SMALL WORLD

Seamus Deane was one of the most vital and versatile authors of our time. *Small World* presents an unmatched survey of Irish writing, and of writing about Irish issues, from 1798 to the present day. Elegant, polemical, and incisive, it addresses the political, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions of several notable literary and historical moments, and monuments, from the island's past and present. The style of Swift; the continuing influence of Edmund Burke's political thought in the USA; the echoing debates about national character; aspects of Joyce's and of Elizabeth Bowen's relation to modernism; memories of Seamus Heaney; analysis of the representation of Northern Ireland in Anna Burns's fiction – these topics constitute only a partial list of the themes addressed by a volume that should be mandatory reading for all those who care about Ireland and its history. The writings included here, from one of Irish literature's most renowned critics, have individually had a piercing impact, but they are now collectively amplified by being gathered together here for the first time between one set of covers. *Small World: Ireland, 1798–2018* is an indispensable collection from one of the most important voices in Irish literature and culture.

Seamus Deane was a founding director of the Field Day Theatre Company, editor of the annual journal *Field Day Review*, the general editor of the Penguin Joyce, a member of the Royal Irish Academy, and the author of several books, including *A Short History of Irish Literature*; *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature*; *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England*; and *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790*. Deane also edited the monumental *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* in three volumes, and wrote four books of poetry and a novel, *Reading in the Dark*, which has been translated into more than twenty languages and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1996. After a lengthy career at University College Dublin, he was Professor of English and Donald and Marilyn Keough Professor of Irish Studies Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame.

SMALL WORLD

Ireland, 1798–2018

Seamus Deane

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TO CIARAN AND CORMAC

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Foreword

Since the 1970s, Seamus Deane has been Ireland's most notable literary critic. Over a career spanning half a century, he has been a literary and intellectual historian, a critical essayist, gifted lecturer, anthologist, poet, novelist, theatre company board member, institution-builder, journal editor, and book publisher. He is among modern Ireland's most distinguished public intellectuals. Few twentieth-century writer-critics – William Butler Yeats, Daniel Corkery, Seán Ó Faoláin – have done as much as he has done to reshape the ways in which we comprehend modern Irish literary culture, and none of these, even Yeats, has so wide an intellectual scope of reference as Deane. Educated in Northern Ireland and at the University of Cambridge, where he studied the reception of the French Enlightenment and Revolution in early nineteenth-century English letters, he began his career by teaching Irish literature in Reed College, Oregon, and the University of California at Berkeley before then returning to Ireland, to University College, Dublin (UCD), where, reversing roles, he taught American and English literature. In mid-career in 1993, he returned again to the United States to head the newly founded Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, until his retirement, teaching part of the year in the United States, part in Dublin.

In his formative disciplinary commitment to French and English intellectual history, Deane's work was from early on unusually internationalist by Irish standards. It was later deepened by extensive reading in Frankfurt School critical theory, Western Marxism, postcolonial studies, and French poststructuralism. Nevertheless, despite this uncommon critical reach, Deane's work has often been tagged in obtuse misreadings

as narrowly and rebarbatively 'nationalist'. Few Irish critics or historians have in fact been more vigilantly attentive to the antinomies of cultural nationalism than Deane, so the application of the term 'nationalist' to his career is therefore a misnomer, though by no means simply an error. Raised in the 1940s and 1950s in the nationalist and republican Bogside district of the then unionist-controlled city of Derry, Deane maintained throughout the Troubles commitments of a kind sufficiently out of step with the political views that then dominated the university, literary, and media worlds of Dublin and Belfast as to make him seem unamenable to 'right thinking' and by such a measure he was deemed perforce a 'nationalist' or 'republican'. Hence, the apparent paradox that Ireland's most European-minded literary critic has also appeared throughout his career in his home country as both a presiding intellectual presence and something of an aloof or isolated déraciné.

Nevertheless, Deane's accomplishments were not, of course, achieved in isolation. He came of age professionally in a period in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Irish society was convulsed by the Troubles in the North, by American corporatization and political Europeanization in the South, and by a variety of social movements, most notably the women's movement, that eventually exerted considerable force on both parts of the island. In this context, as Irish academics of the less timorous variety were called out of their habitual professional routines, several literary critics, historians, and economists became, for a few decades at least, public intellectuals of some significance. Furthermore, Irish academia in this period produced literary criticism of a higher order than the country had witnessed since independence. Because of the under-resourced and tightly self-policed character of the Irish university system, many of this generation of literary critics spent much of their careers overseas, most working in the United Kingdom or the United States, ably connecting Irish studies to emergent cultural critical currents internationally.

