The American Muldoon

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Abstract

This study of Paul Muldoon hinges on the Northern Irish poet's 1987 arrival in the United States. Principally, it asks what bearing the American move has had on the vertiginous changes in scale, allusiveness, and formal sophistication that have come to define the second half of his career. Focussing in the main on his longer forms in both the poems and lectures, I argue that Muldoon's emigration has shifted his *oeuvre* into a serially expansive, polymorphous phase, and that his later works are enmeshed with the new cultural and academic models he encounters in the States. In what I see as their commitment to global and persistently Transatlantic allusive traffic, Muldoon's long forms testify to the pleasures of mobility, even when returning as they often do to the poet's Irish heritage and memories of early life. This Transatlantic traffic will be the study's central focus.

Chapter 1 considers Muldoon's first full collection of poetry produced in America, *Madoc: A Mystery* (1990). Its title poem pivots on a Transatlantic departure, and, as I aim to show, marks a definitive turn in his poetics towards Joyce, the formal avant-garde, and ludic models of self-conscious postmodern obscurity. Chapter 2 offers the first full-scale treatment of Paul Muldoon as critic. In a series of long-voyage lectures from his American years, *To Ireland, I* (2000) and *The End of the Poem* (2006), Muldoon announces himself on the critical scene not only as a 'stunt reader' but, I argue, an extraordinarily Freudian thinker, as this thesis considers in full. Chapter 3 examines his poetics of the slip from *The Annals of Chile* (1994) onward as a new serial genre in Muldoon's later U.S. career, and explores the merits of his mistakes in formal, erotic, intertextual and political terms. Finally, Chapter 4 addresses the importance of memory and the long poem for Muldoon in America, examining the architectural blueprint of ninety rhyme-words which ranges over five consecutive volumes from *The Annals of Chile* to *Maggot* (2010). As I hope to show, this blueprint involves an extensive palimpsestic performance of memory and mourning that is ceaselessly Transatlantic, weaving Muldoon's Irish past and American present into a suggestively autobiographical *magnum opus*.

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Abbreviations

MM	*Madoc: A Mystery*. London: Faber and Faber, 1990.
PQ	*The Prince of the Quotidian*. Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1994.
AC	*The Annals of Chile*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994.
P	*Poems 1968-1998*. London: Faber and Faber, 2001.
MSG	*Moy Sand and Gravel*. London: Faber and Faber, 2002.
HL	*Horse Latitudes*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006.
M	*Maggot*. London: Faber and Faber, 2010.
OT	*One Thousand Things Worth Knowing*. London: Faber and Faber, 2015.
TI	*To Ireland, I*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
EP	*The End of the Poem*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

'To America, I'

In 1998 Paul Muldoon commented on his American room with a view, saying:

> I love the idea of being able to move around, to feel a sense of belonging to several places at once. In my own case, I think this is a function of having been very fixed in one place and dancing on one spot. When I look out of a window, be it in Princeton or in Vermont, it's as if I'm testing the view from the room in which I spent my childhood, a view that's seared onto my retina.[1]

'Two places at once, was it, or one place twice?', Muldoon asks in 'Twice' (*P*, 331). The American Muldoon is fascinated by the possibility of being in more than one place, dancing on multiple spots. Princeton, where he has worked since 1990, or Robert Frost's adopted State of Vermont give way here to the dance of other places, other rooms where the view is displaced by his childhood window as primary (and perhaps primal) scene. Early memories of Northern Ireland are now the testing ground for Muldoon's Transatlantic visions, in which the vastness of America is taken in through 'A Tight Wee Place in Armagh', and also measured against it.[2] The opening quotation comes from an interview with the Long Poem Group, where Muldoon contemplated his attraction to the scale and seriality of longer forms in the year of his eighth major volume, *Hay* (1998). This was the moment for Muldoon when rhyme had started to shape entire collections – and the inter-rhyming connections between collections – in increasingly ambitious ways. Embarking later that year on his encyclopaedic series of lectures, *To Ireland, I*, and on the longer, ludic *End of the Poem* in 1999, these large-scale U.S. constructions reflect Muldoon's extravagant forms of *reading* as well as writing in America. These forms will be the focus of this study. A newly expansive notion of place and form is evident in his work from the New World, in which Transatlantic returns to early memories of Ireland ('the room in which I spent my childhood') become the paradigm for the polymorphous intertextual elaborations of his American career.

Muldoon, who lived most of his early life on a small farm in Collegelands, Co. Armagh, is now an American citizen. His 1987 arrival in the United States was preceded by thirteen years working in Belfast as a BBC radio and television producer, and an interim year spent between the Universities of Cambridge and East Anglia on academic fellowships. Soon after the U.S.

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[1] Sebastian Barker, 'A Drink with Paul Muldoon', in *Long Poem Group Newsletter*, 7 (1998), last accessed 11 Sep. 2017 at http://www.dgdclynx.plus.com/lpgn/lpgn72.html.
[2] Paul Muldoon, 'A Tight Wee Place in Armagh', *Fortnight*, 206 (1984), 19-23.

move, he married the American novelist Jean Hanff Korelitz in August 1987, and took up invitations to teach at Columbia and Princeton. Visiting appointments at Berkeley and Massachusetts followed in 1988-89, before he settled into a permanent position with Princeton's Creative Writing programme in 1990. Muldoon left Ireland the author of five volumes of poetry from *New Weather* (1973) to *Meeting the British* (1987), and has since produced a further seven full-length collections, as well as two books of criticism, three opera libretti, Irish, Romanian and Latin poetry in translation, verse drama, books for children, edited anthologies, several collections of song lyrics and numerous other interim publications. As the prodigious range of this catalogue makes clear, America has had an exponential effect on his writing, both in terms of his poetic output and the work in multiple forms and genres he has produced there in the second half of his career.

From his earliest 'Imramma' in which he 'trailed [his] father's spirit' as far as South America (*P*, 85), Muldoon has long imagined the Transatlantic crossing. More than this, the Americanization of his poetry had begun early in Ireland. Already reading and imitating American writers like Robert Frost and Raymond Chandler,[3] his early work was also bringing local Irish history into touch with American culture (as when a Gaelic Ulster gallowglass named Gallogly 'flees the Museum of Modern Art | with the bit between [his] teeth' (*P*, 136)). Picked up by Faber and Faber in 1973, it was only seven years before his poetry began to circulate on both sides of the Atlantic, with Edna Longley quick to note that Muldoon 'had joined "the Atlantic Club" and found American readers long before any actual embarkation.'[4] While Faber remained his primary publisher, his third, fourth and fifth volumes – *Why Brownlee Left* (1980), *Quoof* (1983) and *Meeting the British* (1987) – were also printed in the USA by Wake Forest University Press, a small university print house and frequent home-from-home for Irish poets seeking American audiences. These dual releases were followed in 1990 by *Madoc: A Mystery*, the first volume Muldoon wrote entirely on U.S. soil, and no less significantly, the book that marked his transition to Farrar, Straus and Giroux, where he was taken on by Jonathan Galassi in 1991. With this move from Wake Forest to FSG, the 264-page *Madoc* represented a serious change in both compositional scale and commercial status.

[3] The title of his first book, *New Weather*, came from a line of 'Wind and Tree', a poem responding to Frost's 'Tree at my Window'. In a later volume, *Why Brownlee Left*, Chandler figures not only on the speaker's bookshelf in 'Making the Move', but also in the hardboiled Chandlerese of his New York detective poem, 'Immram'. See *P*, 4-5, 90, 94-102.

[4] Edna Longley, 'Irish Bards and American Audiences', *The Southern Review*, 31.3 (1995), 757-772, last accessed 23 Oct. 2017 at http://shakespeare.galegroup.com.libproxy.york.ac.uk.

Although the Muldoon of *Meeting the British* and earlier volumes was already looking west, *Madoc* was the poet's true U.S. debut – a mischievous, daring, fiendishly long and distinctly American book which not only introduced his most recent poetry to U.S. audiences but properly launched his career there. That radical 1990 collection was integral to early perceptions of Muldoon in America, so much so that his fellow-Irish poet David Wheatley made a not-uncommon mistake when observing some time later that 'Muldoon's inventiveness has, if anything, become even more pronounced since his move in 1990 [*sic*] to the United States.'[5] If *Madoc* has become almost synonymous with Muldoon's American arrival and newly pronounced inventiveness, its outsize title poem 'Madoc: A Mystery' marked a 'bold attempt to engage with American history,' which, Wheatley adds, 'is unmatched by other Irish poets who have taught in the U.S.'[6] Indeed, in retrospect, the audacious Transatlantic trajectory of *Madoc* is representative of the way Muldoon embraced America with as much gusto as America has since embraced Muldoon, where he is now a luminary establishment figure.[7]

The critical literature on Muldoon has also grown significantly since he reached the States. Of the four monographs on his work – the first completed by Tim Kendall in 1996 and the last by Anne Karhio in 2017 – all appeared long after his 1987 emigration, and only a fraction of the countless articles and reviews of his work were released before his U.S. arrival. For all the recent critical outpour, however, the *American* Muldoon has not received extended attention as a subject in its own right. There are also gaps in addressing his work's formal transformations, and the changes in scale and compositional practice that have taken place since he took up residence in the States, which this study will look to address. Edna Longley has argued that anthologies of Irish poetry generally stress 'nationality' or 'territorial priorities' and 'rarely ground themselves in aesthetics', and the same charge often applies to the available literature on Muldoon both before and after the move.[8]

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Despite his long American residency, there has been a reluctance among critics to relinquish an understanding of Muldoon's writing through a definitively Irish lens. Such

[5] David Wheatley, 'An Irish Poet in America', *Raritan*, 18.4 (1999): 145.
[6] Wheatley, 'An Irish Poet in America', 146.
[7] Muldoon has been the recipient of numerous major prizes in the U.S., including the Pulitzer (for which only Americans are eligible) and the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award. Named Poetry Editor of the *New Yorker* in 2007, his celebrity has since continued to rise: in 2009 he was a guest on the hit American television show *The Colbert Report*, and later that year read for President Obama at the White House.
[8] Longley, 'Irish Bards and American Audiences', 757-772.

accounts owe partly to the easy comparison with his fellow Northern Irishman, Seamus Heaney, who represents 'a temptingly accessible way into an otherwise notoriously "difficult" poet,' as Fran Brearton argues.[9] While Muldoon's relationship with Heaney's work remains a fruitful and instructive comparison to which this thesis returns, simply reading Muldoon *through* Heaney is a reductive and regrettably common trend which has left other aspects of his work underexplored. As Daniel Tobin writes in his 2007 anthology of *Irish American Poetry*, 'the direction of Heaney's "American" poems is retrospective. America occasions thoughts of Ireland in the Nobel laureate's work, rather than exhibiting a sustained presence in its own right'.[10] Muldoon's America is, conversely, vividly imagined. Although the directions of his U.S. poems will, like Heaney's, often occasion thoughts of Ireland, they are as often set on distinctly American soil, as we see in long émigré poems like 'Madoc' (*Madoc: A Mystery*), 'The Mudroom' (*Hay*) and 'At the Sign of the Black Horse' (*Moy Sand and Gravel*) which draw extensively on American history, scenery, and everyday life in the USA. Rather than reflecting the difficulties of displacement, Muldoon's American writing exalts in its familiarity with other places – even if his newly divided family roots between Ireland and America complicate the question of belonging, which is now played out more self-consciously than ever.

Elmer Kennedy-Andrews's *Northern Irish Poetry: The American Connection* (2014) gives the fullest account of Muldoon's U.S. career to date. Although it also seeks out American connections in the works of Heaney, Mahon, Carson and Montague – all of whom cite important American poets as influences and have lived and taught in the States – the Muldoon chapter 'is noticeably longer than all the others,' he says, 'for the simple reason that Muldoon's engagement with America, in evidence from the very beginning of his career and sustained throughout, has been more protracted, complex and profound than that of any of the other poets [discussed].'[11] Muldoon's relationship with America is indeed more protracted than those of his Irish contemporaries, of whom only Derek Mahon (in his 1995 *Hudson Letter*) and the Brooklyn-born John Montague (author of *Mount Eagle* and 'The Complex Fate of Being American-Irish') take on the States *extensively* as a subject.[12] Kennedy-Andrews's study is,

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[9] Fran Brearton, '"Ploughing by the Tail": Longley, Muldoon, and Anxiety of Influence', *Nordic Irish Studies*, 2 (2003), 2.

[10] Daniel Tobin (ed.), 'Introduction' to *The Book of Irish American Poetry: from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), xlii.

[11] Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *Northern Irish Poetry: The American Connection* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), vii.

[12] For Dillon Johnston, 'America figures sizably as setting or subject *only* in works of Eamon Grennan, John Montague, and Paul Muldoon'; and even then, he adds, Grennan's writing 'often leaves the setting uncertain' between Ireland and New York. See Johnston, 'Poetic Discoveries and Inventions of America', *Colby Quarterly*, 28.4 (1992): 203 (my emphasis).

however, less interested in the nature or extensiveness of that American engagement, than in what internationally minded poets with roots in Northern Ireland can tell us about the changing face of 'Irishness' in a globalized world. Turning to what he calls Muldoon's 'Expatriate Transnationalism', he reads the poet's pre- and post-American work as a 'model of transcultural poetics', and is at his best when mapping the work's two-way currents of Transatlantic exchange.[13] These range in Muldoon's case between 'references to his Irish childhood [that] reveal the early appropriation of diverse cultural influences from outside Ireland,' and the 'later adult American perspectives [which] are saturated with memories of his Irish past.'[14] My study engages with the increasingly ambitious, large-scale forms of Muldoon's U.S. writing as they emerge out of that Transatlantic intersection.

Kennedy-Andrews's book covers a great deal on both sides of the water, though its commentaries drift inexorably east, back to Ireland. His argument on Muldoon is that Ireland remains his central point of imaginative contact even in America; and while this thesis will bear out Muldoon's continuing fascination with his Northern Irish past, I want also to raise the question of his poetic development in the laboratory of America, and the distinct opportunities America provides for him as the new place of writing. Considering Muldoon's view *from* the USA more than his view *of* it, I will frame Muldoon's intercontinental departure as a trigger for further departures. His formal innovations are large-scale performances which are pre-empted and partly inspired by his new surroundings, and now involve a Transatlantic exchange of material and memories that throws his expatriated position into relief.

Anne Karhio's recent monograph, *Slight Return: Paul Muldoon's Poetics of Place* (2017), also identifies these fertile intersections of 'repetition and the idea of return' with 'the concept of place in [Muldoon's] writing'.[15] Her primary interest, though, lies less with Muldoon's formal innovations and expansions in America than his career-long representations of 'place, space and landscape', from which she draws a thought-provoking picture of his 'textual cartographies'.[16] When Karhio's study does turn to form, she argues that Muldoon's 'continuing attention to formal craft and stylistic detail may have assumed certain American characteristics, but has never

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[13] Kennedy-Andrews, *Northern Irish Poetry*, 167. His model may well have emerged out of Jahan Ramazani's *Transnational Poetics*, in which Ramazani speaks of modern poetry 'exceeding the scope of national literary paradigms' (xi) in ways redolent of Kennedy-Andrews's argument about Muldoon 'redefining the nature and scope of national paradigms' (174). See Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[14] Kennedy-Andrews, *Northern Irish Poetry*, 169.

[15] Anne Karhio, *Slight Return: Paul Muldoon's Poetics of Place* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2017), 1.

[16] Karhio, *Slight Return*, 1-10, 55-96.

made a complete break from the critical approaches of his first poetic community.'[17] This glosses over the nature, range and intensity of formal approaches in Muldoon's later years. There is a break, I contend, between Ireland as the place of writing and the overreaching, extravagantly playful forms that Muldoon devises in America during the second half of his career. This thesis then situates the question of place within a broader narrative of serial order and expansionism. In it I will show that new kinds of formal pressure, as well as a different sense of the architectural span of his work (including a Freudian and Joycean order), exert themselves over the incorrigibly perverse, extraordinarily ambitious work of Muldoon's American career.

Michael Allen's 2001 essay 'Pax Hibernica/Pax Americana: Rhyme and Reconciliation in Muldoon' survives in my opinion as one of the most illuminating works of Muldoon scholarship around, and its Hiberno-American observations anticipate many of the assumptions made in this thesis. Allen's essay identifies how 'Muldoon's growing interest in experimentation [after *Madoc*] is channelled towards an elaboration of rhyme', and was one of the first to posit a relationship between Muldoon's 'fragmented *Künstlerroman*' in the long poems since 'Yarrow' and 'Joyce's *Portrait* in the way it explores the sexual and the Oedipal drives of the maturing artist.'[18] Allen's shrewd, suggestive reflections about form and biography inform this thesis, which has sought to develop Allen's early sketches of the wider formal and the experimental picture, and to bring together the biographically Joycean *Künstlerroman* with the filial-erotic Freudian principles that Muldoon's later American writings seem to channel.

Clair Wills's *Reading Paul Muldoon* (1998) is another totemic work of scholarship which, although now nearly twenty years old, is arguably still the most sensitive extended study of Muldoon's poetry we have. Wills takes us as far as the 1998 publication of *Hay*, in which she observes the peculiar turn in his later work towards greater formal elaboration. 'Muldoon's technical experiments with form have become if anything even more wide-ranging and adventurous [in *Hay*],' she writes, 'moving beyond his ingenious renewal of the sonnet and the sestina [most marked in *Madoc* and *The Annals*]'.[19] Her attention to Muldoon's developing forms and styles has, like Allen's, paved the way for my developments on what she later calls the poet's

[17] Karhio, *Slight Return*, 28-29.
[18] Michael Allen, 'Pax Hibernica/Pax Americana: Rhyme and Reconciliation in Muldoon', in *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, 77, 67. It should be said that, before Allen, Tim Kendall noted how 'the first "lapse" [in 'Yarrow'] is caused by sexual desire,' as it is in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist*. See Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* (Bridgend: Seren, 1996), 233.
[19] Clair Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1998), 187.

'distinctively baroque sensibility', and the 'involuntary element to the verbal repetitions, slippages and connections which characterise his work'.[20]

If this claim sounds suggestively Freudian, it may come as a surprise that Muldoon's Freudian tendencies are seldom acknowledged by critics. I alluded a moment ago to the Freudian and Joycean order of Muldoon's longer, expansionist American forms, and a central supposition through this thesis is that the American Muldoon is both Freudian and Joycean. As early as 1985, Seamus Heaney's 'Place and Displacement' anticipated – and perhaps helped to formulate – this triangulation of influence: 'the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake* who melted time and place into a plasm of rhythms and word-roots, puns and tunes, a slide-show of Freudian slips for the Jungian typesetter, this Joyce would recognise the verbal opportunism of Muldoon as a form of native kenning, a northern doubling.'[21] While Muldoon's rhyme-play and word associations have never made a secret of drawing inspiration from somewhere not wholly (or not only) conscious, his 'plasm of rhythms and word-roots, puns and tunes' acquire a wider chronological and autobiographical reach within the long-form echo chamber of his America work, where they take on distinctly Freudian and Joycean qualities.[22]

Wills has written more recently of Muldoon's 'not-so-free associations', emphasising the careful artifice behind the illusion of spontaneous thought;[23] but in both the poems and the lectures, Muldoon's writing seems nevertheless to model itself on these kinds of free-wheeling unconscious operations, whether the author actually practices them or not. The archetypal long poem as Muldoonian echo chamber, 'Yarrow', in fact describes itself as 'a supremely Joycean object' (*P*, 380), and the 'encyclopaedic ambitions' and 'play with ordering principles' which Derek Attridge identifies in Joyce are, I argue, exemplary for the encyclopaedic trans-textual forms of Muldoon's American career.[24] 'Yarrow' also finds itself 'reach[ing] for *The Interpretation of Dreams*' in what is perhaps our first full frontal clue to the importance of Freud in Muldoon's family drama of Oedipal desires and conflicts. Freud's models of childhood, slips, play and multiple overdetermined connections not only provide helpful frames for reading the Muldoon

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[20] Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon*, 216.

[21] Seamus Heaney, 'Place and Displacement: Reflections on Some Recent Poetry from Northern Ireland', *The Agni Review*, 22 (1985): 171.

[22] This sense of surrendering to a higher verbal or unconscious power is captured in an interview with John Redmond: 'Words want to find chimes with each other, things want to connect. I believe… I was almost going to say "I accept the universe!" I believe in the serendipity of that, of giving oneself over to that.' In John Redmond, 'Interview with Paul Muldoon', *Thumbscrew*, 4 (1996): 4.

[23] Clair Wills, 'Paul Muldoon and the Dead', in *Paul Muldoon: Poetry, Prose, Drama*, ed. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2006), 189-198: 190.

[24] Derek Attridge, *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4, 121.

dreamscape, but are also, as I hope to demonstrate, an influence in their own right. The Joyce of *Finnegans Wake*, who produced his own 'intrepidation of our dreams', was also attuned to the creative possibilities of 'being yung and easily freudened',[25] and it may be helpful to read Muldoon as the supercharged Joycean reader of Freud, or Freudian reader of Joyce, as the poet presents himself in the virtuoso critical texts of his American period.

It should be said that, in turning to Freud and Joyce, this study does not seek to engage in psycho-criticism, but rather takes its cues from the works in which Muldoon proves himself a very Freudian reader, and a writer of suggestively Joycean texts. As we will see in Chapter 2, Muldoon's lectures and interviews guide us toward these models; and in the longer forms that extend across his collections, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, Muldoon thrives on paradigms of connection and return that are drawn to Freudian and Joycean techniques. Together, Joyce and Freud represent a powerful cultural script for both American and European writers, and this thesis treats them as structural (and at times thematic) models for Muldoon's interpenetrating, analytically-charged long-form poems and lectures in the U.S. years. My chapters draw together Muldoonian themes of memory and desire, slips and play, polymorphic allusion and overdetermined paradigms of connection, which are peculiarly Joycean as well as Freudian. They are also distinctly postmodern in an age of the self-conscious postmodernist academy.

The postmodern aspects of Muldoon's writing are regularly noted, often unfavourably. In a broadside against the slippery, elusive model of contemporary poetry Muldoon might be seen to represent, Seamus Deane criticises 'the postmodernist simulacrum of pluralisms [that] supplants the search for a legitimating mode of nomination and origin'.[26] But pluralism and the search for origin need not be mutually exclusive, and in Muldoon's writing they aren't. Within the widely contested definitions of 'postmodernism', Shane Alcobia-Murphy tenders that 'there are, broadly speaking, two competing conceptions': one that is 'anti-referential, anarchic, decentred, revelling in endless simulation,' which Deane is at pains to traduce, and 'another which is referential and self-reflexive.'[27] The second is potentially enlarging and enriching, and I would argue, represents the version of postmodernism with which Muldoon (like Joyce) has the strongest affiliation. Fredric Jameson published *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* in 1991 and Muldoon's American writings have been composed and received in a

[25] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, introd. Seamus Deane (London: Penguin, 1992), 338.29-30, 115.22-23.
[26] Seamus Deane, 'Introduction' to *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, ed. Terry Eagleton (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 19.
[27] Alcobia-Murphy, *Sympathetic Ink*, 1.

milieu peculiarly hospitable to postmodernism, where the East Coast Ivy League environment at Princeton surrounds (and presumably informs) his day-to-day work.

As we will see in the following chapters, Muldoon's work is increasingly critical of authority in ways that chime with postmodernist agendas. He impugns the political power of George W. Bush in 'Horse Latitudes', for instance, and impishly undermines ideas of academic convention in his critical writings. A laureate of artistic liberties and licentiousness, this strand of his later writing also ties Muldoon to the poststructuralist climate in the American academy, as when namechecking Derrida in *Madoc* and then revoking his 'phallogocentricism' in an early lecture, 'Getting Round'.[28] Muldoon has become a systematically playful and transgressive writer, highly conscious of poetic tradition and artifice and the self-referentiality associated with postmodernism – and that newer strain in his work may reflect the change of critical climate from Queens to Princeton.

If not exactly 'reconciling Derry with Derrida', as Edna Longley accused Seamus Deane of doing in *Poetry in the Wars*,[29] Muldoon's *Madoc* is a philosophically charged Transatlantic romp which reflects the author's transition into a modern, and indeed postmodern, intellectual American climate. Like *The Prince of the Quotidian*, written shortly after *Madoc*, it seems to reflect Muldoon's newly academized life, and his daily 'rubbing shoulders' with 'most of the Princeton heavy | hitters' (*PQ*, 16). Certainly, and perhaps consequently, a new formal self-consciousness enters his work with *Madoc*. A work of serious learning, the volume's expansive title poem has since been compounded at further length by the self-referential, inter-rhyming elaborations of his subsequent collections from *Annals* (1994) to *Maggot* (2010).

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We might ask, what bearing has America itself had on the vertiginous change in scale that defines Muldoon's later writing? During his early years in Belfast, when the radio and television work had become 'wearying, physically and mentally,' giving up the BBC day-job granted him more leisure.[30] Out of this new sense of time has come a new sense of both cultural and formal space. The American move made him a full-time creative writer, a professional man of letters immersed in the academic landscape at Princeton, and later, the Manhattan literary

[28] *MM*, 257; Paul Muldoon, 'Getting Round: Notes Towards an *Ars Poetica*', F.W. Bateson Memorial Lecture, in *Essays in Criticism*, 48.2 (1998), 120.
[29] Edna Longley, *Poetry in the Wars* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1986), 195.
[30] Robert Potts, 'The Poet at Play', interview with Paul Muldoon, *Guardian*, 12 May 2001, last accessed 22 Sep. 2017 at https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/may/12/poetry.artsandhumanities.

scene of *The New Yorker* (where he has been Poetry Editor since 2007).[31] The expansiveness of the U.S. as a nation might also be a factor in the new formal expansiveness of his *oeuvre*: America's geographical size, its range of States and tastes, and its diverse cultural distractions offered Muldoon a *mise en scène* very different from the one he left in Ireland, and this is reflected in the poems. As we shall find, his already transnational and palimpsest-like treatment of Ireland is now complicated by the fact that he's somewhere else, using America as a launch-point for further *immrama* and homecoming voyages. This thesis will also consider Muldoon's encounter with the American academy and the avant-garde which, since 1987, have undoubtedly influenced his writing. The vogue of postmodernism, as well as the poststructural and postcolonial movements in full swing in the late-1980s intellectual climate, placed U.S. writers and critics in the rapidly changing landscape of Anglophone culture, which was developing a new cultural and theoretical aesthetic drawn in part from work done in continental Europe, particularly France.[32]

Joyce, who lived for the best part of his life in Paris, was part of the European artistic community that set down foundations for many of these aesthetic theoretical ideas, as titles like Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer's *Post-structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French* (1984) can attest.[33] Muldoon's transnational, multi-locational worldview is not unlike Joyce's (in whose work Dublin remains the universal place), and it's striking that he should turn explicitly to Joyce only once he gets to America. Joyce, of course, wrote almost all his work as an émigré, and America is where Joyce becomes an explicit model in Muldoon's émigré work. Grasping the epic potential of the slip after Joyce as a micro-form turned *macro* is a striking addition to Muldoon's later American career. Joyce's brother, Stanislaus, relates how Joyce's earliest 'epiphanies' as he called them were 'observations of slips' he kept in a notebook: 'little errors and gestures – mere straws in the wind – by which people betrayed the very things they were most careful to conceal.'[34] Joyce's careful attendance to slips and their epiphanies is continuous with Muldoon's critical and poetic approach in the American years. In his lectures, 'the slip and slop of language'

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[31] Muldoon recently announced the end of his tenure at the magazine, and is to be officially replaced as Poetry Editor by Kevin Young in November 2017. See Sopan Deb's article of 15 Mar. 2017 in *The New York Times*, last accessed 30 Sep. 2017 at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/15/books/kevin-young-new-yorker-poetry-editor.html.

[32] See Dominic Head (ed.), *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, 3rd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 887-888; Aijaz Ahmad, 'Postcolonial Theory and the "Post-" Condition', *Social Register*, 33.33 (1997): 353-381.

[33] Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (eds.), *Post-structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[34] Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper: James Joyce's early years*, ed. Richard Ellmann (Cambridge, M.A.: Da Capo Press, 2003) 124.

and 'a disregard for the line between sense and nonsense' are integral to his readings of 'encryption' and 'subliminal reference', while the poems often 'rake | over these misrememberings' or turn on crucial misunderstandings ('he'd mistaken his mother's name, "Regan", for "Anger"') (*TI*, 107, 108; *P*, 390, 330). Grasping the epic potential of the slip after Joyce is a striking addition to Muldoon's later American career, in which mistakes in his longer forms become individual units (or clogs) in the larger machine.

Muldoon's first real experiment with longer poetic form, 'Immram' from *Why Brownlee Left*, already had an American dimension and destination, crossing as it does Chandleresque *film noir* with early Irish voyage literature. The same is true of the final poems of his next two volumes, 'The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants' from *Quoof* and '7, Middagh Street', from *Meeting the British*, a Transatlantic group portrait of émigré writers and artists. When he finally arrives in America, Muldoon is more interested than ever in long poems. Having launched himself on the American poetry scene with *Madoc* and its sprawling epic poem of early U.S. expansionism and exploration, Muldoon's next volumes *The Annals of Chile* (1994) and *Hay* (1998) show continuing interest in the Long Arrival as well as the 'Long Finish'. In 'Yarrow', from *Annals*, the expansive turns *explosive* with a 149-page poem of astonishing formal dexterity, which models itself on what Muldoon has called 'a series of twelve intercut, exploded sestinas'.[35] The poem's *rococo* scheme of ninety rhymes returns again in all of Muldoon's subsequent volumes (except the very latest in 2015, *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing*), as if engineering a colossal commemorative *magnum opus* that now bridges five collections and sixteen years of poetic output. Of his earlier writing, Wills noted how 'the individual poem invariably resonates, through a pattern of chimes and allusions, with the distinctive voice of the volume in which it appears.'[36] But since the American move, those patterns and chimes and distinctive voices now look as if they transcend not only the individual poem but the volume. I want to argue that in his later American career the single lyric is now divided, broken up into ever-larger intertextual or trans-textual forms, with the unit of the work becoming less and less the individual poem.

Shane Alcobia-Murphy's *Sympathetic Ink* (2006) addresses Muldoon and Medbh McGuckian's intertextual practice, and offers a way into these questions about far-reaching forms. Alcobia-Murphy reads Muldoon's allusions not simply as 'vain displays of learning' but 'as guides, allowing the reader to follow his engagement with such weighty issues as the role of

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[35] Earl G. Ingersoll; Stan Sanvel Rubin, 'The Invention of the I: A Conversation with Paul Muldoon', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 37.1 (1998), last accessed 10 Oct. 2017 at http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0037.106.

[36] Clair Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon*, 22.

a writer in a time of violence,' as well as 'a means of "speaking through other people, other voices".'[37] But while this thesis shares Alcobia-Murphy's interest in polymorphic allusions and ventriloquism, it is equally invested in Muldoon's borrowings from his *own* texts – what we might call the long *intra*-textual or *trans*-textual forms of return that are, I contend, a distinguishing feature of his U.S. career.

These expanding forms are also often biographically oriented, as we shall see. 'Madoc: A Mystery' and '7, Middagh Street' not only build on Transatlantic literary voyages but are essentially works of authorial biography, looking at the counter-factual careers of Coleridge and Southey in early nineteenth-century America on the one hand, and at Auden, MacNeice and mid twentieth-century literary figures in New York on the other. Given the comparable emphasis on the lives of poets in his Oxford lecture series, *To Ireland, I* (2000) and *The End of the Poem* (2006), it seems that biographical readings are often implicit in and appropriate to Muldoon's own polymorphous, coded forms of autobiographical poetry, which draw compulsively on family history, personal relationships and other corners of everyday life.

In addition to branching into a wider range of literary and musical forms, from prose criticism to song lyrics and libretti, Muldoon's books since 1987 have been visibly longer. After the five Irish volumes, each spanning around fifty or sixty pages, his first U.S. book, *Madoc*, came close to matching the combined page-totals of his earlier poetry at a single stroke. His next, *The Annals of Chile* (1994), also exceeded two-hundred pages, and the subsequent five U.S. volumes from *Hay* (1998) to *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* (2015) are more than twice the length of the original five.[38] The American Muldoon then is vastly more prolific, and with this enlargement of the single volume has come an equal profusion of long poems and sequences – most notably 'Madoc' and 'Yarrow', which map out multiple textual identities across Ireland and America and dominate their respective volumes, *Madoc* and *Annals*.

Those two volumes reflect a tendency in Muldoon's American work towards formal and geographical expansionism, not only within the individual collection but over a wider *oeuvre* that includes the poet's critical texts and musical writings. These expansionist forms have coincided with a greater emphasis on authorial biography and autobiography, evident in both his poems

[37] Shane Alcobia-Murphy, *Sympathetic Ink: Intertextual Relations in Northern Irish Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 15, 25.
[38] From *New Weather* to *Meeting the British*, the lengths of his five volumes were, in chronological order, 64, 59, 48, 48, and 60 pages. Once he reached America, the seven subsequent volumes from *Madoc* to *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* have been 264, 205, 160, 112, 128, 128, and 128 pages in span. I take these numbers from the Faber editions used throughout this study.

and lecture series. This thesis wagers a link between that autobiographical turn and Muldoon's shift into a trans-textual key, which has to do with the work of memory and its development as a compositional paradigm in serial form. Often employing the same serial structures, Muldoon is continuously extending and complicating the story his longer poems and lecture-forms are telling about himself. This notion of seriality may have existed before the American move – in a 1981 interview with John Haffenden, Muldoon spoke about setting up his poems like mirrors that reflect across poems[39] – but it is only properly thematised, theorised and systematically deployed in the later work, where it becomes a principle of composition and a poetic genre in its own right. From the breakdown of the autonomy of the individual work comes a complementary sense of the biographical and autobiographical breaking through, or breaking from, the individual poem – a long mythologizing form of life writing (and life reading) which reaches beyond its own boundaries toward a larger, self-revising, continuously re-inventing narrative of family history and cultural identity.

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As I have shown, the significance of Muldoon's longer forms in the U.S. has tended to be obscured by critics who have not adequately accounted for the scale and diversity of their formal practices, the distinctiveness of their American *mise en scène*, or their Joycean and Freudian implications as serial, autobiographical performances. If the unit of Muldoon's American work is less and less the individual poem, now even the longer poetic sequence has been replaced and overwritten by an intertextual or trans-textual paradigm, a model of writing in serial (or even serialist) form.[40] What I hope to demonstrate, then, is the relationship between the American phase of Muldoon's career and this interest in longer playful allusive forms, which are cultural and biographical and psychoanalytic, and which involve new forms of reading as well as writing. Other critics, notably Michael Allen and Clair Wills, have of course discussed Muldoon's formal imagination, but this thesis gives extended attention to Muldoon's idiosyncratic forms of memory and invention during his American period. It works by a close reading of forms (which

[39] John Haffenden, *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 134.

[40] 'Serial' or 'serialist' form will be an important term for this thesis. It does not refer to what Joseph Conte describes as 'serialist procedure' in his book *Unending Design: Forms of Postmodern Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) or to the 'musical serialism' Arnold Schoenberg devised (though it may relate to that, as I will suggest in Chapter 4). Rather, it conveys a form of poetic writing that develops as if by instalments, whereby the individual work remains free-standing but can also be read as part of a larger, continuous aesthetic or formal project.

are also forms of reading), offering a new depth of consideration to their scale and serial nature, and to the American setting that both shapes and situates them.

No one has fully attended to the new formal ambitions, scale and trans-referentiality of the American Muldoon, though some have hinted at his working towards one *magnum opus*. In 1996, Tim Kendall was the first to hypothesise the poet's ambition 'to turn his whole poetic output into a "great wheel",' while Nicholas Jenkins has since suggested that 'the well-wrought urn' in Muldoon's work is now being 'replaced by something that looks like a finely spun (and potentially endless) web'.[41] Rather than the well-wrought urn, this thesis aims to explore the constructive principles of this larger web or wheel, at both the micro- and the macro-level. Reflecting on this all-encompassing sense of seriality in a recent interview, Muldoon described himself as 'one of those poets, like most poets, for whom it's all one big thing':

> Wallace Stevens talks about the whole of harmonium—the whole of harmonium. This is true of most poets, because, almost inevitably, there is some core personality at the heart of the enterprise. It's inevitable that things come together. Some poets have helped things to come together a little bit more. Yeats, for example, took quite an active role in the construction of his system and continuities, from the beginning of his career to the end. He did a little bit of tweaking here and there to encourage people to think that he was quite consistent in what he was doing and, maybe, even knew what he was doing. I'm less interested in knowing what I'm doing. In fact, I'm not interested in that at all, but I'm interested in the idea that the whole world that has come into being through my poems is consistent, and that there are echoes. [42]

This is very much the late American Muldoon talking. His comments apply to the new constructive priorities and principles developed in his later career, which take him beyond the individual poem, keeping in mind 'the bigger thing'. In addition to the oeuvrists Yeats and to a lesser extent Stevens whom he mentions, Joyce is surely another lurking in this engineering 'enterprise'. Enterprise and engineering seem key words for the late Muldoon as he views his career here in the round, and builds his work toward a monumentally ambitious 'system' – not so systematized as Yeats's perhaps, but teeming with 'echoes' as Joyce's was, and born of the same hermeticism which attends such byzantine formal projects.

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[41] Tim Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* (Bridgend: Seren, 1996), 221; Nicholas Jenkins, 'For "Mother" Read "Other"', *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 Jan. 1999, 10.
[42] Paul Muldoon, 'Interview with Lance Rutkin', *American Poetry Review*, 46.3 (2016), last accessed on 10 Oct. 17 at http://aprweb.org/poems/an-interview-with-lance-rutkin.

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In focussing in the main on Muldoon's longer poems, this study considers the ways in which his writing reaches beyond its boundaries – not only through the long form, but through his permeable trans-forms – from which emerge the elaborate structures of rhyme, the roving sequence of his lectures, 'Madoc: A Mystery' as the grand American epic, and slips and mistakes as their own serialist genre as well as a productive principle in the American years. Like all good readings of Muldoon, this thesis will involve doing what Muldoon does so well himself – close reading – while also bringing to bear certain theoretical models of intertextuality, literary language, form and memory deriving from Freud. I will be glancing throughout to the Muldoon papers archived at the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library in Emory, which contain many illuminating indications of how these poems – especially the longer, formally complex ones – came into being. This thesis though is not mainly genetic or biographical, or a study of cultural history, or exegesis poem by poem, but rather an attempt to engage with and define the slippery, overreaching, extravagantly playful forms that Muldoon devises in America. These include the long poem, the lecture series, serial errata, and structures of rhyme that go across volumes as well as single poems, which will be examined over the coming chapters.

