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"A nearness felt as far": the Tensions Between Literature and History in Seamus Deane's Poetic Oeuvre

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Tese apresentada como parte dos requisitos para obtenção do título de Doutor em Letras, junto ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, do Instituto de Biociências, Letras e Ciências Exatas da Universidade Estadual Paulista “Júlio de Mesquita Filho”, Câmpus de São José do Rio Preto.

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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 Deane[3] in this 16-year period, the critic argues that,

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[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 stanched 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

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[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 Fornightly 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 death[19] 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 world[20] 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 melancholy[22] 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 reading[23] 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.

2. Angst and barbarity: the Troubles in Northern Ireland

> "Words are witnesses that often speak louder than documents." (HOBSBAWM, 1996, p. 1)

A quick look at the lexicon of the Northern Irish Troubles gives us a good idea of the ethos of the conflict, the interests that shaped it, the murderousness of Unionist and Nationalist groups, and the often clumsy, not to say disastrous, responses given by Westminster to this "post-Imperial imbroglio" (HARRIS, 2011, p. 171), impotent as it was to mediate the dispute between Protestants and Catholics. Words and phrases like "terrorism", "car bombing", "hunger strike", "supergrass", and "internment" feature prominently in the work of professional historians such as Marc Mulholland (2002), J. S. Connolly (2004) and Charles Townshend (2010), for instance, who have all set out to examine in detail the ideological postulates behind the Northern savagery. Despite not having been coined in that period, these terms were frighteningly recurrent in the different realms of social life, to the point that they have become linguistic hallmarks of that era. The clashes between Protestants and Catholics, and the methods employed by each group to force their political agenda upon their opponents have lent a bitterly Irish flavour to the semantics of those expressions, thus adding a new symbolic edge to actual dissent.

In a way, then, these words and phrases all amount to what might be described as the rhetoric of the Troubles, that is, the language which is summoned to debate the feud and, at the same time, the language that now symbolically embodies part of that atrocious reality. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to discuss that thirty-year conflict in Northern Ireland without invoking at least a handful of them. The Troubles, therefore, have not only left their mark on people's lives, on their traumatic recollections and mutilated bodies, but also on the everyday language they share and use, and by means of which they preserve their memories, elaborate their personal narratives and pass them on. As Hobsbawm's epigraph suggests, deeper historical changes also leave their imprint on language. If we are to agree with him, we can therefore claim that the recurrence of those terms whenever the Troubles are on the table attests to the viciousness of the political disputes during that period just as strongly as traditional historical documentation does. Besides, the charged meaning such words acquired during that time (and in that particular

context) not only makes it hard to shake the traumatic memory of the Troubles from them, but also provides insightful ideas on the ideological bones each side had to pick with one another during that era.

The history of the Troubles in Northern Ireland has already been (re)told countless times by historians,[24] literary critics,[25] journalists,[26] and sociologists,[27] not to mention political and cultural commentators of different ideological persuasions. Apart from these scholarly attempts to reconstruct the main events retrospectively, in a historiographic effort to (re)interpret them, there are also volumes of personal accounts from people who actively participated in the conflicts as members of unionist or nationalist paramilitary groups.[28] In addition to that, there are also the memories of those who survived either the terrorist attacks or the equally atrocious military operations led by the British army, and of the relatives of those who were assassinated or simply "disappeared". All these sources combine to depict the complex framework of the Troubles.

Indeed, recent decades have also witnessed the publication of numerous high-quality books examining the nature of these conflicts, as well as the type of coverage they received in the news.[29] In addition, a similar quantity of excellent documentaries[30] chronicling the main events of the Troubles and how they have interfered with people's day-to-day life have been broadcast and can now be watched on the internet. Hence, the perspectives on the Troubles are as different (and dissenting) as they can be, and there is no shortage of material available for researchers and history buffs to consult.[31]

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[24] See, for instance, Marc Mulholland's *Northern Ireland: A Very Short Introduction*, Charles Townshend's *Ireland: The Twentieth Century* (2010), and the more encyclopedic approach of J. S. Connolly's *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (2004).

[25] See, for example, Peter James Harris's summary of the main events of the Troubles in his *From Stage to Page: Critical Reception of Irish Plays in the London Theatre, 1925-1996* (2011).

[26] The BBC Website, for instance, hosts a detailed archive of the Troubles, with informative texts on a chronology of the main events as well as a collection of pictures that depict central events of the conflict. All this is available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/troubles, accessed on 19 Feb. 2018, at 16h09.

[27] Joseph Ruane is one such sociologist. He co-authored the excellent *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, Conflict and Emancipation* (1996) with Jennifer Todd.

[28] An example of that is the documentary *Walls of Shame* (2007), produced by Al Jazeera, and available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZM-OC0p9us, accessed on 21 Feb. 2018, at 17h45.

[29] See, for instance, Robert J. Savage's *The BBC's 'Irish Troubles': Television, Conflict and Northern Ireland* (2015).

[30] An example of such documentaries is Lena Ferguson's *Bloody Friday*, produced by BBC Northern Ireland, and available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3s1iH3z8EhY, accessed on 04 February, 2018, at 22h00. Another example is Marry Curry and Trevor Birney's *Thatcher: Ireland and the Iron Lady*, produced for RTÉ ONE, and available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foD8GMhRwFw, accessed on 05 February 2018, at 12h10.

[31] In order to situate the reader historically, though, we can quote the encyclopedic account of the Troubles given by Connolly. He explains that "During the late 1960s the civil rights movement took up many of the

Given this wealth of highly accessible material, and its richness of detail, it would be pointless to retell the whole history of Troubles here. Even though there will be moments in which I shall devote greater attention to key episodes of the conflict, my aim is not to go into the gory details of bombing campaigns or the like. Rather, my aim with this chapter is twofold. First, I want to examine the general atmosphere of the Troubles, focusing more on the aftermath of the main events rather than on the events themselves, on how ordinary people and so-called public opinion perceived them, and on the signals these events were, perhaps unwittingly, sending out. Secondly, I seek to address how these tensions and conflicts are encapsulated in the work of some of the poets who wrote in and/or about that period. My aim is therefore to examine how these writers have negotiated the tensions between poetry and history in their respective works, and how (and if) they have interpreted these historical circumstances and incorporated these tensions into their verse. In doing so, I intend to discuss the poetic strategies they have used to respond to barbarity aesthetically. In other words, this chapter focuses on how the rhetorical choices of poets like Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley and Gerald Dawe, for instance, incorporate the tensions of this historical context, marked as it was by fear, uncertainty and perplexity. Indeed, the discourse which shaped a forged legitimacy to the actions perpetrated both by paramilitary and official governmental forces gave birth to some of the rhetoric of dissent these writers captured in their work under different guises.

According to Sarah Broom,

> (…) the Troubles have produced a cultural context that has no equivalent or comparison elsewhere [and] the extremity of the Northern Irish political situation over the last few decades makes it a particularly unique and compelling focus for discussion. (2006, p. 3)

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main Catholic grievances, but the successive governments of O'Neill, James Chichester-Clark, and Brian Faulkner proved unable to deliver reforms, contain growing Catholic street action, or keep Protestant militants in check. British troops were called out 'in aid of the civil power' in August 1969, an intended short-term measure which is still in place more than 30 years later. Mass rioting between Catholics and the police and at Catholic-Protestant interfaces in Belfast, Derry, and other centres was brought under more effective control after three summers of rioting and other major incidents such as Bloody Sunday, in January 1972. But during 1970 the conflict took an even more serious turn as the provisional IRA began a campaign of terrorist warfare against both the security forces and major commercial centres. The death toll rose from 25 in 1970 to 173 in 1971 (all but 30 of which occurred after the introduction of internment on 9 August) and 467 in 1972, before levelling off at an average of about 100 deaths per year from 1977 until 1993. From 1972 onwards Protestant counter-violence from within the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force also became a major feature of the conflict." (CONNOLLY, 2004, p. 412).

The roots of the unparalleled nature of the Northern Irish Troubles on which Broom comments lie partly in the fact that inhabitants of that region have often been at loggerheads, being politically attached to Britain while, at the same time, linked to a cultural matrix more akin to that of Irish traditions and Celtic lore. The impasse created by this situation,

> suggests a certain insecurity about the long-term viability of the northern statelet, hardly hallowed by long tradition and still seen by most of the British Isles (including most unionists) as inherently 'Irish'. (MULHOLLAND, 2002, p. 20)

This argument is somehow common sense among scholars in the field these days, and variations of it have been invoked under different circumstances to address the idiosyncratic nature of that particular region.

Another singular characteristic of the Northern Irish Troubles is that the seed of the discord which galled the battling factions was planted with the very creation of Northern Ireland. Indeed, Townshend explains that "Northern Ireland was born in a crisis, and the fears generated by this crisis effectively determined its future" (TOWNSHEND, 2010, p. 181). He is not the only historian to make such a claim, though. His comment echoes Connolly's statement made in passing, as he discusses the origins of the Troubles, that "Northern Ireland was born in violent conflict" (CONNOLLY, 2004, p. 412) or, we could add, as part of a weird diplomatic compromise aimed at ending the Irish Civil war. Of interest here is that both Townshend's and Connolly's words point to the fact that disquiet, apprehension, and a certain sense of alarm have always permeated Northern Ireland. These sensations were created by the awareness of impending danger, mostly generated by the understanding that big unsettled political and cultural issues still remained in the area. As the years after partition went by and resentment grew, these feelings have consolidated as the bedrocks of the Northern Irish state, itself a barrel of political gunpowder waiting for its wick to be lit. These tensions have been manifest even in the apparently mundane act of naming that area. Indeed, as Kennedy-Andrews argues,

> the term 'Northern Ireland' is contestable because it carries with it some recognition of constitutionalised partition and is thus an unacceptable designation to Nationalists. Republicans and Nationalists prefer the clumsy 'Six Counties'. Protestants favor 'Ulster', though the Irish province of Ulster also included Co. Donegal, Co. Monaghan and Co. Cavan. The most neutral appellation is perhaps 'The North', though,

> since it is a geographical rather than political signifier, it doesn't entirely satisfy Unionists. 'The North of Ireland' almost – but not quite – recognises political realities. (KENNEDY-ANDREWS, 2003, p. 11)

Kennedy-Andrews' comment echoes Hobsbawm's words in the epigraph, for it shows that the roots of dissent in that area are deep enough to turn the nomenclature of the province into a bone of linguistic contention among the parts entangled in those disputes. Therefore, the different names preferred by each side embody the signs of political and cultural tensions that have been simmering in Northern Ireland for centuries.[32] Indeed, that the dissenting groups seem to be at one another's throats even in run-of-the-mill questions such as this hints at the practical effects brought about by their long-standing grudge. In a way, then, language also bears the scars of division in Northern Ireland, paradoxically inscribing the potential for conflict in the only symbolic medium through which reasonable agreements can be negotiated and working compromises be reached.[33]

In their full-length analysis of the social, economic, historical, ideological and political disputes behind the Troubles, and of how the overlapping of these forces generated the internal frictions that gave Great Britain the excuse to crack down on the paramilitary squads to stop their ruthless campaigns, Ruane and Todd explain that,

> The conflict of nationalism and unionism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and its outcome - partition - is one of the great crises of Irish development. A variety of explanations of the crisis - many of them single factor - have been advanced, ranging from uneven development of capitalism in nineteenth century Ireland to supremacist tendencies within Catholic nationalism or Ulster unionism. (RUANE; TODD, 1996, p. 47-48)

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[32] This quibbling over names has a longer history on the island, as Seamus Deane explains in his introduction to *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature* (1985). According to him, "politically, the land question was dominant in late nineteenth-century Irish history. (…) In literature, this economic and political question was converted into a fascination with the regional landscape. Loyalty to that particular region, another characteristic of early Romanticism, when it was called 'local attachment', was both a literary and a political gesture in Ireland. The very naming of the land in both literature and politics – […] Eireann, Eire, Saorstat Eireann, the Republic, the Six Counties, Ulster, Northern Ireland – is a symptom of that combination of political instability and regional loyalty which has defined modern Irish history." (1985, p. 13). Deane goes on to explain that "(…) all those names are associated with various forms of violence. The question is not the legitimacy either of the violence or of the name. It is a question of the impossibility of finding a name which is consonant with the notions of peace and instability. Further, the regional loyalty is subject to intensification in times of violence." (1985, p. 13).

[33] Irish writers have always been particularly aware of these linguistic controversies, for obvious reasons. As Seamus Deane explains "language – always a crucial issue in a country which has had its own language destroyed by a combination of military and economic violence and another imposed by a coercive educational system. The linguistic virtuosity of Irish writers and the linguistic quaintness, to English ears, of the Irish mode of speech in English, are the product of a long political struggle – one still audible in the poetry of John Montague and of Seamus Heaney. Irish literature tends to dwell on the medium in which it is written because it is difficult not to be self-conscious about a language which has become simultaneously native and foreign." (DEANE, 1985, p. 13)

We can infer from Ruane and Todd's words that the extremism of violence in Northern Ireland is just the tip of a huge and complex political and cultural iceberg that involved subjugation as the latter stage of a heinous colonisation process whose consequences were still felt long after the independence of Ireland from England at the dawn of the twentieth century and the manoeuvres that created the Northern state. In fact, there was a massive historical grudge still lingering in Northern Irish society, the manifestations of which progressively erupted in less than amiable ways in the years that led to the Troubles. This is so because, as Connolly explains, Northern Ireland is,

> a province created by the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, made up of the six Ulster counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone, and retained within the United Kingdom after the rest of Ireland achieved dominion status by the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921. (2004, p. 410)

Connolly's words show, then, that Northern Ireland was the result of a political negotiation, a Cabinet arrangement. As such, it was not born out of a democratic decision that could grant the state full political sovereignty. This negotiation involved, at its heart, a deliberate top-down bureaucratic and geographical division which underestimated, or even totally overlooked, the potential sectarianism and its possibly brutal manifestations and consequences that lay ahead of the newly delineated and soon-to-be-proven explosive territory.

As a geopolitical by-product of this disastrous Cabinet agreement, then, Northern Ireland dangerously concentrated the political and cultural dissent of the Irish independence process. As Mulholland explains,

> In the 1921 treaty, Britain had hoped to divide republicans and eradicate the radicals. In doing so they unwittingly created a powerful tradition of revanchist paramilitarism that was to explode in their faces in 1971. (MULHOLLAND, 2002, p. 69).

In other words, the British Government failed in its plans to combat extremist politics in Northern Ireland through its institutional manoeuvres disguised as sensible diplomacy. We can say, then, that the seeds of the Troubles, as Mulholland's (2002), Connolly's (2004), and Townshend's (2010) analyses all suggest, were sown during the political and diplomatic negotiations between England and Ireland to end the Anglo-Irish War early in the twentieth century, while the soil for it to grow had been prepared much earlier, as these authors also suggest. Whether or not the signatories of the treaty were aware that

the truce promised by the document was fragile and could produce new fights in the future is hard to ascertain. However, the Troubles that erupted a few decades after partition were at least partly the result of diplomatic short-sightedness and miscalculation which neglected the potentially reactive power of the discontented side and the counter-reactions that could ensue. Indeed, the "partition [of Ireland] was an attempt to accommodate, rather than to transcend and resolve, the historic conflicts on the island" (RUANE; TODD, 1998, p. 48). Instead of trying to end these territorial, ideological, and political disputes in Ireland, the signatories of that accord opted to ignore the fact that the dissident factions in the region were highly likely to engage in warfare at the earliest opportunity.

Bearing that in mind, it is small wonder that "the political history of Northern Ireland for nearly half a century after 1921 was preternaturally uneventful." (TOWNSHEND, 2010, p. 187). Townshend's words suggest an air of uncanny ordinariness that, in the final analysis, helped to mask key unresolved issues behind the incubation of the Troubles. Indeed, when we look back at the roots of the clashes between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, and the irreconcilable interests and demands behind paramilitary action in the region, we are hardly surprised that nationalist and unionists had so many political, economic, ideological and cultural issues to resolve. Thurston and Alderman, for instance, argue that, even before 1968, "political and cultural tensions occasionally broke out into open violence" (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 24), even though not in the scale and range of later years. In their examination of the forces behind the Troubles, they explain that,

> When (…) the Irish Republican Army (IRA), carried out raids along the border of Northern Ireland in an effort to overthrow British rule in the province and bring about a united Ireland (beginning in 1956, with the so-called Border Campaign), the Stormont government interned hundreds of Republican suspects under the Special Powers Act. Over the course of the decade's last half, ten IRA activists were killed and more than four hundred interned, while half a dozen members of the British Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) were killed and over thirty wounded. The stage was set for the "Troubles" that would erupt at the end of the 1960s from the combination of sectarian tensions within Northern Ireland and pressures from outside the province, emanating from both Britain and the Republic. (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 24-25).

In addition to that, even "though Northern Ireland was in formal terms a democracy (…) it was a one-party state" (TOWNSHEND, 2010, p. 187). This ersatz democratic system described by Townshend was a major source of discontent and resentment, being

established and guaranteed mainly by political manoeuvres that ensured the Unionists' ample majority to govern the region for long periods. When commenting on this topic, Connolly explains that,

> The system of majoritarian democracy, though based closely on the Westminster model, operated in the circumstances of Northern Ireland's divided society to produce a one-party state, in which the interests of the state and the interest of the Unionist Party became dangerously intertwined. (CONNOLLY, 2004, p. 411).

The solidity of the Northern Irish system gradually proved to be inexistent, then. This created a strange situation in which the numerical majority of Catholics could not have their claims heard in Stormont due to their being a political minority in terms of seats in parliament. What is more, to a certain extent, and paradoxically though it might sound, the fierce ideological division in the North was also one of the major forces behind the predominance of Unionist political ideology, and the consequent predominance of this group's interests over those of the Catholics/nationalists.[34] The ideological rifts between nationalists and unionists have greatly facilitated the perpetuation of the latter in power.

"Organized nationalist abstention" (CONNOLLY, 2004, p. 410) was another major factor that undermined the Catholic communities' already limited political influence in the long run. Coupled with the cunning exploitation of electoral loopholes by the unionist side, the nationalist strategy of merely boycotting unionist politics proved ineffective, if not disastrous. By sticking to a bizarre sense of moralistic political and cultural superiority, the only practical thing nationalists managed to do was, perhaps unintentionally, to open the way for unionist political pragmatism to overrule Northern Ireland. It took too long for the nationalist ideologues to realise the scope of the strategic mistake they had made with their withdrawals.

[34] Apart from this, the power of the Unionist Party was also safeguarded by the practice of gerrymandering, another word we can hardly afford not to invoke when dealing with the Troubles. As Mulholland explains, "control of local government authorities gave Unionists a micro-management of the Stormont constituencies. The organizational development of opposition parties was retarded with so few outlets in representative assemblies. Gerrymandering ensured that the symbolic Unionist integrity of the six counties was maintained. In British eyes at least, a nominal Unionist majority in Northern Ireland would be much discounted if Derry City, Fermanagh, and Tyrone fell into Nationalist hands. Gerrymandering had the further advantage of maintaining important sources of patronage in Unionist hands. Excessive population mobility always threatened to undermine Unionist majorities, and it became a priority to corral Catholic (and Labour) voters into well-defined constituencies. Thus Catholic and Protestant populations did not bleed into each other, for fear of anti-Unionist tactical voting on the part of Catholics and Labour-minded Protestants." (MULHOLLAND, 2003, p. 39).

If anything, the nationalist refusal only added grist to the mill of both sides' inability to implement a common political agenda for Northern Ireland. In a context where dissent between historically antagonistic groups escalated drastically, withdrawing from political talks could hardly help to establish sensible middle grounds for all the parties involved. The consequences of this lack of consensus were felt more intensely by poverty-stricken communities. Unionist perpetuation in power was indeed quite problematic for the Catholic/nationalist minorities. They were directly affected by excluding unionist social policies which neglected the needs of the poorest, underrepresented citizens, and overlooked derelict areas of the city. However, the die-hard non-negotiation nationalist position did not prove of any help in turning things around. At best, it only denied Catholics/nationalists a political voice that, weak though it might have been, could, at least theoretically, have represented them institutionally. "The political vacuum" (GOODBY, 2000, p. 142) thus created in institutionalised politics by this staunch Catholic refusal opened the path for the recrudescence[35] of groups which claimed their legitimacy on the grounds that they offered protection to areas beyond the reach of the State.

Unionists were quick to take great advantage of this refusal of nationalists to engage in political negotiations. The Catholic withdrawal from discussions cleared the way for ultra-conservative and reactionary ideas to gain momentum. As Harris shows us, the scene for outright confrontation in the North was also set by the "inflammatory rhetoric" (HARRIS, 2011, p. 173) of Protestant public figures such as Reverend Ian Paisley. In that context of growing animosity,

> Rev Ian Paisley convincingly demonstrated the political force of the extremist tendency amongst the loyalists by winning the very seat vacated in the Stormont parliament by the former prime minister, Terence O'Neill, who had retired from politics. (HARRIS, 2011, p. 179)

Paisley's election therefore shows that, despite all the problems with the state's democratic system, at least a portion of the population large enough to get him a seat in

[35] According to Goodby, "while economic convergence continued – multinational capital continued to be attracted to the Republic and the North, while the UK and the Republic entered the EEC together in 1972 – fallout from the Troubles was catastrophic; North-South suspicions intensified, relations between Britain and the Republic and with other states were soured. Stereotypes and chauvinisms apparently dead and buried were able to flourish again on both sides of the Irish Sea, and further afield" (GOODBY, 2000, p. 142-143).

the parliament endorsed the same ideas the reverend vituperatively defended. Paisley's importance for unionism was, indeed, tremendous. As Mulholland explains, the reverend "was throughout the Troubles the single most popular unionist politician. In this context, it is little surprise that virulent sectarianism could tip over into murderous rage" (MULHOLLAND, 2002, p. 87-88). Paisley's reactionary rhetoric fuelled the flames of the angry Protestant response to the growing Catholic civil rights movement.[36] Thurston and Alderman detail part of this tense scenario:

> social changes (…) erupted with real and sustained violence in Northern Ireland. As David McKittrick (2002) writes, the Catholic and Republican communities (which overlapped but which should not be seen as identical) had, since the partition of 1922, experienced discrimination in employment and various forms of prejudice in political and social life. Movements for Catholic civil rights grew throughout the 1960s, especially in the cities of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry, and, along with the criminal activity of Republican paramilitaries, provoked suspicion and reflexive hardening of positions among the Protestant and Loyalist communities (which similarly overlapped but were not identical). These reactions intensified in 1966. That year, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a Loyalist paramilitary, attacked a Catholic-owned shop in the Protestant Shankill Road of Belfast. The group issued a declaration of war against the IRA and undertook a series of shooting attacks against Catholic businesses and individuals. (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 29)

In this tense, war-like atmosphere fraught with instability and brutality, Paisley's firebrand fervour served to pull the wool over the eyes of voters who mistook reactionary rhetoric for firmness and bravery. In such a context of political upheaval, any discourse with a whiff of assuredness, however fake or misleading it might be, would (as it did) suffice to gain the orator a position in parliament.

Out of the countless episodes of sheer brutality in the history of the Troubles,[37] "Bloody Sunday" is perhaps the one which has attracted the greatest amount of critical

[36] I owe this comment to Professor Peter James Harris' reading of the first version of the manuscript of this text.

[37] As Thurston and Alderman explain, "Violence, in the form of riots, protests and counterprotests, shootings, and bombings continued through the 1960s and early 1970s, peaking in 1972. Militants on both the Nationalist and Loyalist sides increased the frequency and virulence of their attacks, while the governments of Northern Ireland and of the United Kingdom met the troubles with violence of their own, from the internment of hundreds of people (the vast majority Catholics, not all of them Republican or Nationalist) to the militarized reaction of police and, finally, the introduction of British troops into the cities of Northern Ireland." (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 30). On a more practical level, then, Thurston and Alderman's explanation of the dynamics of the Troubles shows that the tactics of fighting hostility with hostily did not make any positive contribution to the solution of the Northern Irish crisis.

commentary, academic scrutiny and artistic response. Harris summarises the events as follows:

> The basic facts are these. Knowing that they were embarking on an illegal activity, since all such protests had been banned by the Stormont Parliament, NICRA managed to marshal a group of between 10,000 and 20,000 people on Derry's Creggan Estate, in what was described as a carnival atmosphere. At 14:50 the march began, with the objective of walking to Guildhall Square in the city-centre, where it was the intention to hold a rally. The policing of the event was conducted by soldiers of various regiments, including the First Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, who sealed off the approaches to Guildhall Square. (…) Seeking to avoid confrontation the march organisers led the majority of the demonstrators down Rossville Street, intending to hold the rally at Free Derry Corner instead. However, at 15:40, a group of protesters started to throw stones and missiles at the soldiers at their barricade in William Street. The soldiers responded with rubber bullets, CS gas and two water cannons. Fleeing from the gas many of the marchers ran into the Bogside estate. At 16:10, the soldiers were ordered to move out and arrest as many of those involved as possible. They therefore left the cover of their barricade and started to advance down Rossville Street into Bogside. According to the Army's version of events, they then came under fire from the Rossville flats, whereupon they returned fire. According to those on the march themselves, the paratroopers simply opened fire on unarmed civilians, both from the street and from the city walls above the Bogside, where army snipers were already in position. By 16:14, after approximately twenty-five minutes of shooting, thirteen marchers lay dead on the ground and a further thirteen were injured. (HARRIS, 2011, p. 181-2)

The latter, more credible, perception of the event, however, helped to spark the fury of the Catholic communities in ways that civil rights organizations had managed to keep under control until then.[38]

In practical terms, "Bloody Sunday, on 30 January 1972, was the debacle that led to the almost complete collapse of Catholic opposition to political violence" (MULHOLLAND, 2002, p. 79). The outcome of the episode enraged Catholics as no other event had done since partition. Their anger at the unprovoked violence of the British troops convinced these communities that the time for rational negotiation had now passed. The calamitous decision to have the soldiers open fire on the demonstrators that fateful Sunday forged a sense of unity among Catholics that ultimately "led to a mass influx into

[38] In fact, the strong reaction that "Bloody Sunday" provoked can also be read as the culmination of simmering anger and dissatisfaction which had existed among Catholics, but had not fully materialised in the form of concrete actions. Commenting on the tactics adopted by civil rights activists, for instance, Goodby states that ,"despite the ultimate concession of many Civil Rights demands, the limited effect of reform and the state's heavy-handedness (and police brutality) fuelled the rebirth of the IRA in 1970, which began a military campaign within a year." (GOODBY, 2000, p. 142).

the ranks of the Derry IRA" (MULHOLLAND, 2002, p. 79). Rage and fear were at the heart of this process. If there was still any hesitation on the part of the Catholic/nationalistic community to resort to violence as a means to claim the rights they were systematically denied, it ended with "Bloody Sunday" and its spurring of Catholic communities into the quest for retaliation. It is ironic that the circumstances changed a demonstration which had set out to reinforce the power and eloquence of peaceful protest into the catalyst of more outrageous forms of violence. It is also ironic that the British soldiers initially sent in to quell potential rioting and prevent violent demonstrations ended up adding fuel to the nationalist fire by unloading their guns on the wrong crowd at the wrong place.

Mulholland's (2002) account of the Troubles shows that there were several moments between 1968 and 1998 when "the possibility of comprehensive political negotiations" (MULHOLLAND, 2002, p. 134) was advanced, or in which at least the wish to end the strife was diplomatically expressed. We can infer from Mulholland's analysis, however, that these were moments during which, paradoxically, the Troubles were closer to an end and were, at the same time, seriously aggravated. Indeed, Mulholland's coverage of these attempts at conciliation suggests they were often pregnant with the potential to turn things sourer among republicans, nationalists and unionists. The irony is that diplomacy generally proved helpless in providing reasonable solutions to the political problems it was invoked to solve. In fact, these attempts at diplomatic talks often deepened the Northern divisions instead of assuaging them. When we remember that, at one end of the negotiating line was, for an extended period, none other than the famously recalcitrant Conservative British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, neither the failure of these attempts nor the permanence of dissent are hard to understand.[39]

Mulholland explains, for instance, that,

> Between 1988 and 1992, there were many attempts to create conditions for all-party talks in Northern Ireland (excluding, because of its support for violence, Sinn Féin). Discussions were to follow three strands simultaneously: relations between the communities within Northern Ireland (strand one), relations between north and south of Ireland (strand two), and relations between the two sovereign governments of the United Kingdom and of the Republic of Ireland (strand three). (MULHOLLAND, 2002, p. 134)

[39] For more on the troubled relationship between Margaret Thatcher and Northern Ireland, see the RTÉ One documentary *Thatcher: Ireland and the Iron Lady* (2013), available on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foD8GMhRwFw, accessed on 16 Feb. 2018, at 10h43.

With so many different interests to negotiate, it was hardly surprising that these attempts at consensus soon turned out to be fruitless. As Mulholland's analysis suggests, the more these efforts towards peace were made, the harder it seemed to reach a compromise solution. As a matter of fact,

> The Troubles that broke out in Northern Ireland in 1968 proved that even liberal democratic institutions and a standard of living enviable in all but the wealthiest countries were no proof against ethnic conflict in the contemporary age. In a multicultural world, the Troubles raised profound questions regarding the willingness of peoples to live with one another. The ability of law-bound states to cope with severe public disorder under the glare of international attention was sorely tested. (MULHOLLAND, 2002, s/p)

In this sense, the Troubles still have important lessons to teach, which extrapolate the frontiers of Northern Ireland. To a certain extent, the main events of the Troubles and the divisions that motivated them, can be read now, two decades after the 1998 ceasefire, as the consequence of the concentration of power and privilege in the hands of a small group that turned the helm of public politics in the direction that best suited their personal or class interests. Moreover, on the cultural and social side, the Troubles also exposed the fragility of notions that are widely celebrated nowadays, like pluralism and multiculturalism, suggesting that the will to live by them is often only superficial. On the institutional side, the Troubles also demonstrated the inefficacy of combating terrorism through repression.[40] What is more, the Troubles revealed serious flaws in British law enforcement, with "internment" serving as a glaring example of the arbitrary abandonment of due process.[41]

Indeed, Gerald Dawe argues that,

> "The Troubles" are unquestionably the watershed in recent Irish history. Life changed irrevocably, both directly and indirectly, for hundreds of thousands (…) who inherited ordinary hopes for the future only to see these break up in the grim squalor of daily bombings and nightly assassinations. A wedge has been driven into the emotional life of that generation, between the past of the sixties, when they were teenagers, and the present. (DAWE, 2007, p. 45)

[40] According to Goodby, "The Troubles not only tarnished Westminster's cherished self-image as the 'mother of parliaments', but the nature of British society was inevitably warped by the state's response , often making its democratic fabric seem threadbare indeed. In the Republic the Troubles led to a similar, if less drastic questioning of the state (most notably in the Arms Trial of 1970), as well as to restrictions of democratic rights, draining the resources of a country whose security budget was ordinarily minuscule." (GOODBY, 2000, p. 143).

[41] Once again, I owe this insight to Professor Peter James Harris.

Dawe's words capture the despondency brought about by the Troubles, during which the prospect of peace seemed merely a far-fetched ideal.

But what have all these feuds got to do with poetry? The answer to this question is indirectly given by Thurston and Alderman (2014), who argue that poems "are produced, circulated, and read in specific historical circumstances" (p. 19). Implicit in their argument is the notion that part of the critical study of poetry (and of literature in general) involves the interpretative effort of examining the extent to which these texts converse with their immediate reality. In that respect, Thurston and Alderman's statement derives its cogency from the Jamesonian motto "always historicize!" (JAMESON, 2002, p. ix), which runs like a theoretical and methodological thread through most of their poetry readings.[42] To put it simply, the study of this context, these historical circumstances, along with the aesthetic peculiarities of literary texts, can help to illuminate passages which might otherwise be lost to the reader, and, on a deeper level, can help to clarify the ways in which texts negotiate the tensions of their historical period in terms of form and content. From that perspective, which can be very critically fruitful for the study of Irish poetry, even the most hermetic reading of an apparently ahistorical poem cannot ignore the context in which it was created and to which it somehow responds.

A similar idea is defended by poet and critic Ruth Padel (2002), who claims that "poems speak outside history, across the barriers of time and culture, but also belong to history. They come from and speak to a specific time and place" (p. 19). Her premise is virtually the same as that advanced by Thurston and Alderman, that poetry is both attached and distant from the reality it either claims to represent or reject, and that it is the critic's task to investigate these tensions, these points of contact and separation. Indeed, autonomous as poetry might seem to be, the fact is that people have written and read poems within a set of circumstances at least since Homer's *Iliad*. In other words, just as with novels, plays, music, painting, sculpture, and so on, "poems are situated" (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 19). For that reason, the critical examination of a poem's formal traits and thematic concerns can only be richer and deeper when the work

[42] The authors often cite Fredric Jameson's ideas as one of their theoretical references.

under scrutiny is satisfactorily located in time too.[43] Indeed, Thurston and Alderman's main argument echoes one of Deane's fundamental critical premises according to which, as Kennedy-Andrews explains, there is no escaping from "art's situatedness in the world of national and political experience" (KENNEDY-ANDREWS, 2003, p. 22). These statements, however, should never be taken for naïve defences of the political engagement of artists. What these ideas suggest is that, from a hermeneutical perspective, it is impossible to sever the bonds between all these forms of artistic expression and the circumstances that enable their existence. An analysis of such contingencies therefore becomes an important part of the reading process.

In the case of Irish contemporary poetry, "the Troubles, and the history of British rule in Ireland that led to them, resonate from time to time in the work of nearly all Irish poets, and poets with Irish ancestry" (PADEL, 2002, p. 28). Padel's point is cogent, since literary responses to the overarching fretfulness of the Troubles were multifaceted, and throughout the years they have been amply documented and discussed by literary critics and scholars.[44] Indeed, not only poets, but also novelists, short story writers and dramatists have sought to negotiate these conflicts in their work by using different literary strategies and rhetorical configurations to address this harsh reality aesthetically.[45] What these artists have in common is their quest to give form and meaning to the dissent that so traumatised those who had to live through the Northern Irish sectarian brutality.[46]

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[43] Indeed, "the relation of Irishness to Britishness, poetically as well as politically, is an especially vexed one after the brutal history of repression in Ireland and the continuing sectarian troubles and tensions following partition and the establishment of the Free State." (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 14).

[44] We can cite, among these critics, Seamus Deane (1985), Robert Garratt (1989), Steven Matthews (1997), John Goodby (2000), Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (2003), Bernard Klein (2007) and Thurston and Alderman (2014).

[45] George O'Brien's book *The Irish Novel* (1960-2010), for instance, lists novelists whose work has dealt with such matters or used them as the backdrop of their plot, like Bernard MacLaverty's *Cal* (1983).