Given his evident early-career brio, Deane soon found himself called upon to positions of leadership in this contentious period. He joined Brian Friel, Stephen Rea, Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin, and David Hammond to become part of the directorial board of the Field Day Theatre Company, which Friel and Rea had founded in 1980 to produce one of Friel's landmark works, *Translations*. Thomas Kilroy, playwright

and professor of English in Galway, later joined that board in 1988, the only southern-born writer to do so. As is now well known, Field Day quickly became one of the most unlikely and innovative intellectual groupings of its kind in the English-speaking world, combining a literary-intellectual theatre of note with a commitment to critical thinking and public debate. In a country where things 'literary' and 'intellectual' were generally quarantined off from each other, and where anything that resembled ambitious analytical thinking was typically treated with suspicion, the cooperation of figures like Friel and Rea, Heaney and Paulin, or Deane and Hammond, represented a new departure not only in terms of the crossing of sectarian Northern Irish community boundaries but also of literary/intellectual lines. While sceptical Irish commentators at the time tried to pinpoint where precisely Field Day stood on 'the national question', as if this were the only thing that mattered about the grouping, the declaration of intent intrinsic to the company's constitutive composition was obvious. Field Day was compositionally anti-sectarian and non-doctrinaire yet in Deane's version at least it was also unapologetically republican-minded and hostile to the notion, as firmly rooted in Ireland as in England, that the 'Celtic temperament' was inherently lyrical and imaginative rather than critical or practical, let alone political or theoretical.

Deane's early immersion in the French Enlightenment of Rousseau, Diderot, and d'Holbach, and in early nineteenth-century radical English republican writers such as Hazlitt and Shelley, had made him inherently suspicious of British and Irish romanticisms and bequeathed to him a strong appreciation of the conservative functions they could serve. For him, the achievement of Edmund Burke, as political thinker and rhetorician, equalled only by that of Rousseau in Europe, remained exemplary, and, as far as Irish writing was concerned, foundational. The liberal cultural nationalist tendencies favoured by Heaney or Friel, or the secular republicanism of Paulin or Rea, helped identify Field Day as an aspirationally civic republican group in its ambition to create not so much a new Ireland as a more robust public sphere that might eventually nurture the vision and thinking that the creation of any new Ireland would certainly require. In the Irish Republic, however, Field Day was taken by many to represent northern Irish republican pretensions to

advance a third 'Irish revival' that no longer assumed Dublin as its capital nor the Abbey Theatre as its Bayreuth, while in unionist Northern Ireland the Derry-based company was viewed as an unsolicited Greek gift lodged ominously inside Londonderry's Trojan walls.

In the 1980s, Field Day won a considerable reputation as a creative and combative theatre company. The combativeness was mainly associated with Deane's pamphlets, 'Civilians and Barbarians' (1983) and 'Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea' (1984) – both collected in this volume – though the edgier political tones of Heaney's 'An Open Letter' (1983) and Paulin's 'A New Look at the Language Question' (1983) caused some to worry that Deane's republicanism was beginning to warp even the more moderate-minded group members. 'Civilians and Barbarians' provoked because it suggested that the discourses of civility and savagery inherited from the Tudor and Stuart settlements continued to fashion both Irish and British understandings of the Troubles and of the Hunger Strikes more particularly. 'Heroic Styles' offered a critique of varieties of what Deane styled, in a provocative phrase, 'literary unionism', this associated with Yeats and other writers who traced their literary influences chiefly to English sources and had set their faces against modernity and what they saw as its mass-democratic vulgarities. However, in the same pamphlet Deane also diagnosed in Joyce's later works an aestheticized expression of a liberal pluralism that anticipated the post-political consumer culture Deane associated with the contemporary Irish republic and the postmodern condition generally. These were widely considered harsh estimates of both writers and appeared to ask too much of literature and the arts at a time when they were held by most commentators to be valiantly sustaining the human spirit and some precarious sense of Irish decency assailed by the vicious Northern strife. However, Deane's scholarship continued to insist on the tentacular complicities of literature and politics, exempting neither writers nor the cultivated classes generally from their contributions to the histories that conditioned a conflict they loudly abhorred. From Deane's perspective, the assumption that writers could create a serious literature by playing the role of irenic inter-communal mediators or simply by condemning violence was inadequate; something more was called for from the arts and universities. Even if it was far from obvious what that envisaged 'more' might be, some

intellectual determination to search out that 'more' was precisely what Deane demanded of himself, of Field Day, and of Irish writers and critics more generally.