Chapter 1 approaches the frontier explorations of *Madoc: A Mystery* (1990), Muldoon's first fully American collection of poetry published three years after the poet left Ireland. The volume is dominated by the title poem, where we find Muldoon at his most resolutely and perversely experimental. The United States would seem to promise Muldoon 'greater freedom to develop beyond the Faber norms,' as John Kerrigan notes, being 'a country where Language-type experiment is acceptable to the point of being institutionalised'.[43] These Anglo-Irish Faber norms are, as Kerrigan adds, 'exploded' in 'Madoc', which turns from closed poetic forms toward a frenetic collage of quotation, dramatic dialogue, inventories, diagrams and cartographic sketches, in prose as well as verse. Unlike anything Muldoon had written before, the intimidating length and stylistic versatility of 'Madoc' reflects a growing interest in formal experimentation which begins in this American epic, a text which also foregrounds Muldoon's technical repertoire shifted lock, stock and barrel to the New World.

The myth of Madoc, a Welsh prince who sailed to America and founded a tribe of Welsh Indians in the twelfth century, is the backdrop to the poem's counterfactual detective story. It

[43] John Kerrigan, 'Paul Muldoon's Transits', in *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, 128.

begins with Robert Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge hoping to realise their dream of Pantisocracy in America, making a journey to the New World which the poets had planned but in reality never took. A history of colonial America told slant, 'Madoc' inveigles its surreal hypothetical fictions within a framework of fact that also reflects Muldoon's own biographical journey to the States. This chapter also explores the Joycean dimensions of Muldoon's most determinedly experimental poem. Infantile babble, often drawn into regions of innuendo, is identified with Wakean nonsense and a Freudian language of slips of tongue, which 'winkles the "semen" out of "semantics"' (*MM*, 222).

Chapter 2 offers the first full-scale treatment of Paul Muldoon as critic.[44] It appraises the major critical works from his breakthrough 'Getting Round: Notes Towards an *Ars Poetica*' (1998) and *To Ireland, I* (2000) to the much longer *End of the Poem* (2006), and considers what these series of lectures from his American years can tell us about Muldoon the reader, as well as the poet. Harold Bloom emerges as a key figure, and so too Seamus Heaney, with the lectures charting a course between Ireland, the American East Coast, and the Examinations Schools of Oxford. Muldoon announces himself on the critical scene as not only a 'stunt reader' but an extraordinarily Freudian thinker, as the incidental or apparently unintentional word-associations he finds are taken as proof of the writer's unconscious resistances and desires. Fascinated by the intertextual origins and biographical backstories encoded within texts, his interest lies predominantly with the compulsive mind of the writer, and what (or whom) that mind seems unable to avoid.

Literary texts as he approaches them are inextricable from the adulterous imaginations of their authors, from the habitually unfaithful Marina Tsvetayeva to the two-timing of H.D.'s husband, and the flings of Stevie Smith to the ultimate infidelity of the translated poem. Preoccupations with infidelity in various guises relate to Muldoon's performance of mischief in the lectures, as well as his own unfaithful habits of misreading – but they also suggest a more basic distrust of the authority of the critical reader, and of any faith one might place in either certainty or suspicion. Given the slippery model of reading performed in these critical texts, this

[44] Heather O'Donoghue's 'The Poet as Critic: Paul Muldoon's *To Ireland, I*' has addressed Muldoon's first series of lectures, but misses the longer second series *The End of the Poem*, which her essay pre-dates. Clair Wills's treatment of 'Muldoon and The Dead' also looks at *To Ireland, I*, but like O'Donoghue's, comes before the full publication of *The End of the Poem*. Michael Robbins's later essay on 'Paul Muldoon's Covert Operations' treats *The End of the Poem* in some detail, but is not about the lectures as such. For O'Donoghue and Wills, see *Paul Muldoon: Poetry, Prose, Drama*, ed. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2006), 199-210 and 189-198; for Robbins's 'Covert Operations', see *Modern Philology*, 109.2 (2011): 266-299.

chapter also asks what kinds of reading his poems are expected to elicit. Muldoon's long-voyage lectures raise questions about his own directions of travel, and represent a turn in his thinking about poetic influence, cryptography and biography which has implications for the later contemporary phases of his poetry in America.

Chapter 3 reads the poems of *The Annals of Chile* as heralding the poetics of the slip as a new serial genre in Muldoon's writing, operating at the micro- as well as macro-level. 'Yarrow' is central here, a confused myth of the poet's adolescence which riffs on slips of the mind and tongue, as well as the 'lapsus' of sexual sin. In the following volume, *Hay*, the compulsion to err reaches fever-pitch, and Muldoon's erroneous and corrective operations slip into the later collections. After the associative slippages of 'Yarrow', I address the ripples of 'Errata' (still felt in most recent volume *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing*), the corrective hand of 'Horse Latitudes', and the poetic and political 'Syllabus of Errors' that animates 'The Side Project', as well as other later poems.

This chapter also considers a Freudian poetics of the slip, as well as the Joycean dimension of what the *Wake* calls 'freudful mistake[s]'.[45] Lexical blunders in Muldoon's poems are often libidinous, as are the unconscious intentions which the slip represents in Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. Muldoon's slips are also related to the agonies of sexual and family guilt, and to the *performance* of mistakes as an extension of the autobiographical impulse in his American career. Taking Freud and Joyce as models, I appraise the pleasures of error in Muldoon's writing, and his psychopathology of extraordinary (as well as everyday) slippage. Mistakes, I argue, are a newly enriching model in Muldoon's American career as a serially creative principle.

Chapter 4 examines the importance of the long poem for Muldoon, and the expanded potential it gives to the autobiographical quest as echo chamber. Beginning with *Shining Brow* (1993), his libretto about the life of American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, it engages with architectural models of elaboration and expansionist rhymes, and suggests a turn in Muldoon's rhyming practice that coincides with the American move. This involves a shift toward new verse forms such as the sestina, and toward extravagant constructions of rhyme influenced by architecture (as in *Shining Brow*) and by music (especially the operatic leitmotif and the serialism of Schoenberg). Another striking development of his American phase is the introduction of a template of ninety end-words, whereby the same rhymes are positioned in almost identical order

[45] Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 411.35-36.

across five volumes from *The Annals of Chile* (1994) to *Maggot* (2010). This procedure of remembering and repeating earlier material has become the blueprint for Muldoon's long forms, and, I argue, represents an extended Freudian performance of memory and mourning. There are now *nine* of these ninety-rhyme poems, and perhaps there will be no more, as the scheme was dropped in his 2015 volume *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing*. With the cycle having apparently run its course, this chapter offers a timely overview of this far-reaching form, the repercussions of which are no less far-reaching.

Overdetermined structures of rhyme offer Muldoon a way of building – or bridging – past material into a verse-form that's endlessly reproducing itself. Of the nine inter-rhyming poems to date, many are elegies, inviting us to read them in relation to the poet's life. These works and their often personal family subjects begin with the mother, as Clair Wills observes,[46] but also encompass the father, the ex-lover, the wife, sister, son, daughter, and friend, with an apparent compulsion towards autobiographical memory. Playing again with the Freudian toolkit – mourning, mistakes, childhood, motherhood, guilt and sexual hang-ups – Muldoon's longer poems are driven by not-so-free associations, remembering and repeating private material even as they perform their failures, in Freudian terms, to 'work through'. Contiguous themes and memories are developed, preserved and methodically rehashed across the poems, producing a repository of autobiographical recollections in a continuous form that makes their return inevitable. If rhyme is often understood as a means of remembering, Muldoon's long forms monumentalize the inability to forget, extending the poet's Irish past into present and future American writings.

We started with Muldoon speaking of 'belonging to several places' and 'dancing on the spot.' The dance makes its own claims on Muldoon in America, where the beat has taken a greater tempo. The poet, who now holds an American passport, finds another creative rhythm or gear in the States, new modes of performance facilitated by his deeply mobile Transatlantic condition. Muldoon's long polymorphous forms, this thesis contends, set up intricately constructed bridges across space and time, place and memory, 'testing the view' in many senses, and changing our view of what poetic language itself can do.

[46] Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon*, 208.

Explorations in America: *Madoc: A Mystery*

A vast American epic of travel, 'Madoc: A Mystery' tells a story of new frontiers. In 1987 Muldoon emigrated to the United States, where he took up academic appointments at several U.S. universities before settling at Princeton in 1990. Published that year, *Madoc: A Mystery* was a collection of poems that had travelled with him across the United States: 'I started it in Saratoga Springs,' he said, 'wrote much of it in Berkeley, finished it in Massachusetts. Moving around a great deal as it moved around'.[1] The title poem, 'Madoc', reflects the poet's biographical journey, exploring alternative timelines in search of a parallel route – as well as the possibility of shared roots – between Muldoon's Ulster homeland and Ulster, Pennsylvania, on the banks of the Susquehanna River. *Madoc* was his first fully American volume of poetry, and its title poem drew mixed reviews.[2] Many were bemused by its riddling complexity, while others expressed outright irritation with the unapologetic demands it placed on readers.[3] Responding to the inevitable questions about difficulty for difficulty's sake, Muldoon cordially dismissed them in an interview with Blake Morrison six months after its publication: 'My aim was to write something that you could zoom through, rapidly turning the pages. I don't want to create work for the reader,' he said, 'I'm not an employment agency.'[4] Questions of employment, or want of employment, were clearly on the poet's mind as he entered his first full-time professorial role at Princeton. While 'Madoc' conforms to Fran Brearton's assessment of his 'habitual self-consciousness about literary-critical approaches to his work',[5] Muldoon's comments also reflect his initial sensitivities about the poem's wider public reception in the United States, where the habitual self-consciousness of his work takes on new and heightened forms.

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[1] Paul Muldoon, 'The Art of Poetry No. 87', interview by James S. F. Wilson, *Paris Review*, 169 (2004), 86.

[2] While it is customary to refer to a text of this size and significance in italics, I will use 'Madoc' to refer to the title poem, and *Madoc* for the volume itself.

[3] John Banville argued, for instance, that '*Madoc* demands that the reader work in ways that seem inappropriate to the occasion'; Michael Hofmann found himself 'tempted to throw the whole thing at a computer and say: "Here, you do it",' and Lucy McDiarmid noted a 'dizzying quantity of proper names, quotations, allusions and historical data' which 'may distract a reader from appreciating the remarkable couplets, sonnets and other verse forms through which Mr. Muldoon tells his story'. In John Banville, 'Slouching Towards Bethlehem', *New York Review of Books* (30 May 1991), 39; Michael Hofmann, 'Muldoon—A Mystery', *London Review of Books* (20 Dec. 1990), 19; and Lucy McDiarmid, "From Signifump to Kierkegaard', *New York Times Book Review* (28 Jul. 1991), 14.

[4] Blake Morrison, 'Way on Down the Susquehanna', interview with Paul Muldoon, *The Independent on Sunday*, 28 Oct. 1990.

[5] Fran Brearton, 'Muldoon's Antecedents', in *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, eds. Tim Kendall and Peter McDonald (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 51.

'Madoc' amalgamates and rewrites founding narratives of America following the War of Independence (1775-1783), weaving historical accounts and anecdotes of varying credibility through its own counter-factual vision. These sometimes competing (though often complementary) narratives are pulled from the myth of Madoc, Prince of Wales, who supposedly landed in America in 1170 and founded a tribe of Welsh Indians; Robert Southey's version of the myth, a colonial tale of Christian conversion told in his long epic poem *Madoc* (1805), in which the travelling prince conquers the Aztecs; the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which set out in 1804 to remap the American frontier after the Louisiana Purchase; and the forced displacement of Native American tribes following various land cession treaties and, eventually, the Indian Removal Act of 1830.[6] Within this jumble of myth, invention, and historical event, 'Madoc' takes its cue from 'where the Way of Seeming and the Way of Truth | diverge' (*MM*, 21), starting with the premise that Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey set sail in 1798 for America, as they had planned, to set up a Pantisocratic settlement. Before a rift between them scuppered the scheme, Coleridge and Southey's letters reveal a sincere, fanatical belief in the virtue and viability of Pantisocracy. Their misguided ambition to start civilization afresh, abolish rights to individual property, and build a utopian society along the Susquehanna was, in the beginning, a genuine one.[7] But when Coleridge firmly resisted the idea that they should be joined there by a company of servants, Southey's interest began to wane, and the scheme soon unravelled. Muldoon's poem intervenes before this rift occurs, envisioning a world in which the Pantisocrats arrive in America during a time of great political upheaval. With this intervention, 'Madoc' rewinds the clock and 'cancels everything in [its] wake' (*MM*, 29), over-writing the two-hundred years of history that followed – though the poem's counter-history is itself ghosted and over-written by a palimpsest of allusions to that two-hundred-year history.

While the text is framed in an unspecified future Irish state, much of the action takes place in a largely factual American past. It begins with a spy named 'South', distantly descended from Robert Southey, who has infiltrated the technocratic Irish hub of 'Unitel'. Discovered hiding with a stolen scrap of paper glossed 'in sympathetic ink', South is stripped of his belongings and hooked up to a 'retinagraph' (19, 18). This sinister machine extracts a fragmentary chronicle of South's ancestral past from 'the back of his right eyeball', shooting the

[6] See Gwyn A. Williams, *Madoc: The Making of a Myth* (London: Methuen, 1979); Robert Southey, *Madoc*, in *Poems of Robert Southey*, ed. Maurice H. FitzGerald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909), 460-608; and *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, ed. Bernard DeVoto (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997 [1956]).
[7] See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 1*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1956-1971]), 83-173.

narrative back to the beginnings of Southey and Coleridge's Pantisocratic voyage to America (20). A stylized lyric 'eye', the retinagraph that retrieves South's family history, and the Transatlantic expanse over which the poem is propelled forward and back, are curiously elaborate frames. For Clair Wills, these intrusive conceptual trappings leave the voice of the poem 'as far as possible from a voice of feeling,' and 'clearly indicate Muldoon's concern to remove himself from the poem'.[8] If she is correct, then the sheer scale of the defensive device is revealing. This chapter will suggest that in putting himself so far out of sight, Muldoon inevitably finds his way back into the picture, revealing much about his U.S. immigration and how it relates to the poem's genesis, as well as the implications for his poetic development during the American years that follow.

As this extravagant set-up forewarns, and as I will go on to argue, 'Madoc' represents Muldoon's poetic cabaret unleashed in America. A disorienting, self-delighting poetic performance which seeks to showcase his full repertoire of styles and techniques for a New World audience, the poem also marks a striking upward shift in scale, and stands to date as Muldoon's largest, obscurest, most experimentally minded work. In it, we find Muldoon searching for new formal models in his adopted nation. Just as he will later use James Joyce's 'The Dead' as the exemplary text for his Transatlantic lecture series *To Ireland, I* (2000) discussed in the following chapter, in 'Madoc' Muldoon draws on the lexical risk-taking and formal elaborations of *Finnegans Wake* as a model of how to write as an Irish émigré. Reflecting Muldoon's adjustment to life in America, the poem is also his most stridently postmodern work. It responds to the contemporary cultural and intellectual climate in the United States when he arrives there, and his introduction to the U.S. Academy as well as the avant-garde of American writing – all of which, as I hope to show, has a profound bearing on the encyclopaedic mock-philosophical churnings of 'Madoc', and so too on the later lectures and poems of his U.S. career.

1

'The almost invisible scrim'

Muldoon's real-life passage to America leaves him in the wake of Seamus Heaney, whom he joined in the late 1980s in the East Coast Academy ranks.[9] His route to Princeton looks

[8] Clair Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1998), 146.
[9] Heaney began as a Visiting Professor at Harvard in 1979.

uncannily like Heaney's to Harvard, but Muldoon is also following Thomas Kinsella and Derek Mahon as Irish poets teaching at U.S. institutions. Conscious of these precursors, Muldoon reflects on his belatedness as an Irishman in America in *Madoc*'s opening prose poem, 'The Key': 'mostly I lag behind, my footfalls already pre-empted by their echoes' (*MM*, 4). His imminent U.S. arrival was also the subject of the pre-American poem '7, Middagh Street', a long sequence rooted (like 'Madoc') in authorial biography, which starts with W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman sailing into New York and ends with Louis MacNeice '[leaving] by the back door of Muldoon's' (*P*, 193). Muldoon's Irish departure is altogether less surreptitious than MacNeice's; and the opening lyrics of *Madoc* paint a cosmopolitan picture of his U.S. arrival, flitting between an L.A. film studio ('The Key'), the Florida Keys ('Tea'), a kitchen in Massachusetts ('The Panther'), and a Manhattan bus stop ('The Briefcase'). Despite the pre-emptive steps of earlier poets then, Muldoon in *Madoc* seems entirely comfortable with his new American surroundings – much more so, indeed, than his title poem's unfortunate protagonists, Southey and Coleridge.

In *Memory Ireland* (1985), not long before Muldoon's American voyage in 1987, the Australian émigré poet Vincent Buckley gave his shrewd take on the issue facing contemporary Irish poets replanted in the United States:

> Irish poets in general are like ambitious youngsters trying to escape from the working class. America is the upper-middle class. Their *vertu*, however, their source of their energy and appeal is in the Irishness which they are trying to escape; they have therefore to emphasise this or some version of it. Their destiny, their complex fate, is not to become Americans, but to be Irish in relation to America.[10]

Buckley's argument is persuasive, and when faced with American frontiers, 'Madoc' does indeed turn back to Muldoon's British and Irish cultural heritage – most obviously in the shape of Coleridge and Southey, but also, as we shall see, Byron and Joyce. I will argue that, rather than exclusively favouring either an Anglo-Irish or a U.S. literary tradition, 'Madoc' tests one against the other, reaching towards an inclusivity that gives historical depth to his poetry's transnational roots, as well as reflecting on his own biographical uprootedness.

After its bizarrely dislocated science-fiction opening, 'Madoc' settles into the main story of eighteenth-century American political infighting and colonial source-hunting. Launched into

[10] Vincent Buckley, *Memory Ireland: Insights into the Contemporary Irish Condition* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 213; quoted in Dennis O'Driscoll, 'Foreign Relations: Irish and International Poetry', in *Poetry in Contemporary Irish Literature*, ed. Michael Kenneally (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1995), 57.

this febrile environment, Southey and Coleridge cross the Atlantic in pursuit of a utopian project that goes badly awry. The English poets arriving in Pennsylvania are soon separated: Coleridge gets entangled with the natives and the Lewis and Clark Expedition after his wife, Sara Fricker, is kidnapped by the Seneca, while Southey turns drastically against the spirit of their Pantisocratic enterprise, enslaving a group of Cayugas to construct an imperial outpost he calls 'Southeyopolis'. Their utopian mission is a total botch, and the text is much concerned with things falling apart: from South's 'disintegrating' retina to the collapse of Southey's miniature empire, the difficulty of preservation or longevity in America is plainly on the poem's mind (*MM*, 118).

Ultimately, though, 'Madoc' is a poem about writers as would-be explorers, and writing and exploration are its chief concerns. John Goodby is right to suggest that, at bottom, 'Madoc' is 'about writing a poem in (and about) the USA.'[11] As the collection takes stock of its surroundings, Muldoon introduces a new scale and degree of playfulness in his writing, as well as an explicitly American focus. The recently transplanted Northern Irish poet appropriates a counter-factual narrative about expatriated English Romantic poet predecessors, including in Coleridge one of the most excruciatingly self-conscious of all English poets. But while *Madoc* takes America as a geographical and historical marker, America's *literary* heritage is given surprisingly short shrift. As if to illustrate that neglect, or rather Muldoon's *self-consciousness* about that neglect, a 'scuffed [copy of] Elizabeth Bishop' is pecked by the birds in 'Capercaillies' (*MM*, 6). Passing allusions are made to Robert Frost in 'Tea' (its injunction to 'Take it. Drink' echoes Frost's 'Directive': 'Drink and be whole again beyond confusion'), and to Wallace Stevens's mock-mystical 'Anecdote of the Jar' in the 'single jar | at once impenetrable and clear' from 'The Panther'.[12] But these modern American writers make only cameo appearances, as Muldoon's collection turns instead to the English Romantic poetry of Coleridge, Southey and Byron for quotation, and, it seems, inspiration. The title poem's extended comic narrative and often ludicrous rhymes owe much to Byron in particular (Muldoon edited a selection of Byron's poetry before completing *Madoc*, published as *The Essential Byron* in 1989),[13] and biographical details about the lives of these English poets embroider the text at every turn. Formally, though, 'Madoc' is another prospect entirely – its experimental meshing of poetry with prose, diagrams,

[11] John Goodby, *Irish Poetry since 1950: Stillness into History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 296.
[12] Robert Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 379; Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 76; Muldoon, *MM*, 5, 9.
[13] *The Essential Byron*, ed. by Paul Muldoon (New York: Ecco Press, 1989).

maps, and journal entries is, I will argue, much more in the vein of the American avant-garde of Williams, Olson and Pound. In a poem based on an unaccomplished journey, these allusive roads taken and not taken are drawn into sharp relief for Muldoon as an Irish expatriate arriving in the United States.

As much as the novel excitements of American life can be felt in the excitable novelties of the collection, Muldoon is also reacting against the conventional narrative of the Irish émigré settling on U.S. shores. Always sensitive to the dangers of unoriginality and cliché, 'Madoc' seems to have been written partly in response to a fear of his becoming too predictable in this regard, developing a counter-factual poetic-historical narrative as a way of exploring his own sense of expatriation in the United States. As Wills observes, 'the historical relation between Ireland and America looms behind [Muldoon's] experience of emigration,' as it does behind *Madoc* as the émigré volume, 'suggesting that, however it might feel, his move isn't really something new – he's repeating history after all'.[14] But while 'Madoc' is repeating American history in a very literal sense, it also tampers with the historical accounts that ghost its actualities. As if rehearsing this anxiety about repeating history, both the poem and volume compulsively repeat themselves with increasingly outlandish differences, packed as they are with modifications, call-backs, copies, echoes, encores, reproductions, and various other disruptive amendments.

All this pseudo-repetition amounts to the feeling that 'Madoc' is characteristic of Muldoon's writing, but not entirely as we know it. If Southey and Coleridge's Pantisocratic expedition was also a plan to escape England at a time of European post-revolutionary disappointment, then perhaps 'Madoc' is framing Muldoon's departure for the New World in comparable terms, as a pursuit of less inhibited climes where freedom and invention are prized in poetry as in all things notionally American. We can read 'Madoc' as the landmark moment in Muldoon's career when his aesthetic inventiveness is most keenly felt, as if the American *mise en scène* were itself an invitation to let it all hang out. To leave Northern Ireland, though, is not necessarily to leave it behind, and the text tells us as much about the baggage Muldoon brings with him as about the view from his new Transatlantic perch. Against what his fellow Irish-American John Montague called, in *Mount Eagle* (1987), 'this strange age | of shrinking space',[15] Muldoon in America opens 'his old valise' and scatters the contents of the 'pearwood box | of

[14] Wills, *Reading*, 138-39.
[15] Quoted in John Kerrigan, 'Paul Muldoon's Transits', in *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, ed. Tim Kendall and Peter McDonald (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 128.

tricks' (*MM*, 15, 31) across the largest possible canvass, mingling the full range of familiar Muldoonian tropes with a host of experimental techniques learned and honed in Northern Ireland (though imported in part, via the likes of Gertrude Stein and Jackson Pollock, from the United States).[16] These Irish-American cross-pollinations are central to 'Madoc'. The poem is a stepping stone on the path to Muldoon's aesthetic revamping in the States, and represents a moment of creative liberation unparalleled in his work before and since. This is not to call 'Madoc' the jewel in Muldoon's crown, but to suggest that the text marks the outer limit of an experimental shift that is reined in and redeployed to greater success in subsequent volumes (*The Annals of Chile* and *Hay* especially). And while the grand elaboration of his rhyming forms will come later, in the ninety rhyme sounds of 'Incantata' and 'Yarrow' that spill out of *The Annals of Chile* into the collections that follow, the scale of these large poetic ventures reflects a growing interest in formal experimentation that began in earnest with *Madoc*. These large poetic ventures and experiments will be the focus of this thesis.

Where then does 'Madoc' leave us on the question of Muldoon's formal project in America? Michael Allen claims that, when leaving for the U.S., 'Muldoon was in no doubt that […] he was entering a literary milieu where rhyme did not carry the premium it retained in Ireland'.[17] Beyond rhyme, and sometimes within it, experiments in the avant-garde over the last fifty years have gone further in the U.S. than anywhere else on the Anglophone poetry scene. We might go back to 1968, and a lecture entitled 'The Invisible Avant-Garde', where John Ashbery observed that the prevalence and popular appeal of the avant-garde was such that it had become a tradition, perhaps even *the* tradition, in American culture.[18] Broad-scale acceptance of artistic innovation in American culture and the U.S. Academy has, he said, changed the sense of risk it once meant to be avant-garde; and for Ashbery writing in America in the late sixties, 'paradoxically, it is safest to experiment'. As such, the United States offered a poet like Muldoon 'greater freedom to develop beyond the Faber norms,' as John Kerrigan sees it, being 'a country where Language-type experiment is acceptable to the point of being institutionalised'.[19] Anglo-Irish Faber norms are 'exploded' in 'Madoc', Kerrigan adds, as Muldoon turns from closed poetic forms to a frenetic collage of quotation, dramatic dialogue,

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[16] Gertrude Stein and Jackson Pollock are named in 'The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants' (1983), where the figure of Gallogly also leaves 'the Museum of Modern Art with the bit between his teeth', in *P*, 136.
[17] Michael Allen, 'Rhyme and Reconciliation', in *Critical Essays*, 77.
[18] John Ashbery, 'The Invisible Avant-Garde' (1968), in *Art Theory and Criticism: An Anthology of Formalist, Avant-Garde, Contextualist, and Post-Modernist Thought*, ed. Sally Everett (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1991), 132-138.
[19] Kerrigan, 'Paul Muldoon's Transits', in *Critical Eessays*, 128.

inventories, diagrams and cartographic sketches, in prose as well as verse. His incorporation of prose in *Madoc* may also reflect the practices of William Carlos Williams in *Paterson*, Ezra Pound in the *Adams/Jefferson Cantos*, and Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems* – dicey formal innovations which contributed to two trademarks of twentieth-century American verse, the poet's prose and a poetics of collage.[20]

We should be careful, however, not to suggest that *Madoc* dispenses entirely with a more European formal heritage, or that it falls in comfortably with the 'invisible' mainstream of Ashbery's American avant-garde. The volume's seventh poem, 'The Briefcase', is a sonnet, albeit a formally unusual one, in which the rhyme-words pair up concentrically (line 1 rhyming with line 14, line 2 with 13, and so on, to produce a mirror-like effect). 'Madoc' itself contains several of these concentric fourteen-liners, as well as more technically orthodox sonnets. While *Madoc* as a volume seems primed for a wholesale formal departure, outlines of the traditional forms that predominate in Muldoon's early (and later) collections are still visible here. His first sestina, 'Cauliflowers', was also published in this collection, though again it is by no means regular: only three of the usual six end-words repeat identically ('light', 'pipe', 'down'), while the other three end-words rhyme loosely as the poem progresses ('market', for instance, is rhymed variously with 'make out', 'mud-guard', 'scorch-marked', 'Magritte', and 'Margaret') (*MM*, 10-11). Traditional closed forms in the volume are present, but often warped, as the poet adopts certain strictures while dropping or adapting others. *Madoc* represents a return and an expansion of Muldoon's formal repertoire then, as well as an explosive shift away from his more familiar practices.

If traditional closed forms play a far smaller role in *Madoc* than they do elsewhere in Muldoon's writing, rhyme is still the volume's prevailing mode. Almost every one of the 233 sections of the title poem, 'Madoc', are rhymed; and while they juggle unpredictably with couplets, tercets, quatrains, sonnets, Byronic *ottava rima* and other stanzaic variations, the individual lyrics tend towards consistency within their given form. '[Hartmann]' is a representative case, where formal symmetry has been made – with an echo of Ashbery's avant-garde – 'almost invisible':

> Coleridge is about to quench his
> thirst in an alkali-

[20] See Stephen Fredman, *Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 [1983]); and Brian McHale, 'Telling Stories Again: On the Replenishment of Narrative in the Postmodernist Long Poem', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 30 (2000): 250-262.

tainted pool. An exorbitant,
harum-scarum
head
over his shoulder.
§
Helter-skelter
across the lava-beds.
§
The almost invisible scrim
of a rabbit-net
strung across a gully.
§
From the Latin, *rete*. Unconscious.
(*MM*, 180)

Skittish line-breaks do not quite conceal the rhymes linking the first line with the last ('his' | 'Unconscious'), the second line with the second-last ('alkali-' | 'gully') and so on, in the same circular pattern seen in 'The Briefcase'. Seeing an 'exorbitant' figure in the pool's reflection points toward the exorbitant mirroring of end-rhyme that pivots on the little '§' nestling between 'his shoulder' and 'Helter-skelter'. Like this almost imperceptible line of symmetry, the hunting trap that snares Coleridge (an 'almost invisible scrim') alludes to an intricate formal configuration that might easily escape our notice.

Some of these rhymes are difficult to hear ('exorbitant' | 'rabbit-net'), echoing as they do across a 'gully' between the opening and closing lines; and the layout in four unequal fragments provides another distraction from the underlying formal pattern. While the form tests the limits of our attention, that this scrim is only '*almost* invisible' suggests that it's there to be found. Networks of textual and historical interrelations, of surprising correspondences that did and did not actually happen, are essential to the text's rhizomatic structure, which takes us back to the original 'retina' that frames the action ('retina', like net, is 'from the Latin, *rete*'). As Muldoon has said of the poem's 'philosopher supertitles', 'one almost wants them to be subliminal, almost not there at all.'[21] Hidden symmetries and connections are central to the poem's formal agenda, and here the final appeal to the 'Unconscious' might be suggesting a more extended use of subliminal or Freudian techniques – like the acrostic concealed in

[21] Lynn Keller, 'An Interview with Paul Muldoon', *Contemporary Literature*, 31.5 (1994), 14.

'Capercaillies', 'Is this a New Yorker poem or what?' (*MM*, 6-7), which *The New Yorker* duly rejected.[22]

Madoc then is a work preoccupied with formal innovation, as if the exigency of poetic invention in America and the influence of the American avant-garde were directing the Northern Irish poet to expand the limits of his formal repertory, but also to conceal it. Muldoon's Coleridge is an intrepid poet *voyageur* of the New World who is, unlike Southey, also looking to blend in; and as a newly arrived participant at the U.S. frontier of the 'Invisible Avant-Garde', Muldoon himself in this collection seems no less the American pioneer *incognito*.

2

'parallel to the parallel realm'

The Madoc myth is the story of a Celtic émigré and the origins of his people – a tribe of white, Welsh-speaking Indians left behind by the 'Welsh prince, Madoc,' as Gwyn Williams records, 'who had discovered America in the year 1170, three hundred years before Columbus'.[23] The myth of these original Celtic settlers seems to have started in England, but would later grip the imaginations of Americans themselves. During the 1790s, Williams writes, 'Madoc fever broke out in America' and inspired numerous historical explorations across the continent.[24] Lewis and Clark's famous expedition, commissioned by Thomas Jefferson, was one of these; and along with other U.S. excursions, Lewis and Clark played a significant role in American westward expansion, as they do in Muldoon's poem. 'Whatever his original provenance and character,' Williams states, '[Prince] Madoc first effectively entered history as an instrument of imperial conflict,' as if proof of reaching America first were enough to legitimate claims of ownership over foreign lands.[25] Perhaps more than anything else then, Muldoon's 'Madoc' reveals the store set by myths of origination – and no doubt the Gwyn Williams study was one of the poem's origins.

For a story about pioneers and peregrination, Muldoon's retelling of the Madoc myth is unusually invested in repetition and duplication. The poem is populated by copies vying with

[22] See Charles McGrath, 'Word Freak', *New York Times Magazine*, 19 Nov. 2006, last accessed 1 Sep. 2017 at http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/19/magazine/19muldoon.html?mcubz=1.
[23] Gwyn A. Williams, *Madoc: the Making of a Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 [1979]), 30.
[24] Williams, *Making of a Myth*, 68.
[25] Williams, *Making of a Myth*, 67.

originals for supremacy, of which the titular narrative is one example: the Madoc myth jostles with Southey's *Madoc* and Muldoon's own version of South's 'retina-scan'. The tribe of Welsh Indians supposedly left by Madoc are variously known in the poem as the Madocs, Modocs, Mandans and Minnetarees, while Coleridge himself assumes and discards the names 'Comerbache' and 'George Rex'. Like these slippery names, objects are confusingly swapped and shuffled along the way. 'The Briefcase' which immediately precedes 'Madoc' in the collection, and contains 'the first | inklings of this poem', is various reimagined in the longer poem as South's 'old valise' – presumably the same one as Southey's 'already-battered valise', which changes hands on several occasions – and 'an exact replica | of the valise' found inside a pearwood box, 'its very contents … identical' (*MM*, 12, 15, 29, 188). Hierarchies which value originals above replicas are suspended or upended as originals and copies become difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish.

It was Walter Benjamin who suggested in a 1936 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' that the authenticity of the 'original' work had become less relevant than ever to our appreciation of the verbal and visual arts. As Benjamin saw it, the Dadaists first saw to this by wilfully despoiling their art's pretensions to authenticity:

> Their poems are 'word-salad' containing […] every imaginable kind of linguistic refuse. The same is true of their paintings, on which they mounted buttons or train tickets. What they achieved by such means was a ruthless annihilation of the *aura* in every object produced, which they branded as a reproduction through the very means of its production.[26]

Intertwining history with fiction, poetry with prose, diagrams with letters and ogham script and more, Muldoon's 'Madoc' is a collage of textual and non-textual fragments reminiscent of those Dada poems and paintings Benjamin describes. With its mélange of forms and sources, the poem echoes Benjamin's reflections, constructed as it is around a visible scaffold of its eclectic building materials and inventions, and so 'branded as a reproduction through the very means of its production.'

Thomas Jefferson's polygraph exemplifies the poem's preoccupation with American inventions, and reflects Muldoon's Benjaminian ideas about originals, replicas and technological

[26] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 3*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eliand and Others, eds. Howard Eliand and Michael W. Jennings (London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 119.

reproducibility. Patented in 1803 by John Isaac Hawkins, an English émigré living in the United States, the polygraph's American rights belonged to Charles Willson Peale, who built the first working model and later added numerous modifications under Jefferson's advisement.[27] Described in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'an instrument … for simultaneously producing two or more identical copies of a drawing, document, etc.',[28] the polygraph's mechanical arms mirror the movements of the writer's hand, so that the text it produces is at once machine-made and hand-written, a copy that's identical to the original:

> Jefferson is so beside himself with glee
> that he finishes off a carafe
>
> of his best Médoc;
> his newly-modified polygraph
>
> will automatically
> follow hand-in-glove
>
> his copper-plate 'whippoorwill'
> or 'praise' or 'love':
>
> will run parallel to the parallel
> realm to which it is itself the only clue.
> (*MM*, 96)

Heady rhymes – 'carafe' and 'polygraph', 'Médoc' and 'automatically', 'whippoorwill' and 'parallel' – suggest the depth of Muldoon's delight in parallel forms (and outlandish Byronic couplets), where coupling 'clue' with 'glee' also signals the poem's mischievous intentions.

While the polygraph is an emblem of the reproducibility of text, 'his best Médoc' is also a highly suggestive replication of Muldoon's title, which hints at the anagrammed 'code' it contains. 'There are many references to codes and ciphers and "sympathetic ink" in the poem,' as Michael Hofmann notes – 'possibly self-references', of which this fine wine (and the

[27] See Thomas Jefferson and Horace W. Sellers, 'Letters of Thomas Jefferson to Charles Willson Peale, 1796-1825', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 28.2 (1904), 136-154.
[28] The *OED* (1.) also gives 'A person who imitates or very closely resembles another; an imitator, an imitation', and cites Coleridge's December 1794 letter to Southey as its first usage in this sense.

polygraph as self-duplicating device) are examples.[29] Having embarked on its own counterfactual history, the text of 'Madoc' inhabits 'the parallel | realm' referred to here. Emphasising the 'graphic' and further complicating the question of authenticity, the polygraph complements the earlier 'retinagraph' which produces the poem in double vision. 'Madoc' appears to relish in the strange doublings and inconsistencies thrown up by these nested narrative frames. Like the retinagraph, the polygraph is at once producing a poem and produced by it in a paradoxical loop of auto-invention like that of M. C. Escher's lithograph *Drawing Hands* (see Fig. 1). Jefferson was a gifted inventor as well as a politician, and an American culture of

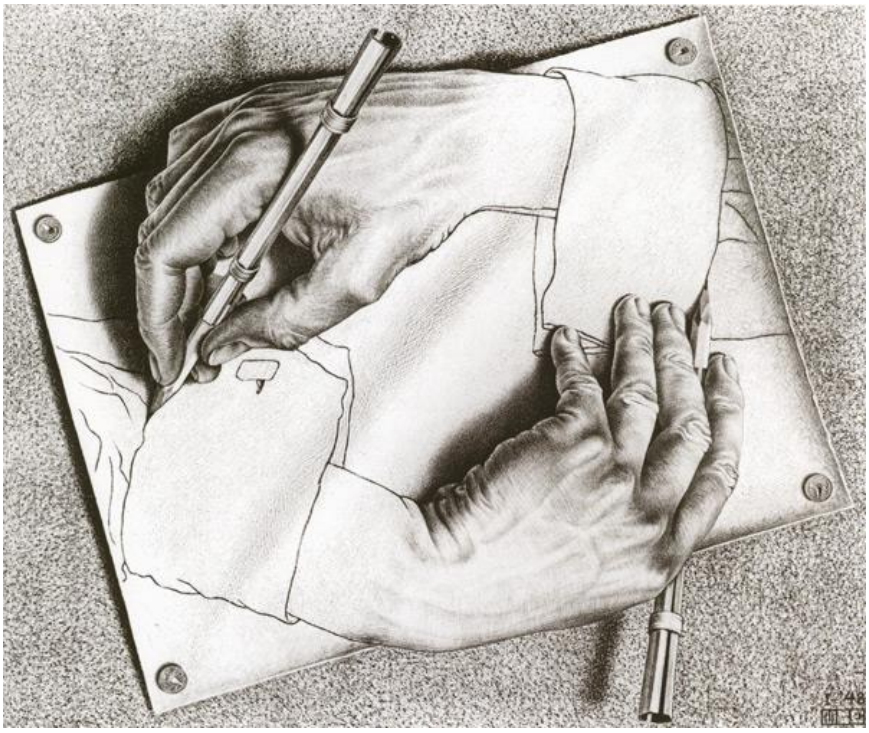

Figure 1. M.C. Escher, *Drawing Hands* (1948)

technological advancement feeds into the poem's experiments with different forms of representation. Muldoon's text showcases its paradoxically parallel construction; and like Escher's print, the poem's palimpsestic forms of framing also beg the question, which hand is Muldoon's?