[46] In his close analysis of how Irish novelists have addressed the Troubles in their respective prose works, Kennedy-Andrews states that "Since 1969 and the most recent outbreak of the Northern Irish Troubles (as the political violence has euphemistically come to be called) there has been a remarkable literary production emanating from the North about the Northern 'situation'. Such has been the impact of the political violence on society, culture and the imagination that it would be hard to think of another regional literature with such a widely shared focus of thematic interest, though, of course, there is great diversity in standpoint and attitude – so great, that it isn't possible to speak of a distinctive 'school' or 'tradition' of Northern writing. This resurgence of Northern writing at the same time as the reirruption of the Troubles in 1969 was surely no coincidence. The Troubles gave a special urgency to the literary impulse, and opened up new themes and emotional possibilities for the prospective artist. The writers, we might say, were hurt into writing by the need to explore and to understand the specific tensions, divisions and ambiguities inherent in Northern society. Yet politics and society did not take over the creative imagination completely: the most significant feature of the literature has been its resistance to, and liberation from, orthodoxy and ideology, its commitment to the 'world elsewhere' made possible by language." (KENNEDY-ANDREWS, 2003, p. 7).

In the field of poetry, Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, and Gerald Dawe, to name but a few, have all tried to reconstruct the tension which plagued their historical context in their writing. As Declan Kiberd mentions in his "Contemporary Irish Poetry" (1991), an essay that introduces the general selection of Northern Irish poems published in the third volume of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* on that same year, "the celebration of the rituals of a domestic life, to which the 'Troubles' are a merely subordinate backdrop, is the more common strategy of the generality of poets" (KIBERD, 1991, p. 1316) when addressing such issues. What varies in the work of these writers is the intensity and poignancy of their response to the Troubles, the distinctive tones they adopt to address the atmosphere of that era in their work, and the extent to which they explore the ways in which barbarity interferes with the quotidian experiences of their poetic subjects.

According to John Goodby, "no poet more completely embodied the encounter between poetry and the Troubles than Heaney (…)" (GOODBY, 2000, p. 151). Several of Heaney's poems formally incorporate the questions I have discussed so far. They do so through different discursive modulations that result in very intimate tones and diction, thus showing a kind of commitment to reality that is primarily personal and aesthetically elaborated. As Bernhard Klein (2007) explains in his comprehensive study of how contemporary Irish fiction, drama and poetry have dealt with the island's complicated history, Heaney addresses the violence of the Troubles,

> not by advertising the link between poetry and politics in a propagandist fashion but by the subtle (and perhaps slightly oblique) technique of offering poetic templates as a moulding device for a thoroughly historicised consciousness of the present. (KLEIN, 2007, p. 141)

This creative ethos enables Heaney's poems not only to reach the roots of the personal and public dilemmas they explore, but also to create the necessary distance from reality in order to thematise some of the hottest political and cultural issues of their time. His aesthetic choices prevent his poetry from being entrapped by the ideological pigeonholes that marked the tone of the political debate at the height of the Troubles.[47]

[47] However, John Goodby argues that *North*, "Heaney's most contentious book, and the one most central to his reputation" (2000, p. 157), is poetically marred by the fact that "sexual and sectarian stereotypes are invariably fused" (2000, p. 157) in it.

Fine a poet that he was, Heaney never allowed his poems to become mere political pamphlets. Heaney was well-aware, above all, that "poems attempt to open up the limitations of political thought precisely through an imaginative appeal to history" (KLEIN, 2007, p. 141). This, in turn, allowed him the chance to avoid moral, political and time restraints as he created poetic scenarios that could embody the angst of the Troubles in their full contradictory and potentially bellicose nature. Implicit in Heaney's poetic ethos is the notion that "history, as the poetry insists, is not a repetitive cycle of the inevitable; it is an imaginative 'outback' full of hidden alternatives, untapped resources, forgotten voices" (KLEIN, 2007, p. 141), all of them demanding to be given shape and expression. At the same time, Heaney's poetry is aware of the latent risks of expression, of giving yourself away in the words you utter, of unknowingly taking sides through the rhetorical choices you make. His four-part poem "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" is an example of that. It uses a collection of pedestrian images, bordering on the prosaic to capture the angst of the Troubles. Published in *North*,[48] this poem is built on a carefully wrought mixture of street violence and echoes of common sense expressed in the voices of local residents quoted by the speaker in the poem's mosaic of barbarity and perplexity.

Derek Mahon also deserves attention for his singular poetic response to the Northern Irish context. He is perhaps the least explicit of the Northern Irish poets when it comes to addressing the Troubles. Yet his poetry deals with the consequences of the Northern atrocities in subtle ways, and tries to negotiate the position of the individual in the face of barbarity by treating these issues as part of a more complex environment of individual bedazzlement and affective turmoils. These unfold in a context of deep social and political unrest, ideological dissent and outright brutality. Mahon's verse is particularly abstruse, which heightens the tension in his work between reality as such and reality as the product of aesthetic reconstruction.[49] As Klein explains,

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[48] *North* is perhaps Heaney's most cited and discussed book of poems as far as his response to the Troubles is concerned. Not only do John Goodby (2000) and Thurston and Alderman (2014) mention it in their respective books, but other critics before them, like Seamus Deane (1985), Robert Garratt (1989), and Steven Matthews (1997), to name a few.

[49] In an interview with John Brown, Mahon says the following about his personal response to the Troubles (and how this is somehow featured in his poetry): "One of the damnable things about it was that you couldn't take sides. You couldn't take sides. In a kind of way, I still can't. It's possible for me to write about the dead of Treblinka and Pompeii: included in that are the dead of Dungiven and Magherafelt. But I've never been able to write directly about it. (…) I was not prepared for what happened. What happened was that myself and all our generation (particularly in the North) were presented with a horror, something that demanded our serious grown-up attention. But, as I say, I was not able to deal with it directly." (MAHON, 2002, p. 116).

> Mahon's poetry longs for access to the 'possible lives' that invigorate the past with fluidity of the imagination, yet the ultimate denial of this hope gives his poetry a note of bleakness and despair that is all the more effective for its stunning formal excellence and measured control. (KLEIN, 2007, p. 147)

Considering this, Mahon's work cannot be accused of being a sheer poetic flight of fancy, aloof in its own aesthetic ivory tower. Nor can his verse be charged with downright nihilism given the weird sense of hope lurking in poems such as "The Mute Phenomena" and the aura of indignation in the face of brutality as in "The Snow Party". His widely quoted and analysed "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford"[50] and "Homecoming" both suggest a dismayed and recondite treatment of reality. In "Afterlives", another poem of his which is frequently quoted and analysed,[51] the speaker looks with some contempt and suspicion at reason as an unfailing instrument to understand the world, and sectarianism emerges in the speaker's musings about his personal lack of attitude in the face of political hostility.

In that sense, "Mahon's poetry aims not to escape but rather to embrace history in all its diversity and unrealized potential – only ultimately to deny the very possibility of this liberating vision of a multidimensional, protean past" (KLEIN, 2007, p. 146). In other words, his poetry never curls up in ahistorical self-absorption, even though cursory readings of his work might suggest so. Instead, in seeking for ways of achieving his aesthetic ambitions, Mahon seeks to liberate his verse from the ideological and political constraints of the Troubles and, thus, enable it to address its historical circumstances profoundly. Hence, his often oblique treatment of the angst and fear of the period, his retreat into intertextuality and his use of erudite allusions equip his verse with the poetic tools necessary to address the vicissitudes of its historical context without being entrapped by it. As Deane explains, "lost lives are Mahon's obsession. His poetry is an attempt to fulfil them" (1985, p. 162).

Michael Longley is another poet who deals with the Troubles in his own particular way. According to Goodby, "the circumspection of Longley's attitude to the Troubles is

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[50] This poem is briefly analysed by Goodby (2000) and John P. Waters (2014), for instance.

[51] John Goodby (2000) discusses this poem, arguing that it "shows Mahon's further absorption of the Troubles in his third volume" (2000, p. 168) of poetry called *The Snow Party*. For Deane (1985), *The Snow Party* (1975) is the volume where risk is taken. (…) [where] liberal hedonism is confronted by the apparently endless violence." (p. 160).

well known and explains the lack of the interest in larger historical and mythic frameworks of specifically Irish provenance in his work" (GOODBY, 2000, p. 173). That does not mean, however, that Longley's poetry overlooks these aspects, their premises, nature and the often dreadful physical and emotional scars they leave on people. His verse is discreet, and the tone of his poems often prudent and rational. Longley's poetic subjects are also deeply observant of their surroundings, often highly vigilant, somehow suggesting to the reader that there is more to a particular scene or situation than meets the eye. This approach to reality contains a certain brand of scepticism which makes his quintessential poetic subject doubt the vague notions of identity and belonging spread and endorsed by nationalist and unionist discourse and ideology. Instead, as a poet, Longley seems more interested in (re)creating individual experience. That the circumstances and context of such experiences can become part of this creative process is only a natural consequence of his poetic view of the world. His poetry reveals his great attentiveness to detail, and even the utter banality of everyday living.

An example of this fine-tuned perception is "Casualty". The poem handles the theme of death through the vivid description of a rotting carcass.[52] The rhetoric of putrefaction shaped by the poem not only creates a distressing image of death, but also one of degeneration, which is embodied in the dispute between the animals hungry for the putrid remains. The title seems to be all that hints at a political subtext, since the word "casualty" is often used as a military and paramilitary euphemism. As we read on, we detect the speaker's incapacity to halt the deterioration he impassively observes. This rhetoric of putrefaction in the poem acquires the aura of a slanted affirmation of impotence and resignation. The poetic subject observes his reality from up close, which also feeds his inner certainty that he can do nothing to change it. At the same time, he realises that the realistic scene he observes is a snapshot of a decaying universe which is much larger than his own limited agency.

"Ceasefire" focuses on death and mourning, and the rituals of loss and grief. In the poem, these feelings are intermingled with stoic reverence. As Steven Matthews has already pointed out, the poem takes its material from "an incident in Book XXIV of the *Iliad* [and] recounts the visit of the old Trojan king, Priam, to Achilles' camp in order to beg for the return of his dead son's body" (MATTHEWS, 1997, p. 1). The mythological

[52] The image bears a resemblance to Baudelaire's poem "Une Charogne", from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, even though the way Longley handles his poetic material and theme is considerably different.

subtext here is one of the strategies through which the poem addresses violence, outrage, and death in the North. At the same time, the poem reaffirms individual resilience in the face of heinousness, and, as Matthews explains, works as "a subtle, moving and timely intervention, suggesting that the inevitable way forward for the two traditions in the North is through mutual understanding and, vitally, forgiveness" (1997, p. 1). When we read the four parts of "Ceasefire" in connection with its title, these intertextual references acquire additional political meanings that enable us to read the poem in the context of the period of its publication, namely, "the complete cessation of violence in the North of Ireland announced by the Provisional IRA [and the] parallel announcements from other paramilitaries on both sides of the religious divide" (MATTHEWS, 1997, p. 1). When we look at "Ceasefire" from this perspective, we gain access to the rhetorical mechanisms that enable the poem to establish a slanted relationship with the relatively calmer yet still tense atmosphere in Northern Ireland. Published nearly a decade later,[53] "War and Peace" features Achilles and Hector once again, and paints a vivid portrait of their deadly encounter. Just as in "Ceasefire", "War and Peace" employs this mythical matrix to address the vicissitudes of its historical circumstances, the difference being that in the latter case, it is conflict rather than conciliation that sets the tone.

Despite their different approaches to poetry, and the peculiarity of their stylistic responses to the Troubles, Goodby argues that these three poets bear important resemblances in the way they aesthetically negotiate their relationship with reality. To illustrate his point, he explains that,

> from the start, Heaney, Mahon and Longley refused a reflectionist poetry of the Troubles, with its attendant dangers of appearing to endorse political positions. Effectively, this stressed inseparability of 'style' and 'message', and hence the validity of the 'obliquity' famously assumed to characterise the poetic response to the Troubles. (GOODBY, 2000, p. 144)

We can also find this poetic ethos described by Goodby in Gerald Dawe's oeuvre. Indeed, Dawe's poetry is quite oblique when it addresses the Troubles. We can see this in some of the poems from *Sheltering Places*. In "Count", for instance, we find the poem's

[53] As shown in the Contents section of Michael Longley's *Collected Poems* (2006), "Ceasefire" was published in *The Ghost Orchid*, in 1995. However, Matthews (1997) explains that this poem was first published in 1994. As he explains, the truce, announced "on 1 September 1994 (…) was greeted two days later by the appearance in the Irish Times of a sonnet by the Belfast poet Michael Longley called 'Ceasefire'." (MATTHEWS, 1997, p. 1). "War and Peace" came out in *Snow Water*, published in 2004.

speaker musing over the moment when he learnt someone close to him had been shot dead. That event destabilises his routine to the point that he finds it difficult to believe or explain what has happened and how he feels. The first two stanzas of the poem show in some detail where he was when the news broke. The lines that mark the transition from the second to the third stanza encapsulate the speaker's perplexity: "it sounded crazy, somehow or other/As incoherent as a dream" (DAWE, 2008, p. 35). The third and fourth stanzas present the speaker's somewhat cynical meditation on the sensationalist coverage of that killing. Yet the impersonal account of the circumstances surrounding the murder leaves him emotionally disturbed. The description of the crime scene by the press, with the authoritative voices we hear in "on the spot commentary/Reasoning details of why and how (…)" (DAWE, 2008, p. 35) the murder had occurred, suggests that the victim had been ambushed. The speaker's playing with the meaningless statistics of the assassination that hold the dramatic centre of the poem together points to an awkward way of mourning. This bespeaks the poetic subject's perplexity, on the one hand, and points to the banality of that cowardly killing on the other.

"Count" contains a deep political subtext in that it throws into question rationality and common sense by pitting them against the way individuals experience death and loss. The tension that renders the poem a coherent formal unit is that between reason and barbarism, which points to the difficulties of the individual consciousness in negotiating what appears to be rationally inexplicable. As Thomas Kilroy writes in the preface to *Sheltering Places*, in "Count" "there is a personal opening-up to suffering" (KILROY, 2008, p. 16), one that ultimately questions the poetic subject's ability to make sense of his experience. Kilroy also adds that "the act of counting becomes a way of registering the numbed reaction to the news of the brutal killing of a friend" (KILROY, 2008, p. 16). In Kilroy's opinion, "'Count' [is] one of the finer short elegies to have emerged out of that awful period of recent Irish history" (KILROY, 2008, p. 17). Perhaps one of the aspects that reinforce Kilroy's critical praise of this poem is that Dawe's emphasis on the speaker's mourning process makes reference to the Troubles only suggestively, perhaps vaguely, challenging the reader to pick up the historical threads in the interpretative process.

Unlike "Count", a poem that works on the level of suggestion to address questions of its historical context, "1974"[54] locates its events precisely in time and place – a "sealed-off Belfast" (DAWE, 2008, p. 37). The poem is a short sestina following no particular rhyming scheme in which the speaker takes a retrospective look at what he and his addressee failed to see, perceive, accomplish or do. That the speaker is looking back to his past is shown in the first line - "it's all old hat now" (DAWE, 2008, p. 37) – a metaphor suggesting triteness and outdatedness. What follows is a digression listing the run-of-the-mill experiences the speaker and his addressee "just missed" (DAWE, 2008, p. 37), which mixes everyday individual common-or-garden experience with a violent atmosphere of social upheaval and orchestrated terrorism. In the speaker's memories, everything becomes banal. Herein lies one of the most penetrating political statements of the poem, with the Troubles being given a cynically hackneyed aura. The poem closes with an image that suggests a sense of freedom from the circumstances, never revealing, however, that this liberty was only possible through blithe unawareness, which the speaker can no longer possess, as the past simple tense verb in the last line suggests.

"Border-crossing"[55] is another of Dawe's poems that addresses the Troubles. It features a speaker who paradoxically feels like an exile at home, [56] and is permeated with a sense of broad cultural alienation that drives a wedge between the speaker and the mores of his broad reality. This separation triggers him into reflection. He meditates on his surroundings, and thinks about the ideas and habits which have potentially shaped his and other people's views of that world. The tone of the speaker's language is somber and mostly contained, bordering on melancholy in some passages. As the title implies, the poem features a strong sense of division at its core. At the same time, though, the speaker exhibits a deep need to traverse the existential but also historical and politically forged distance that bothers him. These are the antagonistic forces which create the tensions that hold "Border-crossing" together and make it breathe as a powerfully expressive response to the atmosphere of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

[54] The poem is also cited by Kilroy in the preface to *Sheltering Places*,
[55] This poem is also cited by Kilroy in the preface of *Sheltering Places*.
[56] This sense of deep estrangement is found in passages like "The kids,/Their keen faces turned towards Dublin,/Think I'm French." (DAWE, 2008, p. 25), and in the opening line of the third stanza we read another instance of this distancing, in the anachronism suggested by "For we come as old-style wanderers" (DAWE, 2008, p. 25).

The image of the thinking wanderer upon which the poem is centred is also important for its formal constituency and coherence. It shows an urge for freedom that poetic language appears to repress. The poetic subject of "Border-crossing", in this case, has to negotiate ways of bridging this gap between himself and his immediate reality, a world that is close to and, at the same time, distant from him. As a result of this paradox, perplexity emerges as an inner constituent of the speaker's experiences. It is also through this set of contradictions that "Border-crossing" captures part of the strained atmosphere of the Troubles. This becomes particularly evident in the final stanza, when the speaker and his fellow traveller return to the Northern side of the border.

According to Kilroy, "Border-crossing" is one of Dawe's poems in which the author deals with the Northern "violence head-on" (KILROY, 2008, p. 16). The critic devotes a considerable portion of his short preface to *Sheltering Places* to defend this idea, implying that this is one of the poems which best encapsulates the principles of Dawe's poetics. Indeed, Kilroy sees in the poem a type of,

> vagueness that finally settles on all human aspiration with the passage of time however hot they may have been in the first place. This is exactly the kind of discrimination that Dawe brings to bear not only upon public issues but on the secret motions of feeling and behaviour as well. (KILROY, 2008, p. 16-17)

Indeed, there is a calculated inexactitude in "Border-crossing" that throws into question not only the premises by which the speaker has lived until then, but also the moral, ideological and political premises by which the strangers he meets and observes might likewise have lived. As Kilroy argues, "there is also another kind of response to brutality in Dawe, in the equanimity, the perspective with which he views the process of history in action" (KILROY, 2008, p. 16). This is what ultimately makes "Border-crossing" an inherently political poem in its subtext.

It goes without saying that these brief poetry readings are merely representative. What I have sought to do in this chapter is to show that, unlike the historians and sociologists cited in this section, who shape their arguments by analysing documents, historical data, archives and other public records in order to try and interpret the ideological and political feuds in Northern Ireland, poets manage to capture the nuances of these disputes through snapshots of this troubled environment. Returning to the epigraph to this chapter and reading it in the light of what has been discussed, we can see

that Northern Irish poets have not only observed events, but have indeed registered the turmoil of the period in their creative use of poetic language.

3. The critical reception of Seamus Deane's poetry

In spite of the eloquence of Seamus Deane's verse, and his focus on contemporary topics central to Irish culture, extended commentary on his poetry is notably absent from some of the finest critical companions to Irish verse including *Poetry in Contemporary Irish Literature* (1995), edited by Michael Kenneally, *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry* (2003), edited by Matthew Campbell, *Modern Irish Poetry* (1989), by Robert Garratt, *Facing the Music: Irish Poetry in the Twentieth Century* (1999), by Eamon Grennan, *Irish Poetry since 1950* (2000), by John Goodby, *A Concise Companion to Postwar British and Irish Poetry* (2014), edited Alderman and Blanton, and *Reading Postwar British and Irish Poetry* (2014), by Thurston and Alderman.[57] The bibliographical research for the present thesis has not encountered any book entirely devoted to Deane's poetry, whereas there are books dealing with the work of fellow poets like Seamus Heaney,[58] Michael Longley,[59] Ciaran Carson, Medbh McGuckian,[60] Eavan Boland,[61] and Derek Mahon.[62] The same is true of the glaring imbalance between the number of academic articles which have been published on the works of those poets, as opposed to those written about Deane's poetry.[63] The same cannot be said about his fiction and literary criticism, both of which have merited extensive critical attention. It is not the purpose of the present study to investigate the reasons for this apparent lack of

[57] An exception to this list is *The Oxford Handbook for British and Irish War Poetry* (2007), edited by Tim Kendall. In this book, Kendall argues that "Seamus Deane foregrounded in coded form the pressure of the Cold War on Northern Irish lives in 'A Schooling' (…) [and that] [t]he 'History Lessons' at the same allegorical school turn to a dream of Moscow, Deane remembering watching a film of the burning of Moscow during the Second World War, again troped as a Cold War education." (KENDALL, 2007, p. 649). Kendall ultimately suggests that the speaker in the poem 'History Lessons' "recognizes his own people in the Moscow story. The history of the Russian struggle against fascism and the Cold War allure of the USSR is colouring the dream of the Troubles (…)" (KENDALL, 2007, p. 649). However, Kendall does not further develop his main argument in his book, nor does he extend his analysis to other poems by Deane. Kendall's comments are thematic rather than aesthetic or formal. He uses the poems he mentions more as illustrations to his far-reaching argument of how different poets writing in English have dealt with the sweeping theme of war (and its effects). Deane's poetry as a whole, in other words, is not the real focus of Kendall's reading in his very comprehensive book.

[58] For example, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: A Critical Guide* (1998), by Neil Corcoran.

[59] *Reading Michael Longley* (2006), by Fran Brearton.

[60] *The Poetry of Medbh McGuckian* (2010), by Shane Alcobia-Murphy and Richard Kirkland.

[61] *Eavan Boland: Inside History* (2016), Edited by Siobhan Campbell and Nessa O'Mahony.

[62] *The Poetry of Derek Mahon* (2010), by Hugh Haughton.

[63] At the present time it appears that there has been no full-length academic study of Seamus Deane's poetry.

interest,[64] since it is more concerned with the aesthetic aspects of Deane's poetry and their interaction with its context.

The critical reception of Deane's poetry is centred around a handful of short general assessments of his achievements and shortcomings as a poet in the form of brief reviews of *Gradual Wars* (1972), *Rumours* (1977), *History Lessons* (1983), and *Selected Poems* (1988), which appeared in academic journals a year or so after each of these books had been published. These reviews, which in some cases, also focus on other poets and poetry books, rarely devote more than one or two pages to Deane's work. In some cases, only one paragraph is dedicated to a specific book of his, the critical commentary being little more than a superficial assessment. None of these reviews deal with poetic form and its relationship with the themes of Deane's poetry.[65]

Most reviewers have adopted a similar methodology in their assessment of Deane's poetry: they choose a handful of his poems, give them a skim-read and then highlight what they deem to be defining characteristics of a given volume or sometimes of his poems as a whole. There is no close reading of particular poems, and, even though some of the critics do try to establish links between these poems and their historical context, their attempts are often distorted by the limited space they have in which to develop their arguments.

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[64] One possible explanation is the fact that his poetry books had low print runs, which limited circulation of his work. These days his books are all now out of print, and used editions are hard to find, and often retail at high prices.

[65] The literature section on the British Council website, for instance, says that: "Deane's early poetry, from *Gradual Wars* (1972) and *Rumours* (1977), established both his preoccupations with violence and history, and his formal indebtedness to European and American models. Despite its stirring imagery, this early work was criticised for awkward phrasing and syntax, stylistic problems which were overcome in the more mature *History Lessons* (1983). This volume is carefully shaped by patterns of departure and return, as the poet moves between local and international experience, trying to make sense of his surroundings through constantly shifting perspectives. It also advances his determined engagement with the past [which] is its governing theme, and the motivation behind its intense engagement with the authenticity of historical imagination, cleverly developed in the title poem of the collection. At times, Deane's poetic evocation of his own family background brings him close to the territory of his contemporary, Seamus Heaney. 'Breaking Wood', for example, is, like Heaney's early poem 'Digging', based on a suddenly released memory of his father, pictured amidst the rich sensory imagery of autumn. There are obvious parallels with Heaney too, in Deane's confrontation with violence, as he processes the trauma of contemporary Northern Ireland. But his manner, in 'A Killing' or 'The Art of Dying', is more direct, and more journalistic. In a vivid late poem, 'Reading Paradise Lost in Protestant Ulster, 1984', (*Selected Poems*1988), he details a political landscape blighted with 'zombie' soldiers and supergrasses, and invokes Milton as a kind of co-witness to the desperate fall of his own native Derry: 'A maiden city's burning on the plain; / Rebels surround us, Lord. Ah, whence arose / This dark damnation; this hot unrainbowed rain?'" However, no systematic analysis of Deane's rhetorical devices is presented in that text, nor does it present any in-depth analysis of how Deane's poems incorporate the tensions of the Northern Irish Troubles.

This is the case, for instance, in Sean Lucy's 1973 review entitled "Three Poets from Ulster", in which the critic examines three different poetry books, one of them being *Gradual Wars*. After quoting two large excerpts from that book, without delving into their aesthetic features and themes, or discussing how the cited passages relate aesthetically or thematically to the rest of the book, Lucy states that Deane's "poetry is posed, careful, intelligent and often obscure" (LUCY, 1973, p. 179). Lucy goes on to draw attention to what he considers to be a contrived affectation in Deane's verse, a cerebral attitude towards poetry that causes it to be or sound vague, aloof, or excessively haughty. Despite the superficiality of Lucy's criticism, it is possibly one of the first attempts by a literary critic to grasp the peculiarities of Deane's poetic language. Lucy points to what he sees as speciousness and chicanery in Deane's poems in *Gradual Wars*, sometimes even implying that the poet might be hiding behind sophistry and poetic self-indulgence in order to avoid taking too many creative risks. For Lucy,

> The excellence of Deane's work is the excellence of this deliberately chosen aesthetic and intellectual withdrawal into an area of language which can be coolly controlled. The images and rhythms have, at their best, a mannered grace which is reminiscent of, and may perhaps even have been influenced by, the voice of Dennis Devlin. (LUCY, 1973, p. 179)

Even though Lucy's assessment of Deane's metaphorical language and musicality is very perceptive, I would venture to say that he is only half-correct in his explanation of the rationale behind the sophistication of Deane's verse. Lucy's argument that Deane's poetry retreats into the safe haven of rhetorical self-containment and unresponsiveness to reality does not hold water when we look closely at some of the poems in *Gradual Wars*, such as "Fourteen Elegies", "Northern Ireland: Two Comments", and "Derry". Even though it is true that Lucy's analysis may partially apply to some of the more personal poems in that book it is not comprehensive enough to cover the ethos of *Gradual Wars* in its entirety.

Lucy also claims in his review that "out of direct and often violent experiences and ideas he has carefully created remote and highly literary landscapes" (1973, p. 179). The idea that the task of the poet is to painstakingly re-elaborate reality in figurative language seems to be the basic premise of Lucy's argument. There is an underlying belief that Deane's poetic style inhibits access to the roughness of Northern Irish reality. However, Deane does not seek to separate out poetry and reality, aesthetic engagement

and socio-historical commitment, nor to cultivate an artistic ethos separated from a political one. Indeed, if there is any distancing between the traumas of experience and their poetic representations in Deane's poems in *Gradual Wars*, it is only a strategy to make their deep intersections more fertile poetically and politically.

Without substantiating his argument with further examples, Lucy states that "*Gradual Wars* is a book in which the aesthetic appetite dominates truth and passion instead of equal sway" (1973, p. 179). For Lucy, the poems in this volume suffer from an imbalance between reason and feeling, the rationality of poetic composition limiting the emotional reach of Deane's lyricism. Even though Lucy is right to acknowledge the aesthetically ambitious nature of Deane's poetry, his argument is undermined by its generalisation, when he suggests that part of the problem with Deane's book is that obsession with artistic beauty causes it to overlook the demands of reality and therefore lose poetic fervour.

Lucy also states that, in *Gradual Wars*, "the poems refine experience rather than reporting or recreating it" (1973, p. 179). Surely it is the poet's task to try and find an imaginative/inventive language to give textual form to the contingencies of human existence so as to make individual questions resonate more universally. Lucy is right when he points out that Deane's poems sift reality through poetic language, distilling or sublimating many of its imperfections. Yet he misses the point that it is the very existence of this process that makes the connections between Deane's poetry and its reality more problematic and therefore meaningfully fertile. In other words, it is because of its rhetorical skill that Deane's poetry can throw into question the body of assumptions and ideological rifts underlying the notions of reportage that Lucy's text seems to endorse as an aesthetic value. The weakness of Lucy's review is that it is predicated on the very notions of factual and accessible truth that many of Deane's poems in *Gradual Wars* and in his other books tend to question.

In his short, scathing review of books by poets Roy McFadden, Gerard Smyth, Michael Hartnett and Seamus Deane, poet and critic James Simmons reluctantly concedes that *Rumours* "is in fact a real breakthrough" (1977, p. 227). Simmons, like other reviewers mentioned in this chapter, does not have enough room to argue his case in detail, though. While praising the innovativeness of the poems in *Rumours*, Simmons comes up with backhanded comments such as: "I don't know that any of these poems quite comes off; but real feelings and energies and intelligence are at work" (SIMMONS, 1977, p. 227). Simmons then quotes the last section of "Scholar I", and concludes his

critical appraisal of Deane's book with the following statement, which says little about the aesthetic quality of the volume under scrutiny: "of course Deane was at school with Heaney which makes him a curious late starter" (SIMMONS, 1977, p. 227). Indeed, Simmons' review at times reads much more like a collection of first impressions randomly strung together than a systematic account of the books he was assigned to examine.

In a 1978 review that examines recent publications by poets Michael Hartnett, James Liddy, Roy McFadden, Aidan Carl Matthews, Paul Muldoon, Gerard Smyth and Seamus Deane, critic Eamon Grennan states, about the poems in *Rumours*, that "Seamus Deane's most distinct marks as a poet are verbal intelligence and care for his craft" (GRENNAN, 1978, p. 116-117). The problem with Grennan's statement is that it is too sweeping, and suffers from a similar drawback to that in Lucy's assessment of *Gradual Wars*. He provides no further details obtained from the close reading of the poems in this volume. As a result, what, for Grennan, makes Deane's poems in *Rumours* stand out is perhaps what distinguishes all great poets, which is their ability to breathe life into their language. Grennan's overall evaluation of Deane's book is little more than a vague, one-size-fits-all critical statement that avoids direct confrontation with the subtleties of Deane's literary language.

Unlike Lucy's text, though, Grennan's review as a whole is far less interested in faithful poetic reconfigurations of whatever truth of experience Deane's work might enclose. Nor does Grennan lambast the poems in *Rumours* for not reworking real-life events and situations in ways that shorten the distance between the text and the world. Grennan's interest in his review of *Rumours* is much more focused on trying to apprehend the ways in which the poems in this book negotiate the conditions of their own existence as aesthetic constructions, as instances of linguistic skill that complicate rather than solve the dilemmas confronted by the poetic subject. Although Grennan's review focuses on the textual organisation of these poems, it fails to touch upon their historical implications.

Indeed, Grennan has a keener eye than Lucy for the subtleties of Deane's poetic language, and he does not seem to share Lucy's opinion that there is a perhaps unintended structural imbalance between reality and poetic creation in Deane's verse. However, given the limited space available for his review of *Rumours*, Grennan can do little more than draw the reader's attention to a few of Deane's poetic achievements. These include, as Grennan mentions, his command of poetic language and the intellectual drive of his poetry. Nevertheless, Grennan misses the most important aspect of Deane's work in

Rumours, namely, the poet's ability to piece together individual and collective memories, interests and concerns without defusing the tensions which naturally arise from such a coexistence of different world views.

If Grennan's review of *Rumours* is limited by an exceedingly formalistic reading of the poems, then J. T. Keefe's review of *History Lessons* seems to overlook these formal aspects as it rushes through the formal traits of Deane's verse and focuses on the relationships between these poems and their historical context. Keefe states that Deane "is a distinguished member of a literary movement that has emerged from the North of Ireland and has the "Troubles" of the last few decades as its mainspring" (1984, p. 608). Keefe is the first reviewer to acknowledge the thematic concern that Deane's poetry has with the world from which it is born, making the case that the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland is a major driving force in his verse. According to Keefe, *History Lessons* "continues the poet's quest for an answer to the intolerable burden of history and the bloody explosions it fuels" (1984, p. 608).

Nevertheless, an awareness of the weight of history does not solve its problems. Many of the poems in *History Lessons* take this impasse as their theme or motif, and, as we shall see later on, stress the uncertainty and anguish which result from that sense of powerlessness. Ultimately, this makes Deane's poetry resonate with the "Irish experience (…) profoundly affected by a sense of insecurity and crisis" (DEANE, 1986, p. 31).[66] To quote Keefe once again, several poems in this book "are wrought with tension and a nervosity that in the personal lyrics occasionally tend to overwhelm that fragile form" (1984, p. 608). The poignancy of Deane's verse, Keefe's comment suggests, is therefore partly attributable to the fact that his poems take the relationship between form and content to its ultimate consequence by searching for a language that can piece together individual traumas and collective dilemmas.

It is undisputable that, out of the four reviewers mentioned so far, it is Keefe who most accurately and perceptively comments on the uneasy relationship between Deane's poetry and history. The critic does so by locating the sources of much of the anguish that permeate Deane's writing. Even though Keefe does not discuss the formal aspects of the poems in *History Lessons*, he does point to important aspects of Deane's oeuvre which merit investigation. To a certain extent, Keefe's review shows possible ways in which we can bridge the gap between Deane's work as a poet and his work as an Irish literature

[66] In: *A Short History of Irish Literature*.

scholar. Nevertheless, referring to these links is as much as Keefe can do in his short review.

In his review[67] for *Books Ireland* No. 80, in February, 1984, entitled "Unrhetorical Record", Desmond O'Grady describes *History Lessons* as a "collection of assured poems" (O'GRADY, 1984, p. 18). O'Grady's succinct account of Deane's poetry does more than highlight the confidence of the poems in the volume. O'Grady not only perceives the poignancy of the collection as a whole, but also hints at questions that lead to a closer reading of the aesthetic features of these poems set in their particular context. Of the reviews examined so far, O'Grady's is the most balanced, and the one that most accurately and coherently brings together a reading of poetic form, on the one hand, and an understanding of the relationship between form and history in Deane's book.

O'Grady states that, "as his title suggests, Deane concerns himself here with the challenging theme of history – personal, national and human; an awareness of history at home and abroad" (O'GRADY, 1984, p. 18). O'Grady's comment draws attention to Deane's interest in the way history is created as discourse and how it at least partly shapes each person's apprehension of the world, and the ways in which they interact with a given set of events or reality, how they try to understand of the contingencies that to a certain extent give their lives this or that direction. O'Grady is here drawing attention to the underlying presence in *History Lessons* of a continuum that expands from the realm of the individual to a more general understanding of mankind. For the critic, a key creative force in Deane's book is the ceaseless shifting of focus from internal historical matters to international history. Even though O'Grady's review hints at an intense dialectic between these histories, which ultimately reveals the deeper similarities between them, Deane's poetry is essentially rooted in the encapsulation of the basic structure of individual traumas in connection with more public, impersonal matters.