The publication of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, Volumes I–III, in 1991 has passed into Irish cultural lore as both culmination and catastrophe for the Field Day project. Under Deane's general editorship, the volumes assembled Irish writing in a diversity of modes in Latin, Irish, and English over a period of some fifteen hundred years. This project reached beyond the theatre company members proper to collaboratively include other scholars and specialists not affiliated with Field Day who offered short introductory essays to sections of the *Anthology* covering periods and genres of writing from the Middle Ages to the contemporary moment. Looking back with the hindsight of thirty years, the *Anthology* project now seems in some respects very much of its time: most of the section editors were male, as were all of the Field Day Theatre Company members, and the representation of women's writings was inadequate. In other respects the *Anthology* appears to be struggling methodologically – ably or weakly depending on one's view – with the critical conundrums of its moment. On the one hand, it tried to find some way to accommodate a plurality of conflicting micro-histories to what Deane called in his introduction a 'hospitable metanarrative' capable of concatenating without suppressing its constituent parts; on the other hand, it tried to avoid making inclusivity its only governing principle in some postmodernist fashion. These were difficult ambitions to coordinate. However, on publication the volumes were dismissed from a Northern unionist perspective as just the latest version of an 'assimilationist' nationalist agenda, a belated cultural relay of the Dublin-based New Ireland Forum a decade earlier. More damagingly, many, though not all, feminists dismissed the anthology as a throwback to a time when the issue of gender equality was subordinated to the national imperative. The charge was that Deane and Field Day were so fixated on Northern Ireland that they had overlooked the struggles to liberalize and modernize the Irish Republic led by the women's movement and others since the sixties. Deane immediately conceded the project's deficiencies on this count and set about raising funding for a further two volumes of women's writings, this latter venture

published as *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (2002).

For all the furor that attended its early reception, the *Anthology* seems in retrospect neither culmination nor catastrophe though certainly a defining turning point for all involved. For Deane personally, the *Anthology*'s hostile reception coincided with his move from UCD to the University of Notre Dame, a move that would soon see him publish a novel, *Reading in the Dark*, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1996, and become, with financial support from Notre Dame, the general editor of the Field Day Critical Conditions series. The Field Day Company generally was changing anyway as its members went on to new stages in their careers; Seamus Heaney, for example, won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1995 and became Poet in Residence at Harvard University in 1998. What has often gone unremarked in subsequent comment on the controversies is the extent to which Volumes I–III represented an actualization of Deane's call for the creation of a more engaged national critical community responsive to its wider society, a call that had unintended consequences when the *Anthology*'s neglect of women scholars and writers also mobilized feminist literary critics to decisive collective action. The five Field Day volumes taken collectively can be said to have recalibrated conceptions of 'Irish writing' more decisively than any other equivalent contemporary enterprise of its kind managed to do. Indeed, when measured against today's more professionalized and pacified Irish university system, one where only historians and economists now seem to attract much attention as public commentators, the company's mobilizations of writers and critics during those decades seems to mark a short-lived moment of commendable public-facing literary scholarship. That Field Day had its weaknesses – especially its failure to address questions of gender and sexuality or capitalism and class as persistently as those of state violence and imperialism – cannot be denied. Yet whatever faults might be laid at its door, Field Day in its heyday must be credited for making a real attempt to stir things up intellectually and culturally in Ireland.

Deane's organizational abilities in these decades should be acknowledged, and in the years since his professional retirement no comparable figure has emerged to play some similar coordinating function. As

mentioned earlier, his role in contemporary Irish culture might on these grounds alone be compared to that of Yeats during the Revival or Seán Ó Faoláin during the meridian of *The Bell* in the 1940s. Pamphlets, anthologies, small magazines, and publishing ventures have typically been essential outlets for such cultural movements and Deane, as already noted, has worked his way through many such forms. Nevertheless, he could only play such a leading role because he was by then widely acknowledged to be the most versatile critic of his generation. Key critical essays – on Burke and the French philosophes, Voltaire, Joyce, Ford Madox Ford, Conrad, J. M. Synge, Austin Clarke, Sean O'Casey, John Banville, Yeats, and others – had appeared from the late 1960s onwards. Deane's first three books were published in quick succession in the mid-1980s, each displaying different strengths: *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880–1980* (1985); *A Short History of Irish Literature* (1986); and *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789–1832* (1988).

The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789–1832 is the last in this sequence of publications but, as the subject of Deane's doctoral dissertation, the earliest in conception. Though still little discussed in most accounts of his work, it nonetheless remains foundational to Deane's formation and to all of his subsequent critical writing. The volume offers an overview of how British writers interpreted the French Enlightenment and Revolution against the backdrop of the Terror and the rise and fall of Napoleon, these events welcomed by few and feared by many in Britain as likely to foment a second revolution in that state as the United Irish insurrection had attempted to do in Ireland. Deane's focus is on the intellectual careers of Edmund Burke, James Mackintosh, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Godwin, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and William Hazlitt, though there are slighter cameos also of William Wordsworth, Robert Southey, John Wilson Croker, Francis Jeffrey, Thomas Holcroft, Thomas Paine, and Joseph Priestley. The study teases out how the main figures here engaged conceptually with some of their leading French counterparts including Jean Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu, Baron d'Holbach, La Mettrie, Helvétius, and others. It examines instances of the intricate relay of ideas of freedom and liberty as they migrated from England into the works of the eighteenth-century French philosophes and then travelled from there back to nineteenth-

century England, where French writings were rejected or reabsorbed by some of the leading English writers of the apocalyptic years between Burke's late career and those that ended the first Romantic generation.