Muldoon asks in 'Capercaillies', 'Paul? Was it you put the *pol* in polygamy…?', and we might wonder whether Paul is also putting the *pol* in polygraphy (*MM*, 6).[30] In 1822, responding

[29] Michael Hofmann, 'Muldoon—A Mystery', *London Review of Books*, 12.24 (1990), 18-19. See, too, Shane Alcobia-Murphy's *Sympathetic Ink: Intertextual Relations in Northern Irish Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[30] See Dillon Johnson, 'Poetic Discoveries and Inventions of America', *Colby Quarterly*, 28.4 (1992): 208.

to Southey's *A Vision of Judgement* in 1821, Byron gave his own sarcastic *Vision of Judgment* in which he blasted the 'multo-scribbling Southey'; and Muldoon's 'Madoc' follows Byron in replicating another Southey title (*Madoc*), with the polygraph as a his own version of the 'multo-scribbling' machine.[31] If the polygraph and retinagraph devices of his poem are evocative of automatic writing, then the deliciously Byronic rhyme on 'Médoc' and 'automatically' strongly suggests the presence of a trickster's hand (or presiding ear). Like Escher's lithograph, Muldoon's text creates the illusion of the writer's hand at once inside and outside the poem, drawing the reader into a visual trick of redoubled frames that lays bare the question of origins and authenticity.

The polygraph's modern meaning as 'lie detector' is a certifier of truth; but that the polygraph should be 'the *only* clue' to the mysteries of 'Madoc' is a deliberately misleading falsehood. The text is in fact brimming with clues – keys, scraps of paper, last words, purloined letters, runes, and cryptograms – which are characteristic of the detective drama. And while the poem lacks a strictly conventional mystery-plot, the traces of a meddling author are everywhere present. When Stan Smith describes the poem's 'postmodern cleverness which seems to testify, ultimately, only to the facility of the self-effacing author,' then, he might be taking Muldoon's self-effacement a little too seriously, mistaking it for an anti-authorial agenda of which the poem is in fact a pastiche.[32] Indeed, Muldoon's reluctance to appear anywhere in the poem seems to imply that he is everywhere.[33] The polygraph, later found under the control of a 'snaggle-toothed gopher', is, like much else in the text, a comic ruse to disguise the author's controlling hand (*MM*, 163). As the *OED* has it, a 'polygrapher' is 'a person who uses, studies, or invents a code', and 'Madoc' is a puzzle about codes and private communication that includes a commentary on its own processes, reflecting on the *detection* of parallel writings as well as their invention.

Muldoon's mania for detection extends beyond the poem's mechanical reproductions. It is sometimes biological, as when tracing how Southey's horse, Bucephalus, catches and spreads syphilis in a series of sexual encounters (*MM*, 181, 246). Syphilis is of course a disease of notoriously disputed origin, and its European source is often attributed to Columbus who may or may not have carried it back from the Americas. Such hypothetical Transatlantic

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[31] George Gordon Byron, *Complete Poetical Works, vol. 6*, ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 332 (l. 514).
[32] Stan Smith, 'Leavings', in *Paul Muldoon: Poetry, Prose, Drama*, ed. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2006), 135.
[33] I echo Clair Wills's phrase here, when she refers to Muldoon's editorial selections in the *Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (1986) from which he self-effacingly exempted his own work. In *Reading Paul Muldoon*, 19.

contaminations are also part of the poem's play with etymology, which suggests numerous (spurious) Celtic roots for Native American words. The echo of 'syphilis' in 'Bucephalus' reflects Muldoon's usual fascination with names as portents, but it also provides an illustration of how lexical coincidence might give rise to bogus derivations. The Welsh words *pen gwyn* for instance, meaning 'white head', bears a resemblance to *penguin*, a term 'likely … originating in North America,' according to the *OED*. But the word was taken in Sir George Peckham's *True Report of Late Discoveries* (1583) to validate the legend of Prince Madoc's Welsh colony in America: 'he then gaue to certaine Ilandes, Beastes, and Fowles, sundrie Welch names, as the Iland of Pengwyn, which yet to this day beareth the same'.[34] Southey later wakes 'in a cold sweat', however, when the derivation proves comically false: 'penguins don't have white heads' (*MM*, 195).

Muldoon seems to have lifted this joke from Gwyn Williams's book on the Madoc myth, which quotes the same passage from Peckham's *True Report* and makes the same incredulous observation: 'penguins have black heads'.[35] Williams also explains how the Madoc myth was used by the British as a means of trumping Spain's territorial claim over North America. The myth's fabrication, as Williams writes, 'comes straight out of the heartland of buoyant Elizabethan enterprise,' where it 'first appears in print in 1583, in a pamphlet *written by an Englishman* to promote a British colonization of America.'[36] In Britain, as Peckham's pamphlet illustrates, this attempt to establish Prince Madoc's pre-Columbian Celtic origins on American soil was based, in large part, on these specious etymological suppositions.

The *Madoc* papers held by the Stuart A. Rose Archives in Emory show Muldoon's preoccupation with the myth and its surrounding sources, including Williams's book and other scholarship. In an unpublished 'Introduction to a dramatic reading of "Madoc: A Mystery"', Muldoon wrote:

> The Madoc myth, the idea that somewhere on the Great Plains was a tribe of Welsh Indians, was current well into the nineteenth century. Lewis and Clark believed they'd found them among the Mandans; the artist George Catlin was of the same opinion; even today, the Harvard-based professor Barry Fell can be found making a case for Celtic

[34] Sir George Peckham, *A True Report of the Late Discoveries* (London: John Charlewood for John Hind, 1583), sig. D4r.
[35] Williams, *Madoc: the Making of a Myth*, 43.
[36] Williams, *Madoc: the Making of a Myth*, 35 (original emphasis).

> settlements in the New World, suggesting rather farfetchedly that certain carved notches on standing stones in New England are examples of the ancient Irish ogham alphabet.[37]

What clearly appeals to Muldoon is the prospect, however 'farfetched', of telling the secret history of Celtic heritage in America. 'Madoc' is engrossed in such narratives of origination, and sifts through etymological and historical accounts of Native America for the pivotal meeting-point – even a knowingly spurious one – when the Old World meets the New. The talking horse Bucephalus is often the mouthpiece for these dubious hypotheses, as when informing Southey that 'the "nock" in Mount Monadnock | is indeed the Gaelic word *cnoc*, a hill' (*MM*, 106). Although tongue-in-cheek, these etymological theories reveal a serious preoccupation with Hiberno-American transmigrations. Even in the absence of a real historical bridge between Muldoon's native languages (Irish and English) and the languages of Native America, the poem conducts an imaginary investigation of Celtic roots and symbols in the New World, implicating Southey and Coleridge in its cod Transatlantic exploration of the mythical legacy of Prince Madoc.

3

'an elaborate system of levers'

While clearly fascinated by mythic and historical models of U.S. expansion and exploration, 'Madoc' also draws in large part on stock motifs from Muldoon's earlier writing in Ireland. Authorial biography, detective fiction, voyages overseas (like the Old Irish *immram*), and Native American culture were also major compositional sources in the long poems of his earlier collections.[38] To a certain extent then, as Carol Tell claims, '*Madoc* is simply a brilliant culmination of Muldoon's other [previous] volumes; it elaborates on the untraveled voyage in *Why Brownlee Left*, the hallucinogenic trip in *Quoof*, and the European poet coming to America

[37] Paul Muldoon, 'Introduction to a dramatic reading of "Madoc: A Mystery"', Stuart A. Rose Archive, MSS 784 (Box 29, Folder 28).

[38] See the authorial biographies of Auden, Dali, Britten, MacNeice, etc. in '7, Middagh Street' (*Meeting the British*), the Native American Trickster mythology of 'The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants' (*Quoof*), and the detective stylings of 'Immram' which parody Tennyson's 'Voyage of Maeldune' (*Why Brownlee Left*). In *P*, 175-193, 127-147, 94-102.

in *Meeting the British*.'[39] Going back to this line of off-the-rack themes and routines, Muldoon appears to be foregrounding his Irish repertoire shifted lock, stock and barrel to the New World.

But when it comes to these reproductions, the poem is also acutely self-aware. 'Madoc' not only returns to what's familiar, but also plays self-consciously with ideas of familiarity – not least in its use of stereotype, self-parody, and cliché. While Muldoon has always enjoyed renovating standard idioms, as Shane Alcobia-Murphy notes, 'Madoc' is peppered with clichés *about writing*.[40] The spy South becomes 'another twist in the plot' when his left eye is 'totally written-off', and later Southey's 'mind's a total blank' (*MM*, 16, 18, 99). It could be that the poem is drawn to clichés about writing partly out of Muldoon's concerns about self-imitation, with 'Madoc' in some sense reacting against the peculiar distinctiveness of his early style. Indeed, Muldoon articulated the problem of 'sounding like oneself' in an interview with Patrick McGuinness: 'There's a Muldoonism, something Muldoonian… and of course one wants to stamp it out – in oneself, most certainly. I think the risks of being self-parodic are so high to begin with, and it's inevitable that somehow one will end up sounding like oneself, I suppose; but to *set out to sound like* oneself I think would be a fatal business.'[41] If Muldoon's U.S. position cries out for a new approach, *Madoc* as a volume represents the burden of accommodating his Irish heritage without being trapped by inherited forms. 'The Key', for instance, sees him derided by a Hollywood Foley artist – himself an Irish immigrant – who mocks the poet for 'Still defending that same old patch of turf' (*MM*, 4). Anxieties about banality, self-caricature and re-opening opened ground are everywhere at play in the U.S. explorations of *Madoc*, in which history is rewritten against the actuality of what happened. Indeed, in opening up the imagined American voyages of Prince Madoc and the Pantisocrats, Muldoon is simulating his struggle to invent an original New World narrative without returning to Old World sources.

This being his debut American volume, Muldoon's U.S. relocation has naturally shaped the poem's reception (the move itself was described by Wills as 'life imitating art').[42] While 'Madoc' can be read as the poet's attempt to align American history with his own Ulster heritage, however, the poem actually spends more time busting shaky narratives of origination than building its own. Indeed, 'Madoc' seems most interested in assessing how we trace origins, or

[39] Carol Tell, 'In the American Grain? Paul Muldoon's "Madoc",' *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 21.2 (1995), 52.
[40] Shane Alcobia-Murphy, *Sympathetic Ink: Intertextual Relations in Northern Irish Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 27.
[41] Patrick McGuinness, 'Speculating: Patrick McGuinness interviews Paul Muldoon', *Irish Studies Review*, 17.1 (2009): 103-110, 103-104 (original emphasis).
[42] Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon*, 135.

at least write about them. The mesh of factual, fictional and mythic roots is so pervasive as to invite us to rethink the very idea of originality, as Deleuze and Guattari do in *A Thousand Plateaus* (transl. 1987). Their model of the 'rhizome' represents a system without a centre, in which 'any point […] can be connected to any other, and must be'.[43] It is a model designed to replace a hermeneutic of origins, and it offers striking parallels with Muldoon's fascination with intertextual forms. As Muldoon would later write in the 1999 Clarendon lectures collected in *To Ireland, I*, 'there's no distinction between one world and the next. Or one text and the next. […] Joyce belongs in Bowen, Bowen, Allingham, and those anonymous ninth-century Irish poets in Beckett. All, indeed, are anonymous.' (*TI*, 24) These rather radical intertextual ideas are already visible in the parallel narratives of 'Madoc', which often disregards 'distinctions between one world and the next' or 'one text and the next'. But as in the lectures discussed in Chapter 2, 'Madoc' is still highly invested in ideas of origin, however multifarious or uncertain those origins might be. Although Muldoon delights in muddling and meddling with lines of succession in this poem, his fascination with roots in all their complexity is plain to see.

The model of the rhizome is representative of a tendency in 'Madoc' towards abstract theoretical models which are almost, but not quite fully integrated into the poem's form. Its subheadings or 'supertitles' named after an encyclopaedic line of Western thinkers exemplify that teasing interpretive legerdemain. Associations between lyric and supertitle are often tangential, relying on puns, jokes and aural felicities rather than anything strictly philosophical ('[Archimedes]', for instance, recalls a school-book example of the mathematician famous for his Eureka moment while bathing: 'Coleridge leaps out of the tub. Imagine that' (*MM*, 41)). 'One risk,' as Muldoon himself acknowledges, 'is that the poem is burdened by this structure – as if the scaffolding were still around the building'. As in the Homeric outline of Joyce's *Ulysses*, with which Muldoon compares his own superstructure, 'readers might feel exasperated looking for a connection.'[44] But the risk of exasperating his audience is one he seems willing to take, and it follows that an interest in broken connections and missing links is precisely what the poem cultivates.

In this epic about a failed Transatlantic expedition, much of the humour comes from the poem's failure to add up. But if the engineering is somehow faulty, it is also self-consciously

[43] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Contiuum, 2008 [1987]), 7.
[44] Muldoon, 'Interview with Blake Morrison', 37.

fanciful, as suggested by the rigorous whimsy of '[Vico]' (a philosopher whose theory of historical cycles was a model for Joyce's *Wake*):

> A hand-wringing, small, grey squirrel
> plods
> along a wicker
> treadmill that's attached
> by an elaborate
> system of levers
> and cogs and cranks
> […]
> and pranks
> and the whole palaver
> of rods
> and ratchets
> to a wicker
> treadmill in which there plods
> a hand-wringing, small, grey squirrel.
> (*MM*, 108-9)

Parodying William Carlos Williams's notion that 'A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words', as Michael O'Neill suggests,[45] this charmingly absurd tableau sees two conjoined treadmills and their plodding squirrels serving no other purpose than to keep each other going. Self-enclosure is also playing out on a formal level, as the rhyme-pairs converge at the centre ('cranks' rhyming with 'pranks', 'levers' with 'palaver', etc.) in the familiar concentric pattern seen earlier in '[Hartmann]' and 'The Briefcase' (*MM*, 180, 12). The ripple effect of this rhyming rotation, like the list of the machine's rotating cogs and cranks, is hypnotic. Going in circles, the 'elaborate | system of levers' is captivating and gratuitous in equal measure, commenting on the elaborate formal system of the whole poem as well as testifying to the pleasures of its excess.

Like Muldoon's clockwork poem-within-a-poem, Giambattista Vico's conception of history in *New Science* is cyclical. Societies of every nation are said to pass through the three primary ages – of Gods, Heroes, and Men – before falling into an intermediary fourth stage of

[45] See Michael O'Neill, *The All-Sustaining Air: Romantic Legacies and Renewals in British, American, and Irish Poetry since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 163.

Chaos, out of which comes a *ricorso* to the new cycle.[46] Using Vico's 'cycles as a trellis', as Joyce told Padraic Colum, these four ages are transposed onto the four books of the *Wake*, in which the final sentence rolls into the first.[47] The circular pattern of '[Vico]' emulates this Joycean or Viconian *ricorso*, and *Madoc* as a collection seems similarly struck by the compulsion to repeat and return – not only 'identically', but with a difference. 'The whole palaver |of rods |and ratchets' that sets one treadmill turning inside another is, in the end, representative of Muldoon's poem as a surreal, repetitive and self-consciously extravagant machine. Joyce hoisted Vico's system into the dream-machinery of *Finnegans Wake*, and, as we shall see, Muldoon's poem draws the *Wake* into its own repertoire of linguistic and structural forms.

4

'Now your snouterumpater is a connoisorrow'

With Joyce as a model, Muldoon's cod American epic moves his writing into a more avowedly experimental phase. One of the poem's most immediately striking elements is its whimsical use of nonsense, the sing-song or nursery-rhyme lilts which seem mischievously off-key in this often barbarous narrative. These mischievous lilts owe much to Joyce, as we will see, but Muldoon's manuscripts also reveal his engagement with a wider literature of nonsense at the time of writing. Among the *Madoc* papers is a telling scribble: 'Coleridge, page 192 | Hugh Haughton, "The Devil is a bore".' (See Fig. 2.)

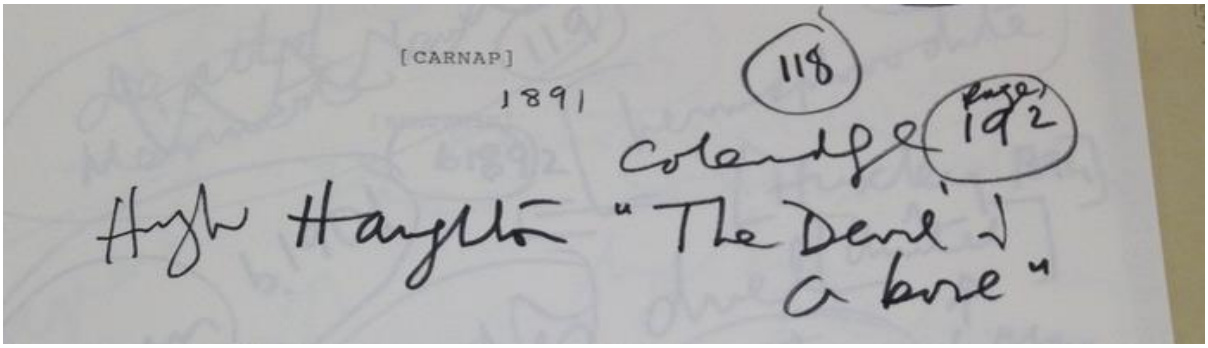

Figure 2. '[Carnap]', Partial Early MS. Box 15 Folder 49.

[46] Giambattista Vico, *New Science: Principles of the New Science concerning the Common Nature of Nations*, Third Edn., trans. David Marsh (London: Penguin, 1999 [1744]).
[47] See Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce,* rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 554.

Hugh Haughton's anthology *The Chatto Book of Nonsense Poetry* (1988) is a historical compendium of nonsense, which takes us from the tenth-century verses of William of Aquitaine to the contemporary poetry of John Ashbery, Bob Dylan, and the book's final entry, Paul Muldoon's 'Quoof'. The line quoted here in Muldoon's hand – 'The Devil is a bore' – is from Coleridge's poem 'The Angel's like a Flea' on 'page 192' of Haughton's edition.[48] Numerous other sources and quotations in 'Madoc' also overlap with Haughton's selections. Muldoon quotes on four separate occasions from 'The Devil's Thoughts', another of Coleridge's light verses, found on pages 188-190 in *The Chatto Book of Nonsense* and immediately preceding the Coleridge poem above.[49] These and other echoes suggest that Muldoon had Haughton's anthology near to hand when writing 'Madoc'. His interest in nonsense permeates right across the poem, which revels in phonetic play and nursery-like reproductions, as in 'slurry-slur', 'goody-good', and 'buddy-bud-bud' (*MM*, 125, 178, 221). Extracts from *Finnegans Wake* are among those included in the anthology (Haughton calls Joyce's book an 'encyclopaedic resumé of popular nonsense'), and the influence of Joyce's sensual, experimental perversion of nursery language is also keenly felt in 'Madoc'. [50]

The playfulness and polysemy of nonsense poetry are verbal characteristics well-suited to the cryptographic purposes of 'Madoc'. In keeping with the poem's reiterations and intense self-consciousness, the most commonly played instrument of nonsense is the repeatable iambic beat: 'de dum'. The sound often functions as part of a rhyme pair (as in 'podium | de dum') or as an imprint of the iambic foot ('De dum, de dum, de dum, de dum, de dum') (*MM*, 244, 36); though at other times it represents language as musical form, and anticipates the later 'Sleeve Notes' where we hear 'a kettledrum's de dum de dum' (*P*, 416). In one striking case, when 'Southey takes its tongue between finger and thumb | and the door-bell is struck dumb, de dum', the last 'de dum' strikes a knowingly superfluous note, not least because the rhyme 'thumb | dumb' is already satisfied without it (53). The added beat after the bell is typical of the whimsical energy that simmers in the language of the poem. In 'How Pleasant to Know Mr Lear!', Edward Lear described himself as 'one of the dumms';[51] and if the words of Muldoon's

[48] Hugh Haughton (ed.), *The Chatto Book of Nonsense Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988).
[49] See Haughton, *Chatto Book of Nonsense*, 188-190. Muldoon's quotations from 'The Devil's Thoughts' appear in *MM*, 56, 59, 60 and 89.
[50] Haughton, *Chatto Book of Nonsense*, 30.
[51] Edward Lear, 'How Pleasant to Know Mr Lear!', in *Complete Nonsense and Other Works*, ed. Vivien Noakes (London: Penguin, 2001), 428. Lear's poem also appears in Haughton's *Chatto Book of Nonsense*, 265-266.

text seem especially attuned, as Lear's are, to their own syllabic melodies, then 'de dum' identifies the moments when those syllables strain for release.

'De dum' operates in the same register as Muldoon's mock-Kristevan 'Signifump', suggesting the kinetic 'thump' of so much Romantic poetry (especially that of the poem's characters, Coleridge and Byron). Nonsense verse enjoys the 'pleasures of going beyond the bounds', as Haughton writes, when 'words – especially the sound of words – [are given] a freer rein than usual', and Muldoon's use of *dums* and *fumps* betoken that impulse toward the freedoms of orality.[52] When Bucephalus 'strains for effect on his halter: | "*Eadem*, de dum, *sed aliter*"' (*MM*, 76), the restless stallion is also embodying the poem's latent disruptive verbal energies, straining here against the reins of Schopenhauer's motto (*Eadem, sed aliter* meaning 'The same, but different').[53]

Haughton states that nonsense was 'a kind of dialect of innocence' for the post-Romantic writers Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, whom he identifies as 'unlikely pioneers of the avant-garde'.[54] Echoes of Lear's exuberant 'Piggy-wig' and 'chippety-tip' can be heard in Muldoon's own playful acoustic pairings – 'Clippety-clop', 'tumble-pour', 'tipple-tope' (*MM*, 54, 21, 77) – which evoke the pleasures of repetition for the ear as well as the eye.[55] Apparently drawn to Lear's syllabic repetitions and hyphenating style, the poem contains over *five-hundred* hyphens, many of which are inserted needlessly into accepted compound words ('half-way', 'ear-rings', 'tell-tale') or between words that shouldn't be hyphenated ('ransom-note', 'canoe-journeys'). The words of the poem repeatedly 'link and uncouple' in this way, as if to emphasize how easily ordinary language can be made to feel unfamiliar (*MM*, 74).

Intertwined as it is with the early words of babies and children, the poem's lively Lear-ish language is made doubly unfamiliar when it turns, as here, toward sinister ends. In this strangely charged scene, 'de dum' substitutes for the gunshot with which Southey destroys his syphilitic horse:

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[52] See Haughton's 'Introduction' to *The Chatto Book of Nonsense*, 5, 8.
[53] Schopenhauer's *eadem, sed aliter* evinces what his biographer David E. Cartwright calls the philosopher's 'concern with the universal, […] the eternally true, and what remains the same behind fleeting and changing circumstances.' In *Schopenhauer: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 513.
[54] Haughton, *Chatto Book of Nonsense*, 22.
[55] See Edward Lear, 'The Owl and the Pussy-cat' and 'The Scroobious Pip', in *Complete Nonsense and Other Works*, 238, 390. Also in Haughton, *Chatto Book of Nonsense*, 243-244, 267-270.

With such innnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnfinite
tenderness, such care,

Southey brushes the glib
from behind the stallion's ear

and takes aim,
de dum. A flash in the pan. A thunder-clap.

Blood-alphabets. Blood-ems.
A babble of blood out of the broken fount.
(182)

Muldoon's 'Blood-alphabets', 'babble' and 'thunder-claps' recall the comparably thunderous beginning of *Finnegans Wake*, in which the hundred-letter word 'bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonnerronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohoohoordenenthurnuk!' speaks of thunder in multiple languages.[56] Joyce's oracular torrent of letters contains twenty-one 'n's, and it can be no coincidence that Muldoon slips exactly twenty-one 'n's into his Joycean accretion of the word 'in[nnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn]finite'. In Muldoon's next collection, 'Incantata' will allude again to what the thunder said ('Quoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiq!' (*P*, 336)), and here 'Madoc' suggests itself as the product of Muldoon's earliest deep encounter with Joyce's last great work. His heavily encrypted reference to the *Wake* points us, I think, toward the most fertile of Muldoon's hidden sources in 'Madoc'. Like Muldoon's mystery epic, Joyce's text is deeply concerned, as Seamus Deane says, with 'authoring and authority, origin and repetition', as well as experimental uses of language and letter-play.[57]

In a poem whose sources are otherwise openly acknowledged, it is striking that Joyce is packaged in code, tucked almost out of sight. Very few have acknowledged Joyce's influence on 'Madoc', even if, as Bernard O'Donoghue sees it, 'The Joyce parallel in "Madoc" is more developed than anywhere previously in Muldoon's work.'[58] '[T]he definition of literary post-

[56] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, introd. by Seamus Deane (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 003.15-17. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *FW*.
[57] Seamus Deane, 'Introduction' to *Finnegans Wake*, xxix.
[58] Bernard O'Donoghue, '"The Thing Half-Said to Them is Dearest": Paul Muldoon', in *Poetry in Contemporary Irish Literature*, ed. Michael Kenneally (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smyth, 1995), 400-418: 417. More recently, Derek Attridge finds 'Madoc' 'a work that countersigns Joyce's signature as we find it in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*'. In 'Foreword', *Joycean Legacies*, ed. Martha C. Carpentier (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), xvi.

modernism and post-structuralism is always seen as having a good deal to do with Joyce, especially *Finnegans Wake*', O'Donoghue adds, and in my view the *Wake* is central to Muldoon's network of avant-garde postmodern sources in 'Madoc', a poem which attests to a new scale of formal and experimental ambition on the American frontier. Joyce's work enjoys a cult-like appreciation in the U.S. Academy, so much so that his Irish contemporary Flann O'Brien claimed that Joyce had been 'invented by Americans';[59] and if 'Madoc' represents Muldoon's first attempt to reinvent himself for an American audience, then the poem at least partly negotiates that Irish-American transition through the work of a deracinated Irish writer with whom he shares an affinity.

Although set in Dublin, the *Wake* is by far Joyce's most American work. Its first page hints at Transatlantic exchange, Sir Tristram having 'passencore rearrived from North Armorica' (where 'Armorica' alludes both to America and the Brittany of Tristram's youth) (*FW*, 3.4-5). The book's central motif is the Boston Letter, a document of uncertain authorship dispatched from the United States. 'Transatlantic signalling and doubling (from one Dublin to another [Dublin, GA]) is a recurring theme in the *Wake*,' Brian Fox claims, and it may be that the paralleled Ulsters of 'Madoc' have Joyce's characteristic doubling of Dublin in mind.[60] Indeed, the more we peruse the comparison of *Finnegans Wake* with 'Madoc', the more compelling the similarities appear. Letters and letter-writing are equally prominent in Muldoon's text, where they are often penned in sympathetic ink or 'written in three ciphers', and where anxieties about reception are extended through epistolary exchanges between Coleridge and his publisher, Joseph Cottle ('a dog-eared letter in cuttle- | ink addressed by Coleridge to "my dearest Cottle"') (*MM*, 194, 188). Both are meta-detective stories involving mysterious letters, and both are excruciatingly self-aware, reflecting on their experimental practices and the strain they put on readers. In Muldoon's case, the text gives frequent indications of 'the tedium, de dum, of it all', as when Southey falls asleep 'clutch[ing] a copy of *Thalaba*' that sends even its author into a doze (*MM*, 125, 252-253).

Sleep is significant in Joyce's suggestively titled *Wake*, as it is in Freud's domain of psychoanalysis. Freud is named in a one-line section of Muldoon's poem, '[Freud]' – 'Her recurrent dream of a shorn and bloody hawser' (190) – which alludes to the kinds of anxieties and repetitions (and anxieties about repetition) we experience in dreams. The somnambulance

[59] Quoted by Deane in *FW*, xlvii.
[60] Brian Fox, '"land of breach of promise": Joyce and America' (Ph.D. diss., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2014), 156.

of Joyce's Wakean nonsense bears comparison with Freud's interconnected ideas about dreams, jokes, and slips, as Derek Attridge suggests in *Joyce Effects*: 'Like the Freudian joke and the slip of the tongue […], the pleasure [of *Finnegans Wake*] is both a childlike pleasure in the nonsense that has been wrought out of adult forms, and an adult pleasure in the sense that can be retrieved from childish nonsense.'[61] The nonsense of 'Madoc' enjoys a comparable coming-together of the childish and the grown-up. In his own way then, Muldoon is following Freud and Joyce, who, in the poem's words, were also inclined to 'winkle the "semen" out of "semantics"' (*MM*, 222). Like the *Wake*, his poem is a self-regarding, word-obsessed, dirty-minded, incorrigibly playful epic text which takes perverse pleasure in the sleepy suggestiveness of nursery language. When Hartley Coleridge's wet-nurse, for instance, feeds the child from her 'diddly-doos', the faux-innocent phrase suggests dildos and diddling; 'Bumble-Cum-Tumble' riffs on 'rough-and-tumble', as well as 'fumble', 'bum' and 'cum'; 'sillycum' is another light-hearted ejaculation; 'pigglepow' implies a sensual jiggle (for 'piggle', the *OED* proposes 'to fiddle or toy with'); and the recurrent 'teeny-weeny' suggests a slangy American cock-word (*MM*, 120, 242, 111, 238, 58). Freud theorized the origins of sexual development in childhood not long before Joyce 'did [his] unsmiling bit on 'alices, when they were yung and easily freudened' (*FW*, 115.21-23), and there is a comparably Freudian/Joycean logic to the nonsense of 'Madoc', which frequently couches its libidinous overtones in the would-be innocuousness of infantile babble.[62]

With her close friends and family, Coleridge's wife Sara Fricker communicated in a nonsense language of her own devising. She called it 'Lingo Grande', and its first appearance in the poem comes under the name of '[Wittgenstein]', that best-known philosopher of language games who said, 'you must pay attention to your nonsense':[63]

> 'Now your snouterumpater is a connoisorrow
> who has lost her raspectabilberry.'
> (*MM*, 79)

For her children, **'**Snouterumpater' was 'a short way of calling Mother,' as Robert Southey suggests in an 1821 letter.[64] The word itself is presumably a blend of 'mater', 'rump' and 'snout',

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[61] Derek Attridge, *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 148.
[62] See Sigmund Freud, 'Infantile Sexuality', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 7*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 173-206.
[63] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright, trans. Peter Winch (Blackwell: Oxford, 1980), 56.
[64] Robert Southey, 'Letter to Grosvenor Charles Bedford', 14 Sep. 1821, in *New Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. Kenneth Curry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965). See also Molly Lefebure, 'The

reflecting the exuberant verbal contrivances and deformations that Muldoon, after Joyce, is now beginning to experiment with himself. Indeed, in the quotation above, her 'connoisorrow' and 'lost […] raspectabilberry' appear to be Muldoon's own coinages, which foreshadow her sister Edith Southey's (*née* Fricker) defilement at the hands of the Seneca.

In that scene, where a sickened Coleridge looks on from a distance as Edith is sexually accosted (and possibly assaulted), the poem's lyricism belies the unsettling picture it frames:

> While the white woman is being rogered
> by one Seneca tipped with chert
>
> she sap-
> sips
>
> a second.
> Coleridge turns away, sickened,
>
> snaps shut the telescope
> and fumbles for his pony's halter-rope.
> (*MM*, 92-3)

Alluding a few lines earlier to 'paddles, pumpkins, | thingums, thingammies,' the lyric's libidinous force takes the essential innocence of Fricker's nonsense Lingo and runs it through the nocturnal spin-cycle of *Finnegans Wake*. The word 'sap-sips' is at once rhythmically delicate and lewdly charged, a singsong chime that draws a dainty 'sip' from the salacious echoes of 'laps', 'lips' 'seeps', 'slips'.

With words like 'tippy-tip' and 'sap-sips',[65] Muldoon is replicating the *Wake*'s way with words – a simultaneously gentle and off-colour slanginess that weaves rhyme and sound-reduplications into an easy-sleazy melody. In HCE's dream of canoeing 'in his tippy, upindown dippy, tiptoptippy canoodle' (*FW*, 65.32), Joyce's text tumbles through a nursery-rhyme sequence of phonic doublings which mirror the fantasy of 'canoodling' two women at once (a scenario Muldoon intensifies and inverts in Edith Fricker's raunchier *ménage á trois*). But the

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Imagination of Mrs Coleridge', in *Coleridge's Imagination: Essays in Memory of Pete Laver*, eds. Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn, and Nicholas Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 82-83.

[65] The pertness of 'tipped' in the passage above recalls the awakening of 'The Panther' and the 'tippy-tip of its nose' (*MM*, 9), as well as Coleridge's 'tipple-tope' of opium in 'Madoc' (77).

Wake's doublings are also *lexical* canoodlings, in which the multiplying words and their echoes swell unsustainably until the line collapses under the weight of innuendo. As in 'Madoc', the *Wake*'s saccharine layers of rhyme and chime distract from, even as they deliver, hints of indecency and violation.

In *The Hunt by Night* (1982), Derek Mahon gave us his 'Joycentenary Ode' written in Finneganese ('Gymsoul, my ho head heavy…').[66] While Muldoon stops short of such a fully-fledged homage to *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce remains a powerful literary exemplar in 'Madoc', as in the later poems and lectures. When asked in 1996 about his use of nonce-words like 'emphysemantiphon' and 'metaphysicattle' in *The Annals of Chile* (1994), Muldoon claimed to be wary of elaborating any further on the nonsensical inventiveness we see emerging in 'Madoc'. 'That is a road down which I can't really go any further,' he said, adding: 'If I go down that road basically next stop is *Finnegans Wake*, and to do that one would always be a kind of tenth-rate Joyce.'[67] There can be no doubt, though, that Muldoon in America goes looking for the avant-garde, seeking out experimental forms or models equal to the demands of his esoteric, impish, expansionist American epic; and in Joyce, he finds one. Muldoon's turn to Joyce in this poem signals a change of scale, as well as new lexical and formal ambitions in the United States. With these Wakean experiments, he is also looking *homeward*, coming to terms with his deracinated American position through the most self-consciously deracinated work of his fellow-Irish émigré exemplar.

5

'a teeny-weeny key'

'Madoc' delights in the perversities and mysteries of its nonsense. But as a self-styled 'Mystery', the poem is also a parody of a detective story which takes mystery and detection as its themes. Going back to his 1980 volume *Why Brownlee Left*, Muldoon has long been taken with the model of the investigative trail, and with detective fiction as a distinctively American genre derived from Poe. In that earlier volume, 'Immram' is a spoof detective sequence in which the speaker, after investigating his father's history and possible whereabouts, ends up barely any the wiser in the New York pool-hall where he began (*P*, 94-102). 'Madoc', though, takes the

[66] Derek Mahon, *The Hunt by Night* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 45-48.
[67] John Redmond, 'Interview with Paul Muldoon', *Thumbscrew*, 4 (1996): 2-18, last accessed 27 Oct. 2017 at http://www.poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record.asp?id=12522.

historical detective story into the realms of outright *metafiction* – a first for Muldoon, who seems swayed by his new American cultural milieu. The self-reflexive stylings of postmodern detective fiction, which were themselves taking off U.S.-based works of the 1960s – Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, say, or Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* – share much with the darkly comic counterfactual sleuthing of 'Madoc'.[68] A then contemporary example of the detective model used in Muldoon's poem is Paul Auster's meta-mystery series, *The New York Trilogy*, published as a single volume in 1987, which presents a trio of works about literary detective jobs which drive their investigators (like Muldoon's sleuthing South) to distraction and eventual self-destruction.

This chapter so far has outlined the poem's convergence on the mid- to late-1980s *Zeitgeist*: Vincent Buckley's *Memory Ireland* (1985), Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (translated into English in 1987), Williams's *Madoc: the Making of a Myth* (reprinted in 1987), Haughton's *Chatto Book of Nonsense Poetry* (1988) and Auster's *New York Trilogy* (1987) reflect the poem's place within its contemporary contexts. 'Madoc' then is very much of its moment, not only in Muldoon's personal history but in the intellectual culture of Irish and American writing. As per Richard Kearney's 1988 title, this was definitively a period *Towards a Postmodern Culture*. Kearney argues that postmodernism 'displays its own artificiality': 'the model of the productive inventor is replaced by that of the *bricoleur* […], afloat in an anonymous interplay of images which he can, at best, parody, simulate or reproduce.'[69] Muldoon's sources tend not to be 'anonymous', but otherwise Kearney is describing the tenets of postmodernism knowingly paralleled and parodied in the fragmentary, intertextual, self-reflective forms and simulations of 'Madoc'. In Wakean fashion, however, 'Madoc' also piles system upon system, and ironizes those strategies of meta-mystery in which, as Kearney says, 'the artist becomes a "player" in a game'.

Another 1980s title, Linda Hutcheon's study of *The Metafictional Paradox*, is about the 'textual forms of self-consciousness' with which Muldoon's poem engages at a playful distance.[70] Hutcheon, who gives over a full chapter to detective fiction, argues that the 'detective story is almost by definition intensely self-aware', stressing 'the self-consciousness of the form itself, its strong conventions, and the important textual function of the hermeneutic act of reading'.[71] Muldoon's poem seems particularly attuned to reading as hermeneutic approach. Always wary

[68] Stan Smith argues that 'Madoc' 'brokenbackedly emulates' Pynchon's *V*. In Smith, 'Leavings', *Paul Muldoon: Poetry, Prose, Drama*, 133.
[69] Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Towards a Postmodern Culture* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 3,13.
[70] Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narratives: The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Routledge, 1984), 4.
[71] Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narratives*, 72.

of falling 'too patly into the scheme | of things' (*MM,* 106), the text's diversions and dead-ends are wilfully foregrounded. Most of its 'trails are already cold,' we are told, and even when aren't cold, they are 'almost certainly false' (*MM*, 42). To give us these details upfront is to undercut every pretence of the conventional (or solvable) detective plot. Indeed, the narrative frequently plays up its illogicality: 'Lewis and Clark had submerged their boats […] How might Coleridge have stolen a pirogue, when there was none to steal?' (218). Continuing in this seemingly impossible vein, every unlikely 'twist in the plot' progresses a metafictional story about how the poem works.

Its two routines – the detective performance and its mock-explanatory meta-performance – play out in tandem over the course of the poem. Muldoon's is a double role, simultaneously the dissimulating mystery-writer and the detective in his own fiction. The 'key' becomes a motif of this compromising doubleness, at once participating in the mystery and emblematizing its solution. It first arrives in a letter sent from Sara Coleridge, 'a teeny-weeny key' 'on a snig of hemp', and is later dropped with mock seriousness: 'That teeny-weeny key. Bear it in mind.' (*MM*, 58, 117). By the end, the key's suggestiveness has been magnified to ridiculous excess, as in the twice-repeated: 'And those teeny-weeny keys on their toggles | of hemp?' (250). 'The keys to. Given!' are handed over on the final page of *Finnegans Wake*, and Muldoon's trope of the key draws on the same mock-suggestion of a solution which the text cannot deliver.