O'Grady is the only reviewer to draw attention to the fact that Deane "significantly (…) prefaces his collection with a poem on Osip Mandelstam, the Russian poet slowly killed for a single poem about Stalin" (O'GRADY, 1984, p. 18), also pointing out that, in the same volume, Deane "evokes, among others, John Mitchell, W. B. Yeats and the Fenians. O'Grady is also the first reviewer to touch upon some of Deane's poetical

[67] In the same review O'Grady discusses other poetry books published in 1983, like Sebastian Barry's *The Water-Colourist*, Paul Durcan's *Jumping the Train Tracks with Angela*, Seamus Heaney's *An Open Letter*, and Julie O'Callaghan's *Edible Anecdotes*.

influences and intertextual references. By acknowledging this aspect of Deane's poetry, the critic raises important questions that merit closer examination. In highlighting the intertextual nature of Deane's poetry O'Grady locates *History Lessons* within a wider poetic series[68] that includes not only Irish poetry, but also the body of poetic tradition written in English and in other languages as well. O'Grady argues that "Deane has served his apprenticeship well so that there is hardly a poem without one, sometimes several memorable phrases and images focused with cinematographic sharpness" (O'GRADY, 1984, p. 18), stressing the singularity of Deane's poetic language, but above all, its visual impact.

O'Grady states that, "throughout, Deane demonstrates a responsible respect for riveted and cadenced internal rhyme; for rhythm in the sequence of the musical phrase and language (…)" (O'GRADY, 1984, p. 18). He is thus the only reviewer to comment on the way Deane explores poetic conventions to produce meaning, and how the musicality of his verse might suggest potential interpretations. He also argues that, in *History Lessons,* "Seamus Deane's craftsmanship reveals itself with a quiet but very assured confidence that rewards careful reading" (O'GRADY, 1984, p. 18). Even though Deane's poetic artistry had already been discussed by previous reviewers, O'Grady was the first to comment on this understated equanimity of Deane's poetry .

Deane's language can be delicately haughty in diction and tone, while his images can be austere at times. At the same time his poetry reveals the speaker's insecurities, uncertainties, anxieties, his desperate reliance on remembrance, and his growing awareness of the impression of his understanding of the truth about his past and present. If Deane's language sometimes sounds unduly supercilious, it only serves to reinforce the deeper existential, historical, and ultimately political doubt at the heart of the conflicts shaped by his verse.

The reviews written by Keefe, Lucy and Grennan fail to discuss how Deane's poetry deals with the tensions that plague the individual consciousness of his poetic subjects as they attempt to understand the reality they confront. The reviews also miss the fact that Deane's poetry engages in a serious dialogue with the literary and philosophical

[68] I use the word "series" in the sense that J. Tynianov uses it in his 1927-essay "Da evolução Literária" ("On literary evolution"), published in *Teoria da Literatura: Formalistas Russos* (1971).

tradition[69] that precedes it, often as a means of interrogating its own poetic premises and the discourse that often shapes our experience of the world, the limited ways in which we interpret our immediate reality. What these reviewers miss is that Deane's poetry is studious in nature. Its linguistic devices and chains of allusions are strategies through which his poems can engage with the vicissitudes of Northern Ireland's turbulent reality. They also reaffirm their aesthetic serious-mindedness by refusing the type of strict political engagement that reduces artistic expression to the level of a political pamphlet.

Gerald Dawe's 1989 review of *Selected Poems*, entitled "Poetic Acts of Defiance" and originally published in the *Fortnight*, delves into the links between the poet and the critic in Deane's work more seriously. Dawe explains that,

> In his *Short History of Irish Literature*, Seamus Deane remarks that, for writers, "the questionable nature of authority has an especial charm, since there is, for an author, no more natural, or, indeed, radical question". Deane's poems work that charm into life and the struggle bears not only poetic fruit but also an awkward, bothered forcing of the issue. Behind the glassy surfaces of his poetry a discontentment, or unsettled containment, wrestles – as in a phrase from *Eleven*: "the lying throat of song". (DAWE, 1989, p. 23)

Dawe's statement touches on the parallels between the poet and the scholar hinted at by Keefe. He takes Keefe's suggestions a step further and relocates these similarities in the realm of literary creation by stating that the relationship between poet and critic is never free of conflict. Dawe's comment also addresses one of the most striking aspects of Deane's poetry, which is the tension between its elaborate language, the elegance of its style and erudition, and the stark reality it encapsulates. The restlessness that governs the relationship between form and content in Deane's poems is given another twist here. What lies behind Dawe's words is the fact that Deane's poetry is shot through with a tension between refinement and barbarity that is worked out through its language, in the images, metaphors and other rhetorical devices he uses to shape his poetic universe. There is always in Deane's verse this uneasiness between subject matter and method. His poetic language does more than simply represent the conflicts of its context. It incorporates them in radically intrinsic ways and enacts them. Deane's language substantiates the conflicts his poems embody and express by refusing any easy synthesis between the elements that comprise its inner dialectics between aesthetic content and historical matters. Indeed, there is an urgent sense of struggle in Deane's verse, which unfolds in different ways and

[69] The notion of "tradition" here is borrowed from the famous T. S. Eliot essay "Tradition and Individual Talent", from *The Sacred Wood*.

layers, as the poems gathered in *Selected Poems* show in various guises.[70] The conflicts of the individual poetic subject with himself, with his immediate experiences, and with the social world he inhabits run through Deane's verse like a thread. An awareness of this chain of conflicts enables us to discern the links between Deane's work and the historical turmoil of the Troubles. We can argue that the relationship between Deane's poetry and the reality of its historical context is halfway between direct critical engagement and Joycean "silence, exile, and cunning" (JOYCE, 2006, p. 218).[71]

In another section of his perceptive review, Dawe explains that,

> Against the grain of Irish poetry, Deane disturbs the cosy insouciance (Tom Paulin's phrase) that elevates art into the great unknowable and the poet to inheritor of a natural birthright of self-hypnotism. Deane's artistic conscience will have none of this and many of his poems are acts of defiance, seeking another light to work by. (DAWE, 1989, p. 23).

Dawe identifies in Deane's verse a resistance to any ethereal or metaphysical notions that would divorce his poems from their secular origins and interests. "Deane's artistic conscience" (DAWE, 1989, p. 23), Dawe suggests, is also a deeply critical one. We could go on to argue that the poet and the critic in Deane's poetry meet in the rhetorical choices he makes in the creation of poetic universe. The scholar and the poet in Deane's poetry converse more actively and productively in the latter's choice of words, in the way he stretches the limits of reason and, more importantly, of any systematic understanding of our place in the world as individuals, of rationality as a possible tool to help us to interpret our experiences.

As far as the formal traits of the poems in *Selected Poems* are concerned, Dawe explains that Deane's,

> language sometimes runs the risk of purging the body poetic with an awareness that is too flinty and contrived, but the clarity at the source of his poems consistently finds the right things to say what he means – things rooted in those strange unheralded revelations that reality presents, like the surreal presence of a deserted factory in *Tongues*. (DAWE, 1989, p. 23)

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[70] I shall return to these questions later on, when reading specific poems in greater detail.

[71] JOYCE, J. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man***.** (Edited by R. B. Kershner). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006.

Like previous reviewers, Dawe also notes the capacity of Deane's poetry to incorporate aspects of individual experience with great sophistication while avoiding obscurity. Dawe thus contests Lucy's charge of obscurantism in Deane's poetry, arguing instead that the balance between refinement and readability is not disrupted. At the same time, Dawe draws attention to what appears to be one of the strongest aspects of Deane's poetry, which is that it is both sensitive to the aesthetic demands of the creative process and to the epiphanies of the world, the moments when the full complexity of human experience in society is unveiled in an insight.[72]

Developing Dawe's analysis we can see in Deane's poems a two-way interpretive movement. In *Gradual Wars*, *Rumours*, *History Lessons* and in *Selected Poems*, there is a vivid interaction between the poems as aesthetic creations and the personal, social, ideological, and historical circumstances of their context. Hence, locating them in the historical scenario of the "Troubles" and reading them against this backdrop is just as necessary, in hermeneutical terms, as reading their formal traits closely to examine how the poet works out these conflicting interests in formal terms. Each poem has its particular way of capturing and interacting with that reality, in the sense that they shed light on the society from which they arose just as their rhetorical aspects are more clearly explained by the historical and social information extracted from it.

Dawe also points to some of the elements that constitute Deane's poetic style. In the following excerpt, for instance, Dawe states that,

> Reaching out through *Selected Poems* there is an almost classical appeal, to Lethe, Rubicon, the banks of the Styx, Pentecost and Babel, alongside the debonair accents of 'benisons', 'Diamante', 'falsetto', 'marl', and Deane's reconciliation of these desires in *History Lessons*. (DAWE, 1989, p. 23)

By listing some of its intertextual references, Dawe shows that Deane's poetry finds its voice in its revisitation of ancient tropes and images. At the same time, it seeks to draw thematic and aesthetic parallels between these influences and its historical context.

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[72] This is similar to the notion of epiphany advanced by the narrator in James Joyce's *Stephen Hero*: "By an epiphany he [Stephen Daedalus] meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments." (JOYCE, 1963, p. 211)

Considering this, then, we can argue that Deane's poetry has a modern tinge to it, even though not quite in the sense that Hugo Friedrich gives to that notion in *The Structure of Modern Poetry: From the Mid-Nineteenth to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (1974). For Friedrich, "European poetry in the twentieth century (…) speaks in enigmas and obscurity" (FRIEDRICH, 1974, p. 3). He also adds that "an intrinsic feature of modern poetry [is that is] obscurity is as fascinating as it is confusing." (FRIEDRICH, 1974, p. 3). Despite its wealth of intertextual references and modern affiliations, Deane's poetry is not hermetic. Friedrich states that "the modern poem (…) prefers (…) to disregard humanitarianism in the conventional sense of the word, "experience", feeling, and often even the personal "I" of the poet" (FRIEDRICH, 1974, p. 3), which is exactly what Deane's verse does not do, even though his poetry is guided by some kind of highly educated poetic intelligence that conjugates emotion, remembrance, analytical thinking and a deep suspicion of rationality as the ultimate means to understand oneself and his/her relationship with the world.[73]

Dawe implies that part of the conflict behind Deane's poetry lies in its use of an urbane, scholarly diction to frame contingencies that are barbarous in their nature and effects. Considering this, we can say that the sophistication of Deane's language and the wealth of literary and philosophical references in his verse, do not constitute a retreat to the comfort zone of hermetic poetry writing. Instead, I would argue that Deane's elegance of style and erudition both reinforce the paradoxes created by the rifts which his speakers try to interpret as these situations are given poetic form. The restlessness of Deane's verse is a byproduct of this dissent between his elaborate discourse, his educated tone and articulate diction, and the aftermath of violence and loneliness that often renders the individual speechless with perplexity.

Dawe concludes his review of *Selected Poems* claiming that, "in these poems, Seamus Deane says that [History] is "personal; the age, our age" with no way out, even through the imagination" (DAWE, 1989, p. 23). The excerpt quoted by Dawe, taken from the poem "History Lessons", reinforces the overpowering presence of history as a major force behind Deane's poetic imagination, at the same time that it suggests that it is the same governing principle behind some of the aesthetic choices made by other contemporary Irish writers. History's reach is so pervasive that not even the mythical or fictitious realms can avoid the dead hand of a past that, if not strong enough to be

[73] I owe this insight to Professor Marcio Scheel, who drew my attention to this fact during the qualification exam.

deterministic, at least has the power to influence the ways artists conceive of their work, how they are read and interpreted. Dawe's comment thus echoes Deane's.

"Poetic Acts of Defiance" is not the only analytical text Dawe wrote about Deane's poems, though. Almost two decades later he wrote a long newspaper article entitled "Seamus Deane the poet: coming to terms with the past", published on 6 April 2017 in *The Irish Times*.[74] In it, Dawe writes a short intellectual biography of Deane with an emphasis on his distinguished career as professor of literature, literary critic and editor. Dawe also mentions Deane's long friendship with Seamus Heaney, briefly discusses the novel *Reading in the Dark* and, as the title of the article suggests, speaks about Deane's career as a poet. The perspective adopted by Dawe in his critical appreciation of Deane's poetry is similar to that in his 1989 review of *Selected Poems*: he comments upon some of the main features of Deane's poetry, its themes, images and historical background, in an attempt to reestablish the links between Deane's writing and its historical and political context. The major difference, however, is that this time Dawe analyses some of these elements in greater detail. Dawe writes that,

> The characteristic homing instinct of his early poems, the journeying back, is a powerful motif in Deane's poetry; not only in terms of the city, imagined as an embattled and at times mystical place – like a Gothic castle – but also the inner décor of the family home and the surrounding streetscapes take on an estranged and ominous reality. The "sirens settle/to a blue yap", clocks and telephones, wallpaper and doors, backyards and street corners hold a kind of philosophical meaning of threat and desire mixed up with fearfulness and anxiety. (DAWE, 2017)[75]

Dawe identifies a major feature of much of Deane's poetry, from his more personal elegies to the more impersonal accounts on the general state of things, the sense that unsettling change can occur at any time, the feeling that we are permanently at risk of being entrapped in something whose nature we cannot gauge, but whose consequences may be devastating. The awareness of peril being just around the corner, of the unpredictability of circumstances, lends strength to Deane's poems. This thematic tension, enacted and contained by Deane's formal choices keeps the reader constantly on

[74] The article "is a shortened version of a lecture given by Gerald Dawe to mark the conclusion of his term as Visiting Scholar at Pembroke College, Cambridge", according to the note at the end of the online version of this text, available at http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/seamus-deane-the-poet-coming-to-terms-with-the-past-1.3037428.

[75] The full article, including this and the other quoted passages, can be read at: http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/seamus-deane-the-poet-coming-to-terms-with-the-past-1.3037428

his/her toes. This emotional charge in Deane's poetry and the rational attempts to give poetic form to this disturbing atmosphere is one of the aspects that most attracts Dawe's attention. He is himself a fine poet with a rare lyrical sensibility as well as a highly perceptive literary critic, as the essays collected in *The Proper Word: Collected Criticism* (2007), a book edited by Nicholas Allen, show. For Dawe,

> On an individual level, it's clear that Deane's remarkable achievement across literary disciplines suggests a completely different kind of imaginative and intellectual bearing than that of a contemporary such as Mahon, for instance, with whom Deane, along with others, edited the short-lived magazine *Atlantis* in the early 1970s, or Heaney, with whom he is much more often identified. (DAWE, 2017)

In other words, what Dawe is suggesting here, then, is that Deane has an educated poetic imagination, that is, one which is at the same time creative and critically specialised, cultivated in the institutional spheres of the schools and universities where Deane studied and taught. Dawe does not explore the contrasts and comparisons he establishes between Deane and Heaney or Mahon as poets, and whose differences in tone, rhythm, diction and thematic concerns far outnumber their similarities. His premise seems to be that Deane, the critic, has some bearing on the work of Deane, the poet, implying that the rational tools employed by the former to read literary texts (and the world) might have, to some degree, coloured the work of the poet. Dawe's argument is more generalised. The line between the critic and the poet is especially hard to draw when you have an intellectual who has always engaged with his reality the way Deane has, and in the kind of context in which he grew up and has lived. As Dawe explains, Deane's,

> poems (…) tell us about the history of Deane's life and times to date, but also about history itself, the monolith he has struggled with, (at least so it seems to this reader) since he kicked a football in the descending dusk of a Derry back field in the late 1940s and early '50s. (DAWE, 2017)

Indeed, Dawe's analysis touches on what seems to be the core concern of Deane's oeuvre, be it as critic, novelist or poet.

Curiously enough, despite Dawe's evident enthusiasm for Deane's poetry, the recent *Cambridge Companion to Irish Poets* (2017), edited by Dawe, does not devote a single full-length chapter to Deane's poetry. Indeed, Deane is only mentioned in passing, and the two of his works that receive some attention from the contributing authors are his political pamphlet "Civilians and Barbarians" and his book of essays called *Strange Country.*

In addition to the features highlighted by Dawe, there is a deep sense of loneliness and exile in most of Deane's poems, with the individual speaker often finding himself lost and confused about the events that unfold before him. There is also a growing awareness of history as destructive force which critical thinking, and rational understanding are powerless to impede. Deane's poetry ultimately attests to the utter failure of reason as the panacea of all evils. Indeed, while Deane's poetry invokes reason as a means of explaining the concrete reality of our experience, it also shows that rational thought can only suppress or distort whatever kind of truth the world may have for the individual. Here we are at the heart of one of the dilemmas running through Deane's verse, namely, that his poetic subjects, however different they may be from one another, have acquired the necessary tools to interpret and make sense of their experience, whilst understanding that the truth of experience is not fully available to them. As a result, Deane's poetic subjects are estranged in their loneliness, caught somewhere between what they used to be or know and what they have still not become or learnt. Poems like "Scholar I" and "Scholar II" are particularly revealing of this aspect.

Assessing the critical reception of Deane's poetry is important for a number of reasons. One is that this metacritical exercise can provide the reader with a general overview of how critics have addressed Deane's poetry so far. The other is to discuss the limits of those assessments and, while dealing with them, to try to look for ways to illuminate questions of content and form which may have been overlooked by previous commentators. The ultimate goal of my brief critical assessment of all this material has been to try and find solid analytical foundations upon which to build my own analysis of Deane's poetry, of its formal and thematic aspects, and the ways in which they complement each other and indirectly reinforce the links between the angst at the heart of his verse and the uncertainties of the historical and political context in which his poems were written. The next chapter deals more specifically with the subtleties of Deane's poetic language through a close reading of poems from *Gradual Wars*, *Rumours* and *History Lessons*.

4. Reading Deane's poetry closely: questions of form and meaning

> "(…) poetry itself is a mode of communication. What it communicates and how it does so and the worth of what is communicated form the subject-matter of criticism." (RICHARDS, 1949, p. 11)

Deane's poetry is permeated by contradictions, and is also obsessed with death as theme. These aspects emerge not only from the clashes of the individual with himself, his memories and existential dilemmas, but also from his strife with himself and his perceived world, plagued by the ruthless dynamics of the political struggles that affect, albeit not in completely determining ways, his life. Besides, we often see Deane's poetic subject at odds with the symbolic tools he can use to give poetic form to his consciousness and experiences of his reality. For that matter, Deane's poetic subjects are essentially troubled individuals at loggerheads with their surroundings, their past,[76] their sense of belonging and their search for certitude of some kind. These general ideas have already been discussed in the previous pages, and have also been commented upon, even though mostly in passing, by the reviewers quoted in the critical reception chapter.

If it is true that the few existing reviews of Deane's poetry I previously discussed do touch on these thematic matters *en passant*, it is also true that not much has been said about his poetic style so far. In other words, how are these conflicts and contradictions given shape in and by his poetic discourse? What are the main tropes we find in Deane's poems? What are the rhetorical mechanisms that typify his poetic language, tone, diction, rhythm and the like? To what extent do his formal choices reinforce the parallels between his poems as independent aesthetic units and the historical context from which they arise? This is the kind of discussion I set out to conduct in this chapter. I aim to investigate the relationships between poetic structure and the creation of meaning in Deane's poetry in order to collect examples to support the debate on Chapter 4 about how his poetry and Northern Irish history intersect.

[76] The speaker of "Return", from *Gradual Wars*, sees the past as a trap, as in "I am snared in my past" (DEANE, 1972, p. 28).

Deane's verse is not limited to traditional fixed forms. We can safely say, for instance, that he is not a writer of sonnets as other important contemporary Irish poets, like Seamus Heaney or Paul Muldoon, are. Indeed, it might sound surprising, at first, that, in the face of his poetic concerns and interests, Deane did not use "(…) the sonnet as a means for exploring the human capacity for disorder and the slim chances of any compensating order in the world." (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 103). The poems in *Gradual Wars*, *Rumours* and *History Lessons* share as an overall structural aspect the fact that they are not guided by any overwhelming sense of strict formal arrangement, though. Hence, if in Heaney's "(…) explorations of the intersection of poetry and politics often take the form of the sonnet, though typically either as part of a sequence (…) or as a stanza in a longer work (…)" (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 100), and that Paul Muldoon, "(…) has also worked in the form when thinking through the role poetry might or could or should play with respect to the political" (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 102), in Deane these concerns are more clearly located in the characterisation of the individuals that inhabit his verse, in their attitudes and states of mind rather than in his choice of any canonical or traditional form. With this resulting relative formal freedom, Deane has some poetic room for manoeuvre which allows him to push the individuals who people his poems to their emotional and rational limits, often exposing in the process their fears, desires and, most importantly, their contradictions and inconsistencies.

Deane does not use strict rhyming schemes in his poems either. Even in "Reading *Paradise Lost* in Protestant Ulster, 1984", which Dawe (2018) sees as "a bulky poem of Spenserian stanzas" (2018, p. 101), Deane loosely employs this metrical pattern while he often subverts the traditional rhyming scheme associated with it, too.[77] Dawe is right in claiming that in this poem, "(…) the twin peaks of Deane's writing life come together – his scholarship and the wayward trip of his imaginative energies" (2018, p. 101). Indeed, the poem is not only aesthetically enticing, with its images of betrayal and violence, but it is also politically incisive, drawing illuminating parallels between the set of Miltonic

[77] As Edward Hirsch explains, "The Spenserian stanza consists of eight iambic pentameter lines with a hexameter (alexandrine) at the end. It rhymes: *ababbcbcc*." (2014, p. 603). Bearing that in mind, Dawe's classification does not fully apply, in that "Reading *Paradise Lost* in Protestant Ulster, 1984" does not entirely abide by that particular rhyming scheme and quite often features half-rhymes, which suggests, at best, a partially free interpretation of this poetic form on Deane's part.

images it employs and the various forms of truculence and power abuse in Northern Ireland under Westminster's direct rule. The first stanza, for instance, reads,

> Should I give in to sleep? This fire's warm,
> I know the story off by heart,
> Was up so late last night and all the harm
> That can be done is done. Far apart
> From Milton's devils is the present crew
> Of zombie soldiers and their spies,
> Supergrasses in whose his
> We hear the snake and sense the mist
> Rise in dreams that crowd the new
> Awaking with their demobbed cries.
> (DEANE, 1988, p. 77)

Dawe also has a point in claiming that

> 'Reading *Paradise Lost* in Protestant Ulster, 1984' presents us with a very powerful sense of Seamus Deane's own coming to terms with the past at the very point his poetry was questioning whether or not history really has any 'lessons' we can learn from or if we can ever really 'let go'. (2018, p. 102).

Nevertheless, despite Dawe's coherent analysis of this poem, his commentary on the form of "Reading *Paradise Lost* in Protestant Ulster, 1984" betrays his skimming through the poem's structure.

Deane's conversation with tradition, to borrow Eliot's[78] term in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", takes shape through poetic strategies other than the systematic revisitation or the subversion of fixed forms.[79] Instead, it is much more thematically-oriented or determined by his use of certain poetic moods, such as the elegy, as we shall see. In that sense, Deane's dialogue with his predecessors is subtle and mostly elusive,[80]

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[78] See the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent", in *The Sacred Wood* (1997).

[79] In *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Poetry* (1989), a book edited by Terence Brown and Nicholas Grene, this Eliotian theme is discussed with a greater focus on Irish writing. In the preface, the editors explain that "(…) what has been so remarkable, particularly in the period of the last twenty years, has been the richness, the diversity and individuality of the poetry which has emerged from Ireland and the extent to which tradition and influence have stimulated rather than stifled poetic creativity." (BROWN; GRENE, 1989, p. 4-5)

[80] Think, for example, of the Biblical references in "The Pentacle" – "Reduced to solitude enough/I would weep, and were I wise/I would purify that stuff/Dreams are made on down to five/Incorruptible straight choices/*To Solomonically divide*/Between my sisters and my brothers,/Parents, children and the others." (DEANE, 1972, p. 51, *my emphasis*). Think also of the allusions to Greek literature in "Unsung" – "*Lonelier than Lesbos*, that shore stretched/Round from Lisfannon in a postcard sweep." (DEANE, 1977, p. 16, *my emphasis*). What ties these references together is that they are both evoked, in different contexts, to

although he often gives clear indications of his literary influences in specific poems like "Turning-Point", written "after Rilke's Wendung" (DEANE, 1988, p. 72). This poem is predominantly contemplative in its treatment of the wisdom that, according to the speaker, feeds "(…) the inner space where/Everything is heavier (…)" (DEANE, 1988, p. 73), and suggests that being wise is also being melancholic to a certain extent. At the same time, it also features powerfully resonant images within the Northern Irish context, like "(…) They raised/Their eyes to see and be seen,/Wanting the siege to be raised/From their invisible city." (DEANE, 1988, p. 72).[81] At a stroke, then, "Turning-Point" conjures up the personal and the political realms in images that bespeak restlessness, meditation and the quiet potential for revolt, never clearly separating these notions. At the same time, the poem creates a scenario in which its speaker craves for a deeper sense of liberation which clashes with the circumstances of his surroundings.

"Turning-Point" is not the only case in which Deane's poetic affiliation is overtly stated. His continental connections are also heard in "Nella Gloria delle Finestre", written "after Mario Luzi" (DEANE, 1988, p. 70). This poem opens with what reads as the prelude for the contradictions and inconstancies that form its theme. It starts with an image of impotent knowledge imbued with an aura of nostalgia by means of which the speaker exhibits his fragile self-assuredness. This, in turn, prepares for the mild statement of perplexity that heightens the sense of hopelessness which runs through the poem:

> I'll tell you later about life,
> If I have the time, how it was,
> For I know all about it.
>
> But right now, it's not like

emphasise the loneliness or isolation of the speaker. Deane also refers back to Greek literature in "Homer Nods", *from Selected Poems*.

[81] In the Irish context, the word "siege" often bears clear historical connotations, due to the Siege of Derry (1689), whose main events Connolly summarises as follows: "Despite the earlier defiance of the Apprentice Boys, Derry's open allegiance to William III began only on 21 March, when the ship *Deliverance* brought arms, supplies, and a new Williamite commission for Robert Lundy, the garrison commander. On 18 April, after the Jacobites had overrun the surrounding countryside, James II appeared in person but was met with gunshots and cries of 'No surrender'. Lundy was now deposed, Major Henry Baker (replaced on his death by John Mitchelburne) and Revd George Walker taking siege equipment, made unsuccessful attempts to force the Butchers' gate on the west wall and to capture the Williamite outpost on Windmill Hill, but relied mainly on starvation to force a surrender. The city's population, normally around 2,000, was swollen by an estimated 30,000 refugees and 7,000 soldiers. Williamite accounts claimed the defenders were reduced to eating rats, mice, and dogs fattened on human corpses, and that 15,000 people, mainly women and children, died of disease and malnutrition. Jacobite attempts to stretch the city's resources further by abandoning Protestant civilians beneath the walls ended when the defenders threatened to hang prisoners in retaliation. On 28 July two ships laden with food broke through the boom with which the Jacobites had blocked the Foyle estuary, effectively ending the siege. The 105-day ordeal of the inhabitants became a central part of unionist folklore, annually commemorated by the Apprentice Boys." (CONNOLLY, 2004, p. 150).

The life I know so well. (…) (DEANE, 1988, p. 70)

The ensuing set of enjambed verses and metrically irregular lines, two recurrent aesthetic devices in Deane's poetry, give life to a series of randomly associated images that gradually present themselves as an eerie embodiment of Joycean paralysis.[82] This formal organisation of the poem's content culminates in the rhetorical question that the speaker asks in his attempts to engage with the reader: "was something revealed to me?" (DEANE, 1988, p. 70). What follows is his immediate and surprisingly[83] categorical answer: "Yes. It was this. An anguish that/Throbbed from the coast to the/Most distant standing-stone." (DEANE, 1988, p. 70). The resulting irony is that, at best, this moment of epiphany[84] has a fairly limited reach in that it only unveils the problems tormenting the speaker, never offering him any plausible escape[85] from them. Hence, the general atmosphere of existential and rational dead-end prevails in the poem, as the tensions raised by its opening lines are never permanently resolved.[86]

"The Thirtieth Lie" is another poem which reveals Deane's continental influences. Its epigraph – "'– *Ah, Seigneur! Donnez-moi la force et le courage/De contempler mon coeur et mon corps sans dégoût!' Baudelaire,* Un voyage à Cythère" (DEANE, 1972, p. 43) – not only sets the general melancholic tone of the poem but also highlights Deane's French ties.[87] Divided into two parts that follow no particular rhythmic pattern, the first of them being composed of three quatrains with occasional rhymes, and the second being

[82] I am thinking here of short stories like "Eveline" and "The Dead", both originally published in *Dubliners* (1914).
[83] The surprise here is both generated by the contrast of the affirmativeness of this line in comparison with the overall erratic mood of the poem, and also by the fact that the act of revelation, as such, is semantically and etymologically ambiguous.
[84] Once again, I use epiphany here in the sense that Stephen Dedalus assigns to the word in *Stephen Hero*.
[85] A similar irony occurs in the two last poetic lines of "A World Without a Name", from *History Lessons*, in which the speaker says that "It was a world without a name;/The world we flew from and became" (DEANE, 1983, p. 33), an idea that echoes Stephen Dedalus' words in the fifth chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets." (JOYCE, 2006, 182).
[86] Apart from "Turning-Point" and "Nella Gloria delle Finestre", other poems in which Deane's continental influences are overtly stated are "Colloquio", written "after Andrea Zanzotto" (DEANE, 1988, p. 66), whose work is also the matrix of "The Silent Life" and "Reflection-Reflex". All these were published in *Selected Poems* (1988).
[87] Indeed, in his interview with John Brown, published in the book *In the Chair: Interviews with Poets from the North of Ireland* (2002), Deane says the following: "My liking for French writers dates from the secondary school period; novelists like Mauriac; a few poets, Verlaine, the wonderfully indecipherable Rimbaud, Alfred de Musset and the rather sinister Baudelaire. But I do believe that then and since the French were used by me, not entirely consciously, as a counterbalance to the Irish, English and American climate of reading and of popular culture in which I was formed. But the Irish writers in English – Yeats or Joyce, Kavanagh or any other writer – were unknown to me for a long time. English Romantics – Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge and Hazlitt in particular – were far more important." (BROWN, 2002, p. 99).

a sixteen-line stanza with scattered full and half-rhymes, the poem is centred upon the reflections of a speaker who is coerced by the crushing power of a ruthlessly truculent legal system. The distress caused by the undecidedness of passages like "(…) Perhaps it's near,/The trial for having lied and lied:/Perhaps it's past; that lie's been tried." (DEANE, 1972, p. 43), that deliberately blur chronology as a means of heightening the tensions created by the aura of doubtfulness, is reinforced by the moral overtones which arise from the second half of the poem. In this section, we encounter a patchwork of ideologically contradictory forms of apprehending and interpreting reality that are superficially sewn together by a more cynical and pragmatic speaker who questions his own beliefs in the "(…) kinds of slogan/I spat out, for years, like pap." (DEANE, 1972, p. 43). This disenchanted tone ultimately throws into question the nature of truth beyond the sheer moral scope of the concept,[88] which prompts a rather melancholic reflection on how ideological fallacies often crystalise into *faux de mieux* common sense in the public arena as well as in the individual consciousness.[89] Here we have Deane not only trying to establish a vivid aesthetic dialogue with his Baudelairean roots but also attempting to cope with the weariness of the troubled Northern Irish political and historical context.

One of the pillars of Eliot's main argument in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" "is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career" (ELIOT, 1997, p. 43). In Deane's verse, the *modus operandi* described by Eliot comes to life in the poet's awareness of the past as a source of stock images he can retrieve and re-signify in his creative process. One such example is "Fording the River", the second poem in *Rumours*. The whole poem is centred on the idea of death as one's last voyage.[90] Its first stanza succinctly paints a gloomy scene, heavy with adjectives that suggest somberness. This quickly creates the context for the speaker to present the main situation of the poem, which comes condensed in the statement that "(…) That day/ you *unexpectedly* crossed the river." (DEANE, 1983, p. 10, *my emphasis*). Here, death comes as a surprise, as the italicised adverb suggests, and the emotional distress experienced by the speaker is

[88] For a discussion on the moral aspects of the notion of truth, see Friedrich Nietzsche's *Sobre a Verdade e a Mentira no Sentido Extramoral* (2007), translated by Fernando de Barros Moraes.
[89] According to H. G. Gadamer, "(...) *sensus communis* does not only mean that universal capacity that exists in all men, but also the meaning that institutes community." (GADAMER, 2015, p. 57, *my translation*).
[90] The quintessential example of this often used representation is the mythological figure of Charon. For details on this, see https://www.britannica.com/topic/Charon-Greek-mythology (accessed on 02 October 2018, at 16h53).

reinforced by the abruptness of his loss. What follows is the description of the random circumstances that caused the passing of the speaker's addressee, the predominance of past simple verbs in the poem unequivocally inscribing the poetic situation in the foggy realm of individual memory. As the memory of death emerges as part of the maze of sensations recollected by the speaker we are also faced with the heedlessness behind that episode. This is reinforced by the closing lines which read "(…) About my son,/Who crossed cold Lethe, thought it Rubicon." (DEANE, 1983, p. 10). Through its evocation of mythological[91] and historical[92] rivers, then, the poem creates a context in which the euphemism of death as passing is also coupled with the thought-provoking notion of it being the result of miscalculation or misinterpretation, with forgetfulness not necessarily being the final border or the point of no return one might eventually cross.

As far as poetic diction and tone are concerned, Deane's verse hovers between a language that is elusive yet not totally obscure, and that ranges from colloquial register to heavy literary references, from crudeness to sophistication,[93] in a permanent struggle to accommodate apparently irreconcilable universes.[94] This strife becomes even more evident when we look into the ways many of his poems promise to follow a particular metrical pattern or rhyming scheme only to break with that possibility in the next poetic line, as if suggesting that in the context his poetry is produced, order and predictability are only far-fetched notions. Deane's poetic aesthetics is therefore troubled from within, and the combination of all these erratic elements formally creates subtly non-predictable cadences in his poems. These "unresolved cadences", to borrow a general musical notion,[95] often add to the poems in which they occur an aura that there are still unuttered things, something lost in the communicative process, some kind of delicate poetic

[91] According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "Lethe, (Greek: "Oblivion"), in Greek mythology, [is the] daughter of Eris (Strife) and the personification of oblivion. Lethe is also the name of a river or plain in the infernal regions." (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lethe, accessed on 02 October 2018, at 16h57).

[92] According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "Rubicon, Latin Rubico, or Rubicon, [was a] small stream that separated Cisalpine Gaul from Italy in the era of the Roman Republic. The movement of Julius Caesar's forces over the Rubicon into Italy in 49 BC violated the law (the Lex Cornelia Majestatis) that forbade a general to lead an army out of the province to which he was assigned. His act thus amounted to a declaration of war against the Roman Senate and resulted in the three-year civil war that left Caesar ruler of the Roman world. "Crossing the Rubicon" became a popular phrase describing a step that definitely commits a person to a given course of action." (https://www.britannica.com/place/Rubicon, accessed on 02 October 2018, at 17h01).

[93] The speaker of elegy "Fourteen" states that "*[t]remulously accurate*,/Is every word we ever wrote." (DEANE, 1972, p. 25, *my emphasis*), the highlighted phrase pointing to a semantic short-circuit that is stylistically given prominence by the syntactic inversion of these lines.

[94] Think of poems like "Smoke Signals in Oregon", in *Gradual Wars*.