One of the book's major claims is that, despite their political and intellectual antagonisms, British writers, conservative and radical alike, came, with few exceptions, to attribute the degeneration of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic dictatorship to the defects of French national character and to assign the apparent successes of the Glorious Revolution to the assumed superiority of British national character. From this standpoint, Parisian intellectual life was volatile and irreligious, French sexual manners shocking and scandalous, and the effect of centuries of Catholicism had inclined the French in favour of the despotism that Napoleon finally embodied. Whiggish and radical Protestant England and Ireland initially welcomed the Revolution because it had seemed to signal an astonishing triumph by the French over their Catholic and absolutist inheritances. However, as the Revolution faltered, the already long-standing views of the contrasting French and English national characters were updated and refined to 'explain' developments in contemporary history. An excessive reliance on 'theory', ideology, and abstract thought, a lack of respect for the gravity of settled custom, the vanity of the intellectuals, and the venality of the owners of both the old and the new wealth were all blamed for the disaster in France. In this propaganda war, a conception of a stable and loyal British national character, the antithesis of innovative brilliance and irresponsible experiment, became one of the most effective weapons in the counter-revolutionary arsenal. As a companion piece to this counter-revolutionary conception of Britishness, there was to hand an equally useful portrait of Irish national character. Deane's work suggested that this weaponized conception of Englishness, eloquently elaborated by Burke, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, subsequently taken up by Matthew Arnold and others, and later outfitted with race theory, became one of the foundational supports for British political thought and literature for over a century to come. Ireland was inevitably affected by ideas that were current among intellectuals and writers in Britain; indeed, *Celtic Revivals* and *Strange Country* would propose that these ideas of national character,

reworked in Irish conditions, would become formative to nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish cultural life and literature also.

Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1890–1980 is possibly Deane's signature work. A slim volume of fourteen essays, it runs to less than two hundred pages. Its longest essay, 'Joyce and Stephen: The Provincial Intellectual', is scarcely seventeen pages; most individual pieces are little more than ten pages each. The opening chapter on 'Arnold, Burke and the Celts' looks back to the first Celtic revival in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This revival was associated in Scotland with Macpherson's Ossian forgeries of 1760 and then taken up in Ireland with Charlotte Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789), Edward Bunting's *The Ancient Music of Ireland* (1796), and the first volume of Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies* (1808). Chapters 2 to 9, the book's core section, deal with the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish Revival, and engage with Yeats, Synge, Joyce, O'Casey, and Beckett. The final section running from Chapters 10 to 14 is the shortest of all; it gingerly assesses then leading contemporary writers Thomas Kinsella, John Montague, Derek Mahon, Brian Friel, and Seamus Heaney. The stress on writers from the northern part of the country in this final sequence caused some commentators to speculate whether Deane was quietly proposing a third 'Northern Revival' in his own day, one to which Field Day was offering itself as the directive intellectual light.

The essays in *Celtic Revivals* include many stylishly succinct and arresting insights. '*Portrait* is the first novel in the English language in which a passion for thinking is fully presented: *Ulysses* is the first novel in which the activity of thought is the central concern and the determining influence on the form' ('Joyce and Stephen: The Provincial Intellectual', 75–6).[1] '[Yeats's] abhorrence of the neutralization of death in the middle-class consciousness led him towards disciplines and interests in which the notion of death was pre-eminent and the contemplation of it a crucial activity' ('Yeats and the Idea of Revolution', 41). 'Ireland, with its dead language, its deadening politics, its illiberal legislation, is the historical correlative of the personal state of nirvana-nullity for which Beckett's people crave. Silent, ruined, given to the imaginary, dominated by the actual, it is the perfect site for a metaphysics of absence' ('Joyce and

Beckett', 130). 'People talk themselves into freedom. No longer imprisoned by sea or cottage, by age or politics, Synge's heroes and heroines chat themselves off stage, out of history, into legend' ('Synge and Heroism', 58). On Heaney's 'A Lough Neagh Sequence': 'That sibilant sensuousness, however spectacular, is not devoted entirely to description. It gives to the movement of the eel an almost ritual quality, converting the action into a mysterious rite, emphasizing the sacral by dwelling so sensually on the secular' ('Seamus Heaney: The Timorous and the Bold', 177). No single volume of essays on Irish writing since Yeats had matched such elegant expression with such intellectual dash nor so deftly probed so many senior reputations with such easy authority. A series of lightning critical forays from Burke and Arnold to Mahon and Heaney, *Celtic Revivals* delivered its assessments with a debonair aplomb that bordered on insolence.

