

Brittney Byrom

Dr. Marilyn J. Richtarik

February 24, 2016

ENGL 8755

Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* Second Half

For the second half of the book I really focused on these stories labeled "Mother" and "My Father." I feel like those two stories reinforce the article that I had chosen to present today, because both create a scene of the reconnection between the narrator and his father and the split between the narrator and his mother. Though it appears that the narrator has more animosity towards his father, he reconnects with him and away that he cannot reconnect with his mother due to the fact that his mother's secret and her silence on it has left her with shame and guilt. A shame that worsens when she sees her son's watchful eyes on her. The narrator will not betray her trust; however, by staying loyal to his mother he inadvertently lies to his father. Despite this secret, he has a stronger relationship with his father and he does his mother by the end of the novel.

The growing rift between the narrator and his mother plays out when the boy promises to bring home ten distinctions, one per examination. He promised to bring these to her but he came up one short. Her response "you could have come first in Ireland if you had tried harder" displays a growing contempt for her child no matter how hard he tries at his studies (226). The "low-intensity warfare" between the mother and the narrator kept up until he tried to bring her recompense with a golden iris (225). After a year of shunning, surely bringing her something beautiful would liken her to her own child, but instead she promptly destroyed the peace

offering. By her crushing the flower, the narrator knew that he had been exiled: “Now the hunting meant something new to me—now I had become the shadow” (228). The narrator became a keeper of the family secret and a ghost of what the family once was.

The decomposing relationship did not go unnoticed by the other family members. His father noticed the mother being overly controlling with their son. The disconnect between the father’s relationship with the narrator and the mother’s relationship with the narrator can be seen in their response to his grades. The father on the other hand, showed pride when his son came home with a degree from college. The father, not knowing the cost of the narrator’s knowledge, could explain why he and the mother react differently to their son’s intelligence. Either way, the son sympathizes with his father who didn’t have the opportunities the son had. When he thinks about his father in this section he sees “the man behind the door, the boy weeping in the coal shed, they walked down that dusty road, the ruined rose bed, the confession in the church, his dead, betrayed brother...” (238).

Overall, the short stories that Deane wrote tell the story of a child with the lust for learning who learns that knowledge comes with a cost. For him it came with the cost of knowing a family secret, the distraction of his relationship with his mother, and lying to his father. These mounting costs became so great to him that he left for college in Belfast to handle the pressures of being his family’s secret keeper. Here he “celebrated all the anniversaries: of all the deaths, all of the betrayals—for both of them—in [his] head...” until he realized that in old age has muddied some of their memory, causing the secret to die out.