[95] For information on types of musical cadences, check the article "Cadence" in the Encyclopedia Britannica, at https://www.britannica.com/art/cadence-music (accessed on 02 October 2018, at 17h10).

dissonance, that leaves semantic gaps for the reader to fill in. This gives Deane's poetry a certain calculated conversational tone which produces colloquial rhythms that are often at odds with his often allusive poetic idiom. These aspects combined lend a contradictory feel to the poems in which they appear, one that is generated by the superposition of erudition and aphasia, rumours and silences.[96]

This, in turn, increases the eloquence of Deane's poetic language by making it sound deeply personal yet critically detached[97] from what it addresses, as well as strongly determined to get to the heart of things but, at the same time, fully aware of its logical and rational limits and drawbacks. Herein lies another paradox in Deane's catalogue of contradictions that make his oeuvre eschew automatic sociological readings that might reduce the individual to a deterministic synthesis of society, on the one hand, and those liberal interpretations that tend to conceive the individual as the ultimate incarnation of his will to be whoever he may seek to be. Instead, Deane's poetry is essentially dialectic, in that it derives its power from the hermeneutic friction between these opposing poles, never settling on any of these specific realms. It is in the dialectics between the individual consciousness of Deane's poetic subjects and their turbulent surroundings that resides the greatest appeal and relevance of his verse. Deane's poetry is at its best when its language seeks to bridge the gap between impression and rational analysis, common sense and bookishness, ordinary experiences[98] and the conceptual abstractions of intellectual flights of fancy, never privileging one extreme over the other.

Gradual Wars opens with a sequence of poems called "Fourteen Elegies" which, in many respects, can be read as a synthesis of many of Deane's aesthetic and thematic concerns.[99] Indeed, it is in his use of the elegy as a key poetic strategy that Deane

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[96] "Silence" is another very recurrent word in Deane's poetic lexicon. It appears, for instance, in elegy "Ten" – "the steep migraine/Rises in salvoes/Of silence (…)" (DEANE, 1972, p. 21), in "Landscape into Art" – "(…) Noise was graded/Down to a silence (…)" (DEANE, 1972, p. 57), in "Eurydice" – "(…) I am aware of the/High footfalling pedigree/Of this silence." (DEANE, 1972, p. 26) and in "Blind Man's Bluff" – "Silences are fingerprints/Relinquished by noise./Voices are sudden as phones." (DEANE, 1972, p. 30).

[97] In "Summer Letter", for instance, the speaker says: "It wrote for pardon and relief/From those dreams it had of you and me/In silent inks on whispered sheets/Of paper haunted by the watermarks/Of grief. *Enhanced remoteness/Of official style*; a damaged summer/Settled out of summer's court." (DEANE, 1977, p. 39, *my emphasis*)" (DEANE, 1977, p. 39), the highlighted passage pointing to that calculated distance as well.

[98] The speaker of "Guerillas", from *History Lessons*, for instance, recalls, "[r]eal life was so impure/We savoured its poisons as forbidden/Fruit and, desolate with knowledge,/Grew beyond redemption." (DEANE, 1983, p. 18).

[99] In his interview with Deane, John Brown affirms that "*Gradual Wars* (1972) is both bleak and elegiac" (2002, p. 102). When responding to this statement, Deane says that "In that book and in *Rumours* there exists the naïve notion that here is a world of public disorder and there is a world of poetry and imagination

converses most productively with both Irish and European poetic traditions, as well as with his historical context in which the individual often found himself/herself "[c]alling goodbye to disaster/And then hello" (DEANE, 1972, p. 49), and in which "[t]he special powers of priests/And policemen need no laws/Beyond themselves." (DEANE, 1972, p. 19-20). [100]As Thurston and Alderman explain "the elegy is an exemplary poetic mode, a kind of poem defined by its topic and rhetoric rather than by its meter, stanzaic structure, or rhyme scheme". (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 107). The elegy as such therefore does not impose formal limits,[101] which gives Deane the necessary openness that the overall hesitancy of his poetry thematically and imagetically requires. Formally speaking, then, this openness ultimately enhances the anguish and perplexity that inhabit his verse. The absence of strict formal constrictions finally installs the troubled scenario in which Deane's poetic diction gradually intermingles with the harsh reality of the Northern Irish historical context.

The first of these elegies, "One", opens with the question "[w]hat else was left?" (DEANE, 1972, p. 11), which not only points to the awareness of an ending, right at the beginning of the book, but also inquires into the nature of the aesthetics of the remains that it announces, and which is also one of the blueprints of his poetry, especially when it addresses themes like loss.[102] The adverb in that passage offers an important lead or clue as to the ambivalent discourse we can expect from the poem and, for that matter, from the book as a whole. This is so because its semantics implies both the idea of addition, and also that of alternative, an ambiguity "One" does not resolve. Moreover, the pronoun

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and order. The outbreak of the "Troubles" exaggerated in me what was already there. It's an unbalancing tension, that remains in *History Lessons*. It creates too much monotonous pressure which petrifies rather than liberates the poems." (BROWN, 2002, p. 102).

[100] See elegy "Nine" in the appendix.

[101] According to Hirsch (2014), an "elegy [is] a poem of mortal loss and consolation. The word elegy derives from the Greek élegos, "funeral lament". It was among the first forms of the ancients, though in Greek literature it refers to a specific verse form as well as the emotions conveyed by it. (…) Since the sixteenth century, the elegy has designated a poem mourning the death of an individual (as in W. B. Yeat's "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," 1918) or a solemn meditation on the passing of human life (as in Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," 1751). The elegy does what Freud calls "the work of mourning." It ritualizes grief into language and thereby makes it more bearable. The great elegy touches the unfathomable and originates in the unspeakable, in inacceptable loss. It allows us to experience mortality. It turns loss into remembrance and delivers an inheritance. It opens a space for retrospection and drives a wordless anguish toward the consolations of verbal articulation and ceremony. (…) The sense of a highly self-conscious dramatic performance, of a necessary and sometimes reluctant reentry into language, continues to power the elegy in our century, but the traditional consolations and comforts of the elegy have often been called into question." (2014, p. 196-197).

[102] Deane's discussion of this theme is always tentative, and permeated by the notion, stated in elegy "Thirteen", that "[t]here is no realism/ For loss" (DEANE, 1972, p. 24).

which opens that line reinforces the semantic instability of that passage, thus announcing the aura of irresolution that runs through the poem like a thread.

”One” proceeds with “(…) He had/Become used to his death/As much as to his youth./This was a measure of truth.” (DEANE, 1972, p. 11). In this section, the relative metrical regularity of the first three lines is broken at the close of the stanza. That part gains particular prominence due to its extra syllable and suggestively emphasises a word that, as we shall see, is a key notion in Deane’s poetry. This prominence is semantically reinforced in that the assertive tone of this closing line contrasts with the interrogative mood of the opening one. Indeed, this is one of the many cases in Deane’s poetry in which the sense of rhythmic order is abruptly interrupted by a line with a different number of syllables or metrical pattern. This installs a sense of permanent instability in his language, which is detected when we read it out loud, and that ultimately undermines whatever sense of Cartesian organisation of reality the reader might come to expect. This erratic rhythm also affects the dynamics of our reading, for it never lets us be unconsciously guided by the musical flow that might be created by a steady metre.[103] In a way, it is as if Deane’s language has incarnated the abrupt ruptures and bumpy continuities which are thematically addressed by this poem,[104] and converted the very uneasiness that sets the overall tone of his verse into one of his aesthetic bedrocks.

“One” is also strong in the contradictions that it shows. The sadness that it presents appears to be unjustified, as the speaker says that “(…) his loss. It was not of love.” (DEANE, 1972, p. 11). He then proceeds with “(…) He had wife/And children. But his fingers/Searched in his shrill typewriter/For the lamentable note for his life,/Lusting lightly for release” (DEANE, 1972, p. 11), the conjunction being the linguistic detail which stresses the tension between an apparently fulfilled life and a full sense of wholeness, on the one hand, and the urgent desire to escape from it. The resulting melancholic aura that this formal configuration produces conveys the idea that no happiness can be complete as we gradually encounter a situation in which the character of the poem seeks liberation in the aesthetic realms of writing.[105]

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[103] For an in-depth discussion of these notions such as rhythm, metre and stress patterns, see *Metre, Rhythm and Verse Form* (1996), by Philip Hobsbaum.

[104] This is a feature of several other poems by Deane, as I will show later on.

[105] There are faint echoes of Stephen Dedalus’ artistic ethos here, especially his urge “to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscious of [his] race.” (JOYCE, 2006, p. 224).

Indeed, there is a strong metalinguistic[106] feel to this poem as well, as its ending suggests – "And so/The poem shudders/On to the sheet." (DEANE, 1972, p. 11) – the act of setting ideas on paper being a possible form of vicarious liberation which is apparently unattainable in real life. What is worth highlighting in this process, though, is that expression comes at a high cost, the act of writing being both painful and fearsome, and the end-result is no braver or more self-assured than the compositional process itself. More importantly, though, is the strong connection between imagination and reality[107] that the poem establishes. It is an ultimate meditation on individual concerns that is metaphorised in the creative process and its relationships with its broad context. In that sense, the fact that this poem opens the volume is also an aesthetic statement of Deane's exploitation of the fine intersecting lines between artistic spirit and historical consciousness, and how one realm feeds off the other incessantly.

We also find a similar restlessness in the two elegies that immediately follow "One". In "Two", the speaker is troubled by an underlying yearning for some unattainable definiteness and completeness. The tone of the poem is fully inquisitive, and at times mildly sceptical, being made as it is of rhetorical questions stacked on a series of enjambed lines of unstable rhythm, punctuated by syntactic inversions and an economic use of similes. The action that closes the poem – "Would we have heard/The mild animals of silence/Round the roots of language *stir*?" (DEANE, 1972, p. 12, *my emphasis*), lays particular emphasis to the speaker's apprehension of things while also hinting at one of the touchstones of Deane's poetics, namely, the tension between speechlessness and the urge to communicate.[108]

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[106] This is not the only moment in which Deane's poetry uses becomes slightly self-referential, but only to emphasise the overall atmosphere of impasse that permeates his poetic oeuvre. One such example is "Under the pen the lines/Curled to an iris. There is no exit/From such flowers. The salt/Of all I learned dried into my speech./I could sense/Exile, a momentary life, Radiance! O my life, what ruin!" (DEANE, 1972, p. 17), from elegy "Seven", a poem in which the speaker also talks about "Idioms [that] flared in the new/Frictions of a forgotten syntax." (DEANE, 1972, p. 17).

[107] As the speaker in elegy "Nine" says, "[i]magination hung above the street/And came down to earth for a cause,/Like a dropping hawk/Foundering on empty claws." (DEANE, 1972, p. 20)

[108] This is the case, for instance, in another poem from *Gradual Wars*, "The Last Impact", in which the speaker states that "We outface the police and troops,/We leave the cities burning,/And we can go on and on/For as we go we are learning,/*Learning a new speech/For the unspeakable act*;/The demands the power of hate/Inexorably exacts; (…)" (DEANE, 1972, p. 34, *my emphasis*), the paradox of the highlighted expression indicating the reflections of police violence and sectarianism on the individual, while the whole passage reinforces that the perplexity of the individual in the face of violence as hostility is coupled with aphasia.

The third elegy, "Three", uses similes more consistently than the other two elegies in order to engender images of truculence and vulnerability. The collectivised speaker talks about "Routine as water in the bath/Beginning to detonate,/Or as spray in a raised lace/Flung like blood across the face." (DEANE, 1972, p. 12). This creates an eloquent scenario in which banality and barbarity dangerously overlap. The poem concludes with "*Night after night* we consume/The noise as an alcoholic/Drinks glass after glass until his voice/Is hurled like a flaw/ Into his numbed palate." (DEANE, 1972, p. 12, *my emphasis*). The aura of intoxication thus created reinforces the speaker's bewilderment in the face of vicious conflict whose origins or reach he, as an individual, seems incapable of understanding or measuring, despite the unceasing nature of these turmoils as is suggested by the italicised phrase in the excerpt. This, in turn, accentuates his aphasia,[109] which is reinforced in the poem by its opening line, which is also repeated in the last stanza: "Whatever you call it (…)" (DEANE, 1972, p. 12). This is a central motif here for it shows that the poetic subject only speaks around his topic, never directly addressing the actual roots of his torment.

The question as to why this happens remains unanswered, though, for the poem denies unequivocal solutions to the queries it poses. The poem (re)creates a warfare state through a series of snapshots of reality that shows the signs of the "Troubles" as a constitutive part of the daily experiences of the speaker.[110] These adverse effects of violence on the poetic subject are also formally registered in the poem by its employment of descriptions and personifications. They bespeak hostility, hint at some kind of madness and also announce barbarity, such as in "The bulb darkens and after/We hear the explosion,/Guerilla laughter." (DEANE, 1972, p. 12-13). The violent diction of the poem, along with its abrupt line changes caused by the heavy use of enjambement, reinforces the unexpectedness of the actions it describes. Besides, the poem's fast dynamics helps

[109] In "Unsung", from *Rumours*, this idea is revisited in different, more personal, lyrical context, from which themes like regret and the sense of lost opportunity emerge: "The aphasia of rocks, the sea giving tongue,/I wish I could have become/The true source of his fatherhood." (DEANE, 1977, p. 16).

[110] This also happens in poems like "The Pander", from *Gradual Wars*, especially in passages such as "Let there be murder in your eyes/For all betrayals,/Watch the stones/Become mossed in their treachery (…)" (DEANE, 1972, p. 21). In *History Lessons*, the speaker of 'Send War in Our Time, O Lord' talks about "The history boys [who] are on the rampage,/The famous noise in the street/Where a jaguar camouflage/Ripples on armoured cars/In a skin of symbols." (DEANE, 1983, p. 12).

to lay greater emphasis on its central idea according to which "Nothing prohibits the sense of death/When we are so exposed." (DEANE, 1972, p. 12). Thus, frailty emerges as a central notion in the poem, one that is both experienced in the personal and the social levels at the same time.

If it is true that these first three elegies address the "Troubles" only in an indirect fashion, and deal with their perceived effects instead of their actual causes or events, we observe a significant modulation in tone in the elegy "Six". Unlike the previous ones, this poem is pretty straightforward in its mourning of "(…) those murdered on Bloody Sunday ('After Derry, 30 January 1972')." (DAWE, 2018, p. 96). The poem's epigraph, quoted by Dawe, contains key hermeneutical clues here. It situates the poem both geographically and temporally, thus providing a sense of historical concreteness that contrasts with the densely figurative images of dispute, defencelessness, resentment and death which form the backbone of this elegy. The poem opens with,

> Lightnings slaughtered
> The distance. In the harmless houses
> Faces narrowed. The membrane
> Of power darkened
> Above the valley,
> And in a flood of khaki
> Burst. Indigoed
> As rain they came
> As the thunder radioed
> For a further
> Haemorrhage of flame. (DEANE, 1972, p. 15).

The eloquence of this section derives mostly from Deane's revisitation of the stock image of the tempest as a symbol of tough times.[111] He breathes new life into it by colouring this general framework with a lexicon that locates the agitation at the heart of the poem within the Northern Irish context. Stylistically speaking, the insidious devastation suggested by this passage is guaranteed by his use of syntactic inversions and line breaks. These techniques ultimately impose constant rethinking on the content they express. Such formal features, along with the poem's skillful use of similes and occasional use of paradoxes and personification produce syntactic and semantic short-circuits which bring together anger and anguish, suddenness and gradualness, resentment and the desire for peacefulness, never defusing the tensions that arise from these approximations.

[111] Think of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, for instance.

Indeed, in the second section of "Six", the speaker expands on the latter tension by claiming that "The peace/Had been a delicately flawed/Honeymoon signaling/The fearful marriage/To come." (DEANE, 1972, p. 15). This section, when read in the light of the historical contextualisation I provided in the first chapter, offers a poignant insight into how the private and the public realms overlap in Deane's poetry, thus setting in motion a rich dialectics between these two universes that, different in nature as they might be, still potently intersect to the point that one is never totally indifferent to the other. In that sense, "Six" goes beyond lamentation pure and simple, and triggers a poignant meditation on the general atmosphere of its historical context. Indeed, Deane's poetry is deeply reflexive and mindful of its historical circumstances, and passages like that reinforce this argument. This is more clearly observed in,

> (…) Death had been
> A form of doubt.
> *Now* it was moving
> Like a missionary
> Through the collapsed cities
> Converting all it came among.
> (DEANE, 1972, p. 15, *my emphasis*)

Indeed, this is an image of personified death roaming about the land spreading its destructive Gospel with dogmatic self-assuredness, which is stylistically reinforced by the straightforward syntax and unadorned diction of the passage which is, nevertheless, essentially euphemistic. This delicate balance between forthrightness and obliqueness, as well as the contrast between past and present, installed by the italicised adverb, also add a melancholically reflexive/critical dimension to this excerpt which, in turn, extends to the whole poem as a cohesive formal unit. This prepares for the lines that link the third and fourth stanzas, which read "(…) Death is our future/And now is our past." (DEANE, 1972, p. 16). The present moment of utterance here is the rational acknowledgement that there is a pervasive sense of personal and public grief that is unlikely to be dispelled, and which the observing individual, however critical, is impotent to change or stop. The panoptic view of death offered by the excerpt gives the poem a pessimistic tone that is consonant with its thematic concerns.

If we can hear a few slight Benjaminian echoes[112] in the way "Six" gradually engenders its portrait of a world perceived as being in ruins,[113] we find a more explicit influence of the German philosopher on Deane's aesthetics in "Northern Ireland: Two Comments". The poem is divided into two halves, the first of which opens:

> History, the angel, was stirred
> To turn her face upon us. Bird
> Or beast, as she turned,
> The streets split and burned.
> Homeward she glanced and we cried
> At the feathery rush of her wide
> And spreadeagling wings
> Which the wind has split and flings
> So severely back that it seems
> She cannot fly. In her face the wind screams.
> (DEANE, 1972, p. 45)

The messianic tone of this passage, and the allegorical nature of Deane's portrait of History, open a rich and productive intertextuality between "Northern Ireland: Two Comments" and Benjamin's ideas. This becomes quite explicit when we compare the opening section of the poem with what Benjamin writes in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History - Thesis IX"[114]:

> A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows

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[112] In his essay, "History Lessons: Derek Mahon & Seamus Deane", Gerard Dawe mentions that "(…) Theodore Adorno and Walter Benjamin, both (…) feature pervasively in Deane's critical thinking." (DAWE, 2018, p. 95-96). Nevertheless, accurate as Dawe is, he does not expand on this commentary, nor does he provide a detailed discussion of specific poetic excerpts that might aesthetically relate Deane's verse to the Frankfurtian affiliation of his literary criticism. Conor McCarthy also draws attention to Adorno's influence on Deane's approach to literary criticism in the article "Seamus Deane: Between Burke and Adorno" (2005).

[113] This also reverberates in the individual and in interior landscapes, as in "A Visit", from *History Lessons*, when the speaker states that ""No memory/Could come clear. It was a scene/Of ruin, fly-freckled mirrors tilting/Half-rooms out from the walls in nettle-green/Darkness, a shoal of dead woodworm silting/Under a burnished floor." (DEANE, 1983, p. 37).

[114] From: BENJAMIN, W. Theses on the Philosophy of History. In: ___. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. (Translated by Harry Zohn). New York: Schocken Books, 2007, p. 253-264.

> skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (BENJAMIN, 2007, p. 257-258)

The parallels between Deane's poem and Benjamin's thesis, however, extend beyond the similar allegorical image of History both texts contain. The first half of "Northern Ireland: Two Comments" is densely and violently figurative just as Benjamin's text is, often bordering on hermeticism. Thus, its overall image of barbarity and destruction acquires a broader reach. Yet, the second half of the poem offers a much harsher and more realistic counterpart to the theologically-oriented depiction of history in the first section, thus creating a powerfully dialectic contrast. In it we read,

> We see them kill as they have always done,
> Imperialists in their khaki slum;
> Men who hold a watching brief
> For the permanence of grief.
> See the street consumed by wind,
> Blurred by fire and thinned
> To those cadaverous bones
> Which the Norwich Union owns?
> There is the gaunt power
> That sucks men for their marrow.
> (DEANE, 1972, p. 45)

In this section, the Benjaminian "catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" (BENJAMIN, 2007, p. 257-258) takes the very concrete form of political and sectarian disputes, their violent and tragic consequences, as well as the never-ending resentment that feeds them.[115] The ceaselessness of the carnage is reaffirmed by the predominance of present tense verbs in the passage, which disturbingly bring together barbarity and routine, suggesting that the latter, in the Northern Irish context to which the title of the poem points, has become lethally banal to the point of being perceived as habitual. The speaker in this excerpt also creates an ideological and sectarian division between his community and its assailants, thus reinforcing the thematisation of historical abuse and the forms of political extremism born from it.

Indeed, if Deane's first book is fraught with a poetic "language/That bespeaks/Gradual wars" (DEANE, 1972, p. 53) by carefully hovering between elusiveness and harshness, fantasy and reality, the instability of discourse and the

[115] In elegy "Ten" we read "[l]et there be murder in your eyes/For all betrayals,/Watch the stones/Become mossed in their treachery (…)" (DEANE, 1972, p. 21), which is just another example of how the Troubles make their way into Deane's verse through his often violent diction.

concreteness of sectarian violence, his second book, *Rumours* (1977), adds another twist to this already complicated relationship between his poetry and its turbulent historical context. The general tension between the individual and his world is, as in the earlier collection, one of the thematic pillars of the book. However, it is now reinforced by the ideas of uncertainty of origin and heightened suspicion that are suggested by the word which gives the book its title.

Indeed, we find these notions in poems such as "Rumours", for instance. It opens with an acknowledgment of ignorance and doubtfulness, as the speaker claims "I wish I knew what they/Were saying. I'm never sure/What it is I hear." (DEANE, 1977, p. 19). Here the poem not only revisits the famous Socratic axiom by reinscribing it in a perspective that incorporates the past and the present, but also suggests, due to the adverb in the second line, that this uncertainty is disturbingly persistent. The following lines are:

> I wish I knew
> That other language
> With the ear
> Of infallible reception
> Which I bring
> To the English of failure.
> (DEANE, 1977, p. 19)

This excerpt is structured upon a flagrant paradox. The incongruity between attentive perception and faulty communicativeness creates this irreconcilable contrast which sets the aura of misunderstanding of this passage, and the subjunctive mood leads us to think we are facing an unlikely resolution.

The second stanza of the poem makes the first a little less opaque, in that it reveals the context of the speaker's musings. This is basically the memory of "people and the police/(…) brawling" (DEANE, 1977, p. 19) on a "(…) deserted square" (DEANE, 1977, p. 19). The scene of this quarrel between the individual and the state forces, and the flagrant imbalance of power, and the speaker's recollection of his interlocutor overlooking this fight, all draw a potent parallel between barbarity and omission. This in turn works as a snapshot of the political tensions with which the poem is suffused, which gradually takes shape as the speaker proceeds with his account. The poetic effect thus created is that of a growing awareness of the roots of these dissensions which are encapsulated by the poem but only elusively addressed by it. "I can hear now what politics/Is saying to someone who can hear/These rumours start" (DEANE, 1977, p. 19),

claims the speaker in the third stanza, just before quoting a passage[116] which deals with death in indirect ways while emphasising the imbrication of falsehood and veracity contained in the semantics of the poem's title. What emerges from this tension is, in the final analysis, a ceaseless battle over which versions of the historical and political narratives that permeate the Northern Irish experience should prevail in the end. Memory meets politics in an unmistakable fashion here.

"A Deeper Exile" is another poem from *Rumours* in which Deane uses contradictory images of meditation and isolation to give shape to a restless poetic consciousness striving to interpret its surroundings and of its role in that context. The poem is structured upon the general idea of exile, through which it thematises loss and loneliness.[117] In addition, the poem also stresses how these notions interfere with the way the speaker conceives of his affections, and how this colours the ways in which he relates with himself and his reality.

"A Deeper Exile" is predominantly contemplative in mood. Its speaker observes a landscape before him – "The mime of clouds moving/Under a high, stabilized sky" (DEANE, 1977, p. 34), and the "sea where the horizon/Perishes in mists that move/Foggily through the water mirrors" (DEANE, 1977, p. 34) – and reflects, in a predominantly resigned fashion, the set of paradoxical images he engenders to try and interpret his world. He speaks of "the stabilities which/*Produce* their transience" (DEANE, 1977, p. 34, *my emphasis*); of the "change [that] *mimics* changelessness" (DEANE, 1977, p. 34, *my emphasis*), for instance. The impression of repetition and continuity, installed by the italicised present tense verbs, reinforce the semantic implications of a poetic diction that hovers between the common sense belief, imbued with resignation, that things are what they are, on the one side, and the pondering posture of a deeply observing and troubled speaker on the other:

> "(…) And I,
> Lost in the heights of that sky,
>
> Knowing the puissant demarcations
> Horizons make, go further yet
> And see in all this race and chase

[116] "Heaven has a sweet tooth/For the choicest mortals./A God is always weighing/The receptive heart/Behind deaf portals/Against the feather of truth." (DEANE, 1977, p. 19).
[117] Deane revisits the idea of exile, and its obvious political connotations in at least two other poems, "Exile's Return" and "Sleep of Exile", both published in *History Lessons*.

Of passing time, the agelessness
Of seas and skies, yet sense
A deeper exile out of time

When I think how, hemmed by weather,
The last time we talked together,
You smiled at its inconstancy.
(DEANE, 1977, p. 34-35)

What we see here is that the speaker's melancholic isolation is interspersed with the experience of loss through separation, and also with the memory of it, which adds density to his meditation on his current state.

The title of the poem synthesises the speaker's awareness that he is part of a more complex scenario, which escapes the limits of his understanding. In the end, he has to face his incapacity to fully grasp the nuances of the sight he attentively observes, which, in turn, "[r]eveals the pathetic fallacy/Of my [his] response to the world's/Conducive beauty." (DEANE, 1977, p. 34). This acknowledgment of impotency is, in the poem, coupled with the recollection of lost happiness, and with the memory of a certain temporary suspension of the critical consciousness for the speaker to enjoy that evanescent moment. More important, though, is the fact that the speaker's exiled consciousness, and the aura of resignation that permeates "A Deeper Exile", indirectly encapsulate the overall mood of the Northern Irish historical context at the time of its publication. This is because the poem as a whole creates an atmosphere of perplexity and restlessness that condenses much of the mood of the Troubles and of the impression created by the sectarian conflicts that Northern Ireland had reached an irreversible political and social cul-de-sac.[118]

What is more, the title "A Deeper Exile" bears strong political connotations given the semantics of its nucleus, which, along with the tensions between stability and instability the poem sets in motion, lends support to this historicised reading. Hence, by contemplating his surroundings and bringing to the fore these images of unchangeableness, Deane's poem converses with its historical context in subtle yet profound ways by highlighting the paradoxes upon which individual experiences such as

[118] These impressions made in the individual consciousness, and in which deeply personal and public affairs subtly intermingle, are also registered in excerpts like this, from "The Pander": "In other foreign rooms/ I've heard your deep contralto stir/Those lamplit shapes and felt them register/A presence, sharp and briefly sinister,/As those shadows rose from their haunches/And came into the light like grooms/Bloodstained from their honeymoons,/Squatters from the street's subconscious/Rising in *son et lumière* to a show of knives/That leave real scars upon the skin,/Designed by their imaginary wives/Who pandered, singing, to the blood within." (DEANE, 1977, p. 21).

that of its speaker are founded. This produces some heightened anxiety that becomes more and more intense as we realise, through the eyes of Deane's speaker, that so-called reality, that of "(…) roads reopening for us/Like scars; (…)" (DEANE, 1972, p. 48),[119] which created the angst of the "(…) unease/[that] Traduced our sleep" (DEANE, 1972, p. 47), as the speaker of "Avalanche" mentions, depends on the countless nuances involved in how each individual apprehends and conceives it just as much as it depends on the various details that escape one's contemplative skill or critical thinking.

The longest poem in *Rumours*, "A Fable", tells of the assassination of "a house-painter (…) in Belfast" (DEANE, 1977, p. 28), and as the speaker draws up his "report of the incident" (DEANE, 1977, p. 28) he also seeks to state the "point in writing" (DEANE, 1977, p. 30) about it. The question "why should the fable/not act in curt accord/with the fact?" (DEANE, 1977, p. 29) exposes the dangerous gap between reality and its discursive fabrication that is already implied by the title of the poem.[120] In addition to that, this question connects the speaker's preoccupation with the whole ethos of *Rumours* and its underlying scepticism concerning "the feather of truth" (DEANE, 1977, p. 19). The poem is shot through with suspicion,[121] and casts doubt upon the common sense that destiny was to blame for the event portrayed. The inquiring tone of "A Fable", and its rational verve are, in the end, the very strategies used by the speaker to probe into the roots of hatred between the conflicting communities in Northern Ireland. As the speaker states,

> If all hold it in mind
> That killers will be killed, that
> The clear-sighted see the blind
> Inscrutable face of Fate
> Swarming with acne
> And adolescent hate, then all should find
> Truer reason for despair
> In the story. (DEANE, 1977, p. 30)

[119] See "A Miracle" in the Appendix.
[120] In this poem, Deane revisits a motif which is already explored in "Great Times Once", from *Gradual Wars*. That is the frail relationship between language, memory, invention and truth. In that poem the speaker says: "These things have happened./But I can't persuade/You to listen or that they/Were true." (DEANE, 1972, p. 60).
[121] Suspicion is, indeed, another strong element in Deane's poetry, and the image of "(…) the spies/Of conscience (…)" (DEANE, 1972, p. 21), from elegy "Ten", particularly hints at this notion, while it also reinforces the aura of vigilance, secrecy, espionage, investigation and ultimately of fear and sectarianism.

The rhetoric of "A Fable" is predominantly argumentative, as the passage above exemplifies, with the speaker trying to prove his thesis that barbarity is not a byproduct of destiny, that it is not a natural or unchangeable thing or something which can or could be merely taken for granted. "There is/a question of Fate/to be considered" (DEANE, 1977, p. 28), the speaker concedes, only to argue immediately afterwards that this should be taken into account "only/after the stricter question/of hate." (DEANE, 1977, p. 28). Indeed, the poem's explanatory tone and its deceitfully prosaic diction, with personifications and syntactic inversions[122] that almost go unnoticed, reinforce the appeal to reasonableness at the heart of its diction. In "A Fable", figurative language plays second fiddle to argument, and this ends up becoming a very eloquent device. Besides, the speaker turns the metalinguistic drive of the poem, the unspoken question about why he writes, into a statement of deep commitment to his world. He does so by questioning the premises behind the rumours that crystalise into tacit half-truths. The logical organisation of the poem's diction makes it read as a critical examination of its historical context as well as a probe into the power of art to overcome sectarianism through the expression of "the [speaker's] desire to be no fewer/than both pursued and pursuer" (DEANE, 1977, p. 30) of the manifestations of barbarity that are traversed in the poem as the work of the heavy hand of destiny.[123]

"Bonfire" thematises conflict through the depiction of a religious tradition, and the meditations of the speaker on the virtual impossibility of agreement or sympathy in a sectarian context. The poem opens with,

> It is too much the way men ask me
> That I understand others too,
> And that if I fail, as I do, I do,
> That I pray for them instead,
> Rather than wish them all as dead
> As is or seems their point of view.
> (DEANE, 1977, p. 22)

[122] Such inversions are a recurrent aspect of Deane's verse, and the line "in my sleep/My voice broke from its throes" (DEANE, 1972, p. 17), from elegy "Seven", in *Gradual Wars*, exemplifies this argument. In this excerpt, unconsciousness and suffering meet halfway, and that encounter is created by the contrast between quietness and torment engendered by Deane's poetic diction.

[123] The theme of the encounter of the individual with his/her destiny is explored in "Directions", from *History Lessons*. Nearly half-way through the poem, destiny, which is the speaker of the poem, tells the reader, after giving instructions for him/her to find him, that "If you follow/Them closely you will find me,/Your destiny, coming like a sigh/To greet you, coming up in the page/You will read next, watching you/Like the small eyes of the dice/We must roll to see who speaks/First." (DEANE, 1983, p. 16-17).

a passage that contains a delicate balance between the affirmativeness of the first four lines and the slight hesitancy of the line which closes the stanza. Unlike "A Fable", Deane's language here is allegorical, and derives its images from theological motifs intermixed with traditional commemorations in order to shape the poem's themes. A central idea in "Bonfire" is that there is a huge gap between the yearning for peace and the possibility of peace itself. The actual measure of impossibility is given by the excerpt which reads that "God hungers for situations/That only the devil could invent" (DEANE, 1977, p. 22), which, in a tone redolent of proverbial morals or wisdom, figuratively encapsulates the extremism embedded in the Northern Irish dissentions, as the rest of the poem suggests. "Bonfire" concludes with

> I wish there were avoiding it
> For the condemned
> And for the wise.
> But who would pretend
> Now to advise?
> For there must be burning once the fire's lit.
> (DEANE, 1977, p. 23)

This excerpt not only reinforces the impasse at the heart of the poem but also points to its permanence. This desire for change and its virtual impossibility are expressed by the subjunctive mood, not uncommon in Deane's verse, while the sentence that ends the poem is pervaded by a sense of obligation that allegorically signals to the continuation of the ideological animosities.[124]

The already complicated relationship between discourse, rationality and the nature of truth that runs through *Rumours* – notably in poems like "Scholars I", that ends with the rhetorical question "Is there a book that I/Would not burn for the truth?" (DEANE, 1977, p. 42) – is intensified in *History Lessons*,[125] since the anguish it provokes is more clearly relocated in the realm of the public arena. As Dawe states, this book "(…) mediates between how the big frame of History, with a capital 'H', imposes order and authority upon the workings of ordinary family life 'underneath'." (DAWE, 2018, p.

[124] This idea is also previously hinted at in *Gradual Wars*, in elegy "Ten", when the speaker juxtaposes violence and isolation in "Of all loneliness/There is no end. You must believe/To breed and kill more." (DEANE, 1972, p. 21).

[125] Dawe argues that "[a]s with the earlier volumes, *History Lessons* relives different kinds and sources of history: the local, familial, unvoiced world of Deane's upbringing and the authorising, validating structure of state and imperial power. 'All my work,' he states in an interview, 'is about uncovering, especially uncovering of voices that speak without governance, or that speak without being heard' – something he has discussed at length in his readings of the playwright Brian Friel." (DAWE, 2018, p. 99).

98).[126] The poems in *History Lessons* continue to be haunted by themes like uncertainty[127] and death, and also continue to be shaped by a predominantly melancholic form of poetic conscience of speakers who strive to take in the personal, political and social circumstances his poetry addresses. More vigorously than in the previous books, though, in *History Lessons*, the urban space emerges as a place of brutal encounters[128] and individual misery, a challenging sight that demands active interaction and understanding on the speaker's part while it only offers destruction, hopelessness and/or the perspective of stagnation in return. In this scenario, the underlying meditation on the nature of truth that permeates key poems in the book also reveals an ongoing search for certainty and security on the speaker part, his attempt to "[l]et the birds of fright fly," (DEANE, 1972, p. 23),[129] an inglorious enterprise that seems gradually doomed to failure.