What *Celtic Revivals* lacks is an overview, a combinatory or totalizing metanarrative. In his *Short History of Irish Literature* (1986), the introduction to *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991), and again in *Strange Country* (1995), Deane would strive to find that metanarrative. The last of these works is his most ambitious attempt to do so. For admirers of *Celtic Revivals*, *Strange Country* can seem a strange book. Gone are the earlier volume's tautly compact chapters, gone the single-author studies or author pairings ('Arnold, Burke and the Celts', 'Joyce and Beckett'), gone too any engagement with contemporary Irish literature beyond Beckett, the earlier sketches of Deane's contemporaries such as Heaney, Friel, Kinsella, and Mahon nowhere now in sight. On second look, though, *Strange Country* is not so much some wholly new departure for Deane as a complex reshuffle of earlier concerns and, bringing to harvest his labours as author of the *Short History* and general editor of the *Field Day Anthology*, a widening out of his conception of 'writing'. The chronicle mode of *A Short History of Irish Literature*, with its steady march through centuries and expected forms, is replaced, therefore, and the more exclusive focus on the great tradition of Irish 'literary' writers in *Celtic Revivals* is downgraded. As Deane's works so often do, *Strange Country* begins with Burke and the Romantic reaction against the French Enlightenment, but it ends not with contemporary Irish literature but with T. W. Moody, F. S. L. Lyons, Louis Cullen, and Irish

historiographic revisionism. In this new conspectus, a political thinker like Burke can be orchestrated with a literary one like Edgeworth or an antiquarian music collector like James Hardiman; novelists like Gerald Griffin or Bram Stoker and poets like Thomas Moore or James Clarence Mangan appear alongside national political campaigners like Thomas Davis, John Mitchel, or Michael Davitt; Yeats features in counterpoint to a critic like Daniel Corkery; and mid-twentieth-century writers like Patrick Kavanagh or Flann O'Brien are discussed as unlikely aesthetic correlatives to the later twentieth-century revisionists with which *Strange Country* closes.

This sinuous narrative weave offers unpredictable prismatic perspectives: here, writers of different denominations, modes, and political persuasions throw curiously angled light on each other, the greater and lesser figures emerging into view as though glimpsed in some distorting gallery of mirrors. The competing and contested conceptions of 'Ireland' and 'Irishness' their writings produce are never gathered into a seamless 'tradition' but neither can they be cleanly separated from each other. *Strange Country* does not offer a new history of Irish writing in any conventional sense so much as a spiralling critical genealogy of the different ways in which writers have drawn on British, European, and Irish discourses to produce competing 'Irelands' amenable to their ambitions. If the expected literary geniuses no longer dominate the foreground in *Strange Country* as they had done in *Celtic Revivals*, this is because for *Strange Country* discourses make and constrain writers as much as writers make or manipulate discourses. One of *Strange Country*'s dominant arguments, taking its cue from Daniel Corkery's *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (1931), is that Irish writing since Burke has relied on a rhetoric whereby Ireland appears as attractively or dangerously aberrant to an English modernity deemed normative. From a conservative Romantic perspective, Ireland might be saluted as an exceptional and enchanted place precisely because it had remained non-modern and had not therefore succumbed, though it always appeared to be about to do so, to the alienated conditions of industrialism, secularism, mass democracy, and an atomized individualism characteristic of England in particular and the Western world more generally. From a nineteenth-century liberal rationalist perspective, though, Irish

conditions of mass poverty, sectarian strife, and excesses of violence, drink, emotion, or self-expression could be ascribed to this same non-modernity, the cure for which was a steady diet of reform and improvement on the English model. In either case, the aberrance of Irish reality was taken to be axiomatic and the very notion of a distinctive Irishness came to rely in time on this sense of the country's persistent strangeness to modernity. In their different ways, British and Irish writers collusively shared this sense of an estranged Ireland, some seeing in that strangeness fertile literary resource, others a rebarbative foreignness to be tamed.

For some Irish Revivalists such as Yeats, Ireland's non-modern strangeness was its most seductive quality and, by combating the Western modernity that threatened to obliterate it, Ireland could nurture both a heroic national literature and a valiant national destiny. However much they might be at odds otherwise, Yeats's vision for Ireland and that of the Irish Catholic Church converged on these grounds at least. For writers like Joyce, however, what defined Ireland was not its non-modernity but its belatedness and spiritually impoverished version of modernity, legacies of its intellectual subjection to the twin forces of British imperialism and Italian Catholicism. Viewed thus, Ireland was in a squalid condition that the writer might record with levels of formal brilliance and naturalistic exactitude so demanding as to represent in itself a contrasting heroism. For Deane, it was, surprisingly, this Joycean modernist commitment to the ordinary, the everyday, and the mundane that had proved the greater force in twentieth-century Irish writing, one far more persistent than Yeats's romanticism or heroic styles.

