the world he sings. I think this is a glamorous

and vacuous notion. At least in its pseudo-liberal therapeutic form, it is mere garbage, although widely canvassed and admired. (BROWN, 2002, p. 103).¹⁵⁴

Deane's poems eschew these extremisms and these liberating daydreams. This refusal to embrace such notions signals to an important critical stance in his verse that is in constant tension with his lyricism, thus being an important element of the dialect that organises his poetic output in an overall coherent literary oeuvre. Indeed, as Deane himself ultimately argues, "if poetry has any enhancing powers for the poet, they surely must include the belief that you must make the effort to break from what formed you, even though this itself is part of an almost predetermined formation." (BROWN, 2002, p. 102).¹⁵⁵ The tension between his poems' attempts to do it, and the impossibility of their doing it, adds great depth to his poetic voice, at once maintaining a vivid dialogue with tradition while also trying to extend beyond it.

One of the biggest virtues of Deane's poetry is that it evades any easy, ready-made attempts to interpret the position of the individual within his/her society and the historical moment from which he/she speaks. That said, Deane's poems neither reduce the world they portray to a caricature of the reality produced by a strong individual bias, nor do they reduce the full intellectual and emotional complexity of the individual to a shallow reflection of his/her circumstances. This is another strong dialectical element in his poetry, for it operates a complex synthesis between what the individual is, and how he conceives of and reacts to his turbulent world. Small wonder that his poetry is full of shadows¹⁵⁶ and walls,¹⁵⁷ of images that both suggest "a deep sensual fright" (DEANE, 1972, p. 34), threat and protection, most of the times in highly ambiguous ways. Deane's poetic universe is a world of silences, of a dark atmosphere of angst and disillusionment, of attempts to escape and of individuals struggling to understand themselves in that scenario.

¹⁵⁴ This passage is also quoted by Dawe (2018, p. 100-101) in *The Wrong Country: Essays on Modern Irish Writing*.

¹⁵⁵ Dawe (2018, p. 100) also quotes this excerpt in his book.

¹⁵⁶ See, for instance, this line from "Children Sleeping", from *Rumours*: "Our shadows too remain articulate/Upon the wall." (DEANE, 1977, p. 48)

¹⁵⁷ See, for instance, passages like "I fear more/The ghost that comes by the wall" (DEANE, 1972, p. 25), as well as "(...) a terrible rain/That inebriated the air with the smell/Of rank grass and fear and decay/While we sheltered at a long wall." (DEANE, 1972, p. 48).

In that sense, in Deane's poetry, history is far from being dead. On the contrary, history in his verse is very much alive, to the point that it becomes one of the strongest pillars of his poetic aesthetics, thus nurturing the idea that "[n]othing's past,/Everything has still to come (...)" (DEANE, 1972, p. 37). In Deane's poetry, then, "History is [a] wall of pain" (DEANE, 1972, p. 47), it is a vital force that intersects with the life and consciousness of his poetic subjects to the point that a clear separation between them becomes virtually impossible. To speak about Deane's individuals, their memories, their experiences, is therefore to talk about the contradictions of their history, of their relationship with their cultural and political world, and the way the Northern Irish Troubles affect them. At the same time, to speak of history in Deane's poetry is to probe its presence in the minds of his poetic subjects.

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