We can see an example of this urban space conceived as a sight of destruction in "History Lessons", a poem which, as Dawe mentions, is essentially "a meditation on a journey taken to Moscow" (DAWE, 2018, p. 99). Memory is a driving force in this poem, and works as the organising principle of its content. The predominance of past simple verbs and the poem's abrupt superposition of brief scenes create a kaleidoscopic scenario whose unit the reader is challenged to reconstruct. The poem opens with "'The proud and beautiful city of Moscow/Is no more.' So wrote Napoleon to the Czar." (DEANE, 1983, p. 10). This image of annihilation is followed by accounts of various incarnations of barbarity that gradually culminate in the depiction of the Northern issues in "Elections, hunger-strikes and shots/Greeted our return." (DEANE, 1983, p. 10-11). Being home, therefore, the passage suggests, is being at risk, an idea which is corroborated by the

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[126] Dawe also draws attention to a few important literary and philosophical intertextual references in *History Lessons*: "Opening with a poem on the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam as a figure of the poet *in extremis*, the volume is backlit by other 'great' literary presences, including a dramatic vignette on Edmund Burke ('Christmas at Beaconfield') – on whom Deane would publish several key essays – [and] John Mitchell, the nineteenth-century Irish republican activist (…)" (DAWE, 2018, p. 98-99) in the poem 'Send War in Our Time, O Lord'. "Christmas at Beaconfield" is particularly sardonic about the Irish situation, with passages like "Ireland in her/Customary decline" (DEANE, 1983, p. 34) and "Parisian orators, lawyers and friseurs/Auctioned history to the mob." (DEANE, 1983, p. 36).

[127] It often appears subtly stated in finely ironic passages such as the following highlighted one, from "Picture from an Institution", in *History Lessons*: "The ocean's/Underneath, tidal remains quicken/In hospitals, monasteries and jails/*Where we write the definite history/Of clouds*, essays on the timbres/Of the winds, sympathetic studies/Of the allergies that afflict sea-caves,/The sinuses of cliffs." (DEANE, 1983, p. 25, *my emphasis*).

[128] In "Hummingbirds", for instance, we hear the speaker talk about "Children [that] sleep in the streets" (DEANE, 1983, p. 22), that "may be lost/In barbaric schools" (DEANE, 1983, p. 22), as well as of "crimes [that]/Are created afresh in the young" (DEANE, 1983, p. 22) while "History perishes in the natural hope/The season brings." (DEANE, 1983, p. 22-23).

[129] See elegy "Twelve" in the Appendix.

disturbing image of “Houses broke open/In the season’s heat and the bulbs/Burned in the ground” (DEANE, 1983, p. 11), which metonymically encapsulate demonstrations of power abuse like internment.

The rhetorical organisation of “History Lessons” causes these parallels between the Russian and the Irish contexts to emerge very subtly yet powerfully. Even though its tone is always affirmative, and its syntax predominantly direct, the correspondences between these two contexts are never clearly stated. This installs a productive tension between forthrightness and elusiveness. The fact that memory is the central axis of this poem accentuates the suggestiveness of the parallels it draws, thus giving them a more poignant effect. This becomes clear in the speaker’s recollection of “a boy running” (DEANE, 1983, p. 11), a key image upon which the poem is structured, which is revisited as a *leitmotif* on at least three occasions, with slight variations. Indeed, in the economy of “History Lessons”, this image weaves together the different contexts the poem addresses due to its inherent sense of urgency, of desperation, and the suggestions of violence and resistance which are imbedded in the memory of the boy’s “clothes scattered open by the wind.” (DEANE, 1983, p. 10).

These ideas are given a more melancholic and slightly nostalgic twist in “Street Singers”, a poem centred on the image of dispirited buskers whose voice is repeatedly suffocated by that of demagogic political ranting, as the opening lines show: “They sang, disheartened, to the dark/In their small kingdom. Speechmakers/Would arrive on lorries and harangue/Them.” (DEANE, 1983, p. 15). This subtly installs the atmosphere of primarily verbal dispute in the poem, which ultimately sets in motion a fine and penetrating dialectic between artistic expression and political statement. Indeed, in “Street Singers”, the lingering memory of past splendour, embedded in the “deaths of democracies and kings [that]/Lent to the air an afterglow” (DEANE, 1983, p. 15), works in tandem with the recollection of “[s]ongs that could congest the eyes” (DEANE, 1983, p. 15) and that “[h]aunted the corners” (DEANE, 1983, p. 15) of the poem’s personified streets. An instance of this personification is “The sleeping city groaned/Replies through all its stifled/Streets.” (DEANE, 1983, p. 15). The combination of these elements creates an atmosphere of irrecoverable loss that is reinforced by the essentially metonymic rhetorical question in the poem’s last stanza: “Where are the fires/That lit, the airs that hung,/The lamps that shone, as the old/Shook and wept?” (DEANE, 1983, p. 15). The abrupt breaks provoked by the extensive use of enjambed lines formally accentuates the

ruptures that "Street Singers" thematises, while, at the same time, they contrast harshly with the feeble sense of permanence that the poem's appeal to memory engenders, as the predominance of past verbs in it linguistically suggests. These are the formal elements that create the tension in "Street Singers", and it is from this subtly conflicting diction that its heavy and pensive atmosphere emerges. The underlying wish for some kind of restoration we find in "Street Singers" clashes drastically with the sense of impotency to change things that is muttered under the speaker's breath.[130]

In "The Art of Dying", Deane returns to the kind of elegiac tone and mood that we find in the first fourteen poems of *Gradual Wars*, and thematises death through a delicate balance of invention and actuality. The poem opens with

> You took the way you died
> From the thrillers you read;
> Dialed 999 and sighed
> And the police found you dead.
> (DEANE, 1983, p. 31).

The opening stanza creates an aura of fabricated mystery that intermingles with scenes of agitation such as "[f]or you took to heart/The toy knife of suspense,/And chose to depart/When England was tense/With strikes and with snow/Shutting everything down." (DEANE, 1983, p. 31). Indeed, it is the economy of information provided by the speaker which emphasises the atmosphere of dubiousness of the poem, which in turn reinforces some of the angst between its lines. Besides, that individual death is announced in the first stanza as modelled after crime or detective[131] novels provides the motif that the speaker revisits in a broader public context in the fourth and fifth stanzas, when he speaks that "London *lay low*/The day you left town/For the Falls in Belfast/Near the Republican *plot*." (DEANE, 1983, p. 31, *my emphasis*). The italicised expressions also reinforce the aura of stealthiness that, in the case of this poem, connect the individual and the public realms. This prepares for the irony in the fifth and sixth stanzas, when the speaker says, as he addresses the memory of the dead person,[132] that "(…) you could not/Have avoided

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[130] If the street is a place that triggers pensiveness, it is also the sight of downright truculence in *History Lessons*. We can see this in passages like "A fight occurred/And then there came the Military/Police who hammered silence out/With night sticks, wall to wall." (DEANE, 1983, p. 18) and "We were beaten for a general guilt,/Regular as clockwork." (DEANE, 1983, p. 19), from "Guerillas", for instance, but also in "The Victim", from *Rumours*, that depicts a persecution which ends in assassination, as its closing line, "The street closed for the kill" (DEANE, 1983, p. 25), shows.

[131] In the second stanza the speaker says "It would take a sleuth/To unravel this case./To tell you the truth,/You left hardly a trace (…)." (DEANE, 1983, p. 31).

[132] The poem has the following dedication: "i.m. Mary Treacy" (DEANE, 1983, p. 31).

a smile/That your funeral's route/In its very last mile/Gained a soldier's salute." (DEANE, 1983, p. 31).

"The Art of Dying" ends with the following stanza,

> Part of this bitter plot
> *Is* the English-Irish scene,
> Police and army on the spot,
> And something in-between
> That *puts* us all askew
> And *keeps* us all apart.
> The life you led may be the clue
> To your dying art.
> (DEANE, 1983, p. 31-32, *my emphasis*)

It not only signals a shift in verb tenses, from past to present, thus emphasising the unrelenting presence of violence in the individual's everyday experience, but also categorically inscribes in the poem the sectarian atmosphere of the Northern Irish Troubles by hinting at the ways this turbulent historical context might have affected the life of the elegised person. In addition to that, part of the underlying tension throughout "The Art of Dying" is maintained by the atmosphere of uncertainty engendered by a poetic diction that gradually changes the reader into a sherlock that, in the interpretive process, has to examine the semantic pieces of evidence written on the page, thus reconstructing the links between the situations the poem presents.

History Lessons ends with "Truth Nearing", a poem that encapsulates some of the core elements of Deane's poetics. Its mood hovers between confessional and discernment, within which we find a poetic "conscience [that] starves" (DEANE, 1983, p. 39) while still remaining critically sharp "[a]midst a surfeit of atrocity" (DEANE, 1983, p. 39). The yearning for the truth forms the thematic backbone of this poem, and, as such, works as a poetic outcome of a few of the themes addressed in *Rumours*. Nevertheless, the poem's tone oscillates between resignation and inquiry, and the speaker's weary willingness to compromise, expressed in "I'd say yes, though, to a sorrow/Or a guilt, however searing,/If I felt with its arrival/That the first star of truth/Would even *sham* appearing." (DEANE, 1983, p. 39, *my emphasis*). However, the conditional structure that gives shape to these lines inscribes the speaker's desire into the realm of a remote possibility, and the elaborate pretence implicit in the semantics of the italicised verb reinforces that unlikelihood whilst it accentuates the contradictory or paradoxical nature of Deane's language. The resulting semantic instability not only connects "Truth Nearing" with the bulk of Deane's poetry,

but also points to a recurring feature of his poetic language, namely, the calculated self-sabotage of certitudes that make his poetry essentially inquisitive and, for that matter, profoundly troubled on both the formal and the thematic levels.

What is so singular about Deane's poetic language, then, is that the rhetorical devices he uses, and the images he creates, all converge towards the affirmation of doubt, and of literature as a dialectic place of clashing differences and of a potentially tense conciliation of aesthetic but also historical and political instabilities. Bearing that in mind, we can add that the ultimate incarnation of this tension between the individual and his world in Deane's verse is the permanent dialectic between the intricacies of poetic immanence and those of Northern Ireland's turbulent historical context. An examination of this relationship, and its interpretive implications, will be the focus of the next chapter.

5. Deane's poetry and the Northern Irish Troubles: theoretical and interpretative questions

You are the loneliest man
In the crowd. You act
Because there is nothing you own.
You live between the throwing
And the thing thrown.
Your solitude is exact.
(DEANE, 1972, p. 34)[133]

The previous chapter showed that a few important recurring poetic characteristics emerge from a close reading of Deane's poems. The first formal aspects of his poetry that draw our critical attention are the continued presence of rhetorical questions, often used in a mildly provoking manner, of enjambed verses, a vast array of similes, and occasional instances of subtle irony, quite often coupled with epiphanic moments that heighten the speaker's disillusionment in his encounters with the world. All these elements converge to creating a fine poetic idiom that, despite being notoriously elusive, never slips into total obscurity, and in spite of its urge to communicate, reaffirms the "(…) [a]larming silence" (DEANE, 1972, p. 49)[134] that results from the isolation of the individual consciousness which is troubled by scepticism, melancholy, as well as a deep awareness of barbarity, dealt with in terms of some kind of "unaccountable account" (DEANE, 1983, p. 14).[135] As a matter of fact, Deane's verse is shaped by a language that ranges from the exploitation of colloquial registers to the use of a poetic diction which is loaded with literary references that are alternately veiled and blatant. The combination of these formal features engenders the tense poetic atmosphere that permeates *Gradual Wars*, *Rumours*, *History Lessons* and the *Selected Poems,* and provides the core thematic links that connect these books. In spite of their aesthetic peculiarities, we can argue that the overall disenchanted tone of Deane's poetic subjects bespeaks a deep sense of restlessness and melancholy which is generated by the individual's realisation that his anguish and perplexity come from his being hopelessly exposed to existential, rational and ultimately historical/political dead-ends. Considering this, the point of contact between the tensions in Deane's verse and those of the Northern Irish Troubles becomes considerably more tangible, in that the consciousness of his poetic subjects is forged by this traumatic contact

[133] See "The Last Impact" in the Appendix.
[134] See "Civil War" in the Appendix.
[135] See "Counting" in the Appendix.

with the kinds of historical pressures which overwhelm the individual yet do not crush him altogether. That said, we can argue that Deane's poetry is imbued with some strong eloquence that manifests itself more powerfully in the intersection between the individual will and the troubled atmosphere of a historical context which tries to stifle reasonableness and understanding.

Bearing that in mind, we can now look at how Deane's aesthetic choices allow for the imaginative reconfiguration of the historical context with which his poems converse. This is at the core of the theoretical reflection which supports my thesis that Deane's poetry is essentially dialectic. Indeed, my argument is that his verse both aesthetically and thematically addresses the general atmosphere of the Troubles by encapsulating the tensions of that historical period. Therefore, even though the questions discussed in this section are focused on Deane's verse and derive their examples from the close reading in Chapter Three, they are also, to a certain degree, a more general debate on the ways (and the extent to which) poetry and history are/can be related. Therefore, the investigation of this dialectic between aesthetics and history in Deane's verse is also part of a broader debate on how this relationship has played out in Irish poetry in the twentieth century, especially in poems by Northern Irish poets such as Deane.

In his book of essays, *Literatura e Sociedade*, Antonio Candido argues, as he discusses the fertile interactions between reality and the inner aspects of a literary work, that,

> when we are in the realm of literary criticism we are led to analyse the intimacy of the works, and what matters is to investigate the factors which act in the internal organisation, in such a way to constitute a peculiar structure" (CANDIDO, 2011, p. 14, *my translation*).[136]

This passage contains one of the hermeneutic pillars for truly solid literary criticism, namely, that the critic should never lose sight of the immanent aspects of the text. In other words, literary criticism should never overlook matters of form, in Candido's view, and his words imply that any contextual reading of a novel, play or poem must start with a careful analysis of its linguistic material. At the same time, for Candido, the interpretation

[136] "quando estamos no terreno da crítica literária somos levados a analisar a intimidade das obras, e o que interessa é averiguar que fatores atuam na organização interna, de maneira a constituir uma estrutura peculiar." (CANDIDO, 2011, p. 14).

of a given piece of literature should not be limited to the study of its strictly structural elements or, to use Fredric Jameson's phrase, "the prison-house of language".[137] However dependent on the words on the page, Candido sees that critical interpretation, should not be merely confined to the immanence of the literary work at risk of being, at best, only partial and inconsistent.

Candido's words suggest that this textual reference is the only solid basis upon which the critic can build his/her interpretation of the novels, plays or poems s/he sets out to scrutinise, mainly because this approach to form eliminates structuralist extremisms, on the one hand and sociological determinisms on the other. This kind of dialectical middle ground is of great interest in any reading of Deane's poems, for they are the linguistic materialisation of an ongoing strife between the poetic subject and his adverse reality, each poem being a "no surrender" statement against intimidating circumstances. When dealing specifically with the reading of poetry in his *O Estudo Analítico do Poema* (2006), Candido also mentions that,

> "in a literary text there is an aspect that is the *translation* of meaning and another that is the *translation* of its human content, of the message by means of which a writer expresses himself/herself by expressing a view of the world and of mankind." (CANDIDO, 2006, p. 27, *my translation*).[138]

We see this more clearly in operation in the "ineducable longings" (DEANE, 1972, p. 13)[139] of Deane's poetic subjects, having to carry on living despite being caught between recollections of "the gloom of childhood" (DEANE, 1972, p. 16)[140] and the sight of "streets/Of mean houses" (DEANE, 1972, p. 19).[141] Theirs is a world of "books, half-read, understood" (DEANE, 1972, p. 32),[142] of "cities burning" (DEANE, 1972, p. 34), of "intransitive/Fears" (DEANE, 1983, p. 38)[143] and "police plunging like animals"

[137] This is the title of Jameson's book on Formalism and Structuralism.
[138] "Num texto literário há essencialmente um aspecto que é tradução de sentido e outro que é tradução do seu conteúdo humano, da mensagem por meio da qual um escritor se exprime, exprimindo uma visão do mundo e do homem." (CANDIDO, 2006, p. 27)
[139] See elegy "Four" in the appendix.
[140] See elegy "Seven" in the appendix. Indeed, this is not the only poem in which childhood is remembered with downheartedness. In "Counting", from *History Lessons*, we hear the speaker say that "I may have counted less/Had there been more that was of more account./A richer childhood, an adroit address/Might have relieved me of the need to count." (DEANE, 1983, p. 14).
[141] See elegy "Nine" in the appendix.
[142] See "A Genealogy" in the appendix.
[143] See "Sleep of Exile" in the appendix.

(DEANE, 1972, p. 17), a turbulent poetic reality from which Deane's poetic subjects "speak of love and hate, of you and me" (DEANE, 1972, p. 49), both with commitment and scepticism.

Indeed, Candido's argument implies that every piece of literature is an imaginative world of its own, and he is not alone here. This notion, for example, partially echoes Hugo Friedrich's statement that "[a] poem is (…) a self-sufficient entity of multiple meanings – a taut network of absolute forces that act suggestively upon prerational levels of the mind and make the secret areas of concepts vibrate." (FRIEDRICH, 1974, p. 4). From this critical standpoint, what matters is the study of what might potentially lie behind these semantic tensions, or else, what this web of potential meanings can say about the real world they somehow rework and incorporate. At this point Candido's ideas become more wide-ranging in scope than Friedrich's, since the Brazilian critic states in a considerably more positive fashion that, however autonomous the literary text strives to become, there is always some form of inseparable link between the imagined world of literature and the real-life experiences which are reconfigured within the text. For Candido,

> "when studying the text, it is important to consider it as integrally as possible, as communication, but at the same time, and mostly, as expression. What the artist has to communicate, he does it as he expresses himself. Expression is the fundamental aspect of art and therefore literature" (CANDIDO, 2006, p. 27, *my translation*).[144]

Despite their theoretical differences, Candido and Friedrich seem to agree that works of literature create a complex universe of potential meanings which the critic has to break down in the interpretive process. Indeed, Candido's comment implies that this is the safest way for critics and readers to grasp the inner dynamics of a literary work, thus deriving meanings from the hierarchies that are formally established within the text. In the final analysis, then, Candido's comment does away with the artificial separation between poetry and politics that typifies more conservative readings, as Terry Eagleton explains:

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[144] "o estudo do texto importa em considerá-lo da maneira mais íntegra possível, como comunicação, mas ao mesmo tempo, e sobretudo, como expressão. O que o artista tem a comunicar, ele o faz à medida que se exprime. A expressão é o aspecto fundamental da arte e portanto da literatura." (CANDIDO, 2006, p. 27).

> it is worth noting that of all literary genres, poetry would seem the one most stubbornly resistant to political criticism, most sequestered from the winds of history. It has its own thickness and density, which are not to be summarily reduced to symptoms of something else. Yet it is not only that a rigorous distinction between poetry and history is itself historically quite recent, and would have bemused many an eminent poet of the past. It is also, not least in the modernist epoch, that the poem's very recalcitrance to social analysis, the way it cuts itself loose from conventional perceptions, is itself an eloquent historical phenomenon. What kind of society is it on which poetry feels it has to turn its back? What has happened to the content of social experience when the poem feels compelled to take its own forms as its content, rather than draw from a common fund of meaning? To write the history of poetic forms is a way of writing the history of political cultures. But to do this, we have first to grant those forms their material reality (…). (EAGLETON, 2007, p. 164)

What Eagleton shows here is that one cannot simply drive a critical wedge between poetry and history, and the work of a poet like Deane, with his trained eye and ear for the dynamics of social and historical unrest serves as evidence that this separation is indeed problematic from the critical standpoint. Indeed, if we are to insist on dissociating poetry from history, our efforts might prove fruitless, if not downright misleading, since this assertion could imply that there is some sort of life outside history, untouched and untainted by it, which is just as inconceivable as any form of rational life outside the realms of language as an abstract symbolic system. This could be especially fallacious in a poetic universe such as Deane's, fraught as it is with the uncertainties of a "time/[that] Held history up like so many candles/In a race of shadows." (DEANE, 1972, p. 17).

By opposing the idea that "[h]istory and poetry are often regarded as opposites" (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 162), Thurston and Alderman imply that this distinction is grounded upon too shallow a reading of the scope of each respective field of knowledge. The main misconception behind this separation, the authors suggest, is the tacitly accepted notion that "[history] seems preoccupied with dates, facts, and events, [poetry] with fictions, images, and representations." (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 162). What this notion ignores is precisely the kind of dialectics to which Candido points out in his text, and that enables us to see all these preoccupations which are typically understood as historical concerns being worked out in terms of poetic form and diction. Several of Deane's poems exemplify this interaction between poetic creation and historical documentation, given the violence of the Troubles, and the traces of

colonisation and postcolonisation.[145] All these concerns are found in the poems as part of their economy, thus becoming important triggers for poetic meaning and not merely accessory information from which the poem could easily prescind. The first elegy in *Gradual Wars*, for instance, could not do without the haunting historical aura of trauma and violence, without which it would run the risk of becoming just another futile metalinguistic exercise, nor could a poem like "Northern Ireland: Two Comments", within which the dynamics of historical violence in the North of Ireland emerges first as a messianic vision and, subsequently, as a realistic threat of nightmarish proportions.

To defend their thesis that history and poetry are closer than is often believed or accepted, Thurston and Alderman argue that,

> historians have to interpret and narrate their historical evidence, and they therefore have to consider representational questions. These questions bring historians and poets together under the term historiography, which is the study of historical methodology. In other words, it is the analysis of how we construct our stories and models of the past. (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 162).

What we can infer from this comment is that, contrary to the critical axiom these and other critics that I mentioned set out to question, poetry and history inevitably intersect. For, in spite of their numerous differences in scope and configuration, the existence of poetry and history as such depends upon language as the means to reconfigure individual and collective experiences. As Thurston and Alderman explain,

> To talk of "history" in poetry is to talk, potentially, of many things. It is useful to be clear about which aspects of history are at stake in a given poem or reading of a poem. Often, by "history" we simply mean that the poem refers to historical persons or events. (…) Sometimes the history is public, matters of war or government; sometimes the history is private (…), though the personal history in such poems is typically measured against, and often invites contemplation of, more public histories. "History" in another of its guises is often present in poems that (again, on the surface) seem to have nothing to do with history (in the sense of well-known events in the national past)." (THURSTON; ALDERMAN, 2014, p. 162).

In the case of Deane's poetry, history appears as the registration of specific events, such as the assassination of Bloody Sunday demonstrators in elegy "Six", which I analysed in

[145] That is detectable, for instance, in the following excerpt of "Return", from *Gradual Wars*, in which the speaker says that "[e]very valley grows with pain/As we run like a current through;/Then the memories darken again./*In this Irish past I dwell/Like sound implicit in a bell*." (DEANE, 1972, p. 28, *my emphasis*).

Chapter Three, or as the "in-your-face" thematisation of poverty in "She was at the fire, face aloof/In concentration. Doing the sums/For food and clothes, the future/In endless hock" (DEANE, 1977, p. 50), in "Shelter", from *Rumours*. History also appears in Deane's verse more subtly, and we can read its traumatic effects in the ways the individual perceives his world and then tries to interpret it, while often trying to understand his personal memories and experiences by pitting them against their political background. This often results in perplexity and deep melancholy, which are heightened by the sense of anxiety and anguish which inhabit Deane's verse. History therefore features in Deane's poetry as both testimony and a symptom of sectarianism which are experienced deep within the poetic self. In either case, history is a key component in the economy of his verse. The imaginary world of Deane's poems is fraught with hostilities and inquietude. This is particularly observable in the way history and politics emerge as the root of the speaker's anguish and the aftermath of the individual consciousnesses that cannot escape the barbarous vicious cycle in which he/she is caught up.

Candido advances his argument by investigating the relationship between literature and society as he claims that,

> When we do this kind of analysis, we can say that we are taking into account the social element, not externally, as a reference that allows us to identify, in the materiality of the book, the expression of a certain period or of a given society; not as a frame that allows it to be historically situated; but as an aspect of the artistic construction itself studied at the explanatory level rather than the illustrative one. (CANDIDO, 2011, p. 16-17, *my translation*).[146]

Candido's argument is indeed very sophisticated. His reading method suggests that we look at the contextual information as an integral part of the literary work, not as a separate piece of information. When we apply Candido's ideas to the study of poetry, and its relationship with history, we see that his critical approach seriously undermines the belief that "[m]ost poetry seems to function at a level remote from history, where a dissociated mind confronts a landscape innocent of social meaning" (SMITH, 1982, p. 1), an idea

[146] "Quando fazemos uma análise desse tipo, podemos dizer que levamos em conta o elemento social, não exteriormente, como referência que permite identificar, na matéria do livro, a expressão de uma certa época ou de uma sociedade determinada; nem como enquadramento, que lhe permite situá-lo historicamente; mas como fator da própria construção artística, estudado no nível explicativo e não ilustrativo." (CANDIDO, 2011, p. 16-17)

which Smith describes as an "illusion [that] is one of the most powerful enchantments poetry weaves." (SMITH, 1982, p. 1). Indeed, this is a critical axiom that is often (and erroneously) taken for granted, and which Theodor Adorno opposes in his essay "On Lyric Poetry and Society" (1991) when he says to his audience that they "experience lyric poetry as something opposed to society, something wholly individual." (ADORNO, 1991, p. 39). The German philosopher also explains to his audience that,

> Your feelings insist that it remain so, that lyric expression, having escaped from the weight of material existence, evoke the image of a life free from the coercion of reigning practices, of utility, of the relentless pressures of self-preservation. This demand, however, the demand that the lyric world be virginal is itself social in nature. It implies a protest against a social situation that every individual experiences as hostile, alien, cold, oppressive, and this sensation is imprinted in reverse on the poetic work: the more heavily the situation weighs upon it, the more firmly the work resists it by refusing to submit to anything heteronomous and constituting itself solely in accordance with its own laws. (ADORNO, 1991, p. 39-40)

Indeed, Smith perceptively argues that "[a]ll poetry, at its deepest levels, is structured by the precise historical experience from which it emerged, those conjunctures in which its author was formed, came to consciousness, and found a voice." (SMITH, 1982, p. 1). On a similar vein, Adorno (1991) explains that,

> the substance of a poem is not merely an expression of individual impulses and experiences. Those become a matter of art only when they come to participate in something universal by virtue of the specificity they acquire in being given aesthetic form. Not that what the lyric poem expresses must be immediately equivalent to what everyone experiences. Its universality is no *volonté de tous*, not the universality of simply communicating what others are unable to communicate. Rather, immersion in what has taken individual form elevates the lyric poem to the status of something universal by making manifest something not distorted, not grasped, not yet subsumed. It thereby anticipates, spiritually, a situation in which no false universality, that is, nothing profoundly particular, continues to fetter what is other than itself, human. The lyric work hopes to attain universality through unrestrained individuation. The danger peculiar to the lyric, however, lies in the fact that its principle of individuation never guarantees that something binding and authentic will be produced. It has no say over whether the poem remains within the contingency of mere separate existence. (ADORNO, 1991, p. 38).

Considering the similarities of Candido's, Smith's and Adorno's main arguments, we can argue that, in the case of Deane's poems, the Troubles do not appear as circumstantial

adornments for what could easily be read as more or less inexplicable existential torments of the individual. Instead, the Northern Irish conflicts act as a powerful grey eminence in Deane's verse as they are the other pole of this dialectic between the individual consciousness and social unrest which lends coherence to Deane's poetic aesthetics (and its ethical counterpart).[147] Indeed, the tense relationship between these two poles is one of the greatest strengths of Deane's poetry, which, on the one hand, never reduces the individual to a mere passive byproduct of society and, on the other, never allows that individual to nurture the illusion that the world is fully subsumed to his always partial and, therefore, limited, apprehension of things.[148] Smith claims that "there is no such thing as an 'innocent' poem" (SMITH, 1982, p. 1), and in Deane this becomes especially evident in the way that even the most common-or-garden experiences retrieved by memory are not historically naïve, being permeated with attempted rational mediations on their broad social circumstances.

The type of reading Candido advocates throughout *Literatura e Sociedade* is therefore one which organically articulates form and content, literary text and historical context. This main argument is what makes his ideas and approach so important for the debate on the relationship between poetry and history in Deane's verse. This is so because Candido seamlessly articulates the analysis of stylistic features, i.e. the rhetorical particularities of literary discourse, its recurrent procedures and the effects they can produce on the reader, on the one hand, and the social and historical information imbricated in these texts on the other. Indeed, Candido's approach bears important similarities with Theodor Adorno's idea that,

> the social interpretation of lyric poetry as of all works of art – may not focus directly on the so-called social perspective or the social interests of the works or their authors. Instead, it must discover how the entirety of a society, conceived as an internally contradictory unity, is manifested in the work of art, in what way the work of art remains subject to society and in what way it transcends it. In philosophical terms, the approach must be an immanent one. Social concepts should not be applied to the works from without but rather drawn from an exacting examination of the works themselves. (ADORNO, 1991, p. 38-39).

[147] The speaker in 'Send War in Our Time, O Lord', from *History Lessons*, talks of a"(…) lucent childhood, [that] stooped to war." (DEANE, 1983, p. 13).
[148] Once again, think of the first stanza of "Rumours".

As a reading methodology, the approach defended by Candido, which, in many ways, resembles Adorno's and Smith's, is important for the analysis of Deane's poetry in that it allows us to see how the author's choices can articulate matters that go beyond the scope of the text as an autonomous structure and extend into the historical and political context from which his poems emerge. Indeed, one of the permanent tensions which holds Deane's poetry together as a cohesive aesthetic statement is that between what is registered on the page, and the resonances produced beyond that poetic universe. Deane's poems, like any literary text, cannot handle the full complexity of the reality from which they emerge, of which they speak and with which they communicate. This happens because these poems cannot entirely eschew the limitations and blind-spots of the individual perspectives around which they are structured as discursive units.

The imbrications between literature and society highlighted by Candido in his book and by Adorno in his essay are akin to the intersections between individual experience and his/her historical upbringing discussed by Stan Smith in his *Inviolable Voice: History and 20th Century Poetry* (1982). In his account of Joyce's fiction, for instance, Smith claims that "the self is inescapably involved in history" (1982, p. 13), and adds that "[t]he world [the self] regards as in some ways exterior and alien to itself is in fact the most basic datum of its being: the self is made up of what it sees and experiences" (SMITH, 1982, p. 10). Analogously speaking, this idea is of particular interest for the study of Northern Irish poetry in that, more than being enshrined in history, as Smith mentions, the self in the work of poets like Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley is rather disturbed by history. The same is valid for Deane's verse, which is fraught with troubled individualities wrestling with their personal and political anxieties and perplexities. Indeed, a poem like "History Lessons", for instance, formally recreates fragmented (and, therefore, partial and limited) perceptions of reality in such a way that it transforms the historical information it evokes into an intrinsic part of its poetic verve. The same kind of angst we can see in "A Truth Nearing".

When commenting on how literary works can potentially relate with their historical context, Smith emphasises the elasticity of poetic language and its capacity to be creative and critical at the same time. According to him, the relationship of a given literary text to its context is, first and foremost, immanent, or rhetorical, literary language being the means in which and through which this connection becomes possible. As he explains, "[t]he words arrange, re-arrange, and in so doing dissemble, the ragged

incoherence of a history that is being lived in all its open-ended, unpredictable bluster somewhere else" (SMITH, 1982, p. 2). In other words, we can think of a certain dialectic between formal order and chaos, which, rather than being polar opposites which never meet are, in fact, the agents of constant inner conflict inside a poem, for, as Smith's words suggest, this restlessness is an essential constituent of the form of the artistic text. Indeed, one of the strengths of Deane's poetic oeuvre lies in the fact that his verse dialectically negotiates these extremes of aesthetics and society, of imagination and rationality, artistic creation and historical documentation, never trying to resolve these tensions. Hence, the images of individual desolation or abandonment are never dissociated from the dire real-life circumstances that his poems incorporate as part of their aesthetics. At the same time, there is another important dialectic between the artistic imagination and critical thinking that his poems leave in suspension. The paradoxical effect which is therefore created is that the intellectual frequently embraces common sense beliefs in search of some consolation, while ordinary voices often take on the aspect of a certain understanding of reality derived from violent and/or traumatic personal experiences. Deane's poems show that no comprehensive understanding of reality is possible, for the inevitable limitations of individual consciousness and interpretation of the world always get in the way.

In his discussion of the relationship between poetry and history, Smith states that "[s]ome of the finest poetry written in this century has come out of (…) the stubborn resistance of the self to that which its experience has made it" (SMITH, 1982, p. 1). For Smith, great poetry thrives in the existing internal conflicts between the individual will and consciousness, on the one hand, and the outer circumstances that interfere with the full emancipation of the individual. The self, Smith's words imply, is the restless synthesis of these antithetical poles, and its full complexity emerges from the examination of these clashes and contradictions.

When defending his interpretive method, Candido also argues that

> we know, also, that the *external* (in this case, the social) matters, not as a cause, nor as a meaning, but as an element that plays a certain role in the constitution of the structure, thus becoming, *internal*. (CANDIDO, 2011, p. 14, *my translation*)[149]

[149] "Sabemos, ainda, que o *externo* (no caso, o social) importa, não como causa, nem como significado, mas como elemento que desempenha um certo papel na constituição da estrutura, tornando-se, portanto, *interno*." (CANDIDO, 2011, p. 14)

Adorno tackles this question from a similar perspective in his analysis of deeper connections between poetry and society. The German philosopher argues that "if lyric works are not abused by being made objects with which to demonstrate sociological theses but if instead the social element in them is shown to reveal something essential about the basis of their quality" (ADORNO, 1991, p. 37-38), then the separation between aesthetics and history can be eliminated. In other words, when the social, historical data is analysed as a constitutive aspect of the poem's inner conflicts, it produces a more comprehensive reading of the literary phenomenon as both form and content, which is therefore thought of not only in terms of its form, but also in terms of how these elements extrapolate the immanent barriers of that particular work and potentially connect with the text's readers. That is the case with poems like "Civil War" and "Northern Ireland: Two Comments", for instance, as well as "A Fable", "Strange Country", "A Killing", "The Art of Dying" and "Reading *Paradise Lost* in Protestant Ulster, 1984". As Adorno argues, in the final analysis, "[t]his relationship should lead not away from the work of art but deeper into it." (ADORNO, 1991, p. 38). It is not a matter of using the poem to simply try to explain the reality from which it emerges, as a document in verse. It is actually considerably more profound than this, in that it is a matter of using this contextual information to heighten the aesthetic potential of the poem and, as a consequence, strengthen its presence as an artistic form of endurance in that particular world. Adorno's ideas here, with which Candido, but also Smith, Padel, and Thurston and Alderman agree, is that the "social substance [of poetry] is precisely what is spontaneous in it" (ADORNO, 1991, p. 43). What emerges from the poem's inner compositional logic is a complex interaction between the individual voice and history.