After the energies of the Irish revolutionary period, revivalism and high modernism had all run down, several mid-century Irish writers (Beckett, Kavanagh, Flann O'Brien in their different ways) had abjured not only the idea of a heroic Ireland – itself a notion absurdly out of sorts with the conservative and quietest Catholic Free State they knew – but also the idea of a heroic literature of either Joycean or Yeatsian kind. Emerging in the aftermath of the high tide of the Irish Revival and high modernism, and in a Europe twice devastated by catastrophic wars, this chastened generation substituted for the grandiose ambitions of their forerunners a satirical, parodic literature of failure, one that mocked or blessed a banal everyday world that literature could neither redeem nor

transfigure. Between this mid-century literature, for which boredom rather than enchantment or the excitements of Yeatsian apocalypse was the keynote, and Irish revisionism, keen to fumigate Irish historiography of its own elements of romantic extravagance or revolutionary pretension, there was, Deane asserted, an elective affinity. By long and circuitous routes, writers and historians alike had come to accept that Ireland's great destiny, once thought to be for better or worse exceptional, was essentially to be unexceptional. Born into strangeness as a lamentably backward or commendably romantic colonial outlier to English modernity, twentieth-century Ireland had found that its real vocation was actually to be ordinary. Strange country, normal people.

The significance of Burke to Deane's understanding of the long reaction to the French Revolution is further emphasized in his next book, *Foreign Affections: Essays on Edmund Burke* (2005). Here, we see Burke in an eighteenth-century French, Irish, and English formation (Swift, Montesquieu, Diderot, and Hume among its central figures), face to face with the triumphant Revolution, and with his demonized other, Rousseau. Accounts follow of the repercussions of Burkean writing in Newman and Arnold, Tocqueville and Lord Acton, in all of whom we sense the menace of an emergent modernity in which Ireland is forecast to play or seen to have already played a key role. Joyce and Yeats emerge from these essays as moulding (and moulded) figures of the next generation.

Small World can be read in relation to these earlier works in two ways. In an obvious sense, the volume represents a selection of essays culled from across Deane's wider writings from the early 1980s to 2018. Like any selection, this one is partial in more senses than one, but the pieces included here afford readers a means to trace some of the contours of Deane's preoccupations from the earlier to the later stages of his career. As with his earlier studies, the assembled essays cover that by now familiar long-reach overview that stretches from eighteenth-century writers Swift, Burke, and Tone to contemporaries such as Anna Burns, an overview that Deane has made his own. Here, though, the reader can get some impression not only of the temporal span of Deane's scholarship but also of the variety of modes that his writings have taken. 'Civilians and Barbarians' and 'Heroic Styles' were first published as pamphlets and share with

'Wherever Green is Read', his most lacerating exposure of the embedded rhetoric of revisionism, the polemical verve of the combative public intellectual writing to the moment. The essays on Swift and Burke, or Joyce and Burns, or Bowen and Lavin, are scholarly appreciations, weighing in the case of Burke, for example, the uses to which he has been bent in twentieth-century American scholarship, or, in the case of Joyce, inspecting the rhetorical crescendos he deploys to achieve the famous closing intensities of his works from 'The Dead' through *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.

Some of the longest pieces collected here, 'Tone: The Great Nation and the Evil Empire' or 'The End of the World', represent the longer essay forms that have characterized the later stage of Deane's career, the decade from 2005 to 2015 during which he edited *Field Day Review*. Ostensibly at least, the Tone essay is a review of a three-volume edition of *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, edited by T. W. Moody, R. B. McDowell, and C. J. Woods, but the piece immediately departs from any conventional review form. It opens with a gripping account of the 1795 trial and courtroom death by self-poisoning of the Anglican clergyman and United Irish agent William Jackson, who chose suicide over a traitor's execution and the disinheritance of his family that would follow. From there, it leads into a harrowing invocation of the reign of legal terror undertaken by the British authorities in the 1790s designed entirely to extinguish the United Irishmen even before any French-assisted revolution was attempted. The use of informers, spies, torture, execution, imprisonment, eviction, and exile to the Americas or the colonies, and the bait of briberies and honours by the British state to suppress an infant Irish republicanism, constituted, Deane argues, 'a new departure from English law, peculiar to Ireland': these would constitute exemplary modes of oppression and reward further refined over the next two centuries and practised successively against the United Irishmen, the Fenians, the post-Famine land agitations, and IRA members during the two 'Troubles' eras. In the narrative sequences that follow, Deane comments on the qualities of Tone's writings and personal friendships, on the uses to which his plain style and aristocratic deportment have been put, on the accomplishments and shortcomings of the editorial decisions that governed the collection of Tone's writings in the volumes under

review, on Tone's departures from specific British republican intellectual traditions running from Milton and Harrington to Toland and Molesworth that had always conceived of Catholics as implacable foes to liberty, and, finally, on the way in which, despite his efforts for Irish Catholics, Tone's 'Roman suicide' would in the writings of later Catholic nationalist historians such as Thomas D'Arcy Magee always place republicanism's founding father outside of the Catholic family fold. What appears in one light a torqued or meandering piece taking its own easy way with the materials in hand becomes in another light a striking series of explorations of the various ways in which a neo-stoic Romanism, in its republican, aristocratic-patrician, and Catholic forms, and a crusading Britonism, in its Protestant and imperial versions, have left their mark on an Irish republicanism intellectually affiliated with and antagonistic to each.