Advancing from one clue to the next 'by ambiguity and innuendo',[72] as Michael Hofmann puts it, some sections of the poem pose conundrums of their own within the wider Mystery. '[Maxwell]', for instance, offers a series of teasing associations which stretch our ability (and inclination) to connect them:

> A tittle-tattle of light on his ax.
> Sackbuts. A butt of sack.
>
> The butt of malmsey.
> St Elmo's
>
> Fire. Fata Morgana.
> Gommeril. Regan.

[72] Hofmann, 'Muldoon: A Mystery', 19.

Will-o'-the-wisp. Jack-o'-lantern.
The seas incarnadine.
(*MM*, 172)

What exactly these lines are about is difficult to tell. At first glance, their various illuminations – 'tittle-tattle of light', 'St Elmo's Fire', the sea mirage of 'Fata Morgana', the 'will-o'-the-wisp' and 'Jack-o'-lantern' – announce a lyric about elusive apparitions. Their sinuous associations, though, are also curiously Shakespearean. 'The butt of malmsey' is lifted from *Richard III*, where it is used to drown Richard's brother Clarence; 'Gommeril' next to 'Regan' suggests Goneril, her co-conspirator in *King Lear*; the 'Jack-o'-lantern' is common fare in Shakespeare, and also appears in *Lear* when the Fool mistakes Gloucester's lantern for 'a walking fire'; and the final line alludes to Macbeth, whose hands are so stained with blood that they would 'the multitudinous seas incarnadine'.[73] Why so many Shakespeare references, and why so densely packaged?

Clarence's assassination is foretold in *Richard III* by his dream of drowning, and in much the same vein, Lear's hallucinations and Macbeth's blood-stained hands are ghostly illusions – otherworldly reflections of the unsettling spectacle 'Madoc' has in store. But the passage may also reflect the poem's more covert textual sources. The oracular dialogue between Lear and the Fool in the 'walking fire' scene is included in *The Chatto Book of Nonsense*, for instance, where Haughton's introduction points to *King Lear*'s 'vivid […] place in the history of nonsense'.[74] What's more, the many faces of 'Shapesphere' or 'Shakhisbeard' were important for Joyce,[75] whose riddles and word-games are frequently drawn to Shakespearean sources (think Stephen's Hamlet theory in *Ulysses*).[76] Muldoon has form with Shakespearean cryptograms of his own, as Tim Kendall has shown: 'it is no coincidence that the fifth line of the tenth stanza [in 'The More a Man Has'] – "*for thou art so possessed with murd'rous hate*" – happens also to be the fifth line of Shakespeare's tenth sonnet.'[77] As in Muldoon's earlier Joycean cipher in 'Madoc' (the twenty-one 'n's nestling in 'infinite'), there may be another cryptogrammic game of cat-and-mouse

[73] *Richard III*, I.4.265; *King Lear*, III.4.107; and *Macbeth*, II.2.60. In *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works, 2nd Ed.*, eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).
[74] Haughton, *Chatto Book of Nonsense*, 11. The Lear scene appears on pages 80-83.
[75] *FW*, 117.31, 295.04.
[76] These riddles have been the subject of numerous essays and book titles. See, for instance, Patrick A. McCarthy, *The Riddles of Finnegans Wake* (London; Toronto: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980); Helen Georgi, 'Covert Riddles in *Ulysses*: Squaring the Circle', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 13.2 (1986): 329-339.
[77] Tim Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* (Bridgend: Seren, 1996), 108. See *P*, 131.

going on here, as Muldoon reveals his technical ingenuity – and his appetite for the esoteric – with an extended feast of intertextual detective work.

These potentially coded trails of allusion and association are in many ways typical of 'Madoc', which invites investigation without promising answers. The poem seems to relish the investigative game, and usually provides us with all the resources we need to play. Real textual origins are frequently named, dated and placed well in the foreground, with many sections comprised of extracts from the sources Muldoon used to write the poem. Chiming with Hutcheon's comments about metafictional works, Alcobia-Murphy notes how 'the narrator performs the constant task of reading and copying other texts, so much so that the poem seems to be a tapestry of quotations, stressing its own materiality, contextuality and intertextual provenance.'[78] Extracts from Southey's *Madoc*, Lewis and Clark's diaries, Southey and Coleridge's letters, Byron's verses and Thomas Moore's songs provide us with much of the original material Muldoon used to compose 'Madoc', as if to read the poem were partly to imagine the process of writing it.

Red herrings and other plot devices are also well-signposted, often sardonically so. One bit-part character, for instance, is named after Alfred Hitchcock's cinematic ruse, 'MacGuffin', later 'Magoffin' (74, 249). When the horse Bucephalus finds himself in a 'quandary, | as to either or either or either or either' (163), he seems to speak on behalf of the reader, or perhaps the critic, whose struggle to reconcile the poem's multiple clues and plot-points is constantly thematised. In this, Muldoon may be anticipating a key concept of his lectures in *The End of the Poem* (2006) he calls 'stunt-reading', in which the author himself is the 'stunt-reader' who 'stand[s] in for subsequent readers, foreshadowing them, determining the impact of those words and those lines' (*EP*, 218). Like this stunt-reader, the meta-mystery writer of 'Madoc' keeps an eye on the possible readings, and reproduces them proleptically inside the poem with enough ingenuity to keep us guessing.

Perhaps such metafictional stratagems call for meta-critical responses? 'Metacommentary' was the title of an essay by the preeminent commentator on postmodernism Fredric Jameson, in which he makes a suggestion to that effect:

> In matters of art, and particularly of artistic perception, […] what is wanted is a kind of mental procedure which suddenly shifts gears, which throws everything in an inextricable tangle one floor higher, and turns the very problem itself (the obscurity of

[78] Alcobia-Murphy, *Sympathetic Ink*, 27.

> this sentence) into its own solution (the varieties of Obscurity) by widening its frame in such a way that it now takes in its own mental processes as well as the object of those processes. In the earlier, naive state, we struggle with the object in question: in this heightened and self-conscious one, we observe our own struggles and patiently set about characterizing them.[79]

It is this movement of interpretive frames 'one floor higher' that 'Madoc' has already encoded within itself. The difficulty of interpreting the poem (or of matching the feats of the stunt-reader) may itself be what calls out for interpretation: 'it is a matter not only of solving the riddle of the sphynx,' as Jameson says, 'but … of standing back in such a way as to apprehend the very form of the riddle itself as a literary genre'.[80] In its meta-detective riddling 'Madoc', like *Finnegans Wake*, is as much about the nonsense of its mysteries as the mysteries of its nonsense.

If the poem's self-reflexive forms and mysteries represent a decidedly postmodern turn, it is no coincidence that Muldoon's move toward a poetry of heightened critical self-consciousness should coincide with his introduction to the U.S. Academy. Some years before his entrance onto the international lecture circuit in 1998 (as will be discussed in the next chapter), the preoccupation in 'Madoc' with criticism and literary theory forms part of Muldoon's earliest response to the Princeton Quotidian. A hallowed cast of names – Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, Ricoeur, Barthes, Foucault, Habermas, Derrida, Kristeva and others – oversee the spectacular breakdown of the Pantisocratic scheme as the poem draws to a close, from the retina which at 'any moment now … will disintegrate' to 'the great palladium … as it goes up in flames' (*MM*, 241, 257). The great palladium's final collapse arrives under the name of '[Derrida]', as the poem aligns itself at a parodic distance with the poststructuralist ideas then fashionable in the academy. The poem's play with nonsense also emerges from this poststructuralist moment, with its theories about semiotics, the arbitrariness of the sign, and the instability of language ('For "ludic" read "lucid",' as Muldoon hints in his later 'Errata' (*P*, 445)). Ihab Hassan, another theorist of the postmodern, claims that 'theory … has clearly shaped postmodernism,' in which 'literature and criticism constantly blend', and Muldoon in America seems newly attuned to this cultural-theoretical blend and its epic potential for pastiche.[81] The autobiographical epic of his next volume, 'Yarrow', at one point gestures toward the 'flock of post-Saussureans' who, 'largely because of *Writing Degree Zero*,' now 'leapt about from "high" to

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[79] Fredric Jameson, 'Metacommentary', *PMLA* 86.1 (1971): 9.
[80] Jameson, 'Metacommentary', 15.
[81] Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), xiii.

"low" | like so many dyed-in-the-wool serows or oorials' (*P*, 378). But the fluctuations of 'low' and 'high' culture, from sci-fi to Saussure, are precisely what Muldoon's postmodern epics are themselves embracing. In 'Madoc', Muldoon presents himself as the joker in the postmodern pack, building the names and theories of post-structuralism, post-colonialism and deconstruction into the vast parodic machinery of its encyclopaedic form. The poem, then, marks an important first step down a theoretical path, where Muldoon gets to grips with the American Academy and his place within it after his arrival in the United States.

6

Conclusion

The broad canvas of open forms and experimental procedures in 'Madoc' reflect the extension of Muldoon's poetic licence in America, an arrival which this chapter has framed in terms of formal liberation, elaboration, and re-definition. In the end, this is a provocative poem about its writer's stylistic response to his U.S. debut, which delights in upsetting formal, linguistic and narrative expectations. If this metafictional, meta-theoretical jigsaw reflects a poet examining his methods upon arrival in the United States, then that examination is itself transformed into a rich mine of material related to the postmodernist culture of his new country. As Louis MacNeice wrote in 'Traveller's Return', defending the emigration of British writers to the U.S. during war-time: 'Of course, it is hard to write where you have no "roots", but because it is hard it may be all the more worth doing.'[82] Muldoon takes the challenge of his Irish-American transition – of synthesising original writing in his adopted nation with writing that is also somehow 'rooted' – as his theme, drawing on the history of America, the mytho-parodic machinery of Joyce and the Pantisocratic worldliness of Coleridge to build 'Madoc' from the wreckage of what Muldoon himself has called Southey's 'unbearably tedious' poem,[83] riffing on the problems of tedium and unoriginality in daringly perverse and original fashion.

Acclimatizing to his own separation from the familiarities of Ireland and his early life, Muldoon's poem is about poets crossing the ocean and starting from scratch in America. The volume is named after the Welsh prince who traversed the Atlantic to escape a bloody family

[82] Louis MacNeice, 'Traveller's Return', *Horizon*, 3.14 (1941): 110-116, 114. A copy of MacNeice's essay is among the 'Madoc' papers contained in the Stuart A. Rose Archive, MSS 784 (Box 14, Folder 5).
[83] Muldoon, '"Madoc": Introduction to Dramatic Reading', Stuart A. Rose Archive, MSS 784 (Box 29, Folder 28).

feud at home, and Muldoon as a self-styled 'Prince of the Quotidian' represents another Northern Irish poet who takes the Transatlantic route out. Although in some ways a bold act of self-portraiture, Muldoon at the same time buries himself beneath a host of self-distancing techniques. By inventing a 'parallel realm' based on a non-event, telescoping history between the outdated 'polygraph' and futuristic 'retinagraph', warping the language of infantile babble, and overlaying it all with an encyclopaedic shroud of philosophers and contemporary theorists, Muldoon is not exactly hiding in plain sight, but surrounding his poem in the 'almost invisible' machinery of the Invisible Avant-garde as he explores his sense of expatriation in America.

'Madoc' is not a wholesale departure from Muldoon's earlier work, or from poetry more generally; but its scale is newly enlarged when compared with his other works, in ways that reflect his entry onto the larger stage of the United States. Certainly the poem exceeds the various forms and narratives that it embeds within itself, unlike his most experimental previous text, 'The More a Man Has', and these questions of large-scale structure – or indeed the suggestion of the super-structure – are essential to the later developments of Muldoon's long-voyage lectures, serial slips, and the ninety-rhyme scheme addressed in the coming chapters. As a volume then, *Madoc* marks a pivotal moment between Muldoon's Irish and American phases. Its title poem signals a greater engagement with experimental forms of writing, from modernist collage to Joycean language and models of postmodern metafiction. Crucially though, the text is also rooted in an Anglo-Irish history of Romanticism, and grounds itself on both sides of the Atlantic through a Pantisocratic voyage and a U.S. myth of Celtic origin. Returning to the poet's Irish-American cross-pollinations of old, 'Madoc' hinges on Muldoon's moment of poetic and professional transplantation, as he recalibrates the scale of his own peculiarly Transatlantic developments – academic, formal, and cultural – as an émigré poet in the New World.

(Up)ending the Poem: Muldoon's Lectures

One of the main developments in Muldoon's career since arriving in Princeton in 1990 has been his cultivation of a body of critical writing, a complex serial text which reflects a distinctive practice of reading. His birth as a lecturer is part of this American turn, offering longer forms of poetic commentary which are themselves long forms – a new form of writing which shows Muldoon as reader. So what does it mean to read like Paul Muldoon? His paradoxical conviction in *The End of the Poem* that 'the tangential is most likely to be on target, most likely to hit the butt',[1] expands on a similar statement he made several years before: 'I myself am much more inclined to appeal […] slightly to one side of what might ordinarily be thought to be on target'.[2] Apparently suspicious of straight-shooting, Muldoon is more enticed by the errant pleasures of mis- and indirection. This appeal to the peripheral or oblique, a direct inclination towards otherwise untargeted targets, is characteristic of Muldoon's perverse approach to literary texts. His first published critical piece was delivered as the F.W. Bateson Memorial Lecture in 1998, and its title, 'Getting Round: Notes Towards an *Ars Poetica*', hints at a form of reading as circumvention, with poems presenting a barrier or front that requires our 'getting round'. The obvious path is one Muldoon as poet-critic habitually steps across, and that wilfully unconventional line has hardened over the course of eight years and two books of criticism into an unmistakable interpretive creed.

1

'Silken ties'

The road not taken is perhaps in the corner of Muldoon's eye when, in the Bateson lecture, he looks to another of Robert Frost's great poems of misdirection. 'Directive' is a beguiling grail-quest, an oracular poem in which the speaker, our 'guide', 'only has at heart your getting lost'.[3] Picking up on Frost's 'Grail', kept 'Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it, | So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't', Muldoon in his talk turns to Mark 4:22

[1] Paul Muldoon, *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures in Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), 288. Hereafter cited in-text as *EP*.
[2] Paul Muldoon, 'Getting Round: Notes Towards an *Ars Poetica*', F.W. Bateson Memorial Lecture, in *Essays in Criticism* 48.2 (1998), 112. Hereafter cited in-text as *GR*.
[3] Robert Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 377-379.

and 'the parable of the sower "sowing the word" – "for there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested"' (*GR*, 114). Frank Kermode refers to this parable of the sower in *The Genesis of Secrecy* (1979), a study of interpretation which takes the Gospel of Mark as its central text (and Frost's lines about Saint Mark as its epigraph). Muldoon shares Kermode's thirst for secrets, and the bible verse strikes a chord with his own inquisitive practice of reading. Knowing that Frost's lines about preventing 'the wrong ones' from being 'saved' are widely read as referring to Mark 16:16 – 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be *saved*; but he that believeth not shall be damned' – Muldoon opts instead to turn elsewhere, acknowledging that biblical passage only to distance himself from it: 'I look not to Mark 16:16, with its direct insistence on why the "damned" will be damned and the "saved" saved' (*GR*, 114). The 'direct insistence' he swerves away from here is not only the piousness of Mark 16:16 but the explicit 'directive' of Frost's poem, which hands us an allusion that Muldoon – as the 'stunt reader' he will name himself in later lectures – must find a way of getting round. This reflexive habit of second-guessing both poet and reader gives an early indication of Muldoon's knowingly suspicious critical intent – of his working, as he puts it, 'at a slight remove from the obvious' (*GR*, 116).

In the subsequent Clarendon Lectures of 1998, collected as his first book of criticism, *To Ireland, I*, Muldoon outlines 'a central tenet of the Irish imagination' as he sees it: 'what you see is *never* what you get. […] There's a discrepancy between outward appearance and inward reality.'[4] His distrust of appearances reflects a passion for concealment, and the interpretive hyperactivity which brings this out is diagnosed as an essentially Irish pathology: 'It's what I'm tempted to call "Eriny"' (*TI*, 6). That the predisposition to dissimulate (and playfully so) should be a specifically *Irish* quality is convenient in a book about Irish writers who participate in the sly hoodwinks and verbal high-jinks in which Muldoon's own writing is so well-practiced. If it takes a thief to catch one, as he seems to be suggesting, then few are better equipped for the role. As poacher turned gamekeeper, Muldoon's critical methodology looks like an exaggerated form of what Paul Ricoeur's *Freud and Philosophy* identified as the 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. Ricoeur noted how thinking of the kind practiced by Marx, Freud and Nietzsche is by nature suspicious, even conspiratorial, since one of its preconditions is the radical exposure of a 'false consciousness':

> If consciousness is not what it thinks it is, a new relation must be instituted between the patent and the latent; this new relation would correspond to the one that consciousness had instituted between appearances and the reality of things. … Thus the distinguishing

[4] Paul Muldoon, *To Ireland, I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6. Hereafter cited in-text as *TI*.

> characteristic of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche is the general hypothesis concerning both the process of false consciousness and the method of deciphering. The two go together, since the man of suspicion carries out in reverse the work of falsification of the man of guile.[5]

Ricoeur identifies a parallel between *en*coding and *de*coding, in which what he calls the "'conscious" methods of deciphering coincide with the "unconscious" *work* of ciphering'[6] – a double road that carries out the same processes in reverse. The method of the code-breaker is, in other words, to invert the method used to make the code. What Ricoeur doesn't account for here is a mischievous hermeneut like Muldoon who is also a falsifier, a 'man of guile' who might invent something in order to reveal it.

'[Ricoeur]' is one of the philosophers named in Muldoon's counterfactual saga 'Madoc: A Mystery', a New World epic teeming with keys and cyphers which marked the coming of Muldoon as code-maker, as I discussed in Chapter 1. The making and breaking of codes are essential operations in 'Madoc' as in the critical texts, which are always searching for 'the encrypted word' (*TI*, 17). Once discovered and decrypted, that word 'allows a reader to open the portal on this passage' and connect it with another – a device, as he explains in *To Ireland, I*, which grants the reader access to allusive pathways known as 'crypto-currents' (17, 58). Such claims reflect the cryptographic vocabulary of Muldoon's interpretive practice, which tends to be less interested in what texts say than in where else they can take us. Muldoon reads poems as intertextual conversations, listening out for the voices of authors they imitate and address. But where the model of interpretation Ricoeur describes is serious and suspicious, Muldoon's is openly mischievous, skipping between texts and whipping up crypto-currents as he asks us, in Michael Robbins's terms, 'to suspend our belief in the necessity of intention'.[7]

Muldoon refers in the Bateson lecture to the phrase 'sways at ease' from Frost's poem 'The Silken Tent', which he calls 'a coded version of "Kay's at ease"' (*GR*, 118). Notably, this is not identified as an echo or allusion which may be coincidental, but a 'coded version' that requires a codifier: Frost either *intends* to conceal the allusion or is concealing it *unintentionally*, perhaps automatically (a reflex that, by his account, Muldoon's poetic subjects all share). The 'Kay' in question here is Kathleen Morrison, Frost's secretary and the married woman he fell

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[5] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Danis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 33-34.
[6] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 34.
[7] Michael Robbins, 'Paul Muldoon's Covert Operations', *Modern Philology* 109.2 (2011), 271.

for after his wife's death. Muldoon notes how Frost's *A Witness Tree*, the 1942 volume which includes 'The Silken Tent', was published with the dedication 'To K.M., for her part in it' and the cipher of Morrison's initials marks the first of many hints of biographical (and often extra-marital) liaisons in Muldoon's criticism. By identifying Kay's name here, Muldoon is not attempting to undermine Frost's poem in search of repressed or latent content in the fashion of Ricoeur's suspicious hermeneutics. Rather, he is granting full knowledge to a poet who is, by his formulation, astonishingly *aware* of the encryptions embedded in the text.

One danger in this biographical method of decryption is that the reader, here Muldoon himself, might be drawn to references that aren't really there, *creating* the allusion in the act of deciphering it. The difference between a deliberate allusion and an accidental, unconscious, or inadvertent echo can be difficult to determine, and it is precisely this ambiguity which Muldoon's criticism delights in exploiting.[8] He jokes of 'The Silken Tent' that 'those very "silken ties" may evoke the post-coital languor which I mentioned earlier, but they also evoke the ludicrous image of a rack of silken ties by Ferragamo or Hermes. A note on hermeticism, with a nod to Wilfred Owen. The poetry is in the serendipity' (*GR*, 120). The image of designer ties is indeed ludicrous, but not undesigning: this is a delightfully irreverent turn on Owen's 'poetry in the pity', and an instance of Muldoon's eye for 'serendipity'.

Farfetched speculations are part of Muldoon's high-wire act, and are crucial to the academic improprieties he seems to relish. The following example is not only improper but brilliantly outrageous, as Muldoon 'lingers' archly over his scurrilous insight:

> The recurrence of the phrase "the silken tent" in the title and the first line suggests to me, as my tongue lingers over it, that I cannot but, can't but, hear a "cunt" in the "sil*ken* tent". (*GR*, 117)

Whether or not Frost was conscious of that echo, Muldoon claims he is revealing the *poem's* hidden intentions, since the poem 'pitches itself' beyond the writer and so possesses 'its own "silk *intent*"' (120). Muldoon is clearly fencing with 'The In*tent*ional Fallacy' here, having already

[8] A. Walton Litz's distinction between 'conscious' and 'subliminal' allusions – the allusion that is *meant* to be recognised, and the allusion that comes more unconsciously from the poet's hand – may be helpful here. Muldoon, who dedicated *To Ireland, I* to Litz, treats most allusions as 'subliminal' by this definition, suggesting a peculiarly Freudian model of reading in which the poet is held responsible for the allusion whether it is consciously made or not. See A. Walton Litz, 'The Allusive Poet: Eliot and His Sources,' in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 144-45; cited by James Longenbach, '"Mature poets steal": Eliot's allusive practice', in *Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. A. Moody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 184.

taken a stand against Wimsatt and Beardsley 'whose concerns for the author's intentions are,' he says, 'somewhat beside the point, since what must be determined is the intent of the poem' (120). The key question raised here is where we locate the authority for textual meaning. For Wimsatt and Beardsley in *The Verbal Icon*, authority lies with the poet only when his or her intentions are manifest in the poem:

> the poem itself shows what [the poet] was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed in doing it, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem – for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem.[9]

But what happens when the poet's intentions are being *disguised*, whether consciously or otherwise? Wimsatt and Beardsley leave no room for this possibility, or dismiss it as extraneous (and therefore irrelevant) to the poem. Muldoon's response, as Adam Phillips neatly summarises, is that poets 'are astoundingly knowing, but rather in the way that divining rods or migrating birds are'.[10] In other words, their instinct to self-encode is ingrained, intuitive; and so too, for Muldoon, must be the reader's instinct to decode. Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that the poem is a 'public' utterance separate from the writer's life; Muldoon, however, insists on 'there being "no barriers" between the poem and the biography of its author' (*EP*, 32). Indeed, a poet-critic such as himself will have peculiar insight into a writer's self-dramatizations and the poetics of disguise. In *To Ireland, I*, he finds in Louis MacNeice a poet who 'presents himself in so many guises and disguises' (*TI*, 91), and in *The End of the Poem* returns to Frost as the exemplary poet of disguise, whose subtle designing and 'everyday level of diction' even Ezra Pound mistook for simplicity (*EP*, 65). It is on these grounds that Muldoon reads Frost's dedication 'to K.M, for her *part* in it' as a disguised token of erotic 'intent', finding the cunt in 'The Silken Tent' and relishing the outrageousness of making 'Kay' the 'key'.

So what is the formula of the Muldoon lecture – this Bateson lecture, and the others collected in *To Ireland, I* and *The End of the Poem*? The case of Frost is in many ways exemplary. First, there is an engagement with romantic and filial biography: literary texts are nearly always found to contain intimate references to the writer's family life or romantic attachments (in Frost's case, Kay Morrison). Muldoon listens intently for the whispers and hints which might betray these ulterior meanings, often enlisting the help of letters and other personal records.

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[9] W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 4.
[10] Adam Phillips, 'Someone Else', review of *The End of the Poem* and *Horse Latitudes* by Paul Muldoon, *London Review of Books* 29.1 (2007), 35.

Second, there is an understanding of the text as multiply allusive, on a literary level as well as an autobiographical one. Muldoon is a notorious dabbler among texts of many kinds – as my analysis of the Bateson lecture shows, from the Gospel of Mark to advertisements for Ferragamo or Hermes, pretty much anything goes – and his lectures situate the works of other writers in an equally expansive network of literary and non-literary intertexts. Whether alluded to directly or suppressed and reconfigured, these intertextual threads are crucial in unpicking the motives and double-meanings these texts are said to conceal from the reader and, at times, their writer. The third aspect is an extension of the first and second: that Muldoon's criticism seeks out cyphers, echoes and obscured traces of what *isn't* obviously present in the text. K.M.'s euphemistic 'part' overshadows 'The Silken Tent', for example, from which Muldoon finds a new erotic-biographical angle on a poem that's no stranger to exegesis. Muldoon is the dedicatee of Tom Paulin's *The Secret Life of Poems*, as Paulin is Muldoon's in *The End of the Poem*, and the poem's secret or double life is – more so than its End – the true subject of his lectures.

If these are the tools Muldoon's criticism is working with, what *form* do the lectures take? His capricious, offbeat mode of analysing a text is at pains to distance itself from what seems apparent or self-evident, and picks up instead on instances where the writer may have swerved away from an overt reference to biographical or literary sources. The 'swerves away' he seeks are reminiscent of Harold Bloom's '*clinamen*', a word Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* borrows from Lucretius to describe 'an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation'.[11] Bloom's study is (like Ricoeur's) a poetic re-casting of Freudian ideas, and the influence of both Bloom and Freud on Muldoon's criticism will be addressed later in the chapter. Muldoon rarely misses an opportunity to hypothesise about creative corrections and transmutations of a Bloomian or Freudian kind. His analysis of 'Dover Beach' credits Matthew Arnold as avoiding a direct reference to 'the coast of France' because, he says, 'it too obviously resonates with the line "The coast of France – the coast of France how near!" from Wordsworth's "September, 1802. Near Dover"' (*EP*, 328). The place-name is also, he suggests, too explicit an allusion to the name of Arnold's wife, '*Frances* Lucy Wightman', with whom the poet stayed in Dover on the last night of their honeymoon when he wrote part of 'Dover Beach'.[12] Catching poems in the act of concealment is Muldoon's critical stock in trade; and the

[11] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 30.
[12] Arnold's biographer Park Honan corroborates this in his *Matthew Arnold: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), 234.

lectures are always on the lookout for words and images that their writers may have redacted, rejected, or disguised in less obvious forms.

2

'*The Voyage of Máel Dúin*'

Muldoon's concern with verbal migrations and words gone awry is longstanding, but when he left for America in 1987 the move had profound effects on his writing. The Oxford lectures, beginning with the Bateson Memorial in 1998, are part of his American career, and were conceived at a time when questions of travel were looming large over his poetic and academic employments. Muldoon's U.S. emigration heralded three years of successive academic appointments at Columbia, Princeton, Berkeley, and Massachusetts before he returned permanently to Princeton in 1990, where he still teaches today.

Before the American move, and indeed for some years after it, Muldoon showed very little interest in prose criticism. As Tim Kendall noted in 1996, his published criticism at the time consisted of 'a handful of (mostly cranky) reviews', of which only a few were concerned with poetry.[13] His U.S. academic appointments did coincide, however, with emerging work that both parodied and pandered to academic concerns. 'Madoc: A Mystery' is, as its dust jacket suggests, 'a mischievous guide to the history of Western philosophy' that arranges itself under chronological headers from Thales to Stephen Hawking. In his subsequent January Journal, *The Prince of the Quotidian* (1994) – its title a nod to Muldoon's Princeton princedom – we find a *cento* containing what looks like the germ of a thesis for *To Ireland, I*:

> After two days grading papers from the seminar I taught
> on Swift, Yeats, Sterne,
> Joyce, and Beckett,
> I break my sword across my iron knee:
> in the long sonata of *The Dead*
> ceremony's a name for the rich horn –
> these images fresh images beget –
> and custom for the hardy laurel tree;

[13] Tim Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* (Bridgend: Seren, 1996), 192.

for the gravel was thrown up against the window-pane
not by Michael Furey but the Dean
who stepped on to an outward bound tram
and embarked on *Immram Curaig Mael Duin*,
while the Butler that withstood beside the brackish Boyne
was one James Butler, Corporal Trim.
(*PQ*, 24)

These Irish writers – Swift, Yeats, Sterne, Joyce, Beckett – are central players in the lectures collected in *To Ireland, I*, where their works lace together as they do in this patchwork sonnet. The famous lines quoted here hint at the mischievous malapropisms which are also a salient feature of Muldoon's lectures, his 'hardy laurel tree', for instance, tweaking 'the spreading laurel tree' of Yeats's 'A Prayer for My Daughter' into a pun on the comedy duo, Laurel and Hardy.[14] Muldoon's poem also anticipates the allusive model followed in the alphabetically organized lectures, where 'the long sonata of *The Dead*' is the Joycean refrain heard on almost every page. One notable omission from this list of Irish authors, present in the poem but barely seen in the Clarendon Lectures, is W. B. Yeats. Joyce takes precedence in *To Ireland, I*, where Yeats is tellingly held back; and though Yeats features later in the inaugural lecture of *The End of the Poem*, his marginal role in *To Ireland, I* seems the book's primal (Bloomian) swerve of the only notable 'Y' in the history of Irish writing. Muldoon's inexplicably short section on Yeats proposes only 'to look very briefly at two or three aspects' of his play *Deirdre*, and it ends on lines from 'The Ghost of Roger Casement', another lesser-known Yeats text: 'the ghost of Roger Casement | is beating on the door' (*TI*, 134). This beating on the door suggests a wry recognition of a poet whose influential work he so pointedly keeps out. Muldoon's lectures seem the critical equivalent of the '*Immram Curaig Mael Duin*' quoted above, an Irish 'Voyage of Muldoon's Boat' launched from American shores; and on that critical voyage to and from Ireland (by way of Oxford), Muldoon leaves little space for William Butler Yeats, who remains, as in the lines above, the forlorn 'Butler' waiting 'beside the brackish Boyne'.

Works like 'Yarrow' and *The Prince of the Quotidian*, which show Muldoon's academic life playing out (and paying out), suggest that the opportunity for the Oxford lectures was made possible by his Princeton appointment. As I outlined in the introduction, the American academy released Muldoon from the pressures of the BBC day-job, giving him a new set of professional concerns and time for critical writing. These early U.S. years are tremendously productive for

[14] My thanks to Stephen Regan for pointing out this joke hiding in the laurels.

Muldoon, whose repertoire extends during this period into Irish verse translation, libretti, writing for theatre, the poetry diary mentioned above, photographic collaborations and poems for children.[15] New levels of mobility become a lived pursuit as well as a thematic concern, and formal expansion and experiments with expanding forms are the order of the day. By far his longest, most experimental poem comes in the first fully American volume, *Madoc: A Mystery* (1990); and the major volumes that follow, *The Annals of Chile* (1994) and *Hay* (1998), show increasing investment in reproductive forms of excess.[16] The signs in these formative American works point to a growing fascination with serial order: *The Prince of the Quotidian* is a 'January journal' ordered by calendrical time, and his children's books *The Last Thesaurus* (1995) and *The Noctuary of Narcissus Batt* (1997), like *To Ireland, I*, take their co-ordinates from the alphabet. *The Annals of Chile* includes two celebrated elegies, 'Incantata' and 'Yarrow', which share a series of ninety rhymes, and the same rhymes appear in a further three long poems in *Hay*, reproduced in almost identical order.[17] Out of this newfound obsession with seriality comes Muldoon's idiosyncratic performance of the lecture series, which further extends his investment in sequential forms. With its abecedarian structure, *To Ireland, I* is a 'long form' comparable with the reproductive verse-forms of his American phase, and 'reads more like a poetic sequence by other means than a critical treatise' as Hugh Haughton observes.[18] Following this, and emerging from the Oxford Professorship, *The End of the Poem* (2006) heralds a new critical genre for exploring the individual poem at length – as part of a serial order beyond both poem and lecture.

In line with this newfound American mobility, his performance in these lectures turns on a series of Transatlantic movements. 'Getting Round: Notes towards an *Ars Poetica*' begins 'somewhere in New England' with an image of 'a white horse standing on an exposed hillside', before calling our attention to the poet's copy of the *Concise Ulster Dictionary* 'published in 1997 by Oxford University Press' (*GR*, 107). From North America to Northern Ireland and the

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[15] In the 1990s alone, Muldoon translates Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill in *The Astrakhan Cloak* (1992), writes the libretti *Shining Brow* (1993) and *Bandanna* (1999) and stages the operas in collaboration with American composer Daron Hagen, keeps a poetry journal entitled *The Prince of the Quotidian* (1994), scripts the verse drama *Six Honest Serving Men* (1995), produces the photographic collaborations *Kerry Slides* (1996) and *The Birds* (1999), writes *The Last Thesaurus* (1996) and *The Noctuary of Narcissus Batt* (1997) for children, and also finds time to edit a delightful anthology of animal poems entitled *The Faber Book of Beasts* (1997).

[16] One interesting comparison here is with W. H. Auden, another poet who made attempts to write long or 'major' poems in his early U.S. years, and whose Transatlantic migration parallels Muldoon's in some key respects. See Peter Firchow, 'The American Auden: A Poet Reborn?', *American Literary History* 11.3 (1999): 448-479, 455.

[17] These poems are 'The Mudroom', 'Third Epistle to Timothy', and 'The Bangle (Slight Return)'. The seriality of Muldoon's long poems in *The Annals* and after will be the subject of Chapter 4.

[18] Hugh Haughton, 'The Irish Poet as Critic', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry*, eds. Fran Brearton and Alan Gillis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 533.

University of Oxford, Muldoon marks out a trans-national triangle that the later lectures proceed to explore, making clear his personal acquaintance with these places and his freedom to move between them. The 'Getting Round' lecture accordingly gets around, jumping between his new house in New Jersey, the neighbouring Delaware-Raritan Canal, and a recent notice in *New York* magazine for an art installation 'at Wooster Gardens, 558 Broadway, New York' (107). His detailed investment in North American locales suggests in these lectures an interesting mix of the personal and professional, and on both levels Muldoon celebrates the practiced ease of the Transatlantic leap.

The title of his first book of criticism, *To Ireland, I*, encapsulates this spirit of mobility. 'To Ireland, I' is Donalbain's response to Malcolm ('I'll to England') after Macbeth's murder of Duncan, a death which sends the princes on separate journeys of exile from which they will one day make a triumphant return.[19] Written *to* Ireland but imaginatively speaking *from* there, the lectures of *To Ireland, I* address Muldoon's home nation from overseas, delivered in Oxford and drafted in the United States with the advice of his Princeton colleagues.[20] As it sails through the gamut of Irish literature from Amergin to Zozimus, Haughton notes how 'the book reads like a critical equivalent of *The Voyage of Máel Dúin*',[21] and the journey motif is indeed pivotal. *Immram Curaig Máel Dúin*, as cited in *The Prince of the Quotidian*, is a story of driftings and strayings to which *To Ireland, I* pays unusually fixed attention. Described as 'a voyage "westward" undertaken by a young man bent on avenging his father's murder' (*TI*, 87), Muldoon's investment in *The Voyage of Máel Dúin* goes beyond its chime with his name. As well as a model for his own biographical journey westward, it is the proto-text for two poems in *Why Brownlee Left*, 'Immram' and 'Immrama', whose young male speakers – transplanted respectively to North and South America – are both sons trailing their father's spirit (*P*, 94, 85). The sea voyage is also the setting of 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', published around the time of these lectures, which riffs again on the *immram* tradition as the father sails to and from the Antipodes (*P*, 458-476).

From the canals and waterways of Princeton, *The Voyage of Máel Dúin* exerts an obvious pull on Muldoon's creative and critical imagination. In *To Ireland, I* he charts the Old Irish text's influence on Joyce in 'The Dead', the poems and radio plays of Louis MacNeice, and the nautical journey of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (*TI*, 87-94, 128-130). When Swift died in 1709,

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[19] *Macbeth*, II.3.92-93, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works, 2nd Ed.*, eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).
[20] He acknowledges this help in *To Ireland, I*, 130. Muldoon dedicated the work to one of these colleagues, A. Walton Litz, a long-serving Professor of English at Princeton and Visiting Professor at Balliol College, Oxford.
[21] Haughton, 'The Irish Poet as Critic', 533.

Muldoon tells us, 'his manuscript collection, including *Imram Curaig Maíle Dúin*, was impounded by Oxford University so as to pay off his considerable debts' (130). In a fortuitous alignment of the book's intertextual and geographical concerns, *The Voyage of Máel Dúin* and the University of Oxford form together, with Swift, a tableau of Muldoon's historical indebtedness. From his Transatlantic position, Muldoon's book claims literary kinship with Swift, MacNeice and Joyce; and in tracing the debts of these Irish mentors back to the same source, *To Ireland, I* offers a literary history in which Ireland and Oxford, Máel Dúin and Muldoon, converge.

Despite their Princeton provenance, however, the lectures of *To Ireland, I* give America a relatively wide berth. By contrast, *The End of the Poem* is decidedly trans-national in its range of material, offering Muldoon's view from America as well as his performance in Oxford as it shuttles between Irish, European and U.S. poets. Each lecture focuses on a single poem, allowing Muldoon's microscopic close reading to enlarge the poem at the level of the individual word. Particular lexical choices are always placed in relation to other words in other poems, so that this fixed attention becomes an excuse for an endless play of intertextual displacement. Seamus Heaney famously lectured on 'Place and Displacement in Contemporary Northern Irish Poetry', and place and displacement enjoy a peculiar status in this work where six Americans (Frost, Bishop, Dickinson, Lowell, Moore, and H.D.) receive their own chapters. Muldoon's fellow East Coast émigré, W. H. Auden, claims another; and the chapter on Ted Hughes, which dwells on the poet's time in America, is about the Americans Plath and Moore as much as Hughes himself. Strengthening the Hiberno-American axis is the figure of Heaney, whose work appears in many of these lectures and most prominently in the last.

If the literary geography in *The End of the Poem* has shifted and spread since *To Ireland, I*, so too has Muldoon's sense of his own critical position within it. One lecture pictures him 'sitting at a desk I acquired from the gentleman who looks after surplus furniture at Princeton', composing these lectures from America, and in another he quips that his 'favourite bathroom reading' is now '*The New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms* (or, if I'm expecting to stay for a while, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetic Terms*)' (*EP*, 249, 91). Princeton and prosody seem to have synchronised in Muldoon's creative imagination, with these hefty Princeton Encyclopaedias contributing to his developments with poetic form and the critical writing of his American career. As these autobiographical vignettes in *The End of the Poem* show, Muldoon's lecture style has moved on since *To Ireland, I* into an idiosyncratic mix of the anecdotal and academic. All his critical works offer a complex skein of word-associative, etymological and onomastic relations between texts, but *To Ireland, I* is altogether less invested in the life story of the author. The

focus there is on the intertextual obsessions of the Irish mind writ large, whereas *The End of the Poem* is more explicit in approaching the psyche of the individual. Appealing to 'the hinterland of the letter, the journal, the gossip column', Muldoon's second book of criticism is intent on collapsing the 'barrier between the poem and the biography of its author' (*EP*, 32), and brings the poet's psychological makeup firmly into the picture.