Even though one must be sceptical of complete spontaneity in literary texts, since poems, for instance, are the result of careful rhetorical elaboration, the fact remains that, in Deane's verse, what arises, in an apparently instinctive manner, is a set of feelings that range from anguish, anxiety, fear, melancholy and restlessness to affective solitude, informed scepticism and individual isolation.[150] What ties these sensations together, apart

[150] A good example that condenses all these notions in Deane's poetry is this excerpt from "The Pander": "Our shadows thrown back from its bright ring,/Young and uneasy shapes, dark visitors/Who vanished in the pool of light/Where the knives of longing sharpened/As depths became surfaces and the night/Shook its foils in a voice that would sing/Under the saxophone and sometimes darkened/Inward towards feeling." (DEANE, 1977, p. 21).

from Deane's control of his poetic craft, is the historical atmosphere of violence, sectarianism and barbarity of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, whose historical causes and social side-effects I discussed in Chapter Two. In his use of enjambement, for instance, which I discussed in Chapter Three, Deane creates the formal conditions for these social and historical tensions to become one of the driving forces of his poetry. The explanation for this argument is given by Hirsch, for whom "[e]njambement creates a dialectical motion of hesitation and flow. The lineation bids the reader to pause at the end of each line even as the syntax pulls the reader forward. This creates a sensation of hovering expectation" (HIRSCH, 2014, p. 204). Considering this, we can read the richness of the poetic effects created by Deane's use of the enjambement as one of the formal features in his poetry that structures the dialectic between his speakers as individual thinkers and their awareness of their historical situation. This strictly formal device is the most evident of a series of minor contradictory forces in his verse which guarantee that his poetry produces this fine dialectic capable of creating meaning out of the confrontations between the individual and the social realms. The way the individual is conceived in Deane's poems is therefore never in isolation from his world. Instead, he is desperately immersed in a suffocating and traumatic reality.

Deane's use of similes is another formal characteristic that reinforces the tensions within his verse. For Hirsch, "[t]he essence of simile is similitude; it is likeness and unlikeness, urging a comparison of two different things. A good simile depends on a kind of heterogeneity between the elements being compared" (2014, p. 583). As a figure of speech, then, the simile, by definition, is a way of conciliating opposites, of accommodating semantically and conceptually dissenting ideas without causing one of the terms to overshadow the other. As Hirsch explains, if "[t]he metaphor asserts an identity" (2014, p. 583), on the one hand, "the simile is a form of analogical thinking" (2014, p. 583). In that sense, the simile is conducive to a more analytical approach to its poetic material, the terms that constitute it. This argument is very important for the study of Deane's poetry, in that its *ethos* is essentially meditative and his speakers are moved by a deep commitment to the critical interpretation of their personal and collective experiences.

Hirsch also explains that "[t]he simile asserts a likeness between unlike things, it maintains their comparability, but it also draws attention to their differences, thus affirming a state of division" (HIRSCH, 2014, p. 583). Therefore, it highlights the identity

between the terms being compared, yet it never eliminates the divergences between the things being compared. Rather, as a figure of speech, the simile maintains and reinforces a fundamental principle of critical thinking, namely, the basic premise that opposing ideas should not be eradicated straight away, but rather, that their dissimilarities should be critically brought to our judgment for sound scrutiny that may lead to some form of philosophical or conceptual truth. In short, the simile contains a strongly anti-sectarian impulse as it values alterity as a fundamental principle for thinking and reaffirms, however paradoxically, the notions of congruence and disparity that we find in Deane's poetic oeuvre. That said, "[t]here is a digressive impulse in similes that keeps extending out to take in new things" (HIRSCH, 2014, p. 583), which in Deane's poetry acquires a strongly political connotation and reach. This happens because, in Deane's poems, the simile provokes the reader into spotting resemblances, drawing parallels, recognising similarities, analysing their aesthetic and historical implications, and also acknowledging the undeniable presence of discordance, of separation and, ultimately, the permanence of all the deep social and historical rifts which inhabit his poetry. "The reader participates in making meaning through simile, in establishing the nature of an unforeseen analogy, in evaluating the aptness of unexpected resemblance" (HIRSCH, 2014, p. 583-584). By challenging the reader into serious interpretation Deane's verse reaffirms its unspoken commitment to individual emancipation and to the critical examination of the historical agents behind his speakers' anguish and melancholy.

The dialectics of Deane's poetry are also aesthetically emphasised by its frequent use of paradoxes. As Hirsch explains, "a literary paradox (…) brings together two seemingly incongruous or contradictory ideas that turn out to be well-founded or true" (HIRSCH, 2014, p. 442). Rather than semantically cancelling each other out, these paradoxical terms or ideas increase the tension within the poems in which they occur. Much like the similes, these paradoxes challenge the readers' intellect and perception into finding coherence where there seems to be only chaos. In a way, the paradoxes and the similes in Deane's verse are two key formal components that unveil, in the opposed ideas or images that they conjugate, the inner contradictions of the historical disputes of the Troubles that his poems encapsulate. As such, the paradoxes and similes are two major aesthetic elements in Deane's oeuvre that give shape to his poetic conception of the relationship between his art and its historical reality. In this relationship lies the deeply political ethos of his poetry. In his interview with John Brown, Deane mentions that,

> All my work is about uncovering, especially uncovering of voices that speak without governance, or that speak without being heard. It's the ostensible composure of voice that lives along with the actual dispersion of voice that I admire most in literature. And yes, I think the finest Irish writing is particularly sensitive to this condition, and that inevitably means a sensitivity to loss. But I would say that loss is real in the primary sense that it can't be recovered; but the sense that something cannot be recovered is both a resource for ingenuity, an aggravation and a distorting agency. Irish writing is fertile in its responses to these varied conditions. It must be said too that loss is by no means the only condition; but it is one of those that seems to me inescapable as such. (BROWN, 2002, p. 106).

In that sense, Deane's paradoxes and similes are the ideal rhetorical vehicle through which the themes he is most concerned with can be given form and expressed. That neither of these two rhetorical devices can guarantee full semantic stability and order – in fact, they have the opposite effect in the context in which they occur – reinforces the sense of profound instability that makes his poetry resonate even more deeply with the tensions between silencing and expression that permeate and foster the sectarianism of the Northern Irish Troubles.

The importance that the Northern Irish historical elements have in Deane's poetry is therefore very much akin to what all the critics and philosophers I have already mentioned have to say about the relationship between textual and contextual information. For both the Northern Irish poet and these critics, there is indeed no significant separation between poetry and society/history, one being the aesthetic reworking of the tensions and conflicts that continuously plague the other. As Adorno says,

> The universality of the lyric's substance, however, is social in nature. Only one who hears the voice of humankind in the poem's solitude can understand what the poem is saying; indeed, even the solitariness of lyrical language itself is prescribed by an individualistic and ultimately atomistic society, just as conversely its general cogency depends on the intensity of its individuation. (ADORNO, 1991, p. 38)

In the case of Deane's poetry, its textual configurations allow us to read many of his poems as attempts to gauge the impacts of the Northern Troubles on the individual consciousness, and, in his case, the "atomistic society" (ADORNO, 1991, p. 38) of which Adorno speaks takes the form in Deane's verse of downright sectarianism whose presence is felt both in the barbarity of some of the actions his poems register but, most often, in the social atmosphere and historical symptoms that even his most personal poems exhibit.

As Octavio Paz explains in the distinctions he tries to establish between poem and poetry in *The Bow and the Lyre* (1973), "[t]he poem is not a literary form but the meeting place between poetry and man." (PAZ, 1973, p. 5). In Deane's work, the poem is where the individual meets his deepest fears, angst, contradictions and, in the process, also meets the harsh realities of his surroundings and history. Paz also sees the relationship between the poem and the world through a very potent comparison:

> Analogy: the poem is a shell that echoes the music of the world, and meters and rhymes are merely correspondences, echoes, of the universal harmony. Teaching, morality, example, revelation, dance, dialogue, monologue. Voice of the people, language of the chosen, word of the solitary. Pure and impure, sacred and damned, popular and of the minority, collective and personal, naked and clothed, spoken, painted, written, it shows every face but there are those who say that it has no face: the poem is a mask that hides the void – a beautiful proof of the superfluous grandeur of every human work! (PAZ, 1973, p. 4).

Of relevance in Paz's powerfully imagetic description is the implicit acknowledgement that a poem worth of the name thrives in contradiction, and in its aesthetic capacity to negotiate the opposites and extremes that constitute our experiences of the world. All this, however, without ever resolving the questions that are raised. In a 1997 interview about *Reading in the Dark* and the parallels between his prose and verse, Deane states that, "in poetry (…) it is possible to leave a great deal unexplained. Part of the power of poetry is, in fact, in leaving something cryptic and letting it, so to say, leak out slowly in repeated readings for the reader". [151] What is implicit in Deane's view of poetry is that, as a form of art, it demands an active engagement of the reader in the hermeneutical process, and a truly investigative drive in order to access the potential meanings the poem projects.

In addition to that calculated obliqueness, another instance of rich contradiction in Deane's poems is precisely that his poems are guided by a search for poetic beauty while, at the same time, examining the disturbing sight produced by the paramilitary and ideological conflicts disrupting the world they depict. Implicit in Paz's comparison is also the idea that a poem is a site of endless confrontation whose terms and conditions vary from one poet to the other. In Deane's case, this confrontation takes the form of a struggle

[151] This interview was published in *The English & Media Magazine*, No. 36, Summer 1997. Available at: https://vinhanley.com/2015/04/03/reading-in-the-dark-an-interview-with-seamus-deane-revisited/, accessed on 08 July 2017, at 10:09.

for individual and intellectual emancipation in the face of historical conditions which impose speechlessness,[152] bespeak barbarity and inspire desolation.

Paz also explains that,

> Poetry is knowledge, salvation, power, abandonment. An operation capable of changing the world, poetic activity is revolutionary by nature; a spiritual exercise, it is a means of interior liberation. Poetry reveals this world; it creates another. Bread of the chosen; accursed food. It isolates; it unites. Invitation to the journey; return to the homeland. Inspiration, respiration, muscular exercise. Prayer to the void, dialogue with absence: tedium, anguish, and despair nourish it. Prayer, litany, epiphany, presence. Exorcism, conjuration, magic. Sublimation, compensation, condensation of the unconscious. Historic expression of races, nations, classes. It denies history: at its core all objective conflicts are resolved and man at last acquires consciousness of being something more than transient. Experience, feeling, emotion, intuition, undirected thought. Result of chance; fruit of calculation. Art of speaking in a superior way; primitive language. Obedience to rules; creation of others. Imitation of the ancients, copy of the real, copy of a copy of the Idea. Madness, ecstasy, logos. (PAZ, 1973, p. 3)

Poetry is therefore this ultimate aesthetic attempt at conciliating extremes, and in this process it reveals itself to be inseparable from the world it represents or recreates. Poetry's richness lies precisely in its capacity to incorporate all such tensions and produce something that reveals the difficulties and conflicts that permeate our problematic relationship with reality. Paz's words have an air of the universal to them, but his arguments can be borrowed for the more historically situated reading of Deane's poems I propose. In that sense, Deane's oeuvre manages to be local and universal at the same time, in that the dramas and dilemmas of Northern Irish history are inscribed in their formal configurations, and are also dealt with in terms of a poetic register which broadens the scope of these local historical and political circumstances. This helps to expand these concerns into more general philosophical meditations about the nature of our confrontations with a world of barbarity.

Deane's poems do not try to (re)interpret reality from a deterministic point of view, not even when his poetic diction becomes less figurative, as in the case of poems

[152] In "Blind Man's Bluff", for instance, the speaker states that "[s]ilences are fingerprints/Relinquished by noise./Voices are sudden as phones." (DEANE, 1972, p. 30). In "Knowing It", the solitary speaker says that "I have been quiet now/For many days." (DEANE, 1972, p. 33).

like “Derry”, originally published in *Gradual Wars* (1972), with its depiction of poverty, conflict and resentment, as its first section makes especially clear:

> The unemployment in our homes
> Erupting on our hands in stones;
>
> The thought of violence a relief,
> The act of violence a grief;
>
> Our bitterness and love
> Hand in glove.
> (DEANE, 1972, p. 29)

This atmosphere of permanent instability and irreconciliation is reinforced in the third section of the poem by the image of “the unfriendly natives/ready for the worst” (DEANE, 1972, p. 29), and also by the speaker’s statement that “It has been like this for years/*Someone says*,/It might be so forever, someone fears,/Or for days” (DEANE, 1972, p. 29, *my emphasis*), with the reported speech structured around an indeterminate grammatical subject adding an aura of indeterminacy and rumour to the passage.

Indeed, Deane’s verse systematically turns the historical conflicts, sectarian divisions and ideological rifts permeating the Northern Irish public arena into a key feature of the poetic subject’s individuality as a whole. Deane’s speakers are troubled because they have internalised the premises that legitimate the barbarous discourses and practices that form the *Zeitgeist* of the Irish Troubles. Yet, at the same time, they refuse to accept such ideas and practices as valid or natural, which is another source of existential unrest and melancholy in his verse. Indeed, much of Deane’s melancholic tone comes from a certain frustrating sensation of being impotent in the face of sectarianism and intolerance. Hence, while imbued with a desire for active artistic, intellectual and social resistance, on the one hand, the individuals that inhabit his poems also progressively find themselves incapable of decoding, let alone fully changing, their social and historical conditions. At the same time, their voice is shot through with a resignation which, when read closely, reveals a scepticism about the actual positivity of changes that are unaccompanied by accountability.

Thus, as we work out the complexities of the individual poetic consciousness in a poem like “Rumours”, for instance, we also trace the nature of the historical forces acting

upon the speaker's attempts at reading his world. In this particular example, we as readers are involved in an atmosphere of uncertainty not only about the speaker's unknowingness, but also about the actual contextual forces creating and feeding his angst. This feeling is reinforced by a clash between resistance and resignation that the poem ultimately embodies. This is shaped by a poetic language which is fraught with the uneasiness of doubt, the ardent desire for the truth to appear – something which is even more ardently desired in the poem "Truth Nearing", for instance – and the speaker's painful realisation that his wish cannot be fulfilled as he wants.

Apart from "Truth Nearing", other poems like "Strange Country", "Scholar I" and "Scholar II", contain a philosophical dimension in the sense that they question the efficiency of rational forms of apprehending reality well enough to provoke substantial changes in it. They embody, in different forms, the failure of enlightened reason to provide a logical explanation for the world in which the speaker is inserted, or of enlightened individuals to actually provide efficient ways to change the state of things. This, for instance, appears more clearly in the speaker's regret of not being able to tell "the thief who fell/Half way down the wall/Of the Houghton Library because/His rope broke under the extra/Weight of the Gutenberg Bible" (DEANE, 1977, p. 43) that things did not have to end that way: "I could have told him/The difference a book would have made." (DEANE, 1977, p. 43). The same speaker who mentions that "I'll know the library in a city/Before I know there is a slum" (DEANE, 1977, p. 43), thus acknowledging his detachment from some hard facts of his world also states that "I could wish the weight of/Learning would bring me down/To where things are done." (DEANE, 1977, p. 43).

Contrary to Deane's speakers often rational credo, no truth emerges from his/her sensible examination of the world, just as there is no consolation for the reality encircling the individuals depicted in the poems. The speaker of "Scholar I", for instance, learns (and poetically expresses his learning) that being book-smart alone is not enough to make sense of his reality, which obviously escapes the theoretical systematisations that try to assign meaning, or one single meaning, to it. It is not enough to negotiate the different tensions that permeate human relationships, nor is it enough to provide all the explanations that somehow define our concept of humanity.

Each of Deane's poems indirectly recognizes that a great deal of our understanding of the world is mediated by non-reasonable feelings, personal perceptions,

and other forms of affection that escape the parameters of enlightened reason. The speaker's readiness to abandon the haughty position of the intellectual as a valid way of encountering the truth of experience, the uncommunicable (and unmediated) understanding of himself, the other, and the world in "Scholar I" and "Scholar II", for instance, reinforces these ideas.

What unites many of Deane's poems as a coherent body of poetic work is the shared impression that their speakers realise that nothing in which they have placed their faith to try and understand their individual presence within their world has returned a satisfactory answer. Their most fundamental queries therefore remain, along with the pervading sense that they have put all their eggs in the wrong basket of rationality. These speakers find themselves in an existential cul-de-sac, a dilemma they cannot solve in the face of the troubled history of Northern Ireland. The awareness of this impotence becomes one of the most powerful catalysers of their existential crises. Deep inside they know they must find an answer for this conundrum, but all they have derived from their investigation of their individual and historical experience is that none of the tools they use to interpret their world is of any use. This is one of the most powerful paradoxes in Deane's verse, and the image of truth as an unattainable notion, quite often sabotaged by the vagueness and untrustworthiness of hearsay, is one of its most eloquent incarnations. Indeed, a great deal of the anxiety and even the muffled desperation in the tone of Deane's speakers comes from the fact that, in the end, these individuals realise that they have built their understanding of their world upon the fragile pillars of rationality and of the scientific explanation of reality. They also know that simply ditching these parameters cannot solve their problem. In fact, they are quietly aware that the alternative to what they have now is the dangerous entrenching of the self within its own set of arbitrary perceptions and unfounded beliefs. These, when amplified as an ideological daydream, potentially become much more conducive to barbarity. Small wonder that, as a consequence, Deane's poetic subjects often find themselves in the Kafkaesque situation of having to choose between the mousetrap of their existential desperation and the preying cat of clearly unsound decisions.[153]

[153] I am thinking of Kafka's "Little Fable": "'Alas,' said the mouse, 'the world gets smaller every day. At first it was so wide that I ran along and was happy to see walls appearing to my right and left, but these high walls converged so quickly that I'm already in the last room, and there in the corner is the trap into which I must run.'

Indeed, if "[p]oetry is a nearness felt as far" (DEANE, 1983, p. 49), as one of the lines from "The Poetry Clock" suggests, we can say the same about the role of history in Deane's verse. The sensation of poetry and history being so close to the individual that he, ironically, is unable to see them, to gauge their bearing upon his life, is just one of the paradoxes that gives shape to this contradictory relationship. History, and, more specifically, the Northern Irish Troubles, appear in Deane's poems ambivalently, hovering between being closer or more distant from the individual whose life is exposed to it/them. Even though the fragments of the history of the Troubles which are reworked in Deane's verse are not deterministic to the point of suffocating the conscious individuality of his speakers, the fact is that this traumatic history locates their dilemmas in the disturbingly realistic scenario of Northern Irish violence and sectarianism. In that sense, then, Deane's poetry is not idealistic, as a mere formalistic reading might suggest, because all the questions that disturb his speakers are deeply rooted in their observation of their role in that troubled, unstable, arbitrary, vicious and ungovernable Northern Irish society of the second half of the twentieth century.

'But you've only got to run the other way,' said the cat, and ate it." Available at: https://genius.com/Franz-kafka-a-little-fable-annotated (accessed on 25 October 2018, at 18h59).

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 shadows[156] 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.

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[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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8. Appendix

This appendix contains all the Seamus Deane's poems mentioned and/or discussed in my thesis, for easier reference. It also contains the poems by other authors which are mentioned in the historical context chapter. The idea for this appendix was given by Dr. Alvaro Hattnher and Dr. Marcio Scheel during the qualification exam.

Poems mentioned in Chapter One

Whatever You Say Say Nothing

I

I'm writing this just after an encounter
With an English journalist in search of 'views
On the Irish thing'. I'm back in winter
Quarters where bad news is no longer news,

Where media-men and stringers sniff and point,
Where zoom lenses, recorders and coiled leads
Litter the hotels. The times are out of joint
But I incline as much to rosary beads

As to the jottings and analyses
Of politicians and newspapermen
Who've scribbled down the long campaign from gas
And protest to gelignite and sten,

Who proved upon their pulses 'escalate',
'Backlash' and 'crack down', 'the provisional wing',
'Polarization' and 'long-standing hate'.
Yet I live here, I live here too, I sing,

Expertly civil-tongued with civil neighbours
On the high wires of first wireless reports,
Sucking the fake taste, the stony flavours
Of those sanctioned, old, elaborate retorts:

'Oh, it's disgraceful, surely, I agree.'
'Where's it going to end?' 'It's getting worse.'
'They're murderers.' 'Internment, understandably…'
The 'voice of sanity' is getting hoarse.

II

Men die at hand. In blasted street and home

The gelignite's a common sound effect:
As the man said when Celtic won, 'The Pope of Rome
's a happy man this night.' His flock suspect

In their deepest heart of hearts the heretic
Has come at last to heel and to the stake.
We tremble near the flames but want no truck
With the actual firing. We're on the make

As ever. Long sucking the hind tit,
Cold as a witch's and as hard to swallow,
Still leaves us fork-tongued on the border bit:
The liberal papist note sounds hollow

When amplified and mixed in with the bangs
That shake all hearts and windows day and night.
(It's tempting here to rhyme on 'labour pangs'
And diagnose a rebirth in our plight

But that would be to ignore other symptoms.
Last night you didn't need a stethoscope
To hear the eructation of Orange drums
Allergic equally to Pearse and Pope.)

On all sides 'little platoons' are mustering –
The phrase is Cruise O'Brien's via that great
Backlash, Burke – while I sit here with a pestering
Drouth for words at once both gaff and bait

To lure the tribal shoals to epigram
And order. I believe any of us
Could draw the line through bigotry and sham,
Given the right line, *aere perennius*.

III

'Religion's never mentioned here,' of course.
'You know them by their eyes,' and hold your tongue.
'One side's as bad as the other,' never worse.
Christ, it's near time that some small leak was sprung

In the great dykes the Dutchman made
To dam the dangerous tide that followed Seamus.
Yet for all this art and sedentary trade
I am incapable. The famous

Northern reticence, the tight gag of place
And times: yes, yes. Of the 'wee six' I sing
Where to be saved you only must save face

And whatever you say, you say nothing.

Smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us:
Manoeuvrings to find out name and school,
Subtle discrimination by addresses
With hardly an exception to the rule

That Norman, Ken and Sidney signaled Prod,
And Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape.
On, land of password, handgrip, wink and nod,
Of open minds as open as a trap,

Where tongues lie coiled, as under flames lie wicks,
Where half of us, as in a wooden horse
Were cabin'd and confined like wily Greeks,
Besieged with the siege, whispering morse.

IV

This morning from a dewy motorway
I saw the new camp for the internees:
A bomb had left a crater of fresh clay
In the roadside, and over in the trees

Machine-gun posts defined a real stockade.
There was that white mist you get on a low ground
And it was déjà-vu, some film made
Of Stalag 17, a bad dream with no sound.

Is there a life before death? That's chalked up
In Ballymurphy. Competence with pain,
Coherent miseries, a bite and sup:
We hug our little destiny again.

Seamus Heaney

(HEANEY, 1975, p. 52-55)

The Mute Phenomena

(after Nerval)

Your great mistake is to disregard the satire
Bandied among the mute phenomena.
Be strong if you must, your brusque hegemony
Means fuck-all to the somnolent sun-flower
Or the extinct volcano. What do you know
Of the revolutionary theories advanced

By turnips, or the sex-life of cutlery?
Everything is susceptible, Pythagoras said so.

An ordinary common-or-garden brick wall, the kind
For talking to or banging your head on,
Resents your politics and bad draughtsmanship.
God is alive and lives under a stone.
Already in a lost hub-cap is conceived
The ideal society which will replace our own.

Derek Mahon

(MAHON, 1991, p. 64)

The Snow Party

(for Louis Asekoff)

Bashō, coming
To the city of Nagoya,
Is asked to a snow party.

There is a tinkling of china
And tea into china;
There are introductions.

Then everyone
Crowds to the window
To watch the falling snow.

Snow is falling on Nagoya
And farther south
On the tiles of Kyōto.

Eastward, beyond Irago,
It is falling
Like leaves on the cold sea.

Elsewhere they are burning
Witches and heretics
In the boiling squares,

Thousands have died since dawn
In the service
Of barbarous kings;

But there is silence
In the houses of Nagoya
And the hills of Ise.

Derek Mahon

(MAHON, 1991, p. 57)

A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford

Let them not forget us, the weak souls among the asphodels.
- *Seferis, Mythistorema, tr. Keeley and Sherrard*

(for J. G. Farrell)

Even now there are places where a thought might grow –
Peruvian mines, worked out and abandoned
To a slow clock of condensation,
An echo trapped for ever, and a flutter
Of wild-flowers in the lift-shaft,
Indian compounds where the wind dances
And a door bangs with diminished confidence,
Lime crevices behind rippling rain-barrels,
Dog corners for bone burials;
And in a disused shed in Co. Wexford,

Deep in the grounds of a burnt-out hotel,
Among the bathtubs and the washbasins
A thousand mushrooms crowd to a keyhole.
This is the one star in their firmament
Or frames a star within a star.
What should they do there but desire?
So many days beyond the rhododendrons
With the world waltzing in its bowl of cloud,
They have learnt patience and silence
Listening to the rocks querulous in the high wood.

They have been waiting for us in a foetor
Of vegetable sweat since civil war days,
Since the gravel-crunching, interminable departure
Of the expropriated mycologist.
He never came back, and light since then
Is a keyhole rusting gently after rain.
Spiders have spun, flies dusted to mildew
And once a day, perhaps, they have heard something –
A trickle of masonry, a shout from the blue
Or a lorry changing gear at the end of the lane.

There have been deaths, the pale fresh flaking
Into the earth that nourished it;
And nightmares, born of these and the grim

Dominion of stale air and rank moisture.
Those nearest the door grow strong –
'Elbow room! Elbow room!'
The rest, dim in a twilight of crumbling
Untensils and broken pitchers, groaning
For their deliverance, have been so long
Expectant that there is left only the posture.

A half century, without visitors, in the dark –
Poor preparation for the cracking lock
And creak of hinges. Magi, moonmen,
Powdery prisoners of the old regime,
Web-throated, stalked like triffids, racked by drought
And insomnia, only the ghost of a scream
At the flash-bulb firing-squad we wake them with
Shows there is life yet in their feverish forms.
Grown beyond nature now, soft food for worms,
They lift frail heads in gravity and good faith.

They are begging us, you see, in their wordless way,
To do something, to speak on their behalf
Or at least not to close the door again.
Lost people of Treblinka and Pompeii!
'Save us, save us', they seem to say,
'Let the god not abandon us
Who have come so far in darkness and in pain.
We too had our lives to live.
You with your light meter and relaxed itinerary,
Let not our naïve labours have been in vain!

Derek Mahon

(MAHON, 1991, p. 62-63)

Homecoming

Has bath and shave,
clean shirt etc.,
full of potatoes,
rested, yet
badly distraught
by six-hour flight
(Boston to Dublin)
drunk all night
with crashing bore
from Houston, Tex.,
who spoke at length
of guns and sex.

Bus into town
and, sad to say,
no change from when
he went away
two years ago.
Goes into bar,
affixes gaze
on evening star.
Skies change but not
souls change; behold
this is the way
the world grows old.
Scientists, birds,
we cannot start
at this late date
with a pure heart,
or having seen
the pictures plain
be ever innocent again.

Derek Mahon

(MAHON, 1991, p. 26)

Afterlives

(for James Simmons)

1.
I wake in a dark flat
To the soft roar of the world.
Pigeons neck on the white
Roofs as I draw the curtains
And look out over London
Rain-fresh in the morning light.

This is our element, the bright
Reason on which we rely
For the long-term solutions.
The orators yap, and guns
Go off in a back street;
But the faith does not die

That in our time these things
Will amaze the literate children
In their non-sectarian schools
And the dark places be
Ablaze with love and poetry
When the power of good prevails.

What middle-class twits we are
To imagine for one second
That our privileged ideals
Are divine wisdom, and the dim
Forms that kneel at noon
In the city not ourselves.

2.
I am going home by sea
For the first time in years.
Somebody thumbs a guitar
On the dark deck, while a gull
Dreams at the mast-head
The moon-splashed waves exult.

At dawn the ship resembles, turns
In a wide arc to back
Shuddering up the grey lough
Past lightship and buoy,
Slipway and dry dock
Where a naked bulb burns;

And I step ashore in a fine rain
To a city so changed
By five years of war
I scarcely recognize
The places I grew up in,
The faces that try to explain.

But the hills are still the same
Grey-blue above Belfast.
Perhaps if I'd stayed behind
And lived it bomb by bomb
I might have grown up at last
And learnt what is meant by home.

Derek Mahon

(MAHON, 1991, p. 50-51)

Casualty

Its decline was gradual,
A sequence of explorations
By other animals, each
Looking for the easier way in –

A surgical removal of the eyes,

A probing of the orifices,
Bitings down through the skin,
Through tracts where the grasses melt,

And the bad air released
In a ceremonious wounding
So slow that more and more
I wanted to get closer to it.

A candid grin, the bones
Accumulating to a diagram
Except for the polished horns,
The immaculate hooves.

And this no final reduction
For the ribs began to scatter,
The wool to move outward
As though hunger still worked there,

As though something that had followed
Fox and crow was desperate for
A last morsel and was
Other than the wind or rain.

Michael Longley

(LONGLEY, 2006, p. 51)

Ceasefire

I

Put in mind of his own father and moved to tears
Achilles took him by the hand and pushed the old king
Gently away, but Priam curled up at his feet and
Wept with him until their sadness filled the building.

II

Taking Hector's corpse into his own hand Achilles
Made sure it was washed and, for the old king's sake,
Laid out in uniform, ready for Priam to carry
Wrapped like a present home to Troy at daybreak.

III

When they had eaten together, it pleased them both
To stare at each other's beauty as lovers might,
Achilles built like a god, Priam good-looking still

And full of conversation, who earlier had sighed:

IV

‘I get down on my knees and do what must be done
And kiss Achilles’ hand, the killer of my son.’
Michael Longley

(LONGLEY, 2006, p. 225)

War and Peace

Achilles hunts down Hector like a sparrowhawk
Screeching after a horror-struck collared-dove
That flails just in front of her executioner, so
Hector strains under the walls of Troy to stay alive.
Past the windbent wild fig tree and the lookout
Post they both accelerate away from the town
Along a cart-track as far as double well-heads
That gush into the eddying Scamander, in one
Warm water steaming like smoke from a bonfire,
The other running cold as hailstones, snow water,
Handy for the laundry-cisterns carved out of stone
Where Trojan housewives and their pretty daughters
Used to rinse glistening clothes in the good old days,
On washdays before the Greek soldiers came to Troy.

Michael Longley

(LONGLEY, 2006, p. 310)

Count

My only problem is your death
When the radio was stuttering
Over breakfast in this flat,
The predicted west gale welting
Around our postage stamp garden,
A fat crow crouched under the wall,

And the early morning warmth
Dazed, an impractical consciousness
Footering with cups and toast laid
In their apparent order,
When first I heard your name.
It sounded crazy, somehow or other

As incoherent as a dream:

Your name, age, place of birth,
And then the on the spot commentary
Reasoning details of why and how they
Waited in a car for you coming out
Of a huckster shop with cigarettes

And pumped six bullets: five when you
Sprawled on the street. It's hard to
Make that count. The boy that did it
Was a few years younger. Twenty years,
Six bullets, nine in the morning.
I toy like a child with these numbers.

Gerald Dawe

(DAWE, 2008, p. 35)

1974

It's all old hat now – the time
We just missed the Provo bombs in Coleraine,
Final year exams during the Workers' Strike,
And meeting up again under the huge dome
Of the Central Library in sealed-off Belfast –
We were starlings flying by the night.

Gerald Dawe

(DAWE, 2008, p. 37)

Border-Crossing

For Joe Bradley

Underground just the managed turf
Breasted into slabs for the cornerstone
Of our ritual fire. I walk around
Knowing hardly a soul. The kids,

Their keen faces turned towards Dublin,
Think I'm French. A friend retorts
In Irish and they refrain in
A preciously broken Irish

For we come as old-style wanderers
On foot, self-conscious and eager –
To watch a cleft-footed mule hike
A load up some crazy laneway

And wait until dawn before going back,
When the day will be bright
And no furtive checkpoints appear
Out of nowhere overnight.

We go back to where people die
For an Ireland of eighteen hundred
And something, and have my noon
Settled again in the city's dereliction.

Gerald Dawe

(DAWE, 2008, p. 25)

Poems by Seamus Deane

Poems from *Gradual Wars*

Fourteen Elegies

ONE

What else was left? He had
Become used to his death
As much as to his youth.
This was a measure of truth.

Ink fleeing upward in water
From old letters, poems
Torn thunderously across
Delicately defined his loss.

It was not of love. He had wife
And children. But his fingers
Searched in his shrill typewriter
For the lamentable note for his life,

Lusting lightly for release.
A swift bird-chatter
Like hail on the windows
Or a child sprung out of his sleep…

And so
The poem shudders
On to the sheet.

TWO

Would love
Never stop? Would it
Have everything? Would
The frugal light that showed
As in a wave ever sink?
Would we still be
Watchful under the fauve
Flower-lit resilience of the sea
When all come to nothing?
And soft as a songbird's throat
Moving, as well fell with the wave,
Would we have heard
The mild animals of silence
Round the roots of language stir?

THREE

Whatever you call it,
It comes as a second thought,
Almost an aftermath.
Routine as water in the bath
Beginning to detonate,
Or as spray in a raised lace
Flung like blood across the face.

Nothing prohibits the sense of death
When we are so exposed.
The bulb darkens and after
We hear the explosion,
Guerilla laughter.
The window savours the shock,
And the red startled sopranos

Of the sirens settle
To a blue yap. Whatever you call it,
Night after night we consume
The noise as an alcoholic
Drinks glass after glass until his voice
Is hurled like a flaw
Into his numbed palate.

FOUR

The Pearl

It could never stop. It would
Go on, drifting through the wave
Until it entered the shell,
Irritating the soft flesh
Into a lustrous pearl.

Philandering amidst the scrolls
Of sunlight weaving the water,
It sensed the darkness fill
Those ineducable longings,
Turning to moly or to asphodel

Charmed acres of water
Scented by the hunting moon.
Sensuality, indigoed,
Darkened to love that shimmered
When underwater currents flowed.
He remembered the red snows,
Their wide and sensorial fall
Grossly flecking the girl
With the slight burns of possibility
That were coldly matched in the pearl.

Once altered, it could never stop.
The flake, extinguished, lightless,
Drifted into a pearl. Free
It found its prison and was altered
As an argument by subtlety.

Then it could stop.
The whiteness of this pearl
Flavoured with the delicate paints
Of past kisses dazzles
My sensuality's most vivid taints.

FIVE

To Marion

Exactis sideribus and the sedulous moon
In the wan arms of the dawn…
O lover! How jealous I have become
Of the clumsy world
Where the rain stalks
Endlessly on!

In a bright sheet your skin is woven
Intershot with grief.
How long you have lain here, hoping
Under the dark cope,
Watching for the parting
Of the lips of endless sleep!

The wind runs epidemic in the grass
In a wild sibilant rumour.
Your mouth draws on my breath
And sighs me, sidereal; o tremor
Of light quenching in the glass,
In what fading register you murmur!

SIX

After Derry, 30 January 1972

Lightnings slaughtered
The distance. In the harmless houses
Faces narrowed. The membrane
Of power darkened
Above the valley,
And in a flood of khaki
Burst. Indigoed
As rain they came
As the thunder radioed
For a further
Haemorrhage of flame.

The roads died, the clocks
Went out. The peace
Had been a delicately flawed
Honeymoon signaling
The fearful marriage
To come. Death had been
A form of doubt.
Now it was moving
Like a missionary
Through the collapsed cities
Converting all it came among.