The 'End of the World' chapter, which rounds off *Small World*, is an even more remarkable construction. Taking its inspiration from Walter Benjamin, the piece is subdivided into twelve sections – 'Helga', 'Lusitania', 'The Blaskets', 'Mar ná beidh ár leithéidí arís ann …', 'A Minor Literature, A Major Language', 'Peig', 'Therapeutic Realism', 'A Therapeutic Language', 'Thomas MacDonagh', 'Daniel Corkery', 'Robin Flower', 'George Thomson'. What binds these vignettes? Or, if searching for any overarching argument is misconceived, the piece a constellated series of *essais* or tries, what emerges from these arrangements? The steamship *Helga* with which 'The End of the World' opens, best known in Irish history and song for the shelling of Liberty Hall during the Easter Rising of 1916, had earlier taken part, Deane notes, in the first Clare Island Survey of 1909–11, and after 1916 was to become a troopship that transported the Black and Tan militias to different ports of Ireland during the War of Independence, before eventually being purchased by the Irish Free State to become part of its tiny marine fleet. From botanical survey vessel to imperial gunboat and troop-carrier to Free State marine service, where she was renamed *Muirchú* (Sea Hound), the *Helga*, Deane observes, passed in the space of a decade 'out of the history of world domination and into the quiet desuetude of the Irish Free State naval service'. This overture prepares readers for another Deane-style history lesson that will, apparently, take them from the

turbulence of history with its empires, revolutions, and atrocities into the conservative calms and retirements of posthistory: the Irish Free State and Republic born of that imperial turbulence somehow, like the *Helga*, also navigating a path into the latter condition. This end-of-history narrative is not absent from 'The End of the World', but neither is it the whole story.

In another of its registers, 'The End of the World' traces a history of the Blasket islanders, sea-scavengers who lived by fishing and for whom the cargoes washed ashore from British and American ships sunk by German submarines during World War I represented a rare bonanza: 'boxed chocolates, barrels of apples, flour, wine, bacon, castor oil, pocket watches, clothes, leather strips and cowhides, cotton bales, wooden planks' were all gifted by the tides to the marvelling islanders in 1915 after the sinking of the *Lusitania*. But the Blaskets, like Ireland's other western islands, were themselves successively scavenged by British surveyors, German philologists, Irish Revivalists, Gaelic scholars, American filmmakers, English classicists, and naturalists for evidence of a prehistorical, non-modern, or classical or epic past miraculously surviving aslant the outer end of Ireland's and Europe's modernity. In this sequence, the slow fade of the Irish language, the disappearance of a primitive way of island life, and the beginning of the end of human habitation on the Blaskets become occasions for various forms of commemorative or conservation exercises. Ranging from those of the Free State to the 'Cambridge school' of anthropology to the contemporary naturalism of Tim Robinson, these exercises are designed to transfer things on the threshold of their obliteration into the literary treasuries, archives, and languages of the successor worlds that will displace them.

Time itself, or the different scales of time that organize human and natural life, will ultimately emerge as Deane's 'theme' in this piece. The *Helga* and *Lusitania* have their places in the essay because each marks a moment in a larger passage of historical time that will, at the cost of two world wars, see the decline of the European empires and the ascendance of their American successor. 'The Great War had been a European affair; it became a World War with the American intervention.' 'The old balance of powers had given way to a new hegemony. Globalization and the World became the key terms of the vocabulary that began to rival, then

replace, the legal idioms of the nation-state and the European balance of power.' The time of this transition from European empire to American world is also obviously the time of the making of Irish Free State and Republic, the new polity's first 'independent' century limned by the death of the one dispensation and the birth of the other. This era will be marked, too, not just by the removal of the Blasket islanders but also of the Irish Ascendancy – Elizabeth Bowen is saluted in two essays in this volume as one of the subtlest Irish recorders of the passing of British and European aristocratic *mentalités* – and by the old Ascendancy Ireland's brief replacement by Catholic Ireland, its anguished, but shy and circumspect life deftly caught in the slanted art of Mary Lavin.