Europe, too, is subject to a different kind of attention in *The End of the Poem*. The national concerns of Pessoa's Portugal, Montale's Italy, and Tsvetayeva's Russia seem to have been chosen (deliberately or not) to reflect Ireland's political and religious divisions, allowing Muldoon to consider his own relation to the troubles in Northern Ireland. 'Portugal became a republic in 1910,' he notes, and Pessoa's search for 'poetical autonomy' is framed within Portugal's search for 'political autonomy', as Muldoon considers the notion of 'selfhood in political terms' that have long coloured discussions of Northern Irish writing (*EP*, 224, 236, 224). Tom Paulin's translation of Montale's 'The Eel' uses 'the foreign poem as a point of departure for his own,' and is noted for importing a certain 'political "*muscle*" from "*Northern*" Ireland' (205; original emphasis). The 'public strife of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath' informs Tsvetayeva's 'Poem of the End', a fact which reminds Muldoon of Mebdh McGuckian, his Northern Irish contemporary, and the Picasso epigraph to her 1994 collection *Captain Lavender*: 'I have not painted the war … but I have no doubt that the war is in … these paintings I have done' (*EP*, 298-99). These three European poets, coloured by war and revolution as Muldoon reads them, are noticeably different from the largely depoliticised readings of American poems and poets we encounter in *The End of the Poem*, suggesting a more personal political investment in poetry from feuding nation states which are, in more than one sense, closer to home.

Ireland occupies a political position closer to Europe than America in this book, much as it does in *To Ireland, I*. The Irish poet's 'urge' 'towards the cryptic, the encoded, the runic' started with Amergin, we are told, as a stance taken up 'for reasons of security' (*TI*, 4-5). Away from Ireland and Europe, the artistic and political freedoms in America are, as Muldoon frames them, conspicuously enlarged. The Ted Hughes lecture dwells on Hughes and Plath's play with 'Pan', their Ouija board communicator, who 'is happy in America, […] likes "life in freedom", [and] uses its freedom for "making poems"' (*EP*, 31). Pan's name bears witness to this spirit of openness, and the American Muldoon of the lectures seems to be enjoying – but also brooding upon – a comparable sense of artistic release. When he refers to H.D.'s 'appeals … to the vocabulary of "America the Beautiful",' it is to the poem's 'valorization of "freedom" and "self-

control'" that he himself appeals (*EP*, 294). Muldoon's knowledge of America seems to accord with Elizabeth Bishop, whose famous lines he quotes: 'dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free', or with the speaker of Robert Lowell's 'Waking Early Sunday Morning', also quoted: 'free to chaff | his own thoughts' (*EP*, 97, 183). Discussed in my previous chapter, Muldoon's American epic 'Madoc' exemplifies this spirit of breaking loose in its sprawling form and experimental style. A poem in search of new constraints from which to release itself, the story of 'Madoc' ends appropriately in revolution, with the late colonist settlers Coleridge and Southey respectively assassinated and overthrown by the indigenous American population. As in that poem, the valences of 'freedom' in *The End of the Poem* belong almost exclusively to Americans, whereas the civil liberties of their Irish and European counterparts are, Muldoon suggests, still very much at stake in their poems (as are their disillusionments with home). This dichotomy of territorial restriction and release may be related to the book's fascination with what poets withhold, or can't bring themselves to say – with the poetics of concealment and self-censorship to which these lectures are carefully attuned.

3

Freud's 'verbal bridges'

As in the Bateson lecture on Frost's 'Silken Tent', Muldoon's readings in *The End of the Poem* are highly sensitive to signs of the erotic, and often toy with the prospect of pursuing a suggestive hint too far. Approaching Marina Tsvetayeva's 'Poem of the End', a poem clouded by thoughts of her family's near starvation and separation during the Russian Revolution, Muldoon teases a sexual subtext from its opening lines:

> Closely, like one creature, we
> start: there is our café!
> There is our island, our shrine, where
> in the morning, we people of the
> rabble, a couple for a minute only,
> conducted a morning service.
> (*EP*, 302)

After finding an 'erotic frisson … in the phrase "morning service",' in another translation of these lines Muldoon reads the rabble's collective 'shiver' – translated in the lines above as 'we |

start' – as 'somewhat reminiscent of a sexual shudder' (*EP*, 302). That tentative phrase 'somewhat reminiscent' indicates that we are on shaky critical ground, even if Elaine Feinstein has attested elsewhere that Tsvetayeva's poem was indeed 'inspired by the end of an intense extramarital affair'.[22] An earlier lecture on Ted Hughes's 'The Literary Life' turns Hughes and Plath's visit to Moore's Brooklyn home – 'We climbed Marianne Moore's narrow stair' – into 'a sexual innuendo that will be picked up later in the word "nest"' (*EP*, 35). Steering that word 'narrow' through Wordsworth's 'Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room', Muldoon reads Hughes's line as a compound allusion to 'Moore's barely perceptible sexuality' (35). This erotic strain makes Hughes a rather different kind of writer than is usually suspected, and confirms Muldoon as a rather perverse kind of reader.

A feature of nearly every lecture, his readings of the erotic are often as ingeniously creative as they are contrary. The significance of eroticism is rarely noted in passing: the sexual frisson he finds in 'Poem of the End' is read in light of Tsvetayeva's infidelities, which bolster Muldoon's conjecture that the poem is about 'the termination of an adulterous relationship' (*EP*, 298). In the next lecture, framing 'Dover Beach' as an erotic poem 'of "ignorant" newlyweds who "clash by night",' Muldoon pins his analysis on Arnold's relationship with Frances Lucy Wightman, which serves in turn to authenticate his discoveries of name-play in the poem's echoes and avoidances of words like 'France', '*luce*', and 'wight' (331). These discoveries are typical of his investment in what Haughton identifies as an 'erotics of naming', with names always taken by Muldoon as a hint that the text is shading into autobiography.[23] Family romance then casts a shadow over 'Dover Beach', as Muldoon concentrates on 'the extent to which it might represent Arnold's own family drama (in his relationship to his father and to his wife)' (*EP*, 324-325). His ambition to read Tsvetayeva's poem as a representation of 'the impact on her of private strife' is again demonstrative, the prosodic reflecting the personal and erotic as 'Poem of the End' mirrors *The End of the Poem* (298).

A comparable commitment to latent signs of eroticism and familial autobiography are longstanding features of Muldoon's poems. In 'Quoof', his 'family word | for the hot water bottle' is carried into a New York hotel room, where a sexual encounter is coloured by childhood memory (*P*, 112). As critic, Muldoon's emphasis on eroticism as an extension of autobiography – and particularly the erotic texture of proper names and family relations –

[22] Elaine Feinstein, 'Review: Poem of the End (*The Death of a Poet: The Last Days of Marina Tsvetaeva* by Irma Kudrova and Mary Ann Szporluk), *The American Scholar*, 73.2 (2004): 154-156, 154.
[23] Hugh Haughton, 'Paul Muldoon and the Game of the Name', unpublished paper presented at the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures Conference, Cork, 29 Jul. 2016.

reveals a studied debt to Freud. Discussing 'autobiography and the erotic' in a 2016 interview, Muldoon was asked whether Freud has influenced his writing, to which he gave an uncharacteristically candid reply: 'I've read a certain amount of Freud, and yes… His descriptions of unconscious connections and word usages and slippages seem very plausible to me. I don't think it's a matter of opinion – this stuff happens, and I think it's revelatory.'[24] Muldoon expresses his faith here in the slippages of the unconscious, which for him are no mere 'matter of opinion', and holds up Freud as a revelatory influence on his poetic and critical writings.

Freud is largely a latent figure in *The End of the Poem*, though he emerges from the closet in the essay on H.D., where Muldoon lifts the following quotation directly from *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

> '*Violets*' was ostensibly quite asexual; but, very boldly, as it seemed to me, I thought I could trace a secret meaning for the word in an unconscious link with the French word '*viol*' ['rape']. To my surprise the dreamer gave as an association the English word 'violate'. The dream had made use of the great chance similarity between the words '*violet*' and '*violate*'—the difference in their pronunciation lies merely in the different stress upon their final syllables—in order to express 'in the language of flowers' the dreamer's thoughts on the violence of defloration (another term that employs flower imagery) and possibly also a masochistic trait in her character. A pretty instance of the 'verbal bridges' crossed by the paths leading to the unconscious. (Qtd. in *EP*, 280)

To 'trace a secret meaning' through 'unconscious links' could hardly come closer to Muldoon's modus operandi in *The End of the Poem*. Keenly attuned as he is to 'the great chance similarity between […] words' and names, his writing capitalises on these slips and similarities in much the same way as Freud's. Muldoon refers to these similarities as 'crypto-currents' in *To Ireland, I* and 'near versions' in *The End of the Poem*, but they amount to the same thing: 'verbal bridges' leading back to the writer's conscious or unconscious intentions.

In his 1994 long poem 'Yarrow', the sexually liberated S— 'reaches for *The Interpretation of Dreams*', and in doing so reveals 'that tattoo on her upper arm' (*P*, 354). This miniature drama of exposure – a hidden signature which the presence of Freud's book inadvertently reveals – is representative of the investigative work with which Muldoon's lectures are engaged. When

[24] Alex Alonso and Stephen Grace, 'An Interview with Paul Muldoon', *Poetry Ireland Review*, 120 (2016), 116.

Muldoon himself reaches for *The Interpretation of Dreams* in this lecture, it is not only to follow up on passages alluded to in H.D.'s *Tribute to Freud*. He seems to be making independent use of Freud's theories, and may have his own copy of the Dream book to hand. In the H.D. lecture, Muldoon sets out to perform 'a Freudian reading of several poems, including "Sea Rose," "Sea Violet," "Sea Lily" and "Sea Iris", all published in her 1916 collection, *Sea Garden*' (*EP*, 269). Water is a recurring symbol in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and as these titles suggest, H.D.'s aquatic imagination is extraordinarily rich. As in his own poem 'Something Else', where he traces the thread of French Romantic Gérard de Nerval's lobster back to a crustacean 'lifted out the tank to be weighed' (*P*, 173), Muldoon intends again to weigh the significance of oceanic fertility – or as he puts it in the lecture, 'to pry below the surface of the poem to the crab world which lies submerged far, or not so far, below' (*EP*, 269). This submarine image conveys itself openly to Freud's understanding of the unconscious mind and invites a comparison with dreams, which, like these poems, are said to possess a penetrable 'surface' beneath which their basic wishes are concealed. The lecture places the interpretive models of poems and dreams side-by-side, making plain the striking continuities between Freud's hermeneutics and Muldoon's own.

Names and biography are brought into play when Muldoon characteristically locates an intricate backstory of paternal drama and sexual infidelity. ('I could name names,' as we hear in 'Kissing and Telling': 'I could be indiscreet.' (*P*, 123)) 'By the time "Sea Poppies" was written,' he says in the lecture, H.D.'s marriage with Richard Adlington 'was under severe strain, largely because of Aldington's philandering' (*EP*, 281). Again, infidelity is in the wings. Muldoon links her husband's remoteness with that of her father, who is identified in *Tribute to Freud* as a very distant figure: 'Provided you do not speak to him when he is sitting at his table, or disturb him when he is lying down, you are free to come and go.' Raising a verbal bridge between 'free' and 'go' here, Muldoon intuits an allusion to 'Edward *Godfree*', her husband's Christian name (*EP*, 280). Onomastic deformations or condensations such as these are a signature technique in Freud's Dream book:

> The work of condensation in dreams is seen at its clearest when it handles words and names. It is true in general that words are frequently treated in dreams as though they were things, and for that reason they are apt to be combined in just the same way as are presentations of things.[25]

[25] Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 4: The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), 295-296.

The name 'Godfree' becomes, when broken into its verbal elements, a cryptonymic condensation disguised in the unremarkable phrase of being 'free to come and go'. The cryptonym is behaving, in other words, as a variant or function of the *cryptographic* model of writing deployed by Muldoon and Freud alike.

Muldoon's lecture returns to H.D.'s marriage once more, picking up on two lines of 'The Sea Rose' – 'Rose, harsh rose, | *marred* and with stint of petals' – where he detects a trace of Aldington, 'to whom she was of course married' (*EP*, 285). This Freudian slip of 'married' and 'marred' seems to have been improvised from Muldoon's own 'Errata' poem, published in *Hay* the year before he took up the Oxford Chair, in which one erratum reads: 'For "married" read "marred"' (*P*, 445). The concerns of his criticism and the operations of his poems are remarkably enmeshed, not only shadowing one another but often re-casting the same material. The echo of 'marriage' in 'The Sea Rose' is tenuous, and Muldoon's analysis quickly skips on – but not before he has revealed the tendency of his poems to carry over, magpie-like, into the poems he reads. We see clearly how Muldoon cannot resist taking temporary ownership over the poems he performs in these lectures, colouring other authors with his own habitual fondness for spoonerisms, anagrams and onomastic play.

The following passage in the Dream book refers to a dream of Freud's that concerns an overrated paper authored by a colleague:

> The next night I dreamt a sentence which clearly referred to this paper: '*It's written in a positively norekdal style*.' The analysis of the word caused me some difficulty at first. There could be no doubt that it was a parody of the [German] superlatives '*kolossal*' and '*pyramidal*'; but its origin was not so easy to guess. At last I saw that the monstrosity was composed of the two names 'Nora' and 'Ekdal' – characters in two well-known plays of Ibsen's. [*A Doll's House* and *The Wild Duck*.] Some time before, I had read a newspaper article on Ibsen by the same author whose latest work I was criticizing in the dream.[26]

Several hallmarks of Muldoon's lectures are here: the reliance on autobiographical details, a shared intertextual source (Ibsen in this case), a focus on slips of the tongue and verbal malformations ('*kolossal*', '*pyramidal*'), and the reading of names as cryptograms or cryptograms as names ('*norekdal*' as 'Nora…Edkal'). Overcoming resistances within the text and the unconscious work done by its creator are, as in dream-work, Muldoon's essential techniques.

[26] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 296.

The secret intentions, witty translations and erotic impulses of dreams are by this account the same characteristics that animate the poem.

In an earlier lecture on Marianne Moore, Muldoon observes that the poet of 'Virginia Britannia' seems 'conscious that she might be too overtly ornamental, too *Moorish*' (*EP*, 249). Because the art and architecture of Andalusia are overwhelmingly Moorish in influence, he reads Moore's line about a 'gray-blue *Andalusian*-cock-feather' as 'indicating a disavowal of her own name' (249). 'Disavowal' here is used in the Freudian sense, '*Verleugnung*', which is defined in *The Freud Encyclopedia* as a defence mechanism whereby the ego splits in two:

> A psychotic defence against an unwelcome idea or perception would typically deny it altogether, whereas *disavowal* acknowledges the perception but minimizes its importance, ignores its implications, or invests another object with its significance.[27]

If Moore is indeed wary of her tendency towards poetic ornamentation, then it is surely telling, Muldoon claims, that she should identify the cock-feather as 'Andalusian' rather than '*Moorish*'. Using this logic, Moore's alleged adjustment is read by Muldoon as a form of self-censorship. This thinking aligns with 'the distortion of dreams' described by Freud, in which such corrections or distortions are 'the result of a censoring activity which is directed against the unacceptable, unconscious wish-impulses.'[28] So her line is said to split off from its original course, separating Moore's name from the Moorish plumage of her poem, and drawing it away from the frills of onomastic self-display.

The relationship between the writer's name and their work is again considered by Muldoon in Moore's poem 'I May, I Might, I Must':

> If you will tell me why the fen
> appears impassable, I then
> will tell you why I think that I
> can get across it if I try.

Muldoon homes in on the word 'fen' and its relation to 'her own name as "marsh," the second sense in which it ['moor'] appears in the *OED*' (*EP*, 250). If 'fen' is a substitute for the autonymic

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[27] Edward Erwin (ed.), *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy, and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 522.

[28] Sigmund Freud, 'Lecture X: Symbolism in Dreams', in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 15: Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis (Parts I and II)*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1963), 149.

'moor', then Moore's preference for 'fen' seems, as he puts it, 'appropriate to the writer's attempts to "get across" her own self'. Like the cock-feather which was not Moore-ish but Andalusian, her use of the word 'fen' eludes the self-consciousness of self-naming ('moor'/Moore) while inadvertently exposing it.

If all this name-play seems more than a little farfetched, Muldoon revels in the outlandishness of his arguments. 'It's humorous in a parlour-gamish way,' he says, 'in the *Nomen est omen* mode I'm fond of playing with' (*EP*, 250). But the humour is also serious, and the game not only played in jest. Names, as they were for Freud, are integral to Muldoon's critical practice. The Bateson lecture paves the way for the rest, relishing the perceived play on Kay Morrison's name in Frost's poem. The lectures of *To Ireland, I* are based on an alphabetic roll-call of Irish authors, whose names (listed as subheadings) assume a striking organizational and typographical prominence. *The End of the Poem* devotes a chapter to the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, master of the heteronym, and the book's references to 'names' and 'naming' number upwards of eighty. Beyond the lectures, Haughton finds 'a positive epidemic of names and naming' in Muldoon's poems, from the colonial name-giving of 'Clonfeacle' ('I translate the placename') to the riverine name-taking of 'Identities' ('streams | That had once flowed simply one into the other | One taking the other's name').[29] Names flow 'one into the other,' but they also slip *out* of other words, as when in 'Sushi' the smack of 'oregano' conjures Arigna, Louis Aragon, and Scotus Eriugena (in which the 'Ireland' of *Eriu* is embedded).

The proliferation of names in Muldoon's poems finds a comparable life in the lectures, where again they are multiple and polymorphous. In his treatment of Stevie Smith's poem 'I Remember', the Harry who appears there is variously the Harold of her poem 'Harold's Leap', King Henry IV, Henry V, the 'Harry' of her 'Wedding Photograph', Henry Wilberforce, Thomas Hardy, and even more improbably, George Orwell (*EP*, 150-151, 161). This nominative ambiguity is put down in part to Stevie Smith reputedly having 'had affairs with a number of men, including George Orwell' (161), so that again the inconstancy of naming relates to the poet's romantic infidelities. Names are markers of identity, but the identities they mark seem inherently slippery in Muldoon's texts on intertextualities.

4

[29] Haughton, 'The Game of the Name', 1.

'To guide, and goad'

Four years and twelve lectures into his Oxford Professorship, Muldoon begins to thematise his own slippery identification as both poet and professor:

> 'To be a professor of poetry is tantamount to declaring that one is not a poet.' This acerbic little *aperçu* by A. Dwight Culler, from the introduction to his 1961 edition of *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, is one upon which I've been maggoting these past four years. (*EP*, 323)

Trading on the uncertainty of his position, the joke is a slightly anxious one. Muldoon has been dancing in and out of the academic circle, flashing his scholastic credentials even as he identifies himself in an earlier lecture as 'a very badly brought-up nonacademic' (67). But while the nonacademic poet takes full advantage of the licence granted by his 'professorial' position, both *To Ireland, I* and *The End of the Poem* express a more serious critique of academic practice (serious, whether or not Muldoon always expresses it in earnest). At the heart of this critique are evidence-based conventions around intertextuality, which are simultaneously invoked and flouted. We are repeatedly forewarned that his readings 'may strike some … as being quite outlandish', outwardly 'fanciful', and 'will seem like a stretch to some'; the allusions he finds are comprised of 'faint echoes', 'invisible threads', and 'near versions'. With these modest affirmations Muldoon is playing a double role, deferring to academic expectations even as he supercharges the speculations and educated guesses upon which, in criticism, so much depends. Asking that we 'indulge' the 'meanderings' of an unpractised critic (*EP*, 283), at the same time these critical texts are satirizing scholastic practice and the illusion of interpretive security.

John Lyon characterises Muldoon's affiliation with academia rather differently, *The End of the Poem* being, as he sees it, 'a shameless seduction of the academy which Muldoon seems so eager to impress'.[30] The accusation from this representative of the academy is overstated, but it does at least serve to illustrate the strangeness of this institutional relationship. If there is a point at which the mock-academic drifts into the academic, Muldoon's criticism steers close to it. But while certainly 'shameless' in their way, the lectures seem as eager to *unsettle* academic audiences as to impress them. Lyon's 'seduction' is a useful word for Muldoon's more tendentious readings, but for the most part we are witnessing something closer to scholastic pastiche – a performance of critical infidelity that takes faith and unfaithfulness as its themes.

[30] John Lyon, 'Our Beauty and Our Trim: Paul Muldoon', *PN Review*, 33.6 (2007), 176.

The nonacademic card is one Muldoon is quick to play, an alibi which allows him to test the limits of interpretive licence. With it, he puts aside certain expectations that might cramp his freewheeling style or restrict the speculative claims on which many of his readings are based. Pretensions to scholarship are not dispensed with, but worked around and worked over. Many scholars are quoted, which only highlights the wilfulness of his weirder readings. On Keats's 'coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine', for instance, Muldoon has 'no doubt – though some will say I should – that the *musk* ghosts the *musc*atel' in Yeats's 'All Souls' Night' (*EP*, 12). This nod to 'some' in the audience, a sideswipe at his redoubtable doubters, is part of the stagecraft. The Montale lecture quotes Will Rogers, the lasso-toting vaudeville star, to exemplify his own impudent habits of close reading as 'close *rodeo*ing': 'Why not go out on a limb? That's where the fruit is' (*EP*, 195, 198). Another of Muldoon's show-biz archetypes is the 'stunt-reader', the daring Hollywood hermeneut who reproduces the writer's verbal high-jinks in the course of interpreting them (195). As these analogies suggest, Muldoon is looking to American pop-culture for models of reading – and writing – as show-stopping performance.

In this vein the lectures delight in the perversity of reading against the grain, dabbling in the relevant scholarship only when it suits them. On Robert Frost's 'The Mountain', for example, Muldoon homes in on the 'lake | Somewhere in Ireland on a mountaintop' and quotes Gerard Quinn's essay on 'Robert Frost and Ireland':

> Quinn suggests, with all the reserve of a well-brought-up academic, that embedded in the word "Ireland" is the word "élan," which might refer us to the *élan vital* central to the 1907 work *L'évolution créatrice*, published in 1911 as *Creative Revolution*, of Henri Bergson, the philosopher within whose name the aforementioned *berg* is itself embedded. (*EP*, 66-67)

Quinn, Muldoon's former teacher and friend of forty years, is jovially taken to task here for his scholastic 'reserve' (which is really nothing of the sort). Where Quinn stops short of any outright declaration, Muldoon would rather 'go the whole hog and say that Frost is indeed involved in such a playful stratagem having to do with Bergson' (67). The change is slight, more a matter of emphasis, but says much about Muldoon's unwavering commitment to intertextuality and his defiance of academic orthodoxy.[31] Quinn is archly set up as the strawman of poetic scholarship,

[31] It might also indicate, as Barra Ó Seaghdha proposes, that Muldoon and his friends are daring each other on 'towards ever more fantastic associative leaps'. In Barra Ó Seaghdha, 'Just Like That', review of *The End of the Poem* and *Horse Latitudes* by Paul Muldoon, *Dublin Review of Books*, 2 (2007), last accessed 26 Oct. 2017 at http://www.drb.ie/essays/just-like-that.

the critic unwilling to stand by his hunch that Frost was influenced by Bergson or saw the 'élan' in 'Ireland'. By contrast, the trigger-happy Muldoon exemplifies a more instinctive, impulsive, but also wilfully perverse school of criticism, possessed of its own *élan vital*, which interprets first and asks questions later.

'Going the whole hog' means Muldoon is free to pursue the unlikely possibility of Bergson's influence on Frost's poem as he genially thumbs his nose at the scholastics. Pushing further, the lecture locates 'a stripped-down version' of the Irish philosopher George Berkeley in Frost's line about 'driftwood stripped of *bark*', and finds 'imperfectly concealed in the phrase "trees with trunks" … the word "bark".' (68-69) He continues with the same derring-do, picking up on the poem's repetitions of 'pasture', 'fields', and 'grasslands' as evidence of the resisted usage: 'lea', a homophonic echo of Frost's middle name, Lee. Muldoon's poem 'Why Brownlee Left' is surely lurking in the undergrowth here: rooted in a similar onomastic riddle, the farmer Brownlee abandons the arable leas that were his livelihood (*P*, 84). 'The Country Club' is also hovering nearby, a poem in which the cuckolding speaker quotes 'The Mountain' at an unsuspecting figure named *Lee* Pinkerton (*P*, 64-65). In his earlier lecture on Yeats, Muldoon had already pinpointed Yeats's resistance to the word 'lees' as another play on names invoking his wife Georgie Hyde-Lees (*EP*, 14). Moments such as these demonstrate the weight of Muldoon's reliance on onomastic intertextual puns, as well as the exemplary operations of his own poems which these lectures so often repurpose.

Returning to 'The Mountain', the missing 'lea' is said to be the term Frost hovers over but doesn't write, a word which happens to complete the Berkeleian cryptonym 'bark lea'. With this discovery, Muldoon steps back and pauses for breath:

> If I were feeling much friskier than I am today I might steer you in the direction of a synonym for 'a dry ravine' in line 33. (Notice again the slightly cumbersome, slightly contorted phrasing of 'A dry ravine emerged from under boughs | Into the pasture.') The synonym I'm thinking of is 'gorge', a near version of Berkeley's given name. But I'm not feeling frisky today, so I won't bother. I will bother to guide, and goad, you in the direction of the guide with his goad in 'The Mountain'… (*EP*, 69)

'The Mudroom' is Muldoon's own mountaineering poem, in which the speaker is guided and goaded across a ravine in the Swiss Jura mountains by an impossibly acrobatic goat.[32] That goat – from the Latin *capra* – is synonymous with the 'friskiness' Muldoon mentions here, and his

[32] See *P*, 395-399.

reading of 'The Mountain' is in this sense characteristically *capricious*. 'The goat fades into the goad' in a slightly later poem, 'Unapproved Road' (*MSG*, 7); and as the 'gorge' fades into 'George' in this lecture (and in others perhaps 'Georgie' Hyde-Lees, or even Lowell's 'George III'), Muldoon implies that he is no longer bothering to seek audience approval. This is itself a conspicuous goad, exemplary of his comical-critical routine which foregrounds its reliance on the whims of the lecturer. With the suggestion here that he is no longer – or never was – arguing in good faith, Muldoon invites our suspicions as to whether we can take any of these lectures at their word. Derek Attridge's assessment of *To Ireland, I* maintains that, while Muldoon stays 'on the windy side of the laws of scholarship', 'nowhere does the mask of seriousness slip'.[33] But even in *To Ireland, I*, perhaps the mask of seriousness never properly fitted; and if it is perpetually slipping in *The End of the Poem*, on this occasion it is quite plainly cast aside.

Dropping the pretence of persuasion here calls into question not only the seriousness of these lectures, but the faithfulness of the lecturer himself. Having noted Muldoon's investment in biographical infidelities, we might ask, how *unfaithful* can a critic be? Mimicking and exaggerating the conventions of scholarship enables Muldoon to push the limits of critical fidelity, and so to raise deeper questions about the purpose and value of criticism. What falls within the bounds of acceptable speculation? When does a gloss become a guess? If *To Ireland, I* 'brilliantly exploits the embarrassment of uncertainty', as Heather O'Donoghue argues, then *The End of the Poem* takes even greater delight in exposing and exploiting the insecurities of its (mostly academic) audience.[34]

The lectures then seem to turn on questions about fidelity and infidelity, trust and suspicion, and even any trust we may have in suspicion. Muldoon approaches poems as secret-keepers and so ensures a level of mistrust on each side, both in the text and his reading of it. The poems themselves, as he sees them, are inextricable from the adulterous pursuits of their authors – the habitually unfaithful Tsvetayeva, the two-timing of H.D.'s husband Richard Aldington, the literary flings of Stevie Smith and the infidelity of the translated poem. If even 'that most dependable of modes, language itself,' is liable to its own forms of 'treachery' as Muldoon avows (*EP*, 333), how can we trust in what a text tells us – or in the critic who purports to be faithful to it? By foregrounding his own infidelity, Muldoon invites us to enjoy the interpretive performance without insisting that we take it on faith. This is what makes his critical

[33] Derek Attridge, *The Work of Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 164.
[34] Heather O'Donoghue, 'The Poet as Critic: Paul Muldoon's *To Ireland, I*', in *Paul Muldoon: Poetry, Prose, Drama*, ed. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Padstow: T.J. International, 2006), 207.

act endearingly persuasive without ever seeming too sincere, as if an air of self-conviction were his greatest fear. In interviews Muldoon has discussed how in 'our era',

> so much is unclear and indirect. I'm not just talking about willed obfuscation and crookedness, though God knows there's plenty of that. I'm just talking about a realization that very little is at it seems, that everything has within it massive complexities – maybe even the inappropriateness of being certain about things.[35]

This belief in complexity and the inappropriateness of conviction is not only a political position (as we will see in Chapter 3), but an aesthetic mantra which these lectures bear out. Preoccupations with infidelity in various guises clearly relate to Muldoon's performance of mischief, and to his unfaithful habits of misreading – but they also suggest a more basic distrust of the authority of the critical reader, and of any faith one might place in either certainty or suspicion.

5

Muldoon's Bloom

Despite 'not feeling frisky today', Muldoon in his lecture on Frost returns to George Berkeley almost as quickly as he dismissed him. Over the page, he identifies an echo of Berkeley's philosophy in the following segment of dialogue which addresses an unseen spring 'almost like a fountain' that resides at the mountain's summit:

> 'That ought to be worth seeing.'
>
> 'If it's there.
>
> You never saw it?'
>
> 'I guess there's no doubt
>
> About it's being there. I never saw it.'
>
> (*EP*, 69)

It's worth noting, as Muldoon does, that 'some version of the verb "see" occurs *eight* times' in Frost's poem. Following up on the poem's emphasis on seeing and not seeing, the lines above are, he argues, 'a fairly obvious rehearsal of Berkeley's most famous dictum, "*Esse* is *percipi*" ("To

[35] Charles McGrath, 'Word Freak', interview with Paul Muldoon, *New York Times Magazine*, 19 Nov. 2006, last accessed 5 Jul. 2017 at http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/19/magazine/word-freak.html.

see is to be perceived").' Berkeley claimed that material things such as mountains or springs do not exist independently of the mind, and the speaker's scepticism about the spring's unseen presence at the summit may be drawing on Berkeley's theory. The interpretation is rather convincing, and on closer inspection, demonstrably wrong. Muldoon mistranslates Berkeley's '*Esse* is *percipi*', laying unwarranted emphasis on its visual implications: the phrase means not 'to see', but 'to *be* is to be perceived'.

To mistranslate such a basic verb as '*esse*' is suspiciously slipshod, especially when we consider Muldoon's familiarity with Latin. His earlier claim that Bergson 'was of Irish extraction, both his parents being Irish-Jewish' (*EP*, 68) is also erroneous: Bergson's mother was Anglo-Irish, his father Polish-Jewish. Mistaken identities are also prominent in Muldoon's poetic routines: the renegade protagonist of 'The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants', for example, resembles the Native American Trickster figure and goes by 'Gallogly, or Gollogly,' 'otherwise known as Golightly,' 'Ingoldsby,' and 'English,' who seems also to be playing the role of his own Apache doppelganger, Mangas Jones (*P*, 144, 142). The identity thefts of the lectures may not be as well-plotted as those of the poems, but Muldoon is certainly happy to seize on Bergson's spurious Irish heritage and Berkeley's mistranslated motto as evidence for Robert Frost having seen the *élan* in Ireland. Are these genuine errors then, or mischievous moments of legerdemain? Returning to Heather O'Donoghue's essay on *To Ireland, I*, we see that Muldoon's critical work has form with misleading slips of this kind:

> Muldoon claims that '*bec* refers quite specifically to the "beak" or "bill" of the blackbird.' But this is not the case: the word *bec* here is the adjective 'little,' referring to the bird—as Muldoon knows perfectly well, since the word lies at the heart of the previous bout of wordplay. [36]

Twisting a line from 'The Blackbird Over Belfast Lough' into a pun on *bec*, the 'diminutive beaked thing' of Samuel Beckett's name, Muldoon conceals a gratuitous mistranslation behind another onomastic discovery (*TI*, 12-13). This is typical of the lectures, where mistakes are often disguised in translation and sustained through misprision. Whether they are as intentional as O'Donoghue claims or not, Muldoon's readiness to cash in on misreadings is instructive.

The Oxford lectures are essentially studies of influence. In this sense they have much in common with the 'antithetical' style of criticism promulgated by Harold Bloom, as 'a series of

[36] Heather O'Donoghue, 'The Poet as Critic', 203.

swerves after unique acts of creative misunderstanding'.[37] In *The End of the Poem*, Muldoon lauds *The Anxiety of Influence* as 'one of the most illuminating contributions to our understanding of the working of poets and poetry' (*EP*, 41). He is not given to glowing evaluations of this kind, and the stridency of his intervention on the debate about the relevance of Bloom's theory is telling. 'Poetic history,' Bloom writes (and Muldoon quotes), 'is held to be indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves.'[38] *The End of the Poem* fixates on the way poets resist imitating the texts they are most profoundly influenced by – a fixation which may reveal something about Muldoon's own resistances, and his unwillingness to imitate either as poet or critic.

By the time Muldoon took up the Oxford Chair of Poetry in 1999, the critical tide had turned decisively away from Bloom's theory of influence. In their roundup of *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (1991), Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein found that the 'author-centred and evaluative concept' at the heart of *The Anxiety of Influence* had been dumped by new historicist, postcolonial, poststructural and feminist thinkers in favour of more 'egalitarian' models based on Julia Kristeva's ideas about intertextuality.[39] That Bloom's influence had then faded to the margins of critical discourse makes Muldoon's return to it seem all the more perverse.[40] But 'strong poets necessarily are perverse', as Bloom first argued in *The Anxiety of Influence*, and the same might go for 'strong' critics.[41] Emphatically re-instating the primacy of the author, Muldoon departs from Roland Barthes and dismisses the then fashionable legacy of Jacques Derrida, whose 'phallologocentricism' Muldoon singled out for attack – and revealingly misspelled – in 'Getting Round' (*GR*, 120).

In his 1998 volume *Hay*, Muldoon was already riffing on suggestions of Bloomian influence in his work. Harold (as well as Leopold) Bloom may be raising his head in the final line of 'Errata': 'For "loom" read "bloom",' and more expressly again in 'The Mudroom': 'It was time … to clear a space between *De Rerum Natura* | and Virgil's *Eclogues*, | a space in which, at long last, I might unlock | the rink' (*P*, 446, 399). '*De Rerum Natura*' is the Lucretius poem

[37] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 93.
[38] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 5; quoted in *EP*, 42.
[39] Clayton and Rothstein, 'Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality', in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, eds. Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 4.
[40] By 1991, Clayton and Rothstein were already outlining 'some reasons why, after a long reign, influence began to fall into decline'. In 'Figures in the Corpus', 12.
[41] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence,* 85.

from which Bloom takes the term *clinamen*, meaning 'swerve'; and in looking 'to clear a space' in the pantheon of greats 'between [Lucretius] and Virgil's *Eclogues*', Muldoon alludes to a Bloomian spoof in which his artistic competition takes the form of a skating 'she-goat', perhaps *Caprice* herself as his own stunt-double.

The thrust of Bloom's theory is, as we have seen, that strong poets make literary history by misprision in a bid for primacy and the freedom of imaginative space. In *To Ireland, I* Muldoon performs a version of this literary history, constructing his own canon of Irish writers from a series of seminal texts he over-interprets and teases into alphabetical order. If writers must clear imaginative space for themselves, then Ireland's writers have, by Muldoon's account, made that space at the margins. These 'ideas of liminality and narthecality' are, he argues, 'central … to the Irish experience' (*TI*, 5), and with them Muldoon claims that marginal space not only for Irish writers, but for himself as critic and poet.

To Ireland, I is a work fascinated by veiled allusions to precursors, especially the one he calls 'the master' – and creator of another Bloom – James Joyce, who is venerated in Muldoon's lectures in much the same way that Harold Bloom venerates Shakespeare.[42] In his own pronouncements about influence, however, Muldoon in this book resists a straightforwardly Bloomian approach. The Irish writers he discusses are marked by their 'appetite and aptitude for intertextuality', he claims, as well as 'a touching disregard for the figure of the author':

> Joyce belongs in Bowen, Bowen [in] Allingham, and those anonymous ninth-century Irish poets in Beckett. All, indeed, are anonymous. Their very disregard for their 'selves' allows them to mutate and transmogrify themselves, to position themselves, with Amergin, at some notional cutting edge. (*TI*, 24-25)

Contrary to his earlier protestations against Barthes in 'Getting Round', Muldoon here sounds a lot like him.[43] This model of literary influence as the 'anonymous' transmutation of material is departing markedly from *The Anxiety of Influence*, where Bloom champions the character of the individual ('Poems are written by men [*sic*],' he says, 'not by anonymous Splendors').[44] The history of authorship for Bloom is a struggle for individuality, which Muldoon's disregard for literary 'selves' appears to contradict.

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[42] Muldoon, *To Ireland, I*, 15.
[43] Cf. Barthes's 'From Work to Text': 'the quotations a text is made of are anonymous, irrecoverable, and yet *already-read*; they are quotations without quotation marks.' In Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1986), 60.
[44] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 42, 43.

Despite this opposition, Muldoon and Bloom's ideas offer several telling continuities. In *To Ireland, I*, writers are supposed to 'mutate and transmogrify themselves' in their work, while for Bloom they mutate and transmogrify the works of others by misprision. Muldoon's writers actively seek to echo and re-animate other writers; Bloom's do so at their peril. Muldoon's writers are protean, and want to inhabit the words of others; Bloom's avoid imitation at all costs, '*must* be unique … and remain unique' to survive.[45] In their different contexts, both agree that inventive writers must return to the works of their precursors – but where Bloom's predominantly English and American writers wrestle to escape one another's influence, Muldoon's Irish writers draw strength from each other and have no wish to break ranks. These strange parallels and inversions suggest that Muldoon is shadowboxing Bloom: as the spirit of competition is re-imagined in an Irish vein, Muldoon veers away from Bloom's line of argument and its Anglo-American focus.