And when the storm passed
We came out of the back rooms
Wishing we could say
Ruin itself would last.
But the dead would not
Listen. Nor could we speak

Of love. Brothers had been
Pitiless. What could ignite
This sodden night?
Let us bury the corpses.
Fast. Death is our future

And now is our past.
There are new children
In the gaunt houses.
Their eyes are fused.
Youth has gone out
Like a light. Only the insects
Grovel for life, their strange heads
Twitching. No one kills them
Anymore. This is the honeymoon
Of the cockroach, the small
Spiderless eternity of the fly.

SEVEN

First it was the gloom
Of childhood. Linoleum and wood,
A subtle idiom, breathed
And understood. Then,
Water, air, sunlight,
Territories of white and green. Night's
Radar, sleeplessness, salt-water peal.

Under the pen the lines
Curled to an iris. There is no exit
From such flowers. The salt
Of all I learned dried into my speech.
I could sense
Exile, a momentary life,
Radiance! O my life, what ruin!

The rats undermining the house,
The police plunging like animals,
The dream of teeth
Shining through sleep,
A brutal verboten face.
The tongue searching the lips
For tenderness. Peace.

Peace is all I prayed
But with rigour, no hopelessness;
The room heard my breath.
The flowers on the wallpaper
Mourned unflinchingly. Death,

O sudden death, nothing
Is as instant as immortality.

And still the mice scratched
In the wall, time
Held history up like so many candles
In a race of shadows.
Ghetto grease burned like resin
And I went up the stairs of the dream
Until the lights failed and the smells
Pungent as flames sang out.
Idioms flared in the new
Frictions of a forgotten syntax.
The named dead rose,
The stairs vanished,
And in my sleep
My voice broke from its throes.

EIGHT

The afternoons hung
Like a water bead,
Morning came as a shock,
Cigarettes burned my fingers.
The hours opened and closed
Like a lock.

How was it to come?
I was sowing the room
With memories. The clock
Hands itched. I returned
Through sympathetic territories
Alive with crop.

The tables shimmered
Under the flowering lamps,
The chairs welled
In their wood, the senses
Rose delicately over
The half-quelled

Odour of trees.
How far in could I reach?
Could all the artifice
Of sense be restored
To a mere possibility,
The faint forest precipice

I came upon

Night after night
When a quicker breath
Heralded the fall
Into a final form –
The furnished room of death?

NINE

To all at No. 38

I saw castles fall
And work up in streets
Of mean houses.

The breadman in winter,
The smoking loaves
That needed a miracle

Of distribution. A sick man
In a Rembrandt darkness.
The nauseous hands

Plucking the flowers
From his Elysian quilt.
Tommy Trinder on the B.B.C.

Joked about Fulham
(of which he was a director)
Languishing in the doldrums

Of the English Football League.
‘England hath need of thee’.
(No inside forward ever equaled

Peter Doherty). All stations
Belonged to Britain, or to the Cross,
Or to the R. U. C.

I was prisoner without a cause;
The special powers of priests
And policemen need no laws

Beyond themselves. If I got free
One night in a hundred
It was within the walls

Of those Spanish castles,
Or it was on a bank of type
Keeling over our faces

In the knuckled cinemas
Of grief. I sought
Unimaginable streets

Whose silent movies I would
Fill with the sound of clayless
Feet. Whatever there was of dream

Fell into morning where the laws
Were different. Walls were walls.
Imagination hung above the street

And came down to earth for a cause,
Like a dropping hawk
Foundering on empty claws.

TEN

For Sean Cassidy, d. 24/2/1972

When you have everything,
When the high tense of your blood
Beats in your arm
And the steep migraine
Rises in salvoes
Of silence, when the unborn

Child stirs in the wet sling
Between the hinted bones,
Let there be murder in your eyes
For all betrayals,
Watch the stones

Become mossed in their treachery,
Keep the life up,
Startle the spies
Of conscience, catch the scouts
Of fear's army, be vigilant,

Watch the mysterious purity
Of love hinged on pain
Closing inward as gently
As the assassin's door.
O Victim. Of all loneliness

There is no end. You must believe
To breed and kill more.

ELEVEN

All the signs of war
World and local,
Lay around the natural
Landscape; that prior
Flash, kerb thunder,
The shivered night.
It was more sudden
And it went as far
As loving someone
At first sight.

Now unless I feel
Attrition as our strategy,
I cannot edge nearer you.
Violence denatures
What once was fidelity.
Nor need this be wrong.
Look! The razors
Of perception are now
So honed they cut
The lying throat of song.

TWELVE

The light gibbets the mirrors,
The moon watches the moulded clouds like an eye.
The mouth of the phone gazes,
The door handle is not moving,
The crypts of water sigh.

Cancel the light, hood the mirrors,
Let the birds of fright fly,
Minervae of the gloom
Before the unilateral moon
Nightingales the listening rooms
Where the unhooked phones lie.

What mills upon the glass
But the ravished green of Spring
Shaken by April while the light
Is voiced within the daffodil?
Nothing as tender, not even
The night-train whistle vanishing

For the listener in the bedroom
Painting out the lost chinoiserie
Of his wonder – a country scene,

Flick of the river and the stream
Of silken green where like a phoenix
He hurtles upward on a cryptic screen.

THIRTEEN

To Dermot Fenlon

Sometimes even the birds
Strange as martlets, tense
On the heraldic field of air,

Sorrow rampant, when I sense
You are gone. To Death,
Australia, into the purpureal waters

Of grief, the small scallops
Of fixity, the surds of forever
Inching upwards, a pastoral clangour

Of bells, Swiss miniature
Of perfection, picture-postcard
Depth. There is no realism

For loss. I am the Duc de Berry
Of this kingdom. My grief
Is royal and has the redolence

Of the small Hours of silk
Whose odd perspective warns
Here is a true collector's piece.

FOURTEEN

Who would become
The voyeur killed in error,
The hardboiled possessor of joys
Or the subtle one
Who mindlessly began the ploys?

The carbon copies of our love
Are photographed in every room
And xeroxed out in every post,
Tremulously accurate,
Is every word we ever wrote.

I don't fear the pimp,
Standardizer by the terror

Of money; nor the whore
Who knows just what she does.
Forgive her. I fear more

The ghost that comes by the wall,
The patterned face upon the curtain,
The sight that can unhinge
The stable doors of the sty
And maraud for revenge.

For I have not become
The voyeur killed in error
Nor the others. I enjoy
Hunting instead the subtle one
Who haunts the gross Hamlets, man and boy.

The Thirtieth Lie

' – Ah, Seigneur! donnez-moi la force et le courage
De contempler mon coeur et mon corps san dégoût!'
Baudelaire, Un voyage à Cythère

I

And in this thirtieth year
I stand untrained and yet untried,
Unready still and so in fear
Of my trial. Nothing clear

And yet I have at times applied
For pardon. Perhaps it's near,
The trial for having lied and lied:
Perhaps it's past; that lie's been tried.

And upon this thirtieth year
I feel the prosecutor smile
To see the list fall into line
That blow by blow makes twenty-nine.

II

(For which, with what intensity,
Do I give or take a rap?)
Kafka's Attic; Myth; and Junk;
The Bureaucrat, Administrator;
Nazi; Angst; and Agitator;
Unionist and Tory, Swine;
Extremist, Fenian, Serving, Time?
(Fifteen different kinds of token

At which to tip my cap.)
Marxist, Maoist and Cuban,
Marcuse, Adorno, Jerry Rubin;
Hitler, Papa Doc, Dictator,
Alienation, Human Time,
Freud, Treblinka, Wittgenstein!
(Fourteen different kinds of slogan
I spat out, for years, like pap.)

Derry

I

The unemployment in our bones
Erupting on our hands in stones;

The thought of violence a relief,
The act of violence a grief;

Our bitterness and love
Hand in glove.

II

At the very most
The mind's eye
Perceives the ghost
Of the hands try
To timidly knock
On the walled rock.
But nothing will come
And the hands become
As they insist
Mailed fists.

III

The Scots and English
Settling for the best.
The unfriendly natives
Ready for the worst.
It has been like this for years
Someone says,
It might be so forever, someone fears,
Or for days.

Departure

When she was gone there was
Little left. The room was
Bare as a harbour, there was
A blade of cold searching my ribs
Though my head burned.
The future was only beginning,
And inwardly my life,
In a waiting profile, turned.

The closing door below sounded
Like a wing folding
Darkness in. The light in the window
Faded to a flower.
This was the oldest sorrow
Only beginning, the cry
Of the siren bleeding to the hospital,
The stanched death tomorrow.

I hear your feet on the stairs
Yet, descending forever
Like a single word dropping
Monosyllabic as a stone
Self-contained in its doom.
Grief throws up its arms
And the shadow rises
To murder me in our room.

Blind Man's Bluff

The streaming air booms
Collaterally and daily round;
I am enamoured of this sound,
For since I cannot see
I have upturned senses.

Clumsiness rolls back like stones,
Fresh vibrant acres are revealed.
Silences are fingerprints
Relinquished by noise.
Voices are sudden as phones.

I feel small disadvantage. The sun
Is strangely congruent with light;
That puzzles. It lacks tone.
It's only when I touch your face
I could scream for my sight.

Chanson

After Malherbe's 'Qu'autres que vous soient desirées'

That others should be desired,
Others adores,
That I appreciate;
But that your beauty is equalled
Which exists in such store,
Annihilates.

That a man in your power
Relish his chore,
I appreciate.
But that my love is equalled
Which exists in such store,
Annihilates.

That women don't mind
Their cruelties retold,
I appreciate;
But that none can touch
Your pitch of cold,
Annihilates.

That others suffer too
From your rigorous laws,
I appreciate;
But that their complaints
Are so divorced from their cause,
Annihilates.

That a man pay good court
For the reward he awaits,
I appreciate;
But that as in my hopeless case
He too won't abate,
Annihilates.

That good sense in the end
Will find me a cure,
I appreciate;
But that to such a proud service
It might me inure,
Annihilates.

Death alone can put an end
To my pain and your law.
That I appreciate;
But that not even martyrdom

Unclenches love's claw,
Annihilates.

On the Mimicry of Unnatural Objects

Look at this configuration; at this
Tactile (almost) acoustic of my mind.
Would or could you guess, (or scorn),
Such words could agglutinate,
Such thought exfoliate
And organically eviscerate
From the whorling migraine
That pulses round the acorn
Death plants in the brain?

There are nights I walk the room
As if I bore, vessel-wise,
Enough nitroglycerine
To make it impossible
For anyone to recognize
What would be left if I jolted.
I should not have the door bolted
Nor the curtains drawn. I should hope,
A hothoused, blacked-out heliotrope.

So I look at this configuration. Look.
It has risen like python sand on glass
Vibrating to the bow-string's blow,
Each dervish shape an instant vision,
Callyxed and pavonian as snow
That fantastically burgeons
Beneath the rubric of the dark,
In weird, mimic, blafard resurgence.

Landscape into Art

The country lay opulent in emptiness.
A lark staggered on a thermal
And the river lapsed in the distance
Into a sheen. Noise was graded
Down to a silence, and the clouds
Were serene continents passing by.

How plangent were the parishes that lay
Sere and tremendous under the sun!
Children played in a province of shadow,
Gorse wrinkled bitterly in the light,

The sea lowed on the whitened coast
And a jet went whispering by.

In so affronted a landscape I find
Nothing to shelter my face.
I assume a defensive gait
With my arms up and around,
Or crouching at a windbreak wall
I dream of an emptiness I gained.

It was imperial. Total nudity of mind.

Eurydice

My womanhood tolls like a bell
In the doom of my body. The
Darkness feasts on my eyes
And I am aware of the
High footfalling pedigree
Of this silence. Hermes
Touches my arm, my skin
Feathers in shivers and I
Wonder where I am going
And when the doom of my
Womanhood will be still.

Roots

Younger,
I felt the dead
Drag at my feet
Like roots
And at every step
I heard them
Crying
Stop.

Older,
I heard the roots
Snap. The crying
Stopped. Ever since
I have been
Dying
Slowly
From the top.

Northern Ireland: Two Comments

ONE A HUSBAND

History, the angel, was stirred
To turn her face upon us. Bird
Or beast, as she turned,
The streets split and burned.
Homeward she glanced and we cried
At the feathery rush of her wide
And spreadeagling wings
Which the wind has split and flings
So severely back that it seems
She cannot fly. In her face the wind screams.

TWO A WIFE

We see them kill as they have always done,
Imperialists in their khaki slum;
Men who hold a watching brief
For the permanence of grief.
See the street consumed by wind,
Blurred by fire and thinned
To those cadaverous bones
Which the Norwich Union owns?
There is the gaunt power
That sucks men for their marrow.

Avalanche

for Conor

A far-off avalanche
Is calling like a beast.
The snow dreams like cumulus.
Our only baby sleeps.

The lucidities of the peace
That touch his temples
Are like pale flares of water.
The silence of his release

Into a drowning darkness
Came upon us. Our unease
Traduced our sleep. Flowers
Stifle, snow slips, can't breathing cease?

Late that night in a silhouette,

Strange, in a quinquereme,
He crossed to his death before me
Over the black lake of a dream.

Inexhaustibly far, on a slope
He lay until the dark
Loomed on his face.
The avalanche moved; a single bark.

And the snow topples. Obliteratingly
It falls. It has swallowed him so deep
The earth has whitened now for miles.
The snow has drenched my mind with sleep.

Dead Relations

for Maeve, Richard and Joe

There are nights when you all die;
When I lean my lips
On your cold brows

And drink until my mouth
Is white and sorrow
Is a remote and streaking fall

In the white light of a ravine
Which has never been
Sounded. This is not a dream.

I can see it now. You
As always so subtly
Real, I know how

You would speak but
That I must feel
How dead you are

And how your head
So bland and light
Of itself, wants to come

Up on my arms but falls
Back and back.
Your death weighs

Like a ton.

The Last Impact

FIRST BROTHER

You are the loneliest man
In the crowd. You act
Because there is nothing you own.
You live between the throwing
And the thing thrown.
Your solitude is exact.

SECOND BROTHER

To what are we at last turning?
We outface the police and troops,
We leave the cities burning,
And we can go on and on
For as we go we are learning.

Learning a new speech
For the unspeakable act;
The demands the power of hate
Inexorably exacts;
The readiness to wait
For the last impact.

FIRST BROTHER

You come out of the mob,
Its night-face implanted
In a deep sensual fright
In all your limbs and memories,
And your look moves
Into my verse like a light.

A Miracle

In memory of No. 38

Imagine a miracle –
The roads reopening for us
Like scars; the afternoons
Welling dangerously again,
The sound of a storm like blood
In our ears, our mouths salted
With pleasure, the high ruin
Of a tree against a crowded sky.
Imagine.
And a terrible rain

That inebriated the air with the smell
Of rank grass and fear and decay
While we sheltered at a long wall.
And after, imagine our hurry
To get home, blindly, subtly
And avariciously sated
With the darkening shadow of rain.
A miracle.
Like watching again with you the birds
Rise in a dull plumage of sound,
And having the joy of renewal stirred
On that abandoned ground.

Civil War
13 August 1970

The way I feel it coming
Is as a fire with one wing
That is already blackening
My heart;

Or as the blind hammering
Of the trapped crowd
On the closing walls
Of the street;

And the seams of the houses
Splitting in a swarm of cock-
Roaches that riot in an
Alarming silence;

And we are all running
Through a cloud, glimpsing icebergs,
Calling goodbye to disaster
And then hello;

The mirrors curl up like paper
In the rumpling fire;
Sightless we follow the blind
Whose hands

Drum fire from our brittle dread
Blow by saturating blow,
Until it hardens to a cold
Rallentando for the dead.

When it comes darkly over us
I will hold you and say

In disappointed love, ‘Look.
See my face in the wave?’

Smoke Signals in Oregon

Like the Indian in the photoless forest
Which crowds this muffled house,
Fear flits through me leaving
Imagined tracks in the soft
And sucking mud that swarms
In the rain outside my door,
While I wait for the real footstep
To clump on the steps and
For the murderer of my sleep
To shudder into the stiffened core
Of the house like a shadow-stabbing
Presence looming on firelit walls
And vanishing up quickly
As my moving lips close.

Pour out the glimmering coal
That slides off the shovel
In a composite crash and
All night watch it turn to
Flame in soft internal shudders.
In the scuttle the coal crumples
Under my pale face, I see
My origins open as briefly
As a sleeping eye in the
Loaded head of a snake.
With that comes the fear in the belly,
Snake slabbed on the arm, tomahawk
On the rising scalp, the fire
A thick growth, roots antlered.

Death. Could it be so quiet?
It mows over my skin as stealth
Parts the lisping grass,
It darkens in my eyes
As cold grieves in the stiffening
Water, it enters the room
Behind my shoulder and shuts
The door into the wall forever.
The smoke roots hesitate on the coal,
The tree warps in the soaring chimney,
And through the wide American night
The ghost totem mounts in a pillar
Of vague faces; the First Faces;
Faceless; smoke signals for fright.

A Genealogy

for Ciaran

I imagine
The winter past, the sick child
Cured, the meal, half-begun, eaten;
The books, half-read, understood,
The mind, half-grown, weather-beaten;
The heart, half-tamed, gone wild
In a labyrinthine wood
Where all the trees are rooted
In a single clutch of fear,
A spasm that electrocuted
Every branch and made it sere.

I imagined
That wild rout and all the trees
Pulled and torn out of season,
All the wood wrecked out of reason.
But the child's arms round my neck
Reminded me then how despotic
Are the feelings which I freeze
In my radical unease;
How the heart that is broken
Is tamed at last to a neurotic
Sensitivity of leaves.

Return

The train shot through the dark.
Hedges leapt across the window-pane.
Trees belled in foliage were stranded,
Inarticulate with rain.
A blur of lighted farm implied
The evacuated countryside.

I am appalled by its emptiness.
Every valley glows with pain
As we run like a current through;
Then the memories darken again.
In this Irish past I dwell
Like sound implicit in a bell.

The train curves round a river,
And how tenderly its gouts of steam
Contemplate the nodding moon
The waters from the clouds redeem.
Two hours from Belfast
I am snared in my past.

Crusts of light lie pulsing
Diamanté with the rain
At the track's end. Amazing!
I am in Derry once again.
Once more I turn to greet
Ground that flees from my feet.

The Pentacle

'... upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir'

Psalm 45:9

Reduced to solitude enough
I would weep, and were I wise
I would purify that stuff
Dreams are made on down to five
Incorruptible straight choices
To Solomonically divide
Between my sisters and my brothers,
Parents, children and the others.

Then the solitude would come
Without sensuality and I would wish
The choices widened out to six,
Even though it ruled
A mind that, once farouche, divided,
Thought it a mercy to be fooled.
Such sovereign order, like an insult,
Sticks.

Now may I weep. I have no choice.
The interregnum yields to sheer
Autocracy of self and voice
In a sixth sense clear,
Free of rack and free of noise,
And prophetically as crowned
As the queen in gold of Ophir.

Knowing it

I have been quiet now
For many days. My hands
Lie here, immutable.
Nothing is as opulent
As this freedom.
I am all love
For nothing.

I know objects
As if I were a hand
Holding them.
No one can do
Anything to me.
I'm on my own here,
Alive, exorbitant.

Promise to my Daughter

for Emer

I watched your birth. The
First hands on your head, the
First eyes on your body, the
First city of your voice, the
First separation of your life, the
Abandoned afterbirth. I
Should be dead when you come
To realize my dumb
Wish for your plain love,
Child. The membraned water
Bursts from your exhausted mother
And floods to me a daughter.

My mouth sucks as its mask.
A tremor at my heart
As small as your hand;
As I touch it,
Your light insect clasp
Turns your blind head
To the stress of my love.
Until the slackening of death
Shall come to whiten
With a simple grief
This dark and complicated heart
That shudders like a leaf,
Until then, child, I will be dumb.

Gradual Wars

The frost is stirring, it
Whitens slow and sudden
On the grass. Darkness
Is pierced by it, it
Has the blind focus of a nail shuddering
In the quiet wood
Which is going to
Split as pipes

Choked in ice do;
And whatever shatters
In this cold
Shatters slow and sudden,
Like a writhe of frost,
In stars.
This is the language
That bespeaks
Gradual wars.

Poet's Progress: A Sequence

I

Illness

My past keeps welling through
Darkening my convalescence.
Everything has a sad and roué air.
Mice whisper like pus
In the gentle eardrum of the wall.
The room is still as a nutshell.
I have no wish to be better.

Objects are inescapable.
Smells wriggle on my skin.
I think dark hands
Are feeling for sockets
To make my phone jump
To my hand for relief.
Talk and I won't answer.

Unicorns, embarrassed
In their chastity
Raise one hoof and mourn
In the room lavender
With sin. Everything
Is their shadow.
I have turned utterly within.

II

Last Trip

It's this journey now. Not yet for us
the crossing of a slant shade
of thwarted water or forest,

the green tone of a glade,
the pounded earth, the spade
driven like a decision
into the ground. Not yet for us.

We think of it as a long grade
travelled upward by a sound
(the distance elided like a vowel)
metronimically bound
to the clock of our senses
like a bomb to its device.
Such a journey is precise,

has an end which is itself,
(travelling's an insufficient term);
or, as suitcases upon a shelf,
the tidal station, the train-
whistle vanishing, figures
asleep in simulated slaughter,
politics shifting a shade

beyond, the shade once flesh
caught in the time flash like the Fat Man
at the booth, like the image in the Troll's
Mirror, music shrieking at the hardened
face. All so much noise and candystripe
swallowed as his landfalling shadow
deepens. The journey is all. The deep mountain.

III

Elegy

He was some kind of a screwball who believed
Unwillingly in God; no, not in a God,
Or in the God; but in God.

I have seen him watch the rain
Blowing endlessly down the steepening sky,
Looking as if he were spattered with the blood

Of his childhood, as if all the inert
Natural forces that bound him
Turned to anguish as they touched

The infinite pale degrees of his skin;
Acting as if every murder
Sobered to print in the newspapers

Was his stupid fault, result of his lies,

As if the dark face of the race
Were reflected perfectly in his eyes,

His eyes! The presumption! Christ,
Who died for everybody, had less
Pretension. And when he wrote

He made a planned withdrawal
In stanzas from every battleground,
Hunched battalions soaked by a long

Surge of frustrating attack. His casualties
Were high. One day, his love for his wife,
Next day, the lost sight of an eye.

And why? Because he saw
A child once, arms around its head,
Beaten by its father for its demands

And he felt the incommunicable dread
In those beating and those beaten hands.
His poems were prayers for the dead.

Great Times Once

It's hard to explain. O don't
Turn over and sleep. I hear
Insects tick in the ground,
And the stairs crack
As the footstepping heat
Fades. I'm waiting for
My blood to blaze, for
A dozen women I know
To nod and florally wave.
These things have happened.
But I can't persuade

You to listen or that they
Were true. The lies
That hide in my eyes,
The waiting that whitens
My hair. I knew
Special things once.
I remember. I was there.
But I've waited too long
And I've lost all my looks
And my grace; too much
To keep up what I imagined
The necessary pace.

But I had great times once.
Remember that, and see
The child looking out of my face.

Poems from *Rumours* (1977)

Rumours

I wish I knew what they
Were saying. I'm never sure
What it is I hear.
I wish I knew
That other language
With the ear
Of infallible reception
Which I bring
To the English of failure.

But I remember too
Your eyes observing
The deserted square
As if they had not seen
The people and the police
There brawling. Something
Else was living
As if the square were filling
With rumours of the perfect sleep.

I can hear now what politics
Is saying to someone who can hear
These rumours start.
'Heaven has a sweet tooth
For the choicest mortals.
A God is always weighing
The receptive heart
Behind deaf portals
Against the feather of truth.'

A Deeper Exile

Thrown over, I must watch again
The mime of clouds moving
Under a high, stabilized sky.

Out at sea where the horizon
Perishes in mists that move
Foggily through the water mirrors

I look too, projecting my ache
For you as a voice into the huge
Auditorium where loneliness is no more

That mood multiplied in the forms
Of natural process. The anatomy
Of perception on days like this,

When change mimics changelessness,
Reveals the pathetic fallacy
Of my response to the world's

Conducive beauty. Yet there is
No force to such acknowledgement.
For the clouds and foggy mists

Disguise the stabilities which
Produce their transience. And I,
Lost in the heights of that sky,

Knowing the puissant demarcations
Horizons make, go further yet
And see in all this race and chase

Of passing time, the agelessness
Of seas and skies, yet sense
A deeper exile out of time

When I think how, hemmed by weather,
The last time we talked together,
You smiled at its inconstancy. Never

Did sea or sky yet dramatise
The alarum of perception that perceives
The changing climates of a lover's eyes,

The eternity of lostness in a face.

Migration

Someone is migrating.
He is going to the fifth
Season where he can hear
The greenness planning its leaves
And the landbreaks and the water
Co-ordinating the moment of foam.
He is going to seek his parents,
Looking in the history of their bodies
For what he inherited. He is migrating

Out of his nativities,
His tongue still undelivered, waiting
To be born in the word home.

Fording the River

Sunday afternoon and the water
Black among the stones, the forest
Ash-grey in its permanent dusk
Of unquivering pine. That day
You unexpectedly crossed the river.

It was cold and you quickly shouted
As your feet felt the wet white stones
Knocking together. I had bent
To examine a strand of barbed wire
Looping up from a buried fence

When I heard you shout. And,
There you were, on the other side,
Running away. In a slow puncturing
Of anticipation I shivered
As if you had, unpermitted, gone for ever.

Gone, although you were already in the middle
Coming back; I picked up
Your shoes with a sense that years
Had suddenly decided to pass.
I remembered your riddle

On the way up here. ‘ “Brother or sister
I have none, but that man’s father
Is my father’s son.” Who am I
Talking about?’ About my son,
Who crossed cold Lethe, thought it Rubicon.

A Schooling

Ice in the school-room, listen,
The high authority of the cold
On some November morning
Turning to fragile crystals
In the Government milk
I was drinking and my world
All frost and snow, chalk and ice;
Quadratic equations on the board
Shining and shifting in white
Isosceles steps. In that trance
What could I know of his labour?

I, in my infinitesimally perceptive dance,
Thought nothing of the harbour
Where, in his fifth hour,
Waist-deep in water,
He laid cables, rode the dour
Iron swell between his legs
And maybe thought what kind of son,
An aesthetician of this cold,
He had, in other warmth, begot?
But there's ice in the school-room,
Father. Listen. The harbour's empty.
The Government's milk has been drunk.
It lies on the stomach yet, freezing,
Its kindness, inhuman, has sunk
In where up starts the feeling
That pitches a cold in the thought
Of authority's broken milk crystals
On the lips of the son you begot.

The Broken Border

'The only road we can take now
To get us home crosses and recrosses
The border, making a loop
Of quiet fields where there are
Strange, scattered boulders
That look as if a meaning
Might have existed once for their exploded
Circlings. I don't know. But we
Could talk about that on the way back.'

'It should be simple, really,
To say why a great stroke of blood
Passed through me when I first
Heard you were sick. Whispers
From our colloquy among the stones
On those border fields with the dark
Approaching, reach me now as
At last the tearing of some silken
Courtesy which it took so many

Patient, later years to weave.
I would unravel all of this,
Take and retake it all apart,
Listening for the first tremor,
The disturbance at your heart;
The deep alto rumour of evening
Surrounding the sharp tenor
Of your son's questioning,

Father. I wanted to penetrate

More than the broken border
And the half-submerged circle
Of stones. 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?
What we both understood easily
In that loop of fields, where the stones
Cropped up and the border
Suffered extinction among the night's
First singular noises, was our own
Compatibility with the scene. Never alone
Then, since it relives us now, in these our two voices.'

Summer Letter

Tenderness that summer was retained
As its solicitor by love whose dreams
Passed high and silent as the clouds
Across the light-embowered sky.

It wrote for pardon and relief
From whose dreams it had of you and me
In silent inks on whispered sheets
Of paper haunted by the watermarks

Of grief. Enhanced remoteness
Of official style; a damaged summer
Settled out of summer's court.
This stormy heaven made the summer short.

When all is over, the autumnal marks
Will come in thrush shades upon the trees.
Solicitude, unsummered, will have tendered
His resignation, penned inward as a cloud

Haunting the widowed waters of pity
After the inks of love have dried.
This letter will be a picture of stillness,
Wave-mark of summer, our water-shadowed sky.

Unsung

Lonelier than Lesbos, that shore stretched
Round from Lisfannon in a postcard sweep.

Above it always a lark, deceitful wretch,
His nest invisible as he, limpid weep-weep,

Morning or evening in the blue museum
Of those Kodak heavens. He would keep

Watching after it had left our sight,
Looking for the source in that clear air

Of a melody that we could scarcely hear.
Echo. Its own echo. Even the night,

Which is ghostlier now, had its own recourse
To noise and music for which no source

Revealed itself. Like his own presence,
For he was the very Idea of a father,

Oddly proximate to daughter and to son,
Not fully himself to any one.

Now after all I have dwelt upon,
The aphasia of rocks, the sea giving tongue,

I wish I could have become
The true source of his fatherhood.

To what inaudible shore must he have come
To sing forth at last what he had never sung?

Going Northward

Going northward,
I would watch the fields
Falling below the sun
Into increasing darkness.

Light has sculpted
A deep silence between mountains
And a leaf on the windscreen
Shudders like an autumn compass,

North, north, north.
I am unwilling to go further.
But your death has brought

The fields, sodden with light,

Flooding between a gap
In the mountains with the bruised
Tang of the sea.
And I must go on,

My anxiety like a radar
Scanning the landscape
For the distance between feelings,
Across death,

Northward.
The moment I sense you
I will send out warnings
Like the murmur of the sea

Threatening behind mountains
Where I must go now,
Northward, until it thaw
Into cries coming sharper, more constantly.

A Fable

for Thomas Kilroy

To take an unmeasured leap
from a ladder through a lobe
of glass and still get shot
as a house-painter did
recently in Belfast,
is perhaps a form of flight
that I would, were I able,
offer you as a fable.
But it is in fighting
out such images that infer
Fate is unable to err

in its aim even once
among the long blades of glass
that leap for the surrendered
body in their high
instantaneous chimes,
that I am writing
out this report
of the incident. There is
a question of Fate
to be considered, but only
after the stricter question

of hate. Who fired the gun?
And why should the fable
not act in curt accord
with the fact? To fall
through the surrounding glass
and to have the delicate
earbones taken away
by a bullet, to feel fear,
run, become the stricken deer,
is an available form of defeat
we have too easily learned.

Look at the place, at the young
gunman. Face his face.
Forget the brilliance of flight,
admit the kudos he earned
for having killed a Teague,
feel the feeling he learned
at that unfeeling age.
Don't think of it as Fate
Taking its toll of the race.
Don't try to be doubly kind
to killer and killed.

If all hold it in mind
that killers will be killed, that
the clear-sighted see the blind
inscrutable face of Fate
swarming with acne
and adolescent hate, then all should find
truer reason for despair
in the story. There is ground
for this when we believe
Fate seeks the pursued.
True. But even truer,

with the pursuer Fate is found.
I can imagine unmeasured
glass and the great rivers
it runs into when a man
bursts storming through its skin.
And I can also imagine
his head, bloodied, and the bullet
lodged as thunder within;
and the chance that tomorrow
the killer will hear glass bells
breaking; and that Fate

has nothing to do with him.
This is my point in writing:

not the admiration of fighting
or flight, which is for many;
but the desire to be no fewer
than both pursued and pursuer.
Whatever image you lob,
Someone comes on still holding
a gun. He has to be got,
that unfinished youth who fires the shot.
I write to finish the job.

The Pander

My moonlight pander was a saxophone
That squiggled in the higher registers
And made the street lamp stand out more alone,
Our shadows thrown back from its bright ring,
Young and uneasy shapes, dark visitors

Who vanished in the pool of light
Where the knives of longing sharpened
As depths became surfaces and the night
Shook its foils in a voice that would sing
Under the saxophone and sometimes darkened

Inward towards feeling. This could bring
Tears to the eyes, fury to the hands,
As the shadows bunched and broke in clans.
Lost pander. In other foreign rooms
I've heard your deep contralto stir

Those lamplit shapes and felt them register
A presence, sharp and briefly sinister,
As those shadows rose from their haunches
And came into the light like grooms
Bloodstained from their honeymoons,

Squatters from the street's subconscious
Rising in *son et lumière* to a show of knives
That leave real scars upon the skin,
Designed by their imaginary wives
Who pandered, singing, to the blood within.

The Victim

for Brian Friel

There was no city once and all those streets
Were idler spaces where routine had walked.

Grandfather owned them, mother too,
With the avarice that poverty can know:
The water shining in the horse's trough,
The swollen jars in sweetie shops,
The history of backlanes that altered

From the geography of childhood fields.
And all was fixed and objects stared
At older people who were part of there.
But though I knew them both, they would dissolve
Out of their shapes and lose their cowed
Assumptions. Their world was a cloud
That changed each time I turned to look;

It interfused with each resolve
To leave until a covert language took
Possession of my mind and made me feel
The foreigner who yet possessed the real
Touch for love the native always knows,
The tang of territory, the zodiac
Of signs, gangland's sudden close

Upon an enemy as though God had made a sign
That this guys's language wasn't theirs or mine,
Though he said nothing other than what he wore
Which cut his body out for other classes
Or sliced his face in two with horn-rimmed glasses.
His sobbing especially was a stolen noise.
He sobbed and ran down gauntlet hill

His throat working wildly for his voice
Until a wall became his cul-de-sac
As he turned like a stick in water,
Stiff, but its direction slack.
Babied with fear he called for Mother! Mother!
The true falsetto of our feeling cracked
Round him. The street closed for the kill.

The Pleasure Principle

Sometimes the pleasure I have had
Seems so much that I
Would wager that the good
Outweighs the bad.

I could twist the oils
From any dried-out grief.
My wrists could torque it round
To the point where it must weep.

But lately now I find my hands
More fragile than an autumn leaf.
The griefs so twisted round in bands
Have grown tighter and no longer weep.

These paler fingers now scarcely move
On sorrow. Their strength has ebbed away.
What was my pleasure has become a bond
Tightened to a tourniquet.

Bonfire

I

It is too much the way men ask of me
That I understand others too,
And that if I fail, as I do, I do,
That I pray for them instead,
Rather than wish them all as dead
As is or seems their point of view.

If you throw seawood on the fire
The flames are alive with the submarine
Greed of the salt and the cold water,
And these elemental odours wake the room
To their own violent charms.
More in light than with heat they consume

One another. God hungers for situations
That only the devil could invent.
I remember our religious festivals;
Bonfires hanging vulpine on the trees
In long, underworld shadows,
And the crowds, engulfed in the burning, content.

II

Had I been then so shone upon
I might have learned a milder wisdom.
Yet I have burnt each hand
In unison with all those damned
Who warmed themselves each year
By the hot wood and I fear

The colder temper that we gained
Endures more stress than we have strained
To give it. I cannot understand or pray
That what others think should weigh

More than it does. A tree that catches
Weighs no more, burnt, than its ashes.

I wish there were avoiding it
For the condemned
And for the wise.
But who would pretend
Now to advise?
For there must be burning once the fire's lit.