Underlying all that clamour of cultural and political history with its ruckus of rising and falling great powers, nations, and classes, there lies yet another temporality: the dimension of evolutionary time, the aeons of earth and seas, things once but no longer thought to be inviolable to human time. Yet even our sense of the differential temporalities of botanical or natural life comes to us, Deane reminds himself, as a product of human scientific or cultural consciousness, as does the perception that the natural world's slow unhurried pace runs contrapuntally to the jaggedly destructive rush of our modernity and postmodernity. Post-Enlightenment history or modernity once promised much, now promises little salvific consolation, but to abjure history, whatever little hope it offers, is to surrender not just the past but also any sense of steerage towards a different future. 'The End of the World' registers the dissolution of Irish and other national histories into the global solvent of American World History, but it also intimates that time may be marking the cards of that World History too, or it might suggest that the end of human habitation on the Blaskets anticipates not just a post-Gaelic world but a post-human time unfathomable to us all.

For many people around the world, Ireland remains a country of writers, not critics. Today, the names of Wilde and Shaw, Synge and Yeats, Joyce and Beckett, Bowen and Banville, Heaney and Kinsella, Edna O'Brien and Sally Rooney, have an international resonance that few figures in the non-literary Irish arts can match and their literary works obviously reach wider readerships than critical writings can hope to do.

To say this does not diminish the accomplishments of Irish critics. Yeats devoted a long career not just to creating a distinctively new Irish literature in his poetry and plays but also to shaping and championing that new literature in his critical writings and essays. When he felt the occasion compelled him to do so, he was not shy to take up the role of public intellectual, plying his rhetorical skills, often intemperately, sometimes with wit, for good and bad causes. A generation later, other writers – the playwright, novelist, and short-story writer Daniel Corkery, and novelist and short-story writer Sean Ó Faoláin – also found themselves duty-bound to play the critic: Corkery addressed what he felt to be stubbornly recalcitrant colonial attitudes in Irish writing; Ó Faoláin chastised not only Yeats's, McQuaid's, or De Valera's Irelands for their perversities but also took his fellow writers to task for what he deemed their inverted romanticisms and circumspect timidities. A poet as well as an essayist in his early career, and the author of the oblique and intricately crafted *Reading in the Dark*, one of the finest novels of the Troubles period, Deane has brilliantly sustained a legacy, now in Ireland more than a century long, of the writer-critic and public intellectual. That novel's form – with its subjective intensities heightened by their communal dimension and then absorbed into an historical narrative – re-enacts his progression of the short essay into longer narrative analyses.

Like Yeats, Corkery, or Ó Faoláin, Deane has never been afraid to be unpopular or at odds with his times. Like these predecessors, he has been willing to challenge his country's dominant ideologies, both political and aesthetic, in so doing risking the hostility not only of the majesties of the law and guardians of the state but also that of those who prefer to consider themselves the keepers of creativity and champions of reasonable debate or dissent. That said, Deane has never allowed himself to settle comfortably into the role of critic if by critic one simply means a castigator or oppositional figure only. His enormous scholarly commitment to several centuries of Irish writing, his assimilation of so many European intellectual traditions from the Enlightenment to the present, his writings as poet and novelist, and his collaborative work as theatre company director, anthologist, and general editor of the Field Day Critical Conditions series, all testify to a career that has been a creatively civic and constructive enterprise. He has never devoted his

energies only to the articulation of his own ambitions, but always to the furtherance of Irish writing in several modes.

If this foreword has stressed the critical writer over the early poet or novelist, this is because Deane has made critical writing and intellectual scholarship his premier vocation. This indeed is the point perhaps at which his career diverges most from those of the precursors earlier mentioned. For those who might have wished a follow-up novel to *Reading in the Dark*, this may be a matter of regret, but for Irish critical writing the gain has been immense. The decision to give priority to the critical work may have been a personal one or a matter of circumstance in the way careers so often are; whatever the reason, it is indicative of a conviction, one already evident in *Celtic Revivals*, that modern Irish writing, in and beyond Ireland, can be more deeply appreciated in an enriching intellectual perspective to be gained only by pressing Irish critical and creative temperaments towards new equilibria.

In 'The Essay as Form', Theodor Adorno argues that the essay as a genre neither begins with definitions or concepts nor ends with conclusions or takeaway theses but with its own completion. For Adorno, 'the law of the innermost form of the essay is heresy. By transgressing the orthodoxy of thought, something becomes visible in the object which it is orthodoxy's secret purpose to keep invisible.'[2] Heretical, sensuously cerebral, cerebrally sensuous, elliptic, elusive, enigmatic, melancholy, modest, ornate, acute, complete, and incomplete, the essays that compose *Small World* – which here can mean Ireland, our chastened and reduced globalized condition, the essay mode itself – show Deane to be an adept of the form as Adorno understood it. At his best, he may be said to have alloyed that difficult union of art and intellect for which in Field Day, his career, his books, he has assiduously striven. *Small World*, large ambition, a career or vocation that has brought much of that ambition to burnished realization.

NOTES

1. Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880–1980* (Winston-Salem, NC: Wake Forest University Press, 1985).
2. T. W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', trans. Bob Hullot-Kentor and Fredric Will, *New German Critique*, 32 (Spring–Summer 1984), 151–71 (at 171).