But if the model of influence outlined in *To Ireland, I* diverges from *The Anxiety of Influence* and is marked by a 'touching disregard' for the figure of the author, *The End of the Poem* is quite the opposite, approaching its authors with touching *regard*. Although inspired by the same cryptographic imagination, the books seem to be performing two different forms of criticism. *To Ireland, I* is concerned with origins rather than ends (or how poems end up), promoting a shared legacy of Irish letters and a model of influence as intertextual continuity, with 'no distinction between … one text and the next' (*TI*, 24). *The End of the Poem*, while still steeped in intertextual traces, is more concerned with *dis*continuity, and the writer's attempts (often the American writer, or the writer in America) to revise or suppress their influences. In the later book Muldoon re-centres ideas of authorship, shifts attention to the reader only insofar as he or she becomes a stunt-double for the writer, and turns forcefully on the question of biography. This is perhaps another muddled version of Bloom, though it seems muddled in different ways – intrigued by the revisionary ratios, but also committed to the life of the writer (a commitment that Bloom would refuse). In short, *To Ireland, I* and *The End of the Poem* offer two distinct accounts of the emergence of original writing: one laying emphasis on Irish tradition, the other on the individual talents of the writer and, significantly, the critical stunt-reader.

For a poet writing criticism in his shadow, it may be that Muldoon is suffering from an Anxiety of Influence towards Bloom himself – more profoundly, perhaps, in *The End of the Poem* than *To Ireland, I*. So when Muldoon ends these Oxford lectures with the insistence that 'The poem is, after all, the solution to a problem only it has raised' (*EP*, 374), he is attempting to cut

[45] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 71.

the Gordian knot of Bloomian 'priority' by making each poem the solution to its own singular problem. Whereas Bloom's riddle of the poem can only be answered by '*another poem – a poem not itself*',[46] for Muldoon the poem is its *own* answer or 'solution'. This statement seems a striking non-sequitur given Muldoon's investment in the intertextual history of poems, where answers appear to lie outside the texts in question. In another sense, though, Muldoon is assenting to the hermeticism of Bloom's model – that 'poetry is never about anything but the act of writing poetry', as Clayton and Rothstein gloss it – whilst also extending his critical licence into the region of psycho-biography.[47] If this extension marks a final swerve from *The Anxiety of Influence*, it also foregrounds Muldoon as performing a departure from an already antithetical study of poetic and critical departures.

6

Redressing Heaney

Bloom's is a study of precursors, and Muldoon's chief poet-critical precursor is Seamus Heaney – a former occupier of the Oxford Chair of Poetry, and a figure with whom his Oxford lectures are in constant conversation. His lectures on Bishop, Montale, Lowell, Moore, and Auden go out of their way to bring Heaney into the picture, and are at pains to emphasise the ways in which his work falls under their influence. 'Heaney's voice could not be more distinctive,' writes Adam Phillips, but Muldoon's point seems to be that 'he also sounds like other people'.[48] That these influences should come as no surprise, being well-known to critics already, might make us wonder about Muldoon's motives in a work that makes surprise its premium asset. While aware, as Neil Corcoran has written, that 'the real subversion [of Heaney] would be the self-assurance of disregard',[49] Muldoon's criticism returns to his work with compulsive regularity. The closing lecture takes Heaney as one of three poetic subjects (with Robert Graves and Cecil Day-Lewis the other two), and is the only lecture to address more than one poet – perhaps an indication that Muldoon was more-than-usually conscious of Heaney's presence in the lecture series, and felt he had dwelt on him too long already. At this final Oxford

[46] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 70.
[47] Clayton and Rothstein, 'Figures in the Corpus', 9.
[48] Adam Phillips, 'Someone Else', 35.
[49] Neil Corcoran, 'A languorous cutting edge: Muldoon versus Heaney?', in *Poets of Modern Ireland* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 125. Here Corcoran writes insightfully of Heaney and Muldoon's apparent rivalry in the poems, in an essay which Muldoon is very likely to have encountered before these lectures were delivered.

lecture Muldoon would have been mindful of Heaney's presence in a very real sense, having called the former Professor of Poetry from the audience to read his poem 'Keeping Going'. The book is in some ways a curious homage to his Northern Irish contemporary, which reflects Muldoon's inability to look past Heaney as well as a desire to explain him. *The End of the Poem* takes the origins of texts as its subject, and while Muldoon's origin story is intimately bound to Heaney, the lectures also frame Muldoon as the rightful heir to his former Oxford Chair. If there is a competitive edge to this line of succession, Bloom's theory is useful for what it can tell us about Muldoon's Anxiety of Influence towards the Examination Schools of Oxford – an anxiety stirred by Heaney as a formidable lecturer there, as well as a 'strong' poet.

In Heaney's Oxford lectures, collected in 1995 as *The Redress of Poetry*, he expresses faith in poetry that is essentially salubrious and celebratory, a kind of secular humanist belief tinged by catechism. Poetry 'does not intervene on the actual,' he says in the inaugural lecture, 'but by offering consciousness a chance to recognise its predicaments, […] it does constitute a beneficent event'; 'It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality', and, quoting Wallace Stevens, 'a violence from within that protects us from a violence without'.[50] These ideas of 'redress' have a ring of religious deliverance, and John Dennison has described another of Heaney's consolatory notions – that of poetry's 'adequacy' – as a 'fulsome symptom of the Arnoldian turn from the Christian gospel to the redemptive function of art'.[51] Muldoon's lecture on Arnold approaches his essay 'On the Modern Element in Literature' from which Heaney retrieved this idea of 'adequacy', and in tackling Arnold is also addressing Heaney:

> The idea with which Arnold doesn't come to terms in 'On the Modern Element in Literature' is that if an epoch 'Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, | Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain,' then the literature of that epoch, to be 'commensurate' or 'adequate' to it, is likely to have 'neither joy, nor love, nor light, | Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.' Rather than accept the intrinsic logic of his own argument, or the argument of the poem 'Dover Beach,' Arnold continues to hanker after the possibility of salve, of salvation, of 'enlightenment', of 'e*luci*dation'. (*EP*, 338)

The contradiction referred to here, as Dennison explains in relation to Heaney, 'stems from an unwillingness or inability to understand poetry's ideal adequacy in anything but a wholly positive

[50] Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2, 1. Muldoon quoted this same line of Wallace Stevens when introducing John Ashbery in 1998, in 'Introduction to John Ashbery, April 11th 1998', MSS 784, Box 81 Folder 8.
[51] John Dennison, *Seamus Heaney and the Adequacy of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 189.

sense'. Adequacy then, becomes 'an ideal forced towards fullness by the post-Orthodox need for a humanist deliverance.'[52] Arnold's argument and Heaney's parallel position are undermined for Dennison (as for Muldoon) by their uncompromising optimism. As if to emphasise his departure from Heaney's lecture, Muldoon then contrives a farfetched etymological root for Arnold's 'adequacy' in the Latin word '*aqua*', attesting again to a critical (and poetic) model buoyed by the suggestively aqueous 'slip and slop of language' (*EP*, 327; *TI*, 107).

In 'The Redress of Poetry' Heaney invokes another former inhabitant of the Oxford Chair when he calls, again with liturgical resonance, on 'W. H. Auden's famous trinity of poetic faculties – making, knowing, and judging'.[53] In his own essay on Auden, Muldoon once again goes after Heaney's source. Auden's 1956 essay 'Making, Knowing and Judging' comes under heavy fire, with Heaney as much the target as Arnold or Auden:

> I want to try here to begin to understand why Auden, and so many others in the Arnoldian tradition, feel obliged to trouble themselves with 'the notion of the good life or the good place' and the 'notion of the Evil One' when they know perfectly well that this is high-sounding claptrap, a substitute for the demise of organized Christianity. […] Isn't there some middle ground between an idea of poetry that is 'adequate' in the Arnoldian sense without being a loose-box for Anglo-Catholics, lapsed or latent? (*EP*, 349-350)

Casting this loose-box aside, Muldoon is 'vastly more taken' with Auden's facetious suggestion that the poet 'may have something sensible to say about woods, even about leaves, but you should never trust him on trees' (350). *Faith* – in a poetic and religious, or poetic *as* religious sense – is what's really in doubt here, and Muldoon remains an ardent sceptic, wary of 'believing in anything too much,' as Phillips says, '[as] if sanctimoniousness was his greatest temptation, and getting caught in someone else's system always a risk.'[54]

Heaney's final Oxford lecture, 'The Frontier of Writing', outlined 'the idea of poetry as an answer, and the idea of an answering poetry as a responsible poetry, being given in its own language rather than in the language of the world that provokes it'.[55] Muldoon makes a point of resisting the idea that poetry need be 'answerable' to anything or anyone other than the poet, and offers a correction to poetry as answer in his own closing Oxford lecture: the 'only decent

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[52] Dennison, *Seamus Heaney and the Adequacy of Poetry*, 180-181.
[53] Heaney, *Redress of Poetry*, 5.
[54] Adam Phillips, 'Someone Else', 35.
[55] Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, 191.

end of the poem', he retorts, is that it should provide 'the solution to a problem only it has raised' (*EP*, 374). There is an unromantic logic to this equation, which rejects outright Heaney's belief in poetry's social utility. Implicit in Muldoon's words is a response to Heaney first expressed in the Bateson lecture, that 'all these ideas of "solace" and "succour", never mind "restitution" and "redemption", […] are perfectly appropriate to religious, but not, I think, literary discussion' (*GR*, 126). Poems are in the business of raising problems, not raising the dead; they might solve *themselves*, he suggests, but they resolve little else. Turning Heaney's words to his own ends at the end of the lecture – 'But you cannot make the dead walk or right wrong', he quotes from 'Keeping Going' – Muldoon calls this assertion 'one we don't expect from a Heaney speaker', framing it as acknowledgment of a point Heaney is otherwise unwilling to concede (*EP*, 395). There are various ways in which poetry can make the dead come to life, and Heaney is indeed on record as having said in 1991 (with reference to his poem 'The Strand at Lough Beg') that elegy 'resurrects the dead one in a benign landscape and makes the dead walk again in a beautiful, freed way'.[56]

Apophrades, 'the return of the dead', is the sixth and last of Harold Bloom's revisionary ratios, from which Muldoon quotes at length in an earlier chapter. Here in the final phase of the lectures, and with Heaney in the audience, it may have come to mind once more:

> The later poet, in his own final phase, holds his own poem so open again to the precursor's work that at first we might believe the wheel has come full circle, and that we are back in the later poet's flooded apprenticeship … But the poem is now *held* open to the precursor, where once it *was* open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor was writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work.[57]

This final lecture does indeed seem to be holding the door open to Heaney, rather than showing him the door; Muldoon has become the successor as poet-critic, but he has also become the commentator on Heaney, as Heaney had been on Muldoon in 'Place and Displacement'. Neil Corcoran quotes the same passage of Bloom in his essay 'Muldoon versus Heaney?', where he also claims that Muldoon's 1994 volume *The Annals of Chile* has 'come into new possession of

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[56] Melvyn Bragg, 'Interview with Seamus Heaney', *The South Bank Show*, broadcast by ITV on 27 Oct. 1991; qtd. by Stephen Regan, 'Seamus Heaney and the Modern Irish Elegy', in *Seamus Heaney: Poet, Critic, Translator*, eds. Ashby Bland Crowder and Jason David Hall (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 19.

[57] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 15-16; quoted in *EP*, 42.

modes and tones that Heaney has long since managed'.[58] The Oxford lectures are keen to challenge this notion of creative priority espoused by Corcoran which sees all roads leading back to Heaney, and they spend a good deal of time locating Heaney's own distinctive 'modes and tones' in the work of other poets like Lowell and Bishop. Turning to Heaney explicitly in the final lecture, Muldoon finally suggests that the speaker of 'Keeping Going', like that of Heaney's 'Widgeon', sounds a little like himself.

Indeed, as Bernard O'Donoghue proposed in his 1994 study of Heaney, 'Widgeon' reads uncannily like a Muldoon poem – so much so that its lines 'might well be attributed to Muldoon if they appeared in a quotation competition'.[59] Written with its dedicatee in mind, Heaney's poem riffs suggestively – and a little suspiciously – on ventriloquism as a creative source:

> 'Widgeon'
> *for Paul Muldoon*
>
> It had been badly shot.
> While he was plucking it
> he found, he says, the voice box –
>
> like a flute stop
> in the broken windpipe –
>
> and blew upon it
> unexpectedly
> his own small widgeon cries.[60]

A lyric about giving voice to the dead, 'Widgeon' is also a parable of poetic influence, in which the poet *takes* another voice and 'unexpectedly' makes it his own. Here we have Heaney impersonating Muldoon in a poem about Muldoon's impersonations, a miraculous act of mirroring which begs the question of whose small cries (or mimicries) we are really hearing. Muldoon reflects on this conundrum when he alludes to 'Widgeon' in his final Oxford lecture, noting 'some confusion about the source of the "small widgeon cries"' (*EP*, 392). Vocal

[58] Corcoran, 'Muldoon versus Heaney?', 133.
[59] Bernard O'Donoghue, *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 66.
[60] Seamus Heaney, *Station Island* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 48.

attribution is at issue again when Muldoon impishly suggests that 'This "Widgeon" is casting its voice, almost inaudibly this time, through "Keeping Going",' via the name of "'Widgery," the controversial Lord Chief Justice whose report on the events of Bloody Sunday was famously described … as "whitewash"' (392). Whitewash is repeatedly imagined in 'Keeping Going', and with this onomastic crypto-current (widgeon-Widgery-whitewash) Muldoon wedges himself into the compositional history of Heaney's poem. Widgeon cries and whitewash hark back to Muldoon's Bateson lecture, where the dead men of Yeats's 'Cuchulain Comforted' 'changed their throats and had the throats of birds'; Yeats's bird-men are drawn, Muldoon argues, from the same avian image-complex as the 'mechanical blackbirds built in "Byzantium",' the four-and-twenty blackbirds of the Song of Sixpence, and 'The Drowned Blackbird' of Seamus Dall Mac Cuarta's seventeenth-century Irish lyric, in which the bird is 'drowned in a bucket of whitewash' (*GR*, 125).[61]

Muldoon's point in all this is not, I think, to whitewash Heaney by suggesting that the ephebe has eclipsed his precursor, but to demonstrate – in his richly intertextual, appropriative style – how the pendulum of poetic influence continues to swing in both directions. His path to critical self-determination directs itself through Heaney's poetic and critical terrain, but Muldoon is also at pains to demonstrate how their paths have been *mutually* enriching, and are similarly enriched by others (Yeats, Lowell, Bishop, Frost, Graves and so on). Neil Corcoran's essay 'Muldoon versus Heaney?' has shown how the two poets negotiate their rivalry 'at the level of brave articulation and explication, rather than suppression or sublimation': how they acknowledge where they might ignore one another, and hold their poems 'open' in the manner of Bloom's sixth revisionary ratio.[62] But Fran Brearton sees the openness of these articulations as suspicious, an over-the-top performance of sibling rivalry, and contends that the terms of Bloom's theory are being 'as much parodied as played out' in Muldoon's work.[63] If Brearton is right to argue that his poems ultimately collapse the 'binarism' between Heaney and himself, then the lectures in *The End of the Poem* forcefully restore it.[64] Where Muldoon's poems parody his association with Heaney and knowingly exhort the cranks of the 'windlass-men' (as critical

[61] In 1999, Muldoon published his sixteen-line translation of the Irish poem as *The Drowned Blackbird* with The Gallery Press. Heaney had already published his own blackbird poem, 'St. Kevin and the Blackbird', in *The Spirit Level* (1996), where we also find 'Keeping Going'.
[62] Corcoran, 'Muldoon versus Heaney?', 135.
[63] Fran Brearton, 'Muldoon's Antecedents', in *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, eds. Tim Kendall and Peter McDonald (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 53.
[64] Brearton, 'Muldoon's Antecedents', 59.

commentators are styled in *The Prince of the Quotidian*), the lectures reiterate the mutual significance and depth of their relationship as Muldoon turns commentator on Heaney.[65]

Appropriately then, *The End of the Poem* ends on a note of conciliation between their positions, if not quite a compromise:

> This is not to say that a poem, such as any of the three [by Graves, Day-Lewis, and Heaney] I've looked at here, doesn't have *some* efficacy in the world, doesn't affect *some* change. It must change something, as these three examples so elegantly display. One of the ways in which they do this is to clear their own space, bringing us 'all together there in a foretime,' if I may borrow that phrase from section 3 of 'Keeping Going'. […] This condition of a 'foretime' of the poem is, yet again, a version of what I described earlier as the 'problem' to which the poem is a 'solution'. (395)

That poems should 'clear their own space' is plainly echoing Bloom; but this shared moment at the end of the lectures, 'bringing us "all together there in a foretime"' at which Heaney was present to read, is an open and inclusive gesture. Adapting part of Heaney's text into his formula for the end of the poem, Muldoon brings the lecture series to rest peaceably, and perhaps a little disingenuously, on the broader continuities of their positions. And yet the reiterated 'foretime' also suggests a changing of the guard; fixing his sights in this final lecture on three poets who are all former Oxford Professors of Poetry, Muldoon foregrounds an inheritance which includes Heaney, and performs himself as successor.

While they range far beyond then, these long-voyage lectures take Heaney as their Ithaca, a point of departure and return, dramatizing him as an influence who is also, in the end, potentially influenced *by* Muldoon. Where Heaney is dubbed by Muldoon 'the great physician of the earth' (*PQ*, 14), Muldoon himself has achieved the critical equivalent of 'walking on air' as Heaney attested in 1988, orbiting but also *obviating* the older poet's terrestrial pull.[66] In a 1998 interview, just before his first series of Oxford lectures began, Muldoon alluded rather bitingly to the position he was beginning to pull away from: 'I think I'm growing impatient with the post-Arnoldian view of poetry as a "stay", as a "consolation", which was just the ticket for the end of the nineteenth century. I prefer to think of it as a destabilizing, disconsoling enterprise.

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[65] *PQ*, 29.

[66] Seamus Heaney, 'The Pre-Natal Mountain: Vision and Irony in Recent Irish Poetry', in *The Place of Writing* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 52.

That seems more appropriate for how we live now.'[67] Against this post-Arnoldian, Heaneyesque vision of poetic consolation, Muldoon prefers the disconsoling – a disruptive, unsettling but also ludic aesthetic whose 'end' is not peace, as Heaney questions in 'The Harvest Bow', but rather the perverse pleasures of transgression and provocation which these serially playful critical texts exemplify.

7

Long-Voyage Lectures

Heaney's work has, as Dennison shows, been read in terms of the critical writings, and we might ask exactly how Muldoon's critical writings in his American period change the way we read him. The Bateson lecture of 1998 offered 'Notes Towards an *Ars Poetica*' and the subsequent long-voyage lectures can be read as an extension of this aesthetic manifesto, paralleling the contemporary later phases of Muldoon's poetry. His chapter on Eugenio Montale's 'The Eel' in *The End of the Poem* is surely related to his translation of the same poem, published in *Moy Sand and Gravel* (2002) at around the same time as the lecture was given, where the eel darts inland 'from the Apennines to the Romagna' and back through the 'gullies of the Pyrenees' (*MSG*, 59). The characteristic fertility of the eel (itself a Heaney trademark) seems to have crossed over from, or into, the lectures, and is a sign of how Muldoon's poetic and critical texts seem to share an appetite for the peripatetic, an ambition to be part of a single continuous skein. In 'It is What It is', another sea-bound poem from *Horse Latitudes* (2006), Muldoon imagines 'the foreshore | of a country toward which I've been rowing | for fifty years'; his son's new plaything is pictured on a distant coastline, and the poet-father, drifting at sea like Odysseus or Máel Dúin, cannot reach it (*HL*, 49). Drawn in middle-age to memories of his own childhood play, Muldoon's speaker mulls over 'the rules of this imperspicuous game' (life as a puzzle, or the puzzle as a poem) and 'the fifty years I've spent trying to put it together'. With this suggestion of the poem as a solution to its own problem, 'It is What It is' invites us to read the secret life of the poem and the fifty-plus years of the poet in symmetry, in a manner characteristic of his interpretive reflex in the Oxford lectures to 'put them together'.

In *Maggot* (2010), 'Lines for the Quartercentenary of the Voyage of the Halve Maen' is the latest re-writing of Muldoon's long-favoured *Voyage of Mael Duin*. The 1609 expedition of the *Halve Maen* ('Half Moon') was launched by English explorer Henry Hudson – another of

[67] Sebastian Barker, 'A Drink with Paul Muldoon', in *Long Poem Group Newsletter*, 7 (1998), last accessed 11 Sep. 2017 at http://www.dgdclynx.plus.com/lpgn/lpgn72.html.

Muldoon's doubled identities – whose attempts to reach China by sailing through North America failed and ended in mutiny. Although Hudson, stranded at sea with his son, was unsuccessful in finding a westward passage to Asia, their colonial voyage did lead to the discovery of Hudson Bay (which keeps the family name). Hudson's vision of returning from China with 'a root-balled persimmon', or lotus fruit, shares a root not only with Odysseus and the Lotus-Eaters but a boyhood fantasy in 'Yarrow', when 'those "persimmons" | and "swedes" … diverted [me] from my quest' (*M*, 75; *P*, 376). 'Yarrow', another mythical voyage poem, pictures the family farm overrun by wildflowers on account of the child's daydreaming, and like these later 'Lines for the Quartercentenary' it ends with a sinking ship, 'a trireme lost with all hands somewhere between Ireland and Montevideo' (392).

Anxieties about getting lost or diverted at sea, as Máel Dúin was, seem to invoke myths of family history, and both are powerful motives in Muldoon's creative imagination. Echoing the terms of 'It is What It is', Phillips reads *The End of the Poem* as 'part of Muldoon's puzzle about himself,' and the poetry of Muldoon's contemporary American period, as well as his criticism, uses the voyage as both a model and a metaphor for self-examination.[68] Dreams, paronomasia and slips of the tongue are equally symptomatic of the poems, their journeys, and these distinctly Freudian lectures, which trade on ambiguities of intention and inattention. The 'tight little knot' of Muldoon's yarrow, 'like something keeping a secret | from itself, something on the tip of its own tongue' (*P*, 348), offers an emblem for the seductively cryptic counter-confessional turn in his poems, which, like his critical texts, invite suspicion about the fidelity of their disclosures. As in the epic quest-poems, these long-voyage lectures also raise pivotal questions about Muldoon's own directions of travel in America, and represent a turn in his thinking about poetic influence, cryptography and biographical affairs that have implications for the later contemporary phases of his writing. Read as equivalents or guides to the later works, these series of lectures are also long forms in their own right, and mark a movement towards the comparably serial, hermeneutically cryptic and linguistically virtuosic poems of Muldoon's American career.

[68] Phillips, 'Someone Else', *London Review of Books*, 29.1 (2007), 35.

'I fluttered, like an erratum slip': The Poetics and Politics of Error

Paul Muldoon's career as a Faber poet began with a misprint. When the first edition of his debut volume *New Weather* (1973) was printed entirely in italics, one reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement*, not recognising the mistake, struggled to look past 'the appearance of a monstrous refrain'.[1] That printer's accident has since proven itself to be strangely prophetic, and the reviewer's description of its effects is in fact a reasonable commentary on Muldoon's poetics of error, where mistakes appear with curious consistency and the remonstrative hand of correction is rarely idle. If his first book gave intimations of a monstrous refrain, his latest volume *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* (2015) gives the derivation of 'refrain' as '*frenum*, "a bridle"' (*OT*, 6), and under such restraints, the rhythms of correction in Muldoon's poetry are perhaps as important as the spontaneous irruptions and interruptions of the slip itself. After a brief tour of the literature and criticism of error in contemporary poetry, this chapter will consider slips as a newly creative principle in his U.S. writing. Mobile, erotic, and systemically transgressive, Muldoon's slips are, as I will argue, set against the parental and Catholic models of correction established in his poems about childhood in Ireland. As in the lectures, forms of authority in these poems are also questioned and undermined by Muldoon's purposeful play with mistakes, which, as I hope to show, takes an increasingly explicit political edge in the later contemporary volumes from *Horse Latitudes* (2006) to *One Thousand Things* (2015). His fascination with errata only really gets going in his American period, but the misprinted volume that overemphasised the coming of 'New Weather' was an early and fittingly serendipitous sign that mistakes would become a refrain in Muldoon's later writing.

1

'For years I thought "muso bello" meant "Bell Muse"'

The poetics of the slip is a relatively unrehearsed topic for critics, though the literature of error is extensive. In prose, the modern master of mistakes is surely Joyce, whose verbal deformations, repetitions, and frequently libidinous slips of the tongue show the greatest continuity with Muldoon's, and have undoubtedly influenced them. *Joyces Mistakes* is the (deliberately unpunctuated) title of Tim Conley's 2003 study, a rich Quixotic work of Joyce scholarship to which we will turn shortly. In contemporary American poetry, John Ashbery

[1] Cited by Tim Kendall, in *Paul Muldoon* (Bridgend: Seren, 1996), 25.

casts a long shadow over any discussion of creative miswriting, and the work of the poets loosely grouped as 'New York School' yields an abundance of play with mistakes. In '3 Poems about Kenneth Koch', Frank O'Hara's gastric slips show the text digesting itself as it comes into being: 'I hang from the mistletoe | of surprising indigestion, I mean indiscretion', he says, before locating Koch 'in the Hotel Imperial Colon, | Mexico City'.[2] Kenneth Koch himself catalogues 'My misunderstandings' in his poem 'Taking a Walk with You': 'for years I thought "muso bello" meant "Bell Muse"'.[3] When it comes to mistakes, the poems of O'Hara and Koch are refreshingly open about their fallibility. For Ashbery, his poems delight in a slipperiness of polysemy which at times tumbles into nonsense. In the title poem of Ashbery's last volume, *Breezeway* (2015), 'Someone said we needed a breezeway | to bark down remnants of super storm Elias jugularly' are lines characteristic of this aesthetic of the slip.[4] Phrases such as 'bark down' and 'remnants of super storm' – suggesting '*break* down' or '*bolt* down', and 'remnants of *supper*' – are like solecisms 'made up of what they almost say and nearly mean,' as Dan Chiasson suggests. Operating at the limits of sense, Ashbery's writing conjures up here – as it does elsewhere – 'a massive mental errata slip'.[5] Muldoon's miswritings also frequently riff on what they 'almost say' and 'nearly mean', and as we shall see, his 1998 volume *Hay* puts the erratum slip itself to exemplary creative use.

For another American luminary, Jorie Graham, the waywardness and imperfections of error have special appeal. Graham entitled her 1997 collection *The Errancy*, and in *The End of Beauty* (1987) wrote of 'loving that error, loving that filial form, that break from perfection | where the complex mechanism fails'. These are lines from 'Self-Portrait as the Gesture Between Them [Adam and Eve]', a poem that opens with the Fall.[6] In his 2015 study *The Poetry of Disturbance*, David Bergman echoes that 'break from perfection' as he claims that 'error,' for Graham, 'unlike perfection, allows for the cocoon of possibility, the imaginative soup from which poems spring.'[7] If Graham is a less obviously *place-bound* writer of error and errancy than Muldoon, then the Language poet Charles Bernstein is a different proposition again. His essay on 'Optimism and Critical Excess' declares that 'poetics must necessarily involve error. Error

[2] Frank O'Hara, *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 151, 152.
[3] Kenneth Koch, *The Collected Poems of Kenneth Koch* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 143.
[4] John Ashbery, *Breezeway* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2015).
[5] Dan Chiasson, 'American Snipper', *The New Yorker*, 1 Jun. 2015, last accessed 20 Jul. 2017 at http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/01/american-snipper-books-chiasson.
[6] Jorie Graham, *The End of Beauty* (New York: Ecco Press, 1987), 7.
[7] David Bergman, *The Poetry of Disturbance*: *The Discomforts of Postwar American Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 62.

in the sense of wandering, errantry, but also error in the sense of mistake, misperception, incorrectness, contradiction. Error … as slips, slides'.[8] Error is 'strongly linked to a political gesture,' writes Nerys Williams in *Reading Error: The Lyric and Contemporary Poetry* (2007), and for Bernstein it permits 'the refutation of an authoritarian rhetoric.'[9] This blend of the erroneous and anti-authoritarian is evident in the lexical mash of Bernstein's 'A Defence of Poetry', where we encounter 'a kind of texutal practice | that you prefer to call "nknsense" but | for *poltical* purpses I prepfer to call | ideological! | , say Hupty Dumpty'.[10] Williams's *Reading Error* takes a philosophically weighty approach to error, focussing on figures like Bernstein from the Language movement and their use of mistakes in 'reconfiguring … the lyric in recent innovative poetry'.[11]

In contemporary English poetry, Geoffrey Hill and Tom Raworth are writers who consistently thematise error, though they hold quite opposite views on the value of miswriting. Mistakes for Hill are a profoundly ethical matter, a phenomenon which his poems brood on and his essays recoil from. In 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement",' Hill quotes the French philosopher Simone Weil on the sinfulness of mistakes in writing:

> It seems to me one of the indubitable signs of Simone Weil's greatness as an ethical writer that she associates the act of writing not with a generalized awareness of sin but with specific crime, and proposes a system whereby 'anybody, no matter who, discovering an avoidable error in a printed text or radio broadcast, would be entitled to bring an action before [special] courts' empowered to condemn a convicted offender to prison or hard labour.[12]

Weil's fanatical stance on the sin of the slip is not quite Hill's, who expresses doubts about the severity of her proposal. But the decision to quote from this passage nevertheless reveals his sympathy for Weil's position, especially where the mistake is written with the intention to mislead or misrepresent. Indeed, in *The Triumph of Love* (1998) Hill hits back at the agents of misrepresentation, correcting the erroneous terms by which his work is judged:

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[8] Charles Bernstein, *A Poetics* (London: Harvard University Press, 153-154); quoted in Bergman, *Poetry of Disturbance*, 62.
[9] Nerys Williams, *Reading Error: The Lyric and Contemporary Poetry* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 29.
[10] Charles Bernstein, 'A Defence of Poetry', *My Way: Speeches and Poems* (London; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1.
[11] Williams, *Reading Error*, 34.
[12] Geoffrey Hill, 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', in *The Lords of Limit: Essays on Literature and Ideas* (London: André Deutsch, 1984), 8; qtd. in Andrew Michael Roberts, 'Error and Mistakes in Poetry: Geoffrey Hill and Tom Raworth', *English*, 56.216 (2007), 344.

For wordly, read worldly; for in equity, inequity;
for religious read religiose; for distinction
detestation. Take accessible to mean
acceptable, accommodating, openly servile.[13]

As John Kerrigan suggests, Hill's errata anticipate Muldoon's 'Errata' in *Hay*.[14] But as a poem which turns the slip into a retributive form, and which strives for correctness above all else, Hill's text could hardly be further away from the impish spirit of muddle found in Muldoon's mock-errata.

Set against the sting of Hill's corrections, Tom Raworth's attitude to error is, like Muldoon's, comparatively festive. As Andrew Michael Roberts suggests in his account of 'Error and Mistakes in Poetry', Raworth, while 'not merely blasé about mistakes', takes 'a relatively sanguine view of error'.[15] Contrary to Hill's economical polish, Raworth seems to simulate the slip and slop of 'the actual process of writing', in which the 'creative serendipity' of the mistake 'may be frankly acknowledged'.[16] So it proves in one example quoted in Roberts's essay, Raworth's 'South America', which narrates the process of composition and catches itself in the act of miswriting:

all one evening he draws on his left arm with felt-tip pens
an intricate pattern feels how the pain does give protection
[…]
he sees that he has written pain for paint and it works better[17]

Here the slip is an aesthetic matter, not an ethical one: his miswriting *pain* for *paint* is allowed to stand because it 'works better'. The felicity of the slip is foregrounded and an enrichment made from the erratum – though presumably 'it works better,' as Roberts shrewdly notes, 'only by being specifically identified as a mistake, a sort of use under erasure.'[18]

[13] Geoffrey Hill, *Broken Hierarchies: Poems 1952-2012*, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 250.
[14] John Kerrigan, 'Muldoon's Transits: Muddling Through After *Madoc*', in *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, eds. Tim Kendall and Peter McDonald (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 143.
[15] Roberts, 'Error and Mistakes', 347.
[16] Roberts, 'Error and Mistakes', 349.
[17] Tom Raworth, 'South America', *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2003), 60.
[18] Roberts, 'Error and Mistakes', 349.

Miswriting brings about a need for correction and 'atonement' for Hill, who is satisfied only with 'the authority of the right, true poem'.[19] This is an ideal Jorie Graham's writing has given up looking for, instead embracing the freedoms of 'imperfection'. Frank O'Hara and Kenneth Koch delight in an aesthetics of ease which gives them the freedom to make and record their mistakes, whereas Ashbery is a master of the off-kilter construction in which correction seems beside the point. For Charles Bernstein, miswriting is a way of challenging the '*poltical*' primacy of the sign, emphasising its plastic materiality in the well-documented manner of the Language poets, while for Raworth it is primarily an aesthetic matter – another device in his creative arsenal, and part of a performance of spontaneous, serendipitous craft.

The poetics of error is not, of course, the sole preserve of contemporary Anglophone poets. Writing and erring are memorably met in the monstrous figure of 'Errour' at the beginning of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, a serpentine creature which regurgitates 'books and papers'.[20] Laurence Sterne's *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* also begins with a notional mistake, Tristram's father having forgotten to wind the clock (an episode alluded to in Muldoon's early Shandean poem, 'October 1950').[21] But of these totemic literary figures, James Joyce is surely the most prolific writer and curator of mistakes. Tim Conley's book on *Joyces Mistakes* is alive to the slippery surface and complex depths of Joyce's texts, in which the slip extends to misreading Joyce as well as to his miswritings. At bottom, Conley's thesis is a simple one: that Joyce's aesthetic is increasingly error-strewn and erroneously minded from *The Dubliners* to *Finnegans Wake*, where error finally becomes 'a principle of composition and publication'.[22] My chapter began with a publishing mistake, but its aim is to establish Muldoon's slips as a principle of composition in his American writing – part of which comes back to Joyce, as well as the Freudian parapraxis. A new genre in the poetry of Muldoon's U.S. period, where miswriting becomes a terrifically fertile serial form, the slip is a topographical and autobiographical phenomenon that extends across his poetry in America.

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[19] Geoffrey Hill, interview with Hermione Lee, *Book Four*, 2 Oct. 1985, Channel Four television; quoted in Roberts, 'Error and Mistakes', 340.
[20] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 1.1.20.
[21] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Ian Campbell Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5; Paul Muldoon, *Poems 1968-1998*, 76.
[22] Tim Conley, *Joyces Mistakes: Problems of Intention, Irony and Interpretation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 6.

2

'I let slip a name'

In the Author's Note to his *Poems 1968-1998* (2001), nearly thirty years after the misprinted first edition of *New Weather*, the now American Muldoon alludes to other errors in transcription:

> Other than to correct such factual errors as my having written 'painfully' for 'painstakingly,' 'bathyscope' for 'bathysphere,' '*Ranus ranus*' for '*Rana temporaria*', 'jardonelle' for 'jargonelle', and 'aureoles' for 'areolae', I have made scarcely any changes in the texts of the poems, since I'm fairly certain that, after a shortish time, the person through whom a poem was written is no more entitled to make revisions than any other reader. (*P*, xv)

This Note is characteristically full of caveats, and suggests that Muldoon's corrections have spread further than the five examples given. Indeed, no mention is made here of the last stanza missing from 'The Year of the Sloes' as it was originally printed in *New Weather*, or the two full sections of 'Yarrow' (pages 146 and 147 in *The Annals of Chile*) which are silently omitted from his *Poems 1968-1998*. 'Omissions are not accidents,' as Marianne Moore wrote in the Author's Note to her own *Complete Poems*, and the slipperiness of Muldoon's revisionary practice is exemplary of his poetic performances, which play games with accidents and mistakes.[23] The Note does at least confirm that Muldoon is not *much* in the habit of revising his poems after publication, and it's worth noting that his latest anthology, *Selected Poems 1968-2014* (2016), does not go to the trouble of correcting the 'factual errors' listed here.

Talk of factual errors raises the question of what exactly makes an error 'factual', and leaves the door half-open to the kinds of error we could call fictional or 'counter-factual'. This is presumably the category of error which covers the self-made 'Errata' of *Hay*, or any of the poems in which Muldoon is deliberately pursuing 'the *via negativa* of the mistake', to borrow Paul Keegan's phrase.[24] If a factual error is an error of ignorance, like misidentifying the Latin binomial for the common frog (for '*Ranus ranus*' read '*Rana temporaria*' in the Author's Note), it makes sense that the poet should want to amend these cases for clarity. But what about mistaking 'painfully' for 'painstakingly'? These words are common enough, and substituting

[23] Marianne Moore, 'Author's Note', in *Complete Poems* (London: Faber, 1984 [1967]), vii.
[24] Paul Keegan, 'Introduction', in Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2002), xiv.

them might well suggest that the poet has undergone a change in attitude towards that word and its inclusion in the poem. ('Aureoles' for 'areolae' is another fascinating slip, and arguably a revision, which I will address in the discussion of 'Yarrow' later in the chapter.) Certainly, writing 'painfully' instead of 'painstakingly' cannot be an error of ignorance, and its revision seems to be hiding more than just a routine slip of the pen.

Freud, of course, would strongly discourage our writing off slips of the pen. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* he describes the *Fehleistung*, or Freudian slip, as 'a mimic means of expression, although often, admittedly, the expression of something unintended; it is a means of giving oneself away.'[25] That substitution of 'painfully' for 'painstakingly' is certainly 'a mimic means of expression', both words echoing the 'pain' in a poem about the death of Muldoon's father. That poem, 'The Fox', was written shortly after his father's death in 1985, and published in *Meeting the British* (1987) in the year Muldoon arrived to work in the United States. Woken in the night by crying geese, Muldoon's speaker looks from his window over the Collegelands fields and is struck by an image of his father's face:

> You seem engrossed,
> as if I'd come on you
> painfully [painstakingly] writing your name
> with a carpenter's pencil
>
> on the lid
> of a mushroom-box.
> You're saying, *Go back to bed.*
> *It's only yon dog-fox.*
> (*P*, 166; correction in square brackets)

Like Ted Hughes's 'Thought Fox' which it acknowledges, Muldoon's poem is a self-conscious reflection on the act of writing. The father signs his name 'with a carpenter's pencil' – but the text also bears the signature of the bereaved poet himself, also a sort of craftsman here, who is 'painstakingly' and perhaps 'painfully' writing. Discussing poetic revisions in a lecture some years later, Muldoon spoke of the writer 'coming under the scrutiny of the poem,' and his consequent inability 'to look it straight in the eyes' (*EP*, 388-389). Surely something comparable

[25] Freud, *Everyday Life*, 82.

to this scrutiny is exerting itself over 'The Fox', as the editorial poet highlights the 'pain' in both the original and revised adverbs, taking pains to hide his earlier pain in writing.