Middle Kingdom

Middle kingdom, where you are
Is where the deepest, most arcane
Dwellings of our senses are.
History is your wall of pain.

Garrison, the planter's warp
In the rebel climate's grain,
Sleep-fortress, wall of class and sex,
Beset by dreams, besought by blame.

The masters of the middle kingdom
Where centuries slip out in a sigh,
Where time has bred into language,
Are conspiring at last to fly

Beyond the codes they have mastered,
Beyond their system-built walls.
Besieged and besiegers are tasting
Truth's vinegar, treason, heart's gall.

Scholar I

I splashed water on my face
And one glabrous drop
Ran down my neck and back
In a zig-zag chill.

As I climbed into bed,
Dazed with reading,
I felt the naked sheet
Sigh for the fool.

Sleep on the glazed eye,
Acrid paste on the tooth –
Is there a book that I
Would not burn for the truth?

Scholar II

I remember at times
How irresponsible I have
Become. No ruling passion
Obsesses me, although passions
Are what I lay among.
I'll know the library in a city
Before I know there is a slum.
I could wish the weight of
Learning would bring me down
To where things are done.

I remember the thief who fell
Half way down the wall
Of the Houghton Library because
His rope broke under the extra
Weight of the Gutenberg Bible.
Perhaps he came from a slum,
Hired to rifle the mint of published
Knowledge too. I could have told him
The difference a book would have made.

Saved him perhaps his broken leg.
Told him the new Faust stories
Of a thousand men who made
The same error and now lie
Under the weight of that beautiful,
Intransitive print. He had to fail.
And now he lies, perhaps for years,
With other slum-children in a jail,
The university of the third degree,
While in other circles move the frail
Inquirers, trailing printed liberty.

Taking the Rap

The Detective Sergeant said that the defendant addressed him when he was kneeling beside the body of the deceased. 'He wanted to be killed,' she said, 'He made himself my parasite and then waited for me to kill him. He was a real joker, he was.' (Newspaper report)

O sir, I could not help but see
How he turned it all to fantasy.
His dream came like a moth that burned
In the light of his intelligence. He turned
The mildest feeling to a test
It had to fail. Even at his best

He wanted something to take a form
That couldn't but do him and me deep harm,
For he was faithless, searching for belief
In me for himself, glad at last to greet
Its non-existence as proof that he was right.
Yet all his fantasy was bright
With figures of live and coloured pride
Which he loved to blanch and then deride
For their fictive flutterings. O sir, he died
A thousand deaths because he lied
About his own innocence. He could not live
Without his fantasies but would not give
Them their own patience. They had to be
Translated into fact immediately;
Smiled always at their evanescence,
Took that gladly for their essence
And left. No sir. He loved not me.
He loved only my incapacity
To love his love. He made it clear
That only to himself was his love dear.

He spoke to me of a wealth
Which he, impoverished, denied himself.
He left me feeling in the end
That I had never learned to spend
My life as life should have been spent.
But love was only the month's rent
He paid for his own bleak room
Where he live alone as a moon
That has lost its planet. He had to find
Someone to pay for his blind
Sojourn. No sir, I would guess
I was landlady to his loneliness.
Ask me no more, sir, on how he died;
He was murdered and he was a suicide,
He was a joker who had made a bet
That the last laugh was the first he'd get.
He cared for nothing, no-one. Even I
Can see that now. Out of a blank sky
He whistled fire on his head and rent
Me open to burn him in his cement.

The Brethren

Arraigned by silence, I recall
The noise of lecture-rooms,
School refectories and dining hall,
A hundred faces in a hundred spoons,
Raised in laughter or in prayer bent,

Each distorted and each innocent.

Torrential sunlight falling through the slats
Made marquetries of light upon the floor.
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 Witherspoon
Sang under the needle old laments
Of careless love and the indifferent moon,
Evoked the cloudy drumbrush scents
Of Negro brothels while our Plymouth Brethren,
Two doors down, sat sunk in heaven.

Stupor Sunday, stupor mundi. What was to come?
The plaints that were growing
Their teeth in the jaws of their aquarium
Sunday's splashless, deep-sown
Peace? What if it were shattered?
Our noise was life and life mattered.

Recently I found old photographs
Fallen behind the attic water-tank
And saw my friends were now the staffs
Of great bureaucracies. Some frames stank
Of mildew, some were so defaced
That half the time I couldn't put a face

On half of them. Some were dead.
The water had seeped through a broken housing,
Had slowly savaged all those eyes and heads.
I felt its rusted coldness dousing
Those black American blues-fired tunes,
The faces echoed in those hammered spoons.

Children Sleeping

Presences. Innocence of apple,
Winter storm. How did we come
To such deep-hearted fall?
Each in his garden, though
One rib-girl, fast in her own ruth,
Is dreamt by brothers and by father
In the aching side-space
Under the heart, preserve for truth.
The faculties fallen, instinct all their grace.

The night-wind bends the shadows
Of the trees across their faces
Abandoned so in sleep. The ill-lit fruit
Subdues its carnal sharpness
While groups of stars recede
In fading orchards through the skies.
Our shadows too remain articulate
Upon the wall. Love, in its season,
Bends with this falling, child-fallen breathing.

Epiphany

Sounds playing truant from their bell
Faded around us as we trudged to Mass
Through a swarming, an inebriate snow.
The steeple of slamming iron let fall
Delicate ikons of tinkling glass

Which alter-boys shook out again like foil
At consecration. The stations of the cross,
Plastered in fourteen friezes on the walls,
Kept their fixed profiles on the full-faced rib
While our heads bowed before the stall

Where Christ took up his five-point-star career
From small beginnings. 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,

We yet concede nothing. Christ hung,
A phantom sound whose rumoured birth
Brought hundreds a Roman and unjust desert.
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. Piety and rage
Change their ratios with age.
Childhood and perfumes of a holy day
Recall our future each Epiphany.

Strange Country

It is too simple
To say I miss you.

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
Where the insensate birds

Fly endlessly, bearing the whole
Weight and total light of a sky

Falling endlessly and piecemeal
Into the indifferent trees.

It is too simple
To say I miss you,

For here the forest stays
The sky and resumes its leaves.

The Poetry Clock

Half-way between an atom and a star,
Confirmed by legends, we consider these –
Parental fostering, childhood –
Rinsed in the sunlight of our distances
From what we were and even what we are.
Poetry’s a nearness felt as far.

And yet it’s nothing. All we supervise
Is observed from centres that forever flee
Towards black enigmas – parricide,
Unholy sabbaths, uncensored instances
Of what we might have been if truly wise.
I speak of love and hate, of you and me.

Still, whatever sense may yet be ours
Of what the universe may truly be
Is no concern when we attempt
To live beyond long, insomniac nights.
What we do best is what it’s best to do,
To let this clock interrogate the hours.

We meantime speak of us as we may never be.

Flash Points

I
The malt bread, butter, the baby,
The grill glaring at the meat.

At such times I feel nauseated
Wanting nothing actual
(Except love) to eat.

Then O for a radio; soft music,
The fawning tempos of grief!

II

The toxic sleeps of the just,
The confetti of the well-informed,
The bright buttons of wit
Opening so many coats to me –
The perfect truths of the deformed.

III

What a bitch is Necessity,
That whoreson mother,
And her glib, lapidary son
Invention whose growth she cannot
Stint. I'd recommend her prevention
For the sake of ease; nothing would be as pure
As her absence; better than any cure.

IV

Imagining your departure there was
Sleep, the last refuge.
Tears, another. And after
That, time, the deluge.

V

The small aeroplane
Leaving into a high
Male rain, its cabin
Holding you in the murmur
Of my surrounding heart,
        O passenger.

VI

Under Christ, why do I
Suffer this out? Idiot.
        This pointless spite
        Will make me rot.
Lover. When we go to bed,
Make up, garland my head,
        Let us not fight

But let us rock
Into silence and let the thorns
Of sleep settle in for the night.

VII

Day begins on my lids
And in my arms there stirs,
Like dust in a balance,
Incipient feeling.
Was it only last night
I fell asleep with this image
Between my arms
Of a girl and a child
Given up and below them,
Head sinking, a father kneeling?
Pietà; the scales are touched.
Lost balance, lost feeling.

VIII

He read late, his brother
Asleep beside him until he could hear
The street begin to cry with the small
Hands of morning cupped
Over the face of its penury. The far-off
Siren sobbing its incandescence
In the light bulb began to fade.
But the tungsten still lay in his eyes
Dropping flares as he dozed.
Workmen had gone, the milk had come.
His brother picked up his book.
Education. God knows. God knows.
So it goes, so it goes,
Silence. The door slams.
He buries himself in the clothes.

Poems from *History Lessons* (1983)

History Lessons

for Ronan Sheehan and Richard Kearney

'The proud and beautiful city of Moscow
Is no more.' So wrote Napoleon to the Czar.
It was a November morning when we came
On this. I remember the football pitches

Beyond, stretched into wrinkles by the frost.
Someone was running across them, late for school,
His clothes scattered open by the wind.

Outside Moscow we had seen
A Napoleonic, then a Hitlerian dream
Aborted. The firegold city was burning
In the Kremlin domes, a sabred Wehrmacht
Lay opened to the bone, churches were ashen
Until heretics restored their colour
And their stone. Still that boy was running.

Fragrance of Christ, as in the whitethorn
Brightening through Lent, the stricken aroma
Of the Czars in ambered silence near Pavlovsk,
The smoking gold of icons at Zagorsk,
And this coal-smoke in the sunlight
Stealing over frost, houses huddled up in
Droves, deep drifts of lost

People. This was history, although the State
Exam confined Ireland to Grattan and allowed
Us roam from London to Moscow. I brought
Black gladioli bulbs from Samarkand
To flourish like omens in our cooler air;
Coals ripening in a light white as vodka.
Elections, hunger-strikes and shots

Greeted our return. Houses broke open
In the season's heat and the bulbs
Burned in the ground. Men on ladders
Climbed into roselight, a roof was a swarm of fireflies
At dusk. The city is no more. The lesson's learned.
I will remember it always as a burning
In the heart of winter and a boy running.

'Send War in Our Time, O Lord'

- *John Mitchel, quoted by W. B. Yeats*

Before sentiments were recruited on the walls
I could hear the constellations
Creak in winter's axle
As I gazed out the window
Towards the New Year bells
That chimed their benisons
Into the lighted houses.
Orion took my fancy most.

From the astronomy page on that sky
The water-bright archer
Swung up with those bells
And hung. Bell, water, star,
The handselled florin in my pocket,
All shone in the dark; the future's wages.
Eternity seemed boyish and the stars
Like wild oats, sown all over.

My parents wished us luck.
There was singing in the street
While yellow houselights answered
White Orion and the frost
Showed a gentle adherence on the roofs.
So that year turned and we with it
Into this, our time. Now
The history boys are on the rampage,

The famous noise in the street
Where a jaguar camouflage
Ripples on armoured cars
In a skin of symbols.
History is personal; the age, our age.
Orion came over out of the summer,
War's astronaut, high enough to see
The dead stir again in their sleep.

Bell and coin, water and star,
That lucent childhood, stooped to war.
Mitchel, your time has come at last.
Our emblems falter. Orion stalls.
Sentiments blaze upon the gable walls.
In quiet watersheds the poet's swans
Rise bitterly from waxen peace
To cry again like Fenian geese.

Osip Mandelstam

'The people need poetry.' That voice
That was last heard asking for warm
Clothes and money, also knew the hunger
We all have for the gold light
The goldfinch carries into the air
Like a tang of crushed almonds.

Nine months before heart-failure
Silenced his silk-sharp whistle
That haunted the steppes as though
A small shrapnel of birds scattered,

Bukharin, his protector, was shot
Along with Yagoda, Rykov, others.

The kerosene flash of his music
Leaps from the black earth,
From the whitening dead of the War
Who burn in its flammable spirit.
The fire-crop smokes in the Kremlin's
Eyes and the scorched marl

Cinders. Son of Petropolis, tell us,
Tell us how to turn into the flash,
To lie in the lice-red shirt
On the bank of the Styx and wait
For the gossamer of Paradise
To spider in our dirt-filled eyes.

Directions

Here are the directions by which
You, like the others, should find me.
When you come to the central square
You will find a statue rise up
Like a shout that ends in the point
Of his finger. Turn your back
And walk downhill. Pass the beggar
At the towngate, but give him nothing.
He's a fraud, but he's always there.
Go left and take your shadow along
The wall while the town clock whispers
Above the river which flashes always
Between buildings, on your right. Then
The streets click like a turnstile
And leave you near a seashelled grotto
While church bells jumble overhead.
Now you're close. Leave the blue light
Of the grotto, stand at the corner
Where the chemist's is, and two men
Will take you between them the whole
Way to the door in a street locked
Into other streets which themselves
Turn into others….Your desire will be
The key and your escorts will take you in.
Corners will peel back, the lamps
Will light up as you reach them
And the house will be there. You will be
Left on your own then. The door will let
You in and will close behind you.
These are my directions.

If you follow
Them closely you will find me,
Your destiny, coming like a sigh
To greet you, coming up in the page
You will read next, watching you
Like the small eyes of the dice
We must roll to see who speaks
First. Just beyond where the statue
Points, at the echo end of his shout,
We will have started to listen
For what he says as it winds
Through the sensitive cartilage of streets,
Clicking and turning until we hear
The very bone of his forehead glowing.

A Visit

I could not see you. A sweat of rain
Prickled on the windows; trees,
Maddened by the wind, blurred again.
Floorboards groaned and the high seas
Of winter air surfed in the chimney.

Essence of snow hung on the clear hills.
In the wardrobe, the hangers queued.
Lisahally, Ardmore. The names distilled
Lost feelings, moments of long-rued
Silence, expulsion. No memory

Could come clear. It was a scene
Of ruin, fly-freckled mirrors tilting
Half rooms out from the walls in nettle-green
Darkness, a shoal of dead woodworm silting
Under a burnished floor. Hurriedly,

I went out into a thick falling snow.
The car spat and hummed. The wipers
Clicked and droned. I still could not see you.
I sat there while the world whitened.
Then drove home as it snowed and snowed.

Christmas at Beaconsfield

(Edmund Burke has invited Sir James Mackintosh down to Beaconsfield to spend Christmas 1796 with him. Mackintosh, famous then as the author of a tract supporting the French Revolution, is about to be converted by Burke to an hostility towards the Revolution and all it represents. His career is about to be blighted. It is snowing outside.)

Beaconsfield. The snottish son dead.
Europe awash. Ireland in her
Customary decline. Omens.
Illuminati glimmered in the dusk
Of German duchies. Madame Guillotine
Was bright and still. 'If we cry,
Like children, for the moon,
Like children, we must cry on.'

Across from him sat Mackintosh,
Warm with wine and with the glare
Of a great log fire. The ceiling
Was whitened by the reflex of the snow
Through the great window out of which
Harmonies of space and light
Flowed and curled into the mouldings
Of the frieze. Hauteur and domesticity
Lived together in this room
And in its owner – hardly owner –
For he was mortgaged to the hilt,
An Irish blade in a Whig scabbard.
He faced the Scotsman who wore a mild
And slightly rictus grin that spoke
Surprise that such a man as Burke could be
So broken by that Parisian brawl
By which the French had tried to emulate
What 'we' had done since 1688.

Imagining that conversion, many times,
I hear the brogue thicken and bellow
On the name Rousseau; feel the sibilance
Of his hate for the dark Genevan.
'The spawn of his disgustful amours,'
'The great apostle of benevolence.'
And the hand beating upon the velvet
Padding of his chair-arm. His 'Sir!'
Veering to a snarl, his long, laborious
Penetrating grief – dead son, dead King and Queen,
Ghosting the dulled room. Twenty-three
Years before in the Rue Royale,
Round Baron d'Holbach's table,
The waspish literati had stopped him cold.
Almost certainly there was Diderot,
With his shut and open face, the unbuttoned
Prince of Philosophers; Chastellux and St. Lambert,
And God knows who else to make his hair
Stand on end, more even than Voltaire.

Poor Mackintosh. Brought to a broody, fearful
Stare at the caving fire while Burke

Glowered at the litter of his life,
Cursed the French for what they had done
When he was too old to win and had no son
To do it for him. The frost of years
In his hair, the ice of conviction
Melting in his eyes, an old man
Whose dinner-gong of a voice
Was comic and ineffectual
To the boneheads of the Commons.
Mackintosh could not look
Near him. Out of God's bare rood
The foliage of power spread and greened.
But in Ireland's and England's pleasant.

Lands, Misrule was Lord; though Hastings
Brought to book, the Dublin junta
Schooled rebels, Fox and Foxites fooled
The Whigs; Partisan orators, lawyers and friseurs
Auctioned history to the mob.
Mackintosh shuddered. A lawyer who had
Vindicated France. He felt like a son
Who had broken a father's heart.
Faint shadows in rosewood stirred.
Burke wept. The clock struck. Christmas blurred.

Sleep of Exile

Was it the blue of peace
Or the powdered gold
Ground of the intimate
Figure that I lost
In the sleep of exile?

Dreams bark in the night
And their intransitive
Fears choke the fragrant
Speech that by day
Should be the night's

And the body's bouquet.

Counting

Time without number I have counted lines
Of roof and wall, cemented garden bed,
Clothes-post, cathedral, scullery and shed;
Counted beyond number the interwines
Of hair-cracked plaster on a gable wall

Growing innumerate towards the chimney's head;
Counting each time in hope of counting all.

And that was nothing. Then I returned instead
To listen for the unattended pause
Between the drops the dripping tap let fall
Out in the yard where a short metal rod
Earthed the mains radio on a wire.
Fire and water alternately would kiss
In that black patch, a tiny choir,
Drowning in static, dying to a hiss.

And that was nothing. I may have counted less
Had there been more that was of more account.
A richer childhood, an adroit address
Might have relieved me of the need to count.
I counted blessings, chances, kerbstones, sheep,
And clocks and bells to animate my ear,
And magic meters for the cracked unclear

Waveband signals from the East. A radio
Childhood, lived in backwaters of reception,
Time discharging into the inner ear,
Broadcasting through the bone the mica
Of voices. Out of that fount
They rose, bearing the good news and the bad,
The final tally, the unaccountable account.

A Killing

Seen, he cannot be imagined.
Blood grinned on his brow
And his hand was eloquent,
Arthritic, as though the pain
Was choice and just so,
Caught in the pucker of his fingers.

A mattress of the blackest blood
Rose slowly under his head
So that it seemed his chin must droop
Into the white lights of his shirt.
His other hand was half up
For where his head had been.

Once imagined, he cannot be seen.
Three hours later, a stain
On the road, a man standing rooted
On the spot, trying to make
The ground yield to him the shock

So he could feel it in his head.

But he could not imagine that
Just so, just such a pain;
He lives with me more easily
Than the dead one, though. Putting
Himself in the dead man's shoes,
He manages that death again.

Street Singers

They sang, disheartened, to the dark
In their small kingdom. Speechmakers
Would arrive on lorries and harangue
Them. The deaths of democracies and kings
Lent to the air an afterglow,
The old ember of a story breathed on
In winter nights as children slept
And the old cried like linnets.

Songs that could congest the eyes
Haunted the corners after the young
Had gone. Disembodied lights
Across the river and the gauze of oil
Enhanced the hill-streets where
The singers stood. When sirens
Mourned in the river's mouth
The sleeping city groaned

Replies through all its stifled
Streets. Where are the fires
That lit, the airs that hung,
The lamps that shone, as the old
Shook and wept? Nothing but fog
Rolling, a block of light split
From an open door, footsteps climbing
A hill out of a soundless pit.

Guerillas

When the Portuguese came in
From manoeuvres in the North
Atlantic, they brought a scent
Of oranges and dark tobacco
To our Arctic streets. Norwegians,
However, were tall and cold,
Drinkers of cheap wine
That blued their eyes more
Than was good for anyone

Who bothered them. Some women
Became sailors' dolls and others
Disapproved. We smelt corruption
In the hot grease of liquor
And foreign language that spat
Around us in the Moonlight Club.
Some pleasure writhed there
And some fear. A fight occurred
And then there came the Military
Police who hammered silence out
With night sticks, wall to wall.
And then we'd steal the drinks
Left on the tables they had pushed
Aside to clear the floor.
The whiskey was watered, we could tell.
A medical treacle had been served
As rum. But that was business.
Pollution entered everything and made it
Fierce. Real life was so impure
We savoured its poisons as forbidden
Fruit and, desolate with knowledge,
Grew beyond redemption. Teachers
Washed their hands of us.
Innocent of any specific crime,
We were beaten for a general guilt,
Regular as clockwork. We watched
And questioned nothing. There would be a time
When the foreign sailors would be gone.
Business would still be business.
Whiskey would still be watered,
Some girls would still be dolls;
The Arctic would have inched nearer,
Pollution have gone deeper
And life, entirely domestic, would carry on.

The Art of Dying

i. m. Mary Treacy

You took the way you died
From the thrillers you read;
Dialled 999 and sighed
And the police found you dead.

It would take a sleuth
To unravel this case.
To tell you the truth,
You left hardly a trace

For you took to heart
The toy knife of suspense,
And chose to depart
When England was tense

With strikes and with snow
Shutting everything down.
London lay low
The day you left town

For the Falls in Belfast
Near the Republican plot.
Home ground at last
Although you could not

Have avoided a smile
That your funeral's route
In its very last mile
Gained a soldier's salute.

Part of this bitter plot
Is the English-Irish scene,
Police and army on the spot,
And something in-between

That puts us all askew
And keeps us all apart.
The life you led may be the clue
To your dying art.

Exile's Return

We came off the Ozarks at night,
Dreaming the motels we stayed in,
Skirted the snow and parked
On the edge of the Grand Canyon.

Now it is tinder of the border towns,
Greened ruins, locked headlands,
Cow-quilted fields and scattered squalls
Scouting for winter. Honey thins

Out of the blood. At four o'clock
The rivers are dark. Yet, desert-bright,
Sensation is not removed here
From what it loves. The last oasis

Before civilization, condensed
Out of ocean, malingering far

West of Eden, its truest colour
Nettle-green. Here the heart begins.

Sleep of Exile

Was it the blue of peace
Or the powdered gold
Ground of the intimate
Figure that I lost
In the sleep of exile?

Dreams bark in the night
And their intransitive
Fears choke the fragrant
Speech that by day
Should be the night's

And the body's bouquet.

Picture from an Institution

Space looks in. A sleet of cherry blossom
Rains now in the suburbs. Dogs bark
And bring owners, slit from sleep,
To hang great window shadows
In the gardens. Night regions.

From this little room, the standard
Anthology of stars represents the best
Space can do this June. The ocean's
Underneath, tidal remains quicken
In hospitals, monasteries and jails

Where we write the definitive history
Of clouds, essays on the timbres
Of the winds, sympathetic studies
Of the allergies that afflict sea-caves,
The sinuses of cliffs. We have snail-horn

Alertness, are vulnerable to worlds
That come to be through silence,
Immobility and pain. We travel
God's own country, bedabbled by light
And dark, vivid morons of faith

Who seek what has not yet been seen.
At ten o'clock, the institution sleeps.
Lights go out. The suburban cherry

Weeps. Camphors and pollen
Sweeten the imagination. Space looks in.

Hummingbirds

The wet roof smokes between storms.
It is January in California.
The long three-year drought is over
And I have come in time for the rains,

For the flash-floods of the auto
In the dipping freeways, for the
Ostensible recovery of greenness.
But look, my children may be lost

In barbaric schools. I fear for them.
We have driven from Atlantic to Pacific
Time, through zoned cities where
Local rapists force the Israelis

Off the front page. My nerve has broken.
The rains are too much as was
The eastern snow before. I still
Sense out the penury of living

With a few books, a few friends,
Dazzled murmurings in the back room
Of a quiet summer. But the dark
Calls out the sirens; the rains

Burst in the wind. Two hummingbirds,
Impaled in motion, quiver on tree-bark.
Children sleep in the streets.
The western states are rusted, crimes

Are created afresh in the young,
The times work like a virus.
Yet the drought has at last broken,
History perishes in the natural hope

The season brings. The sky
Shines in the freeways, the roof drums,
While on dun bark the brilliant darts
Of colour drill as the rains run.

Daystar

We woke to a blaze of lawn
And the shadow-chirp of gimlet

Birds, with an empty throb
In the ribbed nests of nerve
Cribbed under the skull.

Last night we listened
To the light tinkering
Of rain in the honeysuckle.
A small cyst in the glass
Thwarted the plain world beyond

As though we felt faint.
The wind deafened the fire
And hailstones crowded
Into a soft barley on the sill.
Clouds were storming the moon.

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.
Now the curtains, stung by first light,
Are pale rose, their fabric weakened,
Petal-thin. I got out of bed
And left the blanched room

For the hale cold of the house,
Trampling leaf shadows on lit
Floors. Then, with your moving
And the milk arriving, I sensed
The sheer transparency of spring

In which the kitchen shines.
The night fever convalesces.
The one and still unshed tear
Is melting. It's our daystar,
Disappearing into melded skies.

The Party-Givers

Fires were burning in every room
And a secluded record's beating
Shook the floor as frostfresh
New arrivals broke the hall
And children rivalled children
For the door. Alcohol
Lit glimmers on their wrists

As little waves of talk broke around
The walls and gradually they shaded
Off in penciled groups or turned
The platitudes and gossip into twists
Of wit and boredom. You'll carouse,
The eyes of the flowers will smart
In your smoke, the peregrine
Friendships will last till the stroke
Of the smallest of hours is moulded
In light and with it you'll leave,
And with you the night.

Morning knifes in and we retreat
From the racked fires, the cloud
Of glasses drowning in water,
Wishing we were not parents,
I still a son, you still a daughter,
So we might sleep with the true
Freedom of the party-givers.
Light of heart, we could lie and think
This is what we wanted for a home,
The place we came from and the place
For others. The window wanes
Into rainlight, you cup your
Face in your hands and drink
Abandon. Is such weariness the price
For being so wonderfully at home
To others? Or is the party simply over
And we familiars in a foreign life?

A World without a Name

All the colours of Paradise
Lined up in bottles behind the bar.
Golden djinns, seraphs with their hearts
Of white locked up in glass
Eyed us through the smoke
And thunder-dazzle of voices.

Back there in that distant war
Beyond where the rain hums,
The sky still scorches above
The estuary when the sun burns
In the water and the wind lifts
Masonries of waves off the rocks.

This is what you saw on leaving.
Was it not better left?
But you could remember too

Wallpaper images from a nursery,
Daffodils nudging a slow Spring,
Roses a cabbage of fire.

But for us it was always a street
Hissing with rain, a ditch running
Svelte with filth, mouths crabbed
With rancour and wrong, the smooth
Almond of speech burnt. And the
Cropped hair of children with lice,

The stench of wood logged
And simmering with maggots,
The sloth-cold of the nights.
And all those colours of paradise,
A sorcery of golds and whites.
It was a world without a name;

The world we flew from and became.

Truth Nearing

1.
I came home one day under a sky
Full of such tender fires, cloud-embers
Smoking with the chimerical rain
That would later ghost my sleep
With its quicksilver voices.

Amidst a surfeit of atrocity
My conscience starves.
I can't sharpen a pencil.

2.
On a Sunday, I came upon a cottage,
Empty, surrounded by flowers,
The milk on the sill, a book
Open on the table. Someone
Had died in sleep? The precocity

Of strangers is amazing.
If you go back there, the book
Will still be open, the pansies
Still smarting with sunlight.
Still, we had better not.

3.
I'd say yes, though, to a sorrow
Or a guilt, however searing,

If I felt with its arrival

That the first star of truth
Would even sham appearing.
In the meantime, there is that
Cottage, that sky, and those
Peregrine voices, ever nearing.

Poems from *Selected Poems* (1988)

Turning-Point

After Rilke's Wendung

For ages he would gaze
And that would be enough.
Stars winced in the blaze
Of his stare. A god smiled
In its sleep at the rage
Of the look that smelled
Of want. A dazzle of days
Would be cradled in his eyes
When night fell. Animals grazed
In the field of his vision
At ease. Even the caged
Beasts and the birds of the air
Flew into its freedom and lazed

In the blur of its vastness
Where flowers gazed at the gaze.
Rumour whispered, women phrased
The hope there was someone
Who knew how to look. They raised
Their eyes to see and be seen,
Wanting the siege to be raised
From their invisible city.
He sat unseeing in their praise
In the hotel bedroom that looked
In on him from the mirror, days
Engulfing the tormented bed
Where love had blazed.

They could hear his heart beat
In the city but it raised
Only a pulse at his throat.
Their voices came to assuage
Him but stiffened on his body
When they heard him wage

War on his grief and look
Not on them but at the edge
Of the world that his glance
Had embraced. He was the image
Of the man without love,
Not, after all, the seer, the sage.
So they left him loveless to himself.

They could not go over the edge
With him into the deathless
Fall of the heart in the poundage
Of the inner space where
Everything is heavier, and we gaze
Endlessly into the smoking air
For the eyes that will amaze
Us into woman's sight,
Eyes that will be ours and days
That will have the sex of night.
Years of looking will engage
Our eyes; we will see what we love
And love the body that informs our gaze.

Colloquio

After Andrea Zanzotto

Through the fading colours
Of the woods, the cheating fall,
Remote from work and squalor,
I appear in a calm, open and prodigal.

I breathe the mossed flowers,
Scenting the hurt pulse
Of latent waters. Like a vowel
In the valley's mouth, the hours

Of moonlight speak my strange
Life with the connivance
Of the hedgerow leaves. Fringed
By vesper bells, the permanence

Of a season, of the languid
Forever of the miracle
Birds in the woods, of the lucid
Flowers being born, the oracle

Of your voice speaks in the flaw
Of my verse, streak-stained by rain,
A Spring sound that can draw

From autumnal tones to explain
The solitude of that season
That deludes and destroys;
Locked up without reason
Inside October, you say, I enjoy

None of these wonders. All
That festival of green,
The light seen and unseen,
Are struck down at the wall.

The Silent Life

After Andrea Zanzotto

This is no dark wood were we sit
Together again. What soft shrouds
Of light or shade there are I lift
From our foreheads. The grasses crowd

Into the darkness that conquers all.
The winds ignite and quench our breath,
Tides turn, the hours rise and fall,
But we sit tight, mute to the death.

My voice will be the shadow cast
By the shine of my throat. It will wed
The light of your voice which the past
Darkness and this present sun have fed.

Reflection-Reflex

After Andrea Zanzotto

It's then I ask that you wanted,
Stony-faced absence,
Why you wanted the one and the many
Enthralled in your blank gaze,
Semantic silence.

It's then in a drear woodland,
Or leaning into a vivid field
Starlit by nostalgic lights,
That I sense my incompleteness;

It's then I endure a tense joy
More dry-throated than nausea,
And pause at the turn of the path,
At the source of the fertile stream;

Then, when the Gorgon face
Of Spring or Autumn,
Green with verdigris,
Snarls at the gates of sleep.

Nella Gloria delle Finestre

After Mario Luzi

I'll tell you later about life,
If I have the time, how it was,
For I know all about it.

But right now, it's not like
The life I know so well.
It's a waste, a blind year,

A bitter season. You come out of it,
Yes, but with a furtive eye,
Fleeing form a sharp shadow.

I was thinking so in Ireland.
There it was overcast, then clear,
Rain mowing over the grass
In the deserted fields.

There were few people about.
Figures stranded on golf-courses,
Stragglers behind the herds,
A horseman or two. Silence.

It was green, green to the rims
Of the black lakes that lay
On the floors of her valleys.
Was something revealed to me?

Yes. It was this. An anguish that
Throbbed from the coast to the
Most distant standing-stone.
Yes in the eyes of David and Tom,

My friends, my guides, both
Experts on the place,
There were seeds of blue fire
Burning in that dark, green season.

Homer Nods

Were the seas the surge beneath
The marriage-bed? Was this unbelonging
Man escaping over the wine
Of water the fate of having
To belong. Temporary widow,
Forever wife, suitors slaughtered
Nightly in the tapestry

Of their unwound longings;
Ineffectual son. Against this,
Circe and the trek into
The underworld, the sack of Troy,
Gods' angers, favours,
Sex and war and death –
Mature issues that would have made

A better man of that poor
Pawnshipped boy, Telemachus.
Tell us, Ulysses, what we cannot see.
The blind teller lends your story
Wisdom it may not have. The blind leading
The blind on a voyage taken
By a man of infinite clear sight?

Subjects for writers; wife and ocean,
Wandering and stillness; fidelity
Lashed to the mast, destiny?
Or nonsense? Some prefer Circe,
But then is not Penelope
A pearl among swinemen? And could it be
We have here an autobiography

Pretending to epic for authority?
Protean creature, who has come to be
The proof that greatness lives vicariously
In the lies swapped round from men to God.
And when we hear the truth,
Not subject, naturally, to proof,
We allow for Homer and we let him nod.

Tongues

Now and again I have a notion
Of what it will all come to.
Men will be playing noiseless football
In the field far below,
Not working in the factory where

Stones have made black stars
Out of the windows. It will be
The Seventh Sunday after Easter
And at nightfall
We will line up with our torches
In the graveyard to help
Some boy or other lead
His blinded mother
To his father's grave.

For some believe in Pentecost
Though they live in Babel,
Tongues of fire and fiery tongues,
Well-lit but not well-able.

Reading *Paradise Lost* in Protestant Ulster 1984

Should I give in to sleep? This fire's warm,
I know the story off by heart,
Was up so late last night and all the harm
That can be done is done. Far apart
From Milton's devils is the present crew
Of zombie soldiers and their spies,
Supergrasses in whose hiss
We hear the snake and sense the mist
Rise in dreams that crowd the new
Awaking with their demobbed cries.

In the old ground of apocalypse
I saw a broken church near where
Two lines of trees came to eclipse
The summer light. Beside the stair
A grey crow from an old estate
Gripped on the book of Common Prayer,
A rope of mice hung on a strip
Of alter-cloth and a blurring date
Smeared the stone beneath the choir.

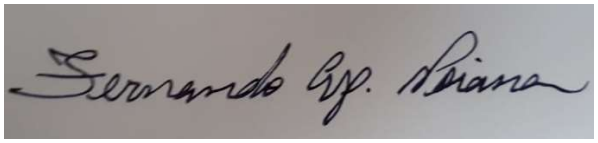
Awake again, I see the window take
An arc of rainbow and a fusing rain.
None should break the union of this State
Which God with Man conspired to ordain.
But the woe the long evening brings
To the mazy ambushes of streets
Marks us more deeply now than that bower
Of deepest Eden in our first parent's hour
Of sexual bliss and frail enamourings
Could ever do. Our 'sovran Planter' beats

Upon his breast, dyadic evil rules;
A syncope that stammers in our guns,
That forms and then reforms itself in schools
And in our daughters' couplings and our sons'.
We feel the fire's heat, Belial's doze;
A maiden city's burning on the plain;
Rebels surround us, Lord. Ah, whence arose
This dark damnation, this hot unrainbowed rain?

TERMO DE REPRODUÇÃO XEROGRÁFICA

Autorizo a reprodução xerográfica do presente Trabalho de Conclusão, na íntegra ou em partes, para fins de pesquisa.

São José do Rio Preto, 05/04/2019



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Assinatura do autor