Also drawn from the pain of bereavement, 'Incantata' is a virtuosic elegy for the artist Mary Farl Powers, a former lover of Muldoon's who died of cancer in 1992. Written in America and collected in the 1994 volume *The Annals of Chile*, the poem is mostly comprised of recollections of their life in Ireland, fulfilling a model of Transatlantic crosshatching which recurs throughout the volume. The mistaking of 'jardonelle' for 'jargonelle' (as per the Author's Note) occurs in this elegy, which is uncharacteristically forthright in its incantations of 'all that's left of' their relationship. Grief is a primal force here, and again seems the source of a revealing slip of the pen:

> Of the 'Yes, let's go' spoken by Monsieur Tarragon,
> of the early-ripening jardonelle [jargonelle], the tumorous jardon, the jargon
> of jays, the jars
> of tomato relish and the jars
> of Victoria plums, absolutely *de rigueur* for a passable plum baba…
> (*P*, 340)

Estragon translates from the French as 'Tarragon' ('Yes, let's go' are Estragon's last words in *Waiting for Godot*), and at this culinary feast the poem patently savours the slips of Beckett's bilingual imagination. 'Jardonelle', however, is a case of Muldoon muddling his jargon, having conflated jargonelle (an 'early ripening variety of pear') with jardon ('a callous tumour on the leg of a horse').[26] Though he comes to see 'jardonelle' as a mistake, it is a particularly poignant one, with a Freudian or even Joycean richness of suggestion, bringing together as it does the ripening fruit with the expanding tumour and two of the familiar specialities of his father in his childhood (the horse, the fruit). There remains some question as whether we can take this erratum on faith, since 'Incantata' is a particularly rich score for wordplay – and in some ways the correction diminishes this, even as it draws attention to the verbal mischief potentially at play.

Combining the slip with the Edenic fruit, Jorie Graham in the poem quoted earlier says 'But a secret grows, a secret wants to be given away.'[27] Likewise the secret infidelities of 'Incantata' seem inseparable from the temptation to let them slip. Powers, for example, 'just

[26] Definitions in parentheses are quoted from the *OED* entries for 'jargonelle' and 'jardon'.
[27] Graham, *The End of Beauty*, 4.

had to let slip' the details of her 'secret amour | for a friend of mine' (332). In a retaliatory scene later in the poem, 'somewhere just south of Killnasaggart',

> I let slip a name—her name—off my tongue
> and you turned away (I see it now) the better to deliver the sting
> in your own tail, to let slip your own little secret.
> (*P*, 334)

The slipped secret here is the 'sting' of infidelity, as deadly as the suggestively murderous misspelling of Kilnasaggart ('*Kill*nasaggart'). Since we never learn the content of these slips, the poem's discretion is finely balanced against this performative unveiling of private indiscretions.

Unfaithfulness is frequently foregrounded in Muldoon's U.S. long poems, as in his elegiac set pieces, which have become their own form of serial writing. The infidelities in these texts are not only romantic but authorial, raising questions about the authenticity of the poet's performance. One such questionable performance materialises in 'Milkweed and Monarch' – another poem about grief, or the bitter slippery work of writing about grief. It presents us with a mistake of an apparently different kind, in which the word is *intentionally* miswritten. Kneeling by his parents' graveside, the figure of the poet is struck by an unsettling mix of sensations, by turns gustatory and lustful:

> As he knelt by the grave of his mother and father
> the taste of dill, or tarragon—
> he could barely tell one from the other—
>
> filled his mouth. It seemed as if he might smother.
> Why should he be stricken
> with grief, not for his mother and father,
>
> but a woman slinking from the fur of a sea-otter
> in Portland, Maine, or, yes, Portland, Oregon—
> he could barely tell one from the other—
>
> and why should he now savour
> the tang of her, her little pickled gherkin,

as he knelt by the grave of his mother and father?
(*P*, 329)

The poem reflects Muldoon's appetite for the perverse, savouring the suggestion of the lover who 'slinks' into the family plot. As the text slips between U.S. places, 'Portland, Maine' and 'Portland, Oregon', it is easy to forget that we're also in a graveyard in Northern Ireland, brought back to the place of childhood as well as a source of forbidden pleasures (or the maternal forbidding of sexual pleasure). Those Transatlantic reveries are then ended by a telling misidentification, a nominal mistake which gives away the poem's position:

He looked about. Cow's-parsley in a samovar.
He'd mistaken his mother's name, 'Regan', for 'Anger':
as he knelt by the grave of his mother and father
he could barely tell one from the other.
(330)

'He could barely tell' raises what can and can't be 'told' in different senses; the poem names his mother as 'Anger' personified, but the *telling* itself is facilitated by the form of the slip. The erotic and the aggressive are surfacing here at the site of the parental grave, expressing repressed Anger towards the mother's 'smothering' influence, and recalling spicy erotic memories of another woman whose 'tang of … pickled gherkin' he relishes. (The mistaking of 'Regan' also suggests the name of Lear's wicked daughter in *King Lear*, a text which emerges prominently in the volume's long concluding poem, 'Yarrow'.) The libidinous preoccupations and maternal resentments of 'Milkweed and Monarch' result in this suggestively Freudian misreading, which parades a version of the mistake characterised in Freud's *Everyday Life* as a word 'modified by the reader's readiness to see something in it that he is prepared to see, some subject that is occupying his mind at the time.'[28] The mistaken name also alludes to the work of another Freudian poet, Robert Lowell, and the erroneous inscription on his mother's coffin in 'Sailing Home from Rapallo', where '*Lowell* had been misspelled *LOVEL*'.[29] Lowell's is another poem about a Transatlantic crossing in which the speaker returns home to the parental burial place; and as in that text, 'Milkweed and Monarch' *performs* the mistake rather than succumbing to it. The line in which the slip takes place should really end at 'Regan', rounding off the villanelle's sequence of *b*-rhymes – 'tarragon', 'stricken', 'Oregon', etc. – but instead the intrusion

[28] Freud, *Everyday Life*, 109.
[29] Robert Lowell, *Collected Poems*, ed. Frank Bidart and David Gewanter (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), 180.

of 'Anger' makes a show of knocking the rhyme scheme off kilter.[30] In the poem's model of displacement, the end-rhymes slip out of position with a display of formal mimesis – itself, in Freud's terms of the slip, 'a mimic means of expression' which reproduces the mistake as psychic disturbance.

3

'a single lapse'

These poems present us with a new category of Muldoonian mistakes as they emerge in *The Annals of Chile* – stylized, theatrical little riffs on the Freudian slip which imply a more-than-passing investment in Muldoon's family history, and a Freudian psychopathology of everyday family life. His 1994 book, the first American collection after *Madoc: A Mystery* (1990), foregrounds the U.S. as a site of return to Northern Ireland and the poet's childhood discontents. *The Annals* is, like *Madoc*, almost wholly eclipsed by a concluding long poem which takes up the vast majority of its pages. That poem is 'Yarrow', where the poet leafs through the Annals of Childhood, playing up the Transatlantic exchange as he returns from overseas to examine what's left of the family farm near the Moy. After founding narratives of America were rewritten in 'Madoc' as discussed in my opening chapter, 'Yarrow' rewrites the poet's own founding narrative, with autobiography flooding back now in a U.S. scene of writing. 'Madoc' was mainly about mapping out new territory, experimenting with unconventional hybrid forms of writing as well as 'unpacking the old valise' of Muldoonian tricks in the New World. 'Yarrow' continues that interest in formal experimentation; but where the earlier 'Madoc' sought to put down roots on U.S. soil, 'Yarrow' suggests that the poet's roots are still firmly planted in Northern Irish turf.

Muldoon's kaleidoscopic childhood tale interweaves myth, epic and adventure stories with personal memoirs of farm life, sexual awakening, and the death of his mother. The poem is his first extended autobiographical self-performance in his U.S. period, described by Tim Kendall as 'an hallucinatory portrait of the artist as a young man'.[31] It begins on Muldoon's home-patch, with the child-self surveying the family farm in Collegelands while the adult-self looks back from America, haunted by the foreknowledge that 'all would be swept away' by the

[30] Tim Kendall observes a similar effect in his analysis of the poem, in *Paul Muldoon* (Bridgend: Seren, 1996), 221.
[31] Kendall, *Paul Muldoon*, 230.

proliferating yarrow 'that fanned across the land' (*AC*, 39).[32] As it dwells on these early episodes (by turns real and imagined), 'Yarrow' also plays and preys upon slips of memory. Its narrative is based on a crucial misremembering, with the culprit seemingly the figure of the young poet himself, who mistakes his mother's request for 'marrow' seeds on the way to market: yarrow is accidentally purchased and planted, and quickly overgrows the farm.

Like 'Milkweed and Monarch' then, 'Yarrow' foregrounds the evocative significance of the horticultural – and it, too, is about a mistake. Both poems return to a Northern Irish past, as well as bearing the marks of Muldoon's recent settlement in America. In its opening pages 'Yarrow' finds the mother browsing 'a seed-catalogue | she's borrowed from Tohill's of the Moy', before revealing the poem's vantage point as 'a den in St. John's, Newfoundland,' where 'I browse | on a sprig of *Achillea millefolium*, as it's classed' (*AC*, 43). The sprig of yarrow, once mistaken for Irish marrow, is picked up here in the poet's North American den, suggesting a botanical model of creative fertilization rooted in Transatlantic exchange.

The poem includes many crossings between Ireland and the Americas – voyages taken by ships like the *Hispanola* of Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, bird migrations, and even the flights of a fighter-plane of uncertain origin ('"American," did I write? British.' (*AC*, 177)). A recurring emblem of these Transatlantic crossings is the 'bridge', a word which appears in the poem on 11 occasions. Geographically, Newfoundland's position on the Canadian east coast is one such bridge between Muldoon's Old and New Worlds, marking the shortest distance between Ireland and the North American continent; and its capital city of St. John's, where the poet is seen flicking through television channels as he stretches out on a davenport, has been a thriving port of trade between them for nearly four hundred years. In the pseudo-fantasy world of the poem, one significant figure behind this bridging of Ireland, Canada and the U.S.A. is the courier 'Milady Clark' (possibly an alias of the treacherous Milady de Winter in Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*). Here she is associated with the Ulster Defence Association in Ireland and the Irish Republican Brotherhood in the United States, representing each organization under slightly different names:

> not Milady Clark, who helped the U.D.A.
> run a shipment of Aramis
> into Kilkeel

[32] Due to the textual variants discussed later in this section, references to 'Yarrow' are taken from *The Annals of Chile* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), rather than the text that appears in slightly amended form in Muldoon's *Poems: 1968-1998* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001).

but Milady *Clarik*, whose great-great-grandfather led the I.R.B.
invasion of Canada, the one who helped foil
the plot in which the courier

was none other than herself, her […].
(*AC*, 85; original emphasis)

Much rests on the slip of that letter 'i' in 'Clark/Clarik' which signifies alternative Irish pronunciations, and thus represents the difference between the loyalist U.D.A. and republican I.R.B. factions.[33] In the spirit of slippage then, for '*Clarik*' read 'Clark', or vice versa; and for 'a shipment of Aramis' (the perfume) read 'shipment of arms' for the Ulster paramilitaries in Kilkeel. The 'I.R.B. | invasion of Canada' refers to the U.S. Fenian raids on Canada during the 1860s, in which a group of Irish-Americans sought to take Canadian territory from the British and then trade it back to them in return for Irish independence. Milady's role in this affair is unclear, but her 'foil[ing] | the plot' here is a clue that the Fenian raids ended in failure, as did their historical bid for an Irish-American territorial trade-off with Britain. More importantly, Milady's doubling of names and places (Clark or Clarik, Canada or Kilkeel) appeals to the multidirectional turns of the poem as a whole, which flicks between the child's home in Collegelands and the adult's Newfoundland den, playing out its own local and historical fantasies of territorial exchange.

'Yarrow' turns on these Transatlantic slips, as well as the child's momentous mistake, and acquires its dizzying momentum from the notion of slippage. Its 'intercut, exploded sestinas', as Muldoon has called them,[34] are built on a faltering series of verbal and episodic returns, much in keeping with the poet's restless zapping through TV re-runs. John Ashbery has compared writing poetry to turning on a television set ('I can plug into poetry whenever I want to'),[35] and it may be that Muldoon is – warily but playfully – tuning in here to the static of the Ashberian postmodern in America's recent poetic tradition. Within the poem's stumbling series of sestinas, 'slip' appears in the rhyming position on ten occasions, far more frequently than any other word. As both a verb and a polymorphic noun, slips not only refer to mistaken expressions or inadvertent actions, but to giving his pursuers 'the slip', the 'slip of a girl' who

[33] See Kerrigan, 'Muldoon's Transits', 139.
[34] See Earl G. Ingersoll and Stan Sanvel, 'The Invention of the I: A Conversation with Paul Muldoon', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 37.1 (1998).
[35] Sue Gangel, 'An interview with John Ashbery', *San Francisco Review of Books*, 3 (November 1977), 15.

appears in an erotic dream, the woman's undergarment or 'diaphanous half-slip', a cricketer's 'short slip', the 'carbon-slip' (a copy of the boy's list of seeds for purchase), and the horticultural 'little green slip', among other uses (*AC*, 122, 104, 69, 52, 105, 107). These repetitions (almost always as end-words) suggest that slips are not only pressing on the mind of the poem, but also pressed into its structural framework. Used extensively as a creative device in *The Annals* as a whole and the subsequent 1998 volume *Hay*, in 'Yarrow' the slip is being experimented with on a larger scale, as a principle of composition.

The long poem generated out of slip after slip is a distinctly U.S. Muldoon invention, casting itself back across the 'all too familiar terrain' of the mother, the father and the farm in Armagh, from what is now a trans-continental distance (*AC*, 40). And as an extended performance of the *topographical* slip, 'Yarrow' is the work of a Northern Irish expatriate for whom misremembering is almost inextricable from writing about home. Indeed, his American position now seems to intensify the compulsion to rake up these Northern Irish roots, and to revisit the primal scene of the slip which the poem obsessively replays. 'Yarrow' describes itself as a 'supremely Joycean object, a nautilus | of memory jammed next to memory' (152) – but memory itself also seems to 'jam' here, seemingly stuck on repeat as the poet-speaker is haunted by the same old mistakes in new far-flung places.

As this Joyce connection suggests, the poem's mistakes have partly to do with the slippery promiscuity of language. Words like 'expiatory', 'officer' and 'mustang' are subject to a Joycean form of infection, becoming 'expiapiaratory', 'officiffer' (hinting at *Lucifer*, or the *cipher*) and 'mustn'tang' (*mustn't*) in a series of *Wake*-like mutations which embrace the slippery contrariety of the spoonerism. 'Yarrow' is full of such moments of libidinous linguistic resistance, like *The Oklahoma Kid* miswritten as '*The Oklamydia Kid*', and Yeats's line about how they 'all gave tongue' gleefully mistaken for smut (*AC*, 50, 145). Continuing, after 'Madoc', to winkle the semen out of semantics, the text takes perverse delight in innuendo and the latent ubiquity of sex in its language.

Charged with keeping any hint of promiscuity in check, the mother in 'Yarrow' is a censorious figure who piously polices misbehaviour (and, it seems here, language itself):

> Mother o' mine. Mother o' mine. That silver-haired mother o' mine.
> With what conviction did she hold
> that a single lapse—from *lapsus*, a slip

or stumble—would have a body cast
into the outer dark.
(*AC*, 89)

John Kerrigan calls this an 'archly laboured translation … calculated to underline "slip",' which he associates with 'the slip and slop of language' in Muldoon's *To Ireland, I*.[36] But it also underlines '*lapsus*', as in the *lapsus linguae* and *lapsus calami* in Freud's *Everyday Life* – slips in speech and in writing which the child lives in fear of, and which this schoolmasterly definition of 'lapse' is guarding against. The mother's brand of Catholicism is singularly unforgiving, where a single slip amounts to a mortal transgression, and punishment for the lapsed means eternal damnation. If Freudian slips (as well as Joycean ones) are lurking behind this *lapsus*, so too is the sting of his mother's Latinate Catholic tongue.

The mother's excessively punitive influence seems to fuel the poem's obsession with mistakes, her repressive Catholic attitudes inadvertently encouraging the speaker's 'baroque sexual adventures with "S—", decked out with whips and ski-hoods', as John Redmond puts it.[37] Indeed, the real lapse that concerns his mother is a sexual one, epitomised here by Charles Stewart Parnell (as it was in the dinnertime disagreement of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist*):

Since every woman was at heart a rake
and the purest heart itself marred by some base alloy
and whosoever looketh on a woman to lust

after her would go the way of Charles Stewart Parnell,
'*Ná bac*,' she would intone,
'*ná bac leis an duilleog*

rua ar an craoibhín
aoibhinn álainn óg,' and, rummaging in her purse,
'For Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands.'
(*AC*, 90)

[36] Kerrigan, 'Muldoon's Transits', 136; Paul Muldoon, *To Ireland, I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 107.
[37] John Redmond, 'Indicting the Exquisite', review of *The Annals of Chile* by Paul Muldoon, *Thumbscrew* 1 (1994-5), 73.

'Don't be bothered with the red leaf on the beautiful little branch,' his mother instructs in an Irish that draws the poem's wide horticultural vocabulary into a warning against masturbation.[38] Everything seems to stem from these youthful moments of erotic desire and its maternal correction, with the speaker in 'Yarrow' – as in 'Milkweed and Monarch' – imagining outlets for his simmering libidinous appetites. Even the mother 'rummaging in her purse' becomes an irrepressibly stimulating phrase which slips out here in the context of correcting 'idle hands'.

Kendall observes of 'Yarrow' that 'the first "lapse" is caused by sexual desire',[39] just as it was in Joyce's *Portrait* (and in the 'Self-Portrait' of Jorie Graham's we glanced at earlier). After the edict against masturbation comes the primal scene of the boy's biggest mistake, the purchase of yarrow instead of *marrow* seeds which he barely remembers ('I guess') but remains haunted by:

> our own *Defensor Fidei* is somewhat reminiscent of Olyve Oyl
> as she continues to reel
>
> off in her own loopy version of R.P.
> 'parsnips', 'swedes', and, I guess, 'vegetable marrow';
> hers is a sensibility so rare
>
> that I'll first know Apuleius
> as the author of *The Golden Beam*;
> 'It should be *Fidei Defensor*, by the way, not *Defensor Fidei*.'
> (*AC*, 95)

Tripping over this 'loopy' pronunciation calls to mind another verbal infidelity, as the mother continues in her role as Defender of the Faith ('*Fidei Defensor*') by bowdlerising Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* as '*The Golden Beam*'. While that Ass is tucked out of sight here, the mother's substitute-word does not fully efface it, since 'beam' in the *OED* also gives us 'the (width of the) hips or buttocks'. Much rests, though, on how we read that final line, where Latin rather than Irish is the language of correction, and the mistaken '*Defensor Fidei*' is restored by an unidentified voice to '*Fidei Defensor*'. If this is the mother's voice correcting his Latin, rather than the poet correcting *hers*, it offers a glimpse of how the poem not only imagines and records past

[38] See Matthew Campbell, 'Muldoon's Corrective Hand', unpublished paper delivered at the conference 'Paul Muldoon and Postmodern Poetry', School of English, University of Leeds (15-16 Sep. 2005), 10.
[39] Kendall, *Paul Muldoon*, 233.

examples of correction, but also *internalises* the corrective hand of his mother (and that of the Catholic Church) as part of the process of writing.

The question of Fidelity is also raised by the correction: of the mother, who demonstrates how a Defender of the Faith can act unfaithfully, censoring the written word as she sees fit; but also of the poet, who may be inventing his own mistakes in order to correct them. Another such mistake is placed in the mouth of 'S—', the mother's godless double, when she 'begs me to, like, rim | her for Land's sakes; instead of "Lord", she says "Land"' (85). Slipping in and out of the Nationalist Imperative, 'S—' seems to associate sexual liberation from Catholic pieties with Ireland's freedom from British rule. Indeed, it was Pope Leo X who conferred the title of *Fidei Defensor* on Henry VIII in 1521, so that the Catholic mother is identified with the English monarchy as well as the Roman papacy. (For Brigid Regan, perhaps, read *Britanniarum Regina*.) 'F.D.' or 'Fid. Def.' is still engraved on British coins to this day; and by bestowing the royal style on his mother beyond the grave, the poem suggests that her corrections remain the official unit of currency in Muldoon's economy of error.

Renamed '*Fidei Defensor*' under the patronym of the Holy Father, the mother in 'Yarrow' represents a forbidding combination of Catholic and parental authority. In Lacan's 1963 seminar on 'The Names of the Father', the patronym is said to confer identity on the subject: 'it names him', Dylan Evans explains in *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, and 'positions him within the symbolic order'. But *le Nom du Père* is also, for Lacan, *le 'Non' du Père* (the 'No' of the Father), or 'the prohibitive role of the father who lays down the incest taboo.'[40] Prohibition and taboo are the subjects of Muldoon's 'Brazil', the second poem in *The Annals of Chile*, where the child seeks to purge himself of the 'shame' of sexual thoughts:

> When my mother snapped open her flimsy parasol
> it was Brazil: if not Brazil,
>
> then Uruguay.
> One nipple darkening her smock.
>
> My shame-faced *Tantum Ergo*
> struggling through thurified smoke.
> (*AC*, 6)

[40] Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (Hove: Routledge, 1996), 119.

The parasol's extension in the opening line anticipates a moment of sexual awakening occasioned by the sight of the nipple, which is glimpsed here in Muldoon's performance of the primal scene. Religious self-correction kicks in like a reflex at the first suggestion of erotic desire, with his '*Tantum Ergo*' – from the rites of Benediction – suggesting a higher form of spiritual paternity. The line that follows '*Tantum ergo Sacramentum*' in the Benediction is '*Veneremur cernui*' ('let us bow our heads in veneration'), though of course the child in 'Brazil' bows his head because his mother is washing his hair – rather oddly, it should be noted, 'over the font'. The mother then reinforces the 'No' of sexual prohibition, putting on liturgical airs as she rinses away the shampoo: "'*Champi*…? *Champi*…? *Champi*…?'", she repeats, before 'her triumphant "*ChampiÑON*".' The speaker imagines himself 'hunched over the font' while she wets his head baptismally, as if christening him under the sign of the '*Champiñon*'. A Spanish button mushroom named after the French *Champignon*, the italicised word alludes to Muldoon's father's occupation as a mushroom farmer, as well as the prohibition contained within the name: not only the French Lacanian '*NON*' that prevents the Oedipal act, but also the Father's 'Thou Shalt Not' which corrects the sin of desire with strict Catholic observance.

Psychological and religious correction reigns supreme in 'Yarrow', and perhaps because of it, the slip becomes a seditious and invariably seductive prospect. The women of the poem are frequently associated with the slip in their various stages of undress: a girl 'steps from her diaphanous half-slip', and a 'hornless doe' appears to him in a dream 'as a slip | of a girl' who 'offered me her breast' (69, 104).[41] The *lapsus* of the slip seems inseparable from the sexual act, two forms of Catholic transgression from which the mother's corrective hand is never far away. When S— 'reaches for *The Interpretation of Dreams*', Freud's input is hardly required to work out the implications of that dream which, as Kerrigan writes, 'his mother' – or the Church – 'could hardly approve'.[42]

The partly covered breast appears elsewhere in 'Yarrow', replaying the earlier scene from 'Brazil' in which the mother corrects her son's wayward glances. Her '*a Phóil*' directly addresses the young 'Paul' in an Irish which recalls her previous instruction, '*Ná bac leis*,' or 'Don't bother with it,' translated here into mock-Arthurian English:

> This is some goddess of battle, Macha or Badhbh,
> whose '*Ná bac*

[41] This 'hornless doe' may be echoing Wyatt's 'Whoso List to Hunt', a poem about a woman as bridled deer and another Defender of Faith, Henry VIII.
[42] Kerrigan, 'Muldoon's Transits', 137.

leis, a Phóil' translates as 'Take heed, sirrah:

you must refrain
from peeking down my dress, though it's cut so low
you may see my aureoles [areolae].'
(*AC*, 153)

'Aureoles' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is 'a Catholic term' for a 'celestial crown won by a martyr, virgin, or doctor, as victor over the world, the flesh, or the devil', and Muldoon would later correct the term to 'areolae' (as filed under the errors listed in the Author's Note to his *Poems*). These 'areolae' refer, conversely, to 'a coloured circle such as that around the human nipple', bringing us back to the mother's darkened smock. Muldoon comes to see the original 'aureoles' as an error, and yet its image of a golden crown remains a wonderfully fitting bowdlerization of the mother's nipple in a context that pits the son's lusts of the flesh against the mother's puritanical Catholic faith. Against this backdrop of religious and Oedipal correction, tripping over the nipple-word is testament to the libidinous exigency of slips of the tongue, and seems a textbook example – staged or otherwise – of what Freud describes in *Everyday Life* as 'the replacement of an intended remark by its reverse, […] caused by self-criticism and internal resistance to what one is saying'.[43]

'Yarrow' is a highly self-critical text, in many ways a performance of Freud's 'internal resistances' which are motived as much by the repressions of Catholicism as the trauma of loss. Tim Kendall remarks on the poem's 'desperate swervings away from the source of grief',[44] but in another sense the poem is desperately swerving *towards* the source of grief – or at least towards the mother as the source of *grievance*. Unlike 'Incantata', an elegy which addresses his grief for Mary Powers directly, 'Yarrow' turns alternately to and from the pain of loss. The poem suffers from an inability to articulate what's on its mind, and at times seems unable even to remember exactly what has been 'lost':

though it slips, the great cog,
there's something about the quail's 'Wet-my-foot'
and the sink full of hart's-tongue, borage and common kedlock

that I've either forgotten or disavowed;

[43] Freud, *Everyday Life*, 82.
[44] Kendall, *Paul Muldoon*, 226.

it has to do with a trireme, laden with ravensara,
that was lost with all hands between Ireland and Montevideo.
(*AC*, 189)

What's missing or may have been omitted in the poem's Transatlantic exchanges is left uncertain; and as it turns over the same raw material 'again and again' out of an apparent helplessness to do anything else, the text can do little but 'rake | over these misrememberings for some sign' (183). The endless reticulations of 'Yarrow' are based on that void, circling round a slip that has been 'forgotten or disavowed'. In an exploration of childhood, these 'disavowals' and 'misrememberings' are suggestively Freudian compulsions. Indeed, 'disavowal' ('*Verleugnung*') is an important concept in Freud's later texts, which he describes in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* as a 'half-measure', an 'incomplete attempt at detachment from reality' which involves a 'splitting of the ego'.[45] The splitting of selves is an endemic practice in 'Yarrow', where names and identities are divided between the same small cast of actors, and the poet imagines himself as both adult and child, poet and poet-to-be.

Clair Wills is right to state that this childhood poem is not simply 'a therapeutic replaying of a "forgotten" trauma which will help to break its hold'.[46] But that is not to say that the text isn't drawing on psychoanalytic tropes – if not exactly 'replaying', then certainly *playing up* what the poem openly identifies as a repressive Catholic upbringing. While Muldoon generally keeps the Freudian implication at the edge of the frame, in one scene S— seems to be undergoing analysis:

'*Níl aon tinteán*,'
S— was confiding to Livesey and Zorro, the analysts,

'*mar do thinteán féin*'; she'd dreamed that a huge deelawg
or earwig or, as she preferred, a '*perce-*
oreille', had caught her in its pincers near some ash-girt well.
(*AC*, 146)[47]

Adventure characters as 'analysts' investigating an earwig dream frame the poem, or at least this portion of the poem, as a goofy version of the therapeutic hour. The dream sheds new light on

[45] Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 23*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 204.
[46] Clair Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1999), 181.
[47] Her Irish translates: 'There's no place like home.'

the earlier reference to S—reaching for *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and in the hands of this Joycean poet, the 'earwig' itself might suggest the multi-form 'Earwicker' of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. Earwicker's name often puns with 'earwig', and the French translation preferred here ('*perce- | oreille*') also supplies the name of one of Earwicker's substitutes, 'Persse O'Reilley'. These lines in 'Yarrow', rich in Wakean and Freudian suggestion, come from a section of the poem which was silently removed when the text was reprinted in *Poems 1968-1998*. Why this revision was made is not clear; but the omission nevertheless implies a buried narrative of influence, in which Joyce and Freud – two possible touchstones for the poem – are unusually prominent.

Whether courting Joyce and Freud or keeping their writings at bay, 'Yarrow' is a text enriched by slips which appear, as slips do, in defiance of spiritual and maternal authorities, as well as other psychological forms of censorship. The lines of the poem repeat their mistakes in subtly different ways, returning to examine the faultlines along which the form and narrative fall 'wildly out of synch' (*AC*, 170). Just as the italics of *New Weather* gave the entire volume 'the appearance of a monstrous refrain', so 'Yarrow' has adapted that refrain into an aesthetic of continuous slippage, powered by a sestina-like wheel which reprints and misprints itself into a monstrous autobiographical palimpsest.

While the broader consequence of slips in everyday life is often relatively minor, in 'Yarrow' slips take on the utmost importance, 'a single lapse' being enough, as we've seen, to 'have a body cast into the outer dark'. From the mistaken marrow seeds and missing carbon-slip to the final loss of the trireme in Atlantic waters, Muldoon seems preoccupied not only with the 'accident waiting to happen,' as Matthew Campbell says,[48] but with locating the original link in the chain of error. In 'Madoc', it was South's stumble that tripped 'a sensor-tile | that set off the first in a series of alarms | and sent a ripple through Unitel' (*P*, 202), but in 'Yarrow', as in 'Incantata', it is cancer – or as it's described in 'Horse Latitudes', the 'inescapable flaw' (*HL*, 4):

> 'Look on her. Look, her lips.
> Listen to her *râle*
> where ovarian cancer takes her in its strangle-hold.'
> (*AC*, 175)

[48] Campbell, 'Muldoon's Corrective Hand', 10.

This is actually Cordelia's body in *King Lear*, another moment of identity-swapping which remembers Lear's last words: 'Look on her. Look, her lips. | Look there, look there.'[49] On her 'lips' is an anagrammed hint of the 'slip', drawn from the same family of rhyme words set out earlier in the poem. We can see in the drafts collected in the Stuart A. Rose Archive that Muldoon hesitated over these lines, though it's unclear whether the decision to 'cut' – later scribbled out in purple ink (see Fig. 3) – refers to the positions of quotation marks or to the line itself.

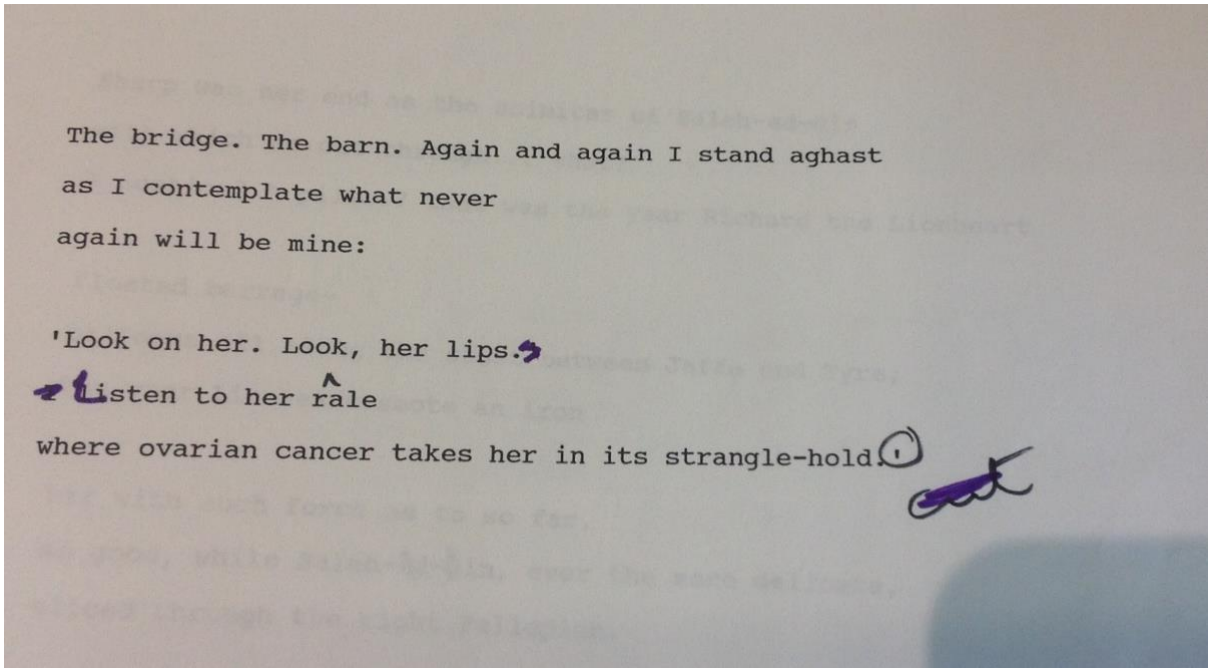

Figure 3. 'Yarrow', Corrected Typescript Fragment, 1992-1993. Box 21, Folder 1.

King Lear is a play famously lacking in maternal influence, and the poem's slip between the dying mother's lips and those of the dead Cordelia looks askance at another of Lear's daughters in Shakespeare's play, Regan, who shares the poet's mother's name. Unlike her sisters Goneril and Cordelia, Regan herself is never named in a poem that frequently alludes to *Lear*. To have mistaken his mother's name for 'Anger' in one poem, only to have it drop out of another in the same collection, seems a pointed omission. It suggests that something else here may be amiss, and so it proves two sections later:

> 'Ovarian,' did I write? Uterine.
> (177)

[49] *King Lear* (The Folio Text), V.3.286-287. In *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works, 2nd Ed.*, eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

This is a startling mistake about the poet's mother's womb, a slip of the pen which takes him back to the site of insemination, and it must be rewritten. That Muldoon has really mistaken the diagnosis of his mother's cancer seems unlikely, but the correction draws our attention to the serial pattern of repressive 'forgettings and disavowals' of which the poem is a masterful performance.

Campbell suggests that the key word in this line is 'write', a *lapsus calami* not a *lapsus linguae*, which issues 'another reminder of the real, another slip of the actual into the frame which is doing its best to repress it in its endlessly associative machine'.[50] But the written slip is equally a reminder of the *artificial*, allowing another correction to slip into the frame which is simulating (and also stimulating) the mistake. What we witness is not necessarily Muldoon correcting himself, but *a trope* of self-correction – a performance of the poet turning on himself. At times like these, it seems that the poem is recording or inventing its own mistakes as a way of reproducing the confessional act, even where there is no sin to confess, and no mother by whom to be absolved. Miswriting and misremembering appear to give Muldoon the imaginative freedom he needs to slip back into some difficult autobiographical material, as well as a model for approaching it from the relative distance of his contemporary American position. 'Yarrow' as such epitomises this process of the slip as a U.S. serial form, which is at once a means of complicating the truths of autobiography, and a terrifically fertile model for writing back from North America to the Northern Ireland of his childhood.

4

For 'mother' read 'other'

Slips become conspicuous as a creative device in Muldoon's U.S. writings, where they are prevalent from *The Annals of Chile* onwards. There, as we have seen, 'Yarrow' seems to take the slip a step further, experimenting with it as a formal model as well as a basic principle of composition. Those experiments bear what are perhaps their richest fruit in *Hay*, the following volume of 1998, in which such poems as 'Errata' demonstrate the slip as a new *genre* in Muldoon's repertoire of poetic forms in the United States.

[50] Campbell, 'Muldoon's Corrective Hand', 10.

The lines of 'Errata' are not genuine misprints or even Freudian slips, but rather a series of mock-errata which demonstrate the possible infidelities of writing, and parody the idea of correction:

> For 'Antrim' read 'Armagh.'
> For 'mother' read 'other.'
> For 'harm' read 'farm.'
> For 'feather' read 'father.'
> (*P*, 445)

Critics tend to read these errata as playfully erratic: a kind of 'lunatic mimesis' in John Kerrigan's terms, 'the proof-reader's correction' as 'post-modern manual' in Peter McDonald's, or a 'blush-making love letter to the current critical establishment' as John Lyon loudly dismissed them in a very superior essay on the 'Vanity of Interpretation'.[51] But in a 2016 interview, Muldoon called for a revision of these assumptions when he identified 'Errata' as 'a kind of autobiographical poem, masquerading as an erratum slip.'[52] Indeed, these opening lines suggest a continuation of the Freudian drama developed in *The Annals*, with 'Armagh' and 'farm' naming the original place, and 'mother' and 'father' the original actors. The poem is also a directory of family names: 'For "Aiofe" read "Aoife"' refers to his daughter Dorothy Aoife, who is first named in 'The Birth', a poem about her birthday in *The Annals*; 'For "Jane" read "Jean"' hints at Yeats's 'Crazy Jane' poems as well as naming Muldoon's wife, the American novelist Jean Korelitz; and 'For "Moncrieff" read "Monteith"' might suggest Scott Moncrieff, the translator of Proust's autobiographical fiction about memory, as well as referring back to Muldoon's first editor at Faber, Charles Monteith (to whom 'Burma' in *Hay* is dedicated). Almost all the corrected words in the poem also appear elsewhere in Muldoon's work, implying the existence of an autobiographical text that the poem is editing. Perhaps this latent text is an invisible or unspoken Annals of Muldoon, encoded along the fault-lines of his previous and present collections – just as *To Ireland, I* includes running allusions to *Immram Curaig Maíle Dúin*, a little 'crypto-current' of a similar kind.

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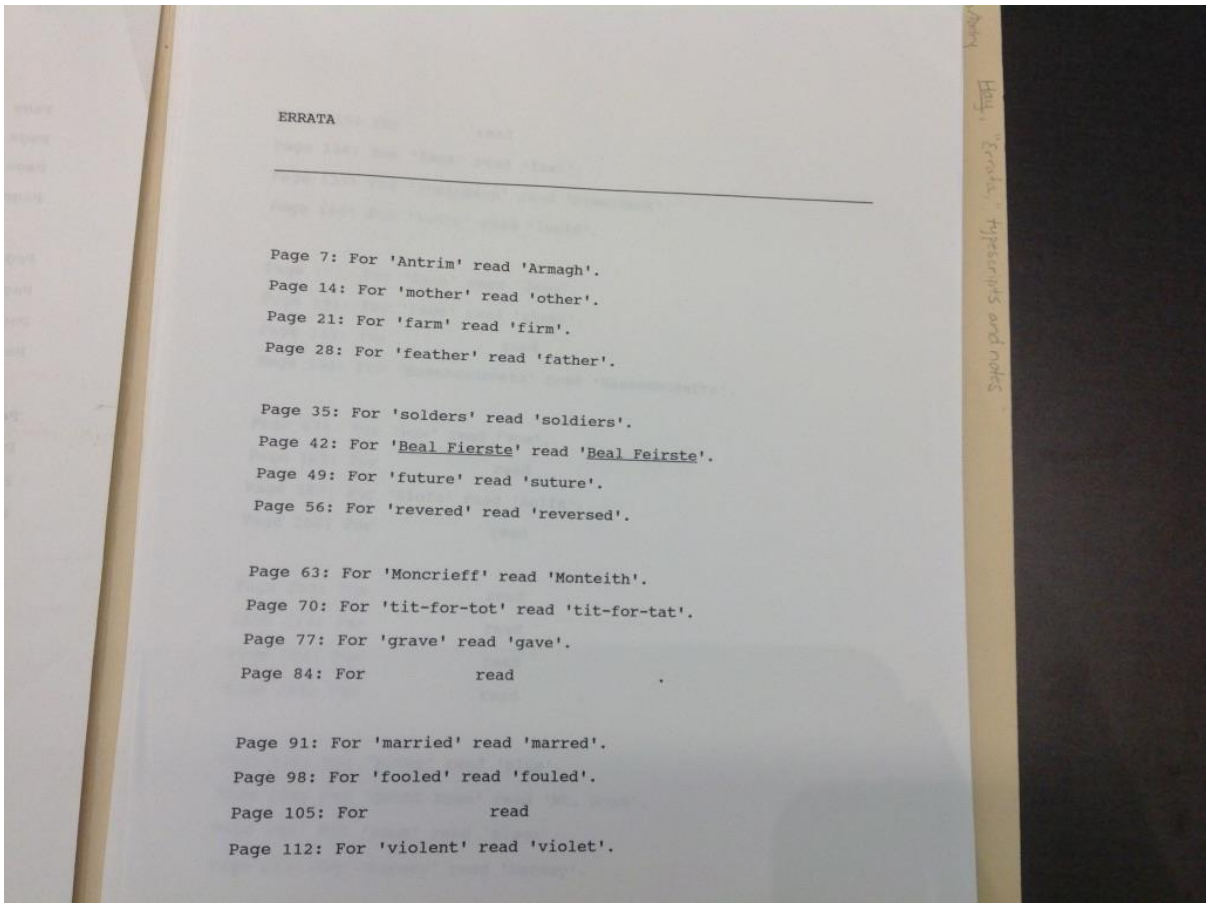
[51] Kerrigan, 'Muldoon's Transits', *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, 141; Peter McDonald, 'The Poet at Play', *The Irish Times*, 24 Oct. 1998, last accessed 23 Oct. 2017 at https://www.irishtimes.com/news/the-poet-at-play-1.207246; John Lyon, '"All that": Paul Muldoon and the Vanity of Interpretation', in *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, 122.

[52] Lance Rutkin, 'An Interview with Paul Muldoon', *American Poetry Review* 46.3 (2017), last accessed 23 Oct. 2017 at http://aprweb.org/poems/an-interview-with-lance-rutkin.

The implication of this editing process is clearest in early drafts of the poem, where each erratum is accompanied by a page number down the left-hand margin (see Fig. 4).



ERRATA

Page 7: For 'Antrim' read 'Armagh'.
Page 14: For 'mother' read 'other'.
Page 21: For 'farm' read 'firm'.
Page 28: For 'feather' read 'father'.

Page 35: For 'solders' read 'soldiers'.
Page 42: For 'Beal Fierste' read 'Beal Feirste'.
Page 49: For 'future' read 'suture'.
Page 56: For 'revered' read 'reversed'.

Page 63: For 'Moncrieff' read 'Monteith'.
Page 70: For 'tit-for-tot' read 'tit-for-tat'.
Page 77: For 'grave' read 'gave'.
Page 84: For read .

Page 91: For 'married' read 'marred'.
Page 98: For 'fooled' read 'fouled'.
Page 105: For read
Page 112: For 'violent' read 'violet'.

Figure 4. 'Errata', Typescript. Box 66, Folder 20.

As we see from these gaps in the manuscript, Muldoon is allowing the rhymes of the erratum slip to shape the text of the poem, plucking out words or pairs of words that feature elsewhere in his work. On 'Page 70', for example, 'tit-for-tat' is lifted directly from 'Sleeve Notes' (*P*, 413) –

> the *reductio ad absurdum*
> of the *quid pro quo* or 'tit for tat'
> killing

– and inspires the spooneristic 'tit-for-tot' in 'Errata', where the play on the young 'tot' and nourishing 'tit' returns us to the child's nipple fantasies in 'Yarrow' and 'Brazil'. As in those lines from 'Sleeve Notes', though, 'tit for tat' alludes to the reprisals of sectarian violence, which are reprised here in other allusive corrections: 'soldiers' for 'solders', 'suture' for 'future', 'violent' for 'violet'. Presumably drafted around the time of the Good Friday Agreement, which was

signed in the same year *Hay* was published, this muddle of military violence seems to be worrying away at the wounds of the 'Troubles'. And yet the political or paramilitary theme is far less explicit in the final version of the text, where none of these quoted corrections appear. Instead Muldoon compresses these concerns with exquisite economy into a single allusion to Northern Ireland's sectarian divisions, covering a great deal of ground in one suggestive erratum: 'For "religion" read "region".'

Although many of these hypothetical errata were cut before the poem reached print, one is worth lingering on for a moment. 'For "violent" read "violet"' is a suggestively Freudian correction, recalling a passage about 'violets' from *The Interpretation of Dreams* which, as noted in the previous chapter, Muldoon quotes at length a few years later in *The End of the Poem* (2006). This is an excerpt from the longer passage quoted in that lecture:

> The dream had made use of the great chance similarity between the words '*violet*' and '*violate*' —the difference in their pronunciation lies merely in the different stress upon their final syllables—in order to express 'in the language of flowers' the dreamer's thoughts on the violence of defloration.[53]

It's plausible that the botanical substitution of 'violets' for 'violence' in the Muldoon manuscript was a Freudian interpolation – alluding to 'the "verbal bridges" crossed by the paths leading to the unconscious', as Freud describes (and Muldoon repeats) later in the same paragraph of his Dream book. Editing this erratum out of the final copy was perhaps Muldoon's way of swerving Freud (*pace* Bloom) and of avoiding the over-determination of his theme, as when cutting the 'analysts' from 'Yarrow'.

The page numbers running down the left-hand margin were also edited out – though this early manuscript may suggest that the original idea was to produce a properly self-editing text, having the errata match up with the relevant pages in *Hay*. While this idea is less obviously formulated in the final poem than in these earlier drafts, 'Errata' nevertheless raises the question of a pre-existing text that the poem is reading itself against. There is a sense that Muldoon is 'trying', as Tom Raworth tries in the same poem quoted earlier, 'to write down a book he wrote years ago in his head' ('South America').[54] By directing the reader elsewhere, however mischievously or unfaithfully, 'Errata' suggests the possibility of a serial order of the slip beyond

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[53] *EP*, 280. See also Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol 5: The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), 375.
[54] Raworth, *Collected Poems*, 60.

the individual poem or volume. Read in this way, the errata themselves become less significant than what they seem to imply – namely, an authorial intra-textuality cutting across the oeuvre, inserting the single lyric into a serial continuum on a larger scale, with a chronological order.

In *Joyces Mistakes*, Conley proposes that, in Joyce's eyes, 'Correction is only a makeshift remedy against the resilient and ever-mutating virus that is language'.[55] By this token, the ever-mutating 'Yarrow' is pure virus, and 'Errata' can be read as a comparably serial form of lexical mutation, in which correction becomes a *catalyst* for slips inside and outside the poem. The corrections of 'Errata' are by this measure counter-corrective substitutions, redoubling the significance of the error rather than cancelling it out. The poem is in this sense a parody of the foreclosure of correction, in which Muldoon plays up the plasticity of the slip – equivocation becoming a form of false equivalence.

Like 'Yarrow', 'Errata' fully appreciates the fertility of mistakes, and the excitable libidinous propensity of words to reproduce themselves as well as get things wrong. Some are unremarkable errors in typing ('For "pharoah" read "pharaoh"'), but others turn self-reflexively on ideas of misspeaking ('For "spike" read "spoke"') and mishearing ('For "hearse" read "hears"'). Unlike the slips of 'Yarrow', though, these errata do not suggest a repressive force at work; on the contrary, they represent an exaggerated form of permissiveness. Poetry is first an affair of language, and 'Errata' embraces its infidelities, which are also the author's. This is in line with the emphasis on infidelity in *The End of the Poem*, discussed in the previous chapter; and as Wills observes of *Hay*, 'there is surely a suggestion that sexual promiscuity has its verbal parallel in catechresis, the wilful misuse of words'.[56] Muldoon's misuse of words here is wilful indeed, exaggerating the deviousness of the writer as much as the deviancy of language. While critics like McDonald account for these 'Errata' in theoretical terms, the poem in fact represents a stylistic and autobiographical self-examination, in a text which says more about Muldoon's own writing than about writing in the shadow of poststructuralism.

Extending the self-referential intertextualism of the poem, in another early draft we find 'For "*naohmog*" read "*naomhog*"': this is the Irish word for 'Curragh', and presumably alludes to *The Voyage of Muldoon's Curragh* so important to Muldoon's *To Ireland, I*, as discussed in the previous chapter. (See line three in Fig. 5.)

[55] Conley, *Joyces Mistakes*, 38.
[56] Clair Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon*, 195.

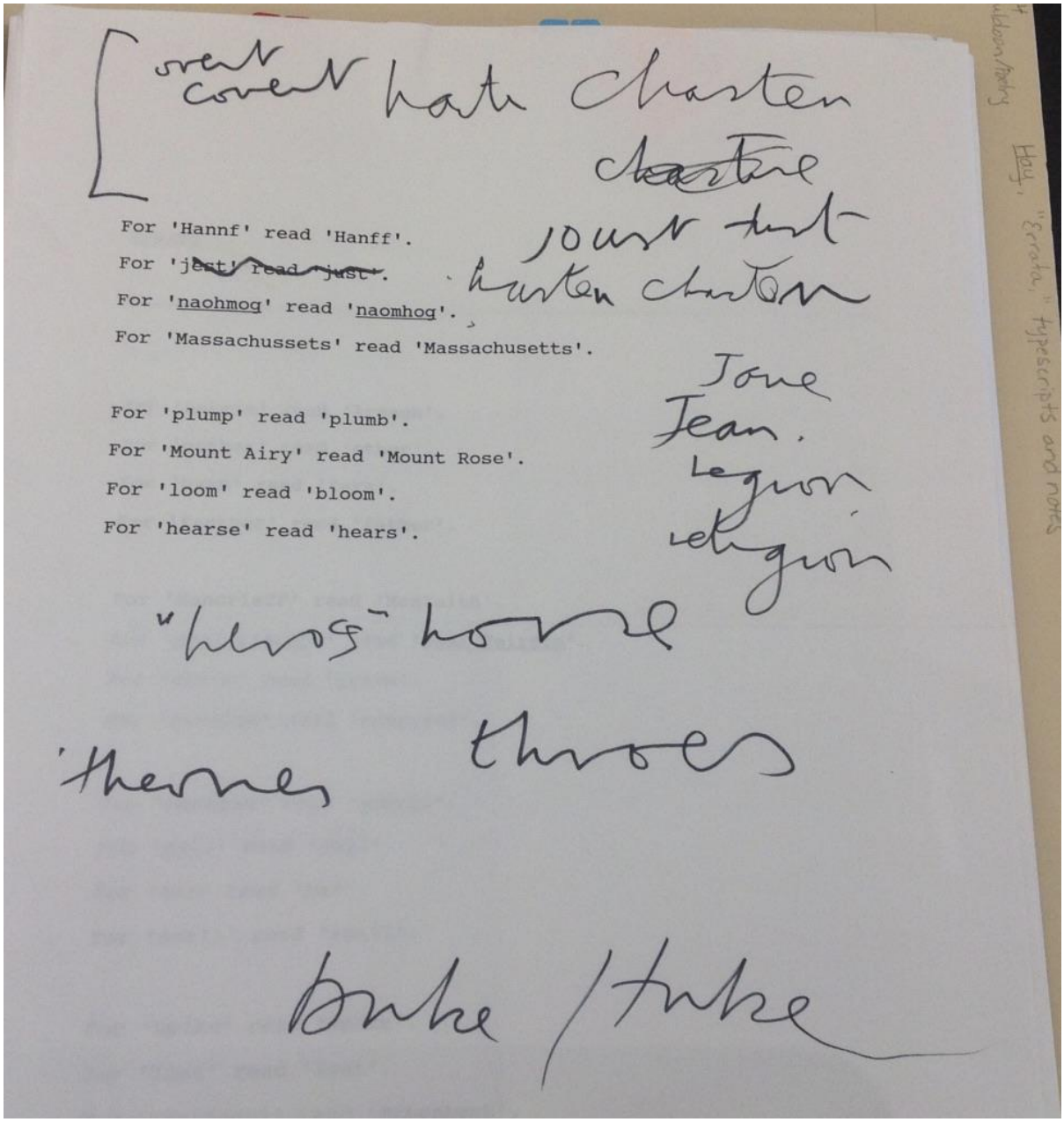


Figure 5. 'Errata', Typescript and Notes. Box 66, Folder 20.

This manuscript provides a fascinating picture of the text generating itself, and of lines not written. Interesting slips like 'overt' for 'covert' (the given and the hidden), and 'heroes' for 'horse' (bringing the father into play), are among the handwritten word-pairs left out of the final text.[57] Of the typewritten lines, only two end up in the published poem, and both are suggestively Joycean. The first, 'For "plump" read "plumb",' echoes 'Stately, plump Buck Mulligan' in the opening line of *Ulysses*; and the second, 'For "loom" read "bloom",' seems a further cultivation

[57] From top to bottom, these read: 'overt covert', 'hate chasten [~~chastise~~]', 'joust thrust[?]', 'hasten chasten', 'heroes horse', 'Jane Jean', 'region religion', 'theories throes', and 'bribe tribe'. Of these, only Jane/Jean and region/religion make the final cut.

of Joyce, coming out of the earlier 'farm' – and the 'pink-and-cream blooms' of 'Yarrow' – in a serial proliferation of Muldoon's botanical slips.

'Errata' puts peculiar pressure on the individual word, teasing out its potential to go in multiple directions. Many of these words and their substitutes are playfully open, but the poem is also a serious celebration of the *mobility* of the slip. As with the confusions of Portland (Maine) and Portland (Oregon) in 'Milkweed and Monarch', 'Errata' delights in the apparently limitless ways the poet can find of slipping between places ('For "Antrim" read "Armagh"'), and, in 'The Little Black Book', of slipping between people: 'I fluttered, like an erratum slip, between her legs' (*P*, 445). That suggestive 'erratum slip' is also punning on the French undergarment, '*un slip*,' as Muldoon continues to flutter between Error and Eros. The play of trips and slips brings us back to 'Errata', where 'For "rod" read "road"' confuses the open road with the questionable rod.[58] In this 'rod' not taken, the disciplinary switch of his Irish Catholic youth (recorded in 'Anseo') is replaced by questions of travel. Other routes in the poem are no less suggestively autobiographical. 'For "Rosemont" read "Mount Rose"' names places in the Princeton environs near Muldoon's home in Hopewell, New Jersey, and 'Mount Airy' in an earlier draft also names a New Jersey town, as well as cities in North Carolina and Maryland. Mixing up places is a reminder of how place-names reproduce themselves, especially across the Atlantic stretch – like the 'Mt. Rose' in Nevada, or indeed the 'Montrose' in Dublin, which is home to RTÉ.

The mistakes of 'Errata' then are partly about the poet's recent history of relocation, exploring new locales as well as more familiar ones. Most notable in this collection are voyages to the Far East: 'The Bangle (Slight Return)' imagines his father's passage to Australia, and long poems like 'The Mudroom' and 'The Long Finish' are studded with allusions to Japanese Noh ('*Matsukaze* … by Zeami') and other souvenirs from the poet's 1994 trip to Japan, like 'the little *shuinshu* covered with black brocade | I bought for two zuzim our last day in Kyoto' (P, 399, 440). Japan is the site of such poems as 'The Humors of Hakone' in *Maggot* (2010), and it was presumably this 1994 trip which inspired a 90-episode series of 'Hopewell Haiku' in *Hay*. Muldoon's long serial poems are typically multi-located, transnational forms, though Ireland and America remain the dominant poles between which *Hay* habitually slips. This is exemplified

[58] It's worth noting that the words 'rod' and 'road' appear as a rhyme pair in the earlier poem 'César Vallejo: *Testimony*' (*The Annals of Chile*), Muldoon's translation of Vallejo's poem about his own persecution and imminent death in Paris: 'they hit him hard with a rod' 'by the aforementioned roads' (*P*, 344).

in the riverine exchanges of 'Sleeve Notes', in which Irish waterways are traded for those of the American East:

> BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *The River*
>
> So it was I gave up the Oona for the Susquehanna,
> the Shannon for the Shenandoah.
> (*P*, 414)

The volume's title, *Hay*, is also the name of a river in New South Wales, Australia, while the Susquehanna points to other intertextual pairings, recalling 'Madoc' and the Pantisocratic labours of Coleridge and Southey who set down there by the American township of Ulster. But when 'the [River] Hay's meandering comes to mean | nothing on the border of Queensland and the Northern Territory' towards the end of 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', the precariousness of geographical markers is thrown into relief (*P*, 467). Ostensibly we are deep in Australian territory, but as John Kerrigan suggests, Queensland might also refer to the old Queen's County in Ireland (as the U.S. Ulster refers to its Irish namesake), with the Hay River becoming 'a kind of Antipodean River Moy' in a slippery transplantation of Irish border lines.[59]

In the collection's Transatlantic orbit, 'such multiplication of names and places, mistaking of names, and shifting between alternative names and places are', as Hugh Haughton writes, 'typical of Muldoon's play with the name across his work'.[60] While this is indeed a career-long phenomenon, Muldoon's slips between Irish and American places seem to feature most prominently in his longer poetic series. In *Maggot*, for example, 'Plan B' shows a tortured prisoner 'spilling his guts | about how his grandfather had somehow fetched up in Cork | straight from the Vilna ghetto, | having misheard, it seems, "Cork" for "New York"' (*M*, 8). Mishearing 'Cork' for 'New York' is a reminder of the potential mobility of the slip in Muldoon's transnational imagination, with the two port cities representing a model of Transatlantic exchange which, after 'Yarrow', has become its own category of the slip in Muldoon's writing.

As a volume and a river, *Hay* is a compendium of erroneous sources. The title of its opening poem, 'The Mudroom', is the first solecism; originally published as 'The Mud Room', the words were later pushed together as 'The Mudroom', as if to emphasise the spooneristic 'Muldoon' (another revision not listed in the Author's Note to *Poems: 1968-1998*). In 'Sleeve

[59] Kerrigan, 'Muldoon's Transits', *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, 144.
[60] Hugh Haughton, 'Muldoon and The Game of the Name', unpublished paper delivered at IASIL Conference, 'Change', at University College Cork (Jul. 2016), 3.

Notes', the Muldoon name is muddled once more as a cameraman addresses him as the prestigious-sounding 'Mr. DeMilledoon' (*P*, 414). Then we get the French waiter mispronouncing his name in 'The Bangle (Slight Return)': 'Mul-do-on, *non*? *Avec trois syllabes*?' (*P*, 468). As these eponymous slips suggest, Muldoon is especially drawn to *self-referential* forms of misnaming. 'Third Epistle to Timothy' is another authorial misnomer: the New Testament includes a First and Second Epistle to Timothy, but no Third, and the poem deliberately mistakes the biblical Timothy for 'timothy grass'. The epigraph to this poem is taken from Benjamin Franklin's 1747 letter to Jared Eliot, author of *Essays on Field Husbandry*: 'You made some mistake when you intended to favor me with some of the new valuable grass seed,' he tells Eliot, 'for what you gave me … proves mere timothy.' (451) Franklin's dilemma strikes an obvious chord with the child's slip in 'Yarrow', no doubt a comparison Muldoon expects us to make in this poem about his father's childhood on a farm.

As with the 'crypto-currents' discussed in the previous chapter and frequently called upon in Muldoon's lectures, the slips in these poems represent the intertexts or 'verbal bridges' to which his poetic writings are also highly attuned. In *To Ireland, I* (2000), Muldoon alights on a poem about Ian Paisley by Belfast writer W. R. Rodgers, suggestively titled 'Home Thoughts From Abroad'. In this poem, which equates Paisley with 'the old giants of Ireland', Muldoon picks up on the botanically inspired slip of the pen that gives away Rodgers's position: 'I place | This bunch of beget-me-nots on his grave.' Noting how the graveside slip on 'forget-me-not' provides 'a "nice derangement of epitaphs", as Sheridan's Mrs Malaprop might have put it,' Muldoon's lecture gives a roundabout reflection on his own churchyard malapropism in 'Milkweed and Monarch', as well as his funereal error in 'Errata': 'For "brave" read "grave"' (*TI*, 103; *P*, 445). These seem part of a family of autobiographical mistakes rooted in the herbal and the parental, weaving through Muldoon's Northern Irish past as well as his present and future writings in America. Edna Longley has observed how 'autobiography has become a more prominent or explicit connective tissue in the "American" Muldoon,'[61] and an oblique performance of autobiography seems to be one of the things that Muldoon's slips are showing.

This serially self-elaborating, self-connecting, intra-textual form generates a portrait of the artist, playing along his fault-lines, making hay with fine-spun associations that slip over the border of the individual poem. The word 'errata' is exemplary here: an erratum is 'an error in writing or printing,' as the *OED* explains, while *corrigenda* is the proper term for 'errors or faults in a printed book, etc., of which the corrections are given'. Strictly speaking then, 'Errata' should

[61] Edna Longley, *Poetry and Posterity* (Highgreen: Bloodaxe Books, 2000), 255.

be titled 'Corrigenda'; but Muldoon rarely speaks strictly, and here he withholds the mistake until the end of the volume when it is finally disclosed by another: 'For "errata", Virgil smiled, 'read "corrigenda"' (*P*, 475). Rather than removing it from the original poem, Muldoon not only leaves the wrong title in place but records the erratum *intertextually*, highlighting the persistently self-referential nature of slips and corrections across his work. 'Errata', too, points up this intertextual imperative, slipping in and out of other Muldoon poems and alluding to a serial form of correction, as well as error, in his writing. Given that even his titles partake in these technical mistakes, we might ask, with John Kerrigan, is there no end of slippage?[62] The circulations of self-quotation and redoublings of the slip seem perpetually in motion in Muldoon's U.S. writings. Not only that, but these writings seem to relish the idea of correcting when it seems *incorrect* to do so, as if correction itself might become a new form of mistake. Fidelity and infidelity – or purity and impurity – are once more at the heart of the issue, as Muldoon invites us to question how far the slip can take us, and how much faith we can place in correction.

5

'*Syllabus of Errors*'

In the title poem of *Horse Latitudes* (2006), another long sequence, the American Carlotta has a habit of misplacing prepositions:

> 'Why,' Carlotta wondered, 'the House of *Tar*?
> Might it have to do with the gross
> imports of crude oil Bush will come clean on
> only when the Tigris comes clean?
> (*HL*, 9)

This is from the sonnet 'Blackwater Fort', site of the 1598 Battle of the Yellow Ford fought in Country Armagh during the Nine Years War. The curious 'House of *Tar*' may have been suggested by the Gausoline cigarettes smoked by the cancer-stricken Carlotta – though for 'Gausoline' read 'gasoline', and the 'gross imports of crude oil' for which George Bush was accused of leading U.S. forces into Iraq. Like the repeated calls for Bush to 'come clean', those

[62] 'Is there no end to error?' he asks (with some frustration) of Muldoon's 'Errata'. In Kerrigan, 'Muddling Through after *Madoc*', 138.

'*gross* imports' and '*crude* oil' seem to be aligning impure motives with improper language, as well as the line of impure thoughts – both sexual and political – that threads its way through the sequence. Four sonnets later, in 'Badli-Ke-Serai', Carlotta's misgivings about Bush are brushed off by the pedantic grandfather who 'smooth[s] over Carlotta's grammar: | "*On which… on which* Bush will come clean.'" (*HL*, 15; original emphasis) Correcting her grammar rather than answering her question, the grandfather suspiciously nullifies Carlotta's concerns about the inflammable motives behind America's hawkishness in the Middle East.

Campbell has observed how the grandfather represents here, as the mother represents elsewhere in Muldoon's work, 'another [in a] long line of familial oppressors, or at least the casual oppressiveness of familial correction of slips of speech.'[63] In 'Burma' at the very end of the sequence, that casual oppressiveness hardens into an image of callous brutality:

> Her grandfather's job was to cut
> the vocal cords of each pack-mule
> with a single, swift excision,
> a helper standing by to wrench
> the mule's head fiercely to one side and drench
> it with hooch he'd kept since Prohibition.
> 'Why,' Carlotta wondered, 'that fearsome tool?
> Was it for fear the mules might bray
> and give their position away?'
> At which point I see him thumb the shade
> as if he were once more testing a blade
> and hear the two-fold snapping shut
> of his four-fold, brass-edged carpenter's rule:
> 'And give *away* their *position*.'
> (*HL*, 21)

Correcting her mistake – if indeed it is one – becomes an act of linguistic violence, silencing the protests of Carlotta as the brays of the mules were silenced. The position of the word 'position' at the end of the line is now doubly significant: corrected to rhyme with the censoring 'excision' and 'Prohibition' in lines 3 and 6, it also revives a sombre echo of the first line of the sequence, 'I could still hear the musicians' (*HL*, 3). In this solemn harmony of repetition and correction,

[63] Campbell, 'Muldoon's Corrective Hand', 1.

the chain of feminine rhymes (excision | Prohibition | position | musician) is linked by the same syllabic 'Shun' – an abbreviated form of the military call to 'Attention' on which the poem is a stark and virtuosic turn.

A slip of memory is also built into this poem about correction. The name the grandfather forgets in 'Blenheim' is a version of the Iron Maiden, a figure of torture associated, it seems, with the tortured figure of Carlotta:

> he ran his thumb
> along an old venetian blind
> in the hope that something might come to mind,
> that he might yet animadvert
> the maiden name of that Iron Maiden
> on which he was drawing a blank.
> (*HL*, 12)

The name is again on the tip of the tongue in 'Bunker Hill', where the surgeon operating on Carlotta prepares 'to ganch | her like What's-his-face's Daughter' (13). The forgotten name is 'Skeffington's Daughter', also the title of an earlier Muldoon poem where a father leads his young daughter to a backstreet clinic for an illegal abortion procedure (*P*, 29).[64] Questions of transgression and impurity then are again lurking in the shadows. The corrective procedure in that poem puts a premium on concealment – 'She would again be taken | For that clever, | Careful virgin' (*P*, 30) – and like the grandfather's crude mule operation in 'Burma', the father of 'Skeffington's Daughter' is determined not to give away their position.

Forgetting proper names in Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* is bound up with intentional and unintentional meanderings of attention. Of one example involving the Italian painter Signorelli, Freud writes:

> What I wanted to forget was not in fact the name of the painter of the masterpiece at Orvieto, but the other subject, the one I did want to forget, contrived to associate itself with his name, so that […] I unintentionally forgot one idea while I intentionally meant to forget the other.[65]

[64] 'Skeffington' presumably recalls Francis Sheehy Skeffington, killed by the British Army during the Easter Rising in 1916. Given Skeffington's pacifist and feminist sympathies, the name is oddly and ironically chosen for 'Skeffington's Daughter'. My thanks to Stephen Regan for alerting me to this.
[65] Freud, *Everyday Life*, 8.

'My aversion for remembering,' he adds, 'was directed against the content of one idea; my inability to remember emerged in another context.' Whereas in 'Milkweed and Monarch' and 'Yarrow' that aversion for remembering was tied to the poet's mother, in 'Horse Latitudes' it is directed toward Carlotta, whom her grandfather alternately 'attends' to and 'shuns'. Finally, the missing name is recalled:

> Skeffington's Daughter. *Skeffington*.
> Attention. Shun. Attention. Shun. Shun. Shun.
> (*HL*, 17)

In this military contraction of 'Attention!', the repetitions of 'Shun' draw attention to the other sense of the word, as per the *OED*: 'to avoid encountering or exposing oneself to (dangers, conditions)'. The grandfather's military past and ghastly silencing of the mules seem related to these moments of onomastic aversion – to the name of Skeffington at which he first draws a blank, and of course the blanking out of his granddaughter's questions, to which his only answer resides in the tacit silence of his corrections.

So what is really being 'shunned' in the poem? As Muldoon has explained, the poems in this sequence 'have to do with a series of battles (all beginning with the letter "B" as if to suggest a "missing" Baghdad) in which horses or mules played a major role.'[66] As with 'the terms "widdershins" | and "deasil" expunged from the annals of Chile' in 'Brazil', or 'the phantom "a" in Cesarian' from 'Footling' (two poems collected in *The Annals*), this sonnet sequence is based on a meaningful omission (*AC*, 7, 30). A performance of self-censorship which is buoyed, as in 'Yarrow', by the *lapsus* of forgetting, 'Horse Latitudes' is another of Muldoon's oblique sequential narratives of the slip. And like 'Yarrow', it also returns to Ireland from an American position, the missing B also suggestively hovering over Belfast as the battleground closest to home. The difference from Muldoon's earlier poems about mistakes, though, is that here the slip seems politically motivated, and is directed against *corrections* more than errors – or the viciousness potentially present in corrections, military and linguistic.

The politics of error and correction are shifted into the circus ring in 'The Side Project', the concluding long poem of the 2010 volume *Maggot*. It tells the story of a nineteenth-century circus troupe in the heyday of P.T. Barnum, whose 'Greatest Show on Earth' toured America during the Civil War and subsequent period of Reconstruction. The poem refits the 'Players and

[66] Quoted in James Fenton, 'A Poke in the Eye with a Poem', *The Guardian* 21 Oct. 2006, last accessed 23 Oct. 2017 at https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/oct/21/featuresreviews.guardianreview6.

painted stage' of Yeats's 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', as Muldoon – here himself a fifty-nine-year-old public man – considers Yeats's late reflections in relation to his own poetic career. As it did for Yeats, the circus poem marks 'the end of an era' (*M*, 102): in Muldoon's case, the last in a series of nine long poems which uses the same arrangement of rhymes over five consecutive volumes (as I will discuss in Chapter 4). Taking stock at the beginning of the poem, the speaker looks back on a series of extraordinary, gratuitous performances that began in *The Annals*:

> Forty years of Jumbo doing a one-handed handstand while some geek
> simultaneously bites the head off a Wyandotte cock
> and the band plays a Hungarian dance by Brahms
> doesn't mean we're all on the same page.
> (*M*, 93)

As the Barnumite pageantry shows, Yeats's 'Circus' has been replaced by an American one: a high-wire affair spiced with elegiac quips and perversities. In this sense, 'The Side Project' is a fitting showstopper in Muldoon's repertoire of extended poetic forms of the slip, as well as a commentary on the poetic showmanship of his American phase.

As in the earlier 'Madoc', the poem's historically rooted narratives dovetail with more fabulous imaginings, turning here on the speaker's account of a love affair between himself, Frog Boy, and a woman named Human Chimera. One of these factual narratives is General William Sherman's victory at the Battle of Atlanta, and his subsequent March to the Sea during the American Civil War; another involves the longest serving pope, Pius IX, whose 1864 *Syllabus Errorum* 'appeared', as Sarah Bennett notes, 'in the same year as the Battle of Atlanta'.[67] The poem hinges on the events of that year, 1864, which was also when the First Vatican Council met to define the doctrine of Papal Infallibility (though the notion had existed long before). This *Syllabus of Errors* seems a crucial new link in the Muldoonian chain of error, trailing all the way back to the Catholic pontifications of *The Annals of Chile*, and the mother in 'Yarrow' as *Fidei Defensor*. The *Syllabus* was a lengthy catalogue condemning the 'principal errors of our times', in which the final article denounced the view that 'The Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization.' With this, as Thomas Bokenkotter writes in his *Concise History of the Catholic Church*, 'the *Syllabus of Errors* anathematized the ideology of modern secular liberalism,' and set the Church against the

[67] Sarah Bennett, 'Corrupt to Maggots' (2011), in *Tower Poetry Reviews 2004-2014*, ed. Peter McDonald (Oxford: Tower Poetry, 2015), 183-4.

prevailing political and theological attitudes of the modern Western world.[68] In offering the possibility 'to remake ourselves', 'The Side Project' issues a political corrective to the conservatism of Pius IX and his *Syllabus of Errors*, a document which the poem clearly reads as a dangerous miscalculation (*M*, 103).

The ring-leaders of the poem are frequently subject to their own forms of miscalculation, their names mistaken or casually exchanged. 'Pius IX', for example, 'oversee[s] the Bearded Lady being sawn in half' at the 1846 Papal Conclave; Sherman is seen setting off 'from Atlanta for Savannah with his big caravan | of big cats' on his 1864 march; and the circus impresario himself is identified as 'Barnum IX', 'heaping ignominy | upon ignominy', having just bought off Judas Iscariot 'for his part in the papal masquerade' (98, 99, 100, 97). These are very public displays, less a Syllabus than a parading Circus of Errors. If the juggling of names and roles is part of the circus act, there are also serious national and international injustices at play: Barnum's exploitation of animals and American public taste, Sherman's total war, and Pius IX's alleged endorsement of the Confederacy are mourned and judged as part of the poem's political recriminations. There is a suggestion here, as in 'Horse Latitudes', that Muldoon's devotion to errata represents an alternative to Papal Infallibility and military authority – a suggestion which may have roots in Muldoon's Northern Irish Catholic childhood, though now turning out on a more public, and distinctly American, stage.

6

For 'Freud' read 'feud'

Muldoon's poetic syllabus of errors – or annals perhaps – continues into his most recent collection, *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* (2015). One slip of the tongue appears near the beginning of the first poem, 'Cuthbert and the Otters', written in memory of Seamus Heaney: 'Did I say "calamine"? | I meant "chamomile."' (*OT*, 5) Freud's word for the slip of the pen is the 'lapsus calami', though this particular 'lapsus *calamine*' may in fact be a red herring. 'Calamine' appears nowhere else in the poem or volume, and has featured only once elsewhere in Muldoon's writing (where it was again hesitated over: 'our cargo of calomel (or calamine)' in 'Yarrow' (*P*, 372)). If the suggestion here is that Muldoon's corrective hand has slipped into autocorrect, mistakenly correcting where it is incorrect to correct, it also implies his return to a

[68] Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church, Rev. Ed.* (London: Image Books, 2005), 2.

botanical model of the slip – 'chamomile' being a herbal cure extracted from the daisy-like flower of that name. 'Cuthbert and the Otters' is a poem brimming with remedies from 'the earth's old ointment box', with Muldoon apparently searching through his 'vast herbarium' – just as he did in 'Incantata' two decades before – for 'the leaf that had it within it … to anoint and anneal' (*OT*, 8; *P*, 341). The urge to correct his herbal slip of the pen, whether real or imagined, seems related to these remedial aspirations of elegy – and perhaps to the botanical enchantments of 'A Herbal' in Heaney's final self-elegising volume, *Human Chain* (2010).

The phantom slip of 'chamomile' resurfaces later in the volume, in a poem with an appropriately corrective title, 'Some Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them': 'Bear in mind that "calomel" looks a lot like "chamomile" | to the guy trying to compile | a camping checklist' (69). This is a poem 'for Asher', Muldoon's son; and given how often Muldoon's memory of mistakes is tied to family members – his mother especially, who is the target of his not-altogether-mistaken 'Anger' in 'Milkweed and Monarch', and 'They That Wash on Thursday' in *Hay* – the impulse to correct may be coming full circle here for the poet as parent.

Parenthood is a continuing theme in 'Noah & Sons', a title which sounds more like the name of a family business (carpenters perhaps). In the poem's middle section, Muldoon doubles back to an aesthetics of error first explored in 'Errata':

> For 'missile' read 'Missal.'
> For 'darnel' read 'thistle.'
> For 'skewered' read 'skewed.'
> For 'hart' read 'chart.'
> For 'Freud' read 'feud.'
> For 'dirt' read 'dart.'
> (*OT*, 92)

This is a sabre-rattling list of slips, with 'missile', 'thistle', 'skewered', 'feud', and 'dart' – like the 'daggers drawn' at the end of the poem (93) – painting with violent strokes on the poem's mock-biblical canvas. That 'missile', mistaken for the Catholic mass book or 'Missal', plays into Muldoon's continued association of military action with the Catholic Church – 'Christ's checking us out from his observation post,' he reflects in another poem (*OT*, 28) – and looks ahead to such potentially volatile slips as 'warship' for 'worship' in the volume's final poem, 'Dirty Data' (116). But the Book of Genesis is also in the backdrop here, God bringing the flood

to correct the errors of a world deemed 'corrupt' and 'filled with violence'.[69] Error comes back here as founding narrative, raising questions about the genealogy of sins and mistakes in the wider family context of Muldoon's 'Errata'. 'For "shame" read "Shem"' names the virtuous eldest son of Noah, for instance; but it also names 'Shem the Penman', HCE's sinful son in *Finnegans Wake*, as if the poem were deliberately trailing its Joycean coattails as 'Errata' did with 'bloom'.

The inclusion of Freud's name is also striking in the poem's biblical taxonomy, and its allotted Muldoonian slip even more so: 'For "Freud" read "feud".' Recalling the parental feud by the graveside in 'Milkweed and Monarch', 'Noah & Sons' opens 'at the entrance to the graveyard' where the speaker and an unnamed companion are 'fleeing a primal scene | to which we're bound to repair | as long as yellow + blue = green' (91). The 'primal scene' is a concept that originated with Freud as part of the Oedipal model; and by invoking it here as a scene 'to which we're bound to repair', Muldoon is openly thematising his return to the template of his parents (who seem to mark the primal grievance). The title of the volume itself goes back to his parents in 'Charles Emile Jacque: *Poultry Among Trees*', where it names a practical handbook consulted at home – especially by his 'father', who despite his proficiency with poultry, 'still boned up in full | on "how to remove the merry-thought of a fowl" | from *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing*.' (18)

Pointing to other texts, 'Noah & Sons' represents a way of returning to and re-reading Muldoon, as well as an encore to his earlier 'Errata'. A jarring line at the start of the poem, 'while lovers screamed with tumult harsh,' extends the intertextual game beyond the errata list at the centre, lifted as it is from an obscure poem of Wordsworth's called 'The Russian Fugitive'. Exactly what Wordsworth's ballad is doing here is anyone's guess, though Muldoon's primal scene might resonate with those Wordsworthian lovers, whose 'screaming' could signify pleasure as well as pain. But the allusion itself contains a mistake, the original line of Wordsworth being 'While *plovers* screamed with tumult harsh'.[70] Muldoon's verbal corruptions are now flying beyond the obvious sign-posts of the errata list; and indeed flicking between the two sections either side of that list we find 'pommel' and 'pummeled', 'alder' and 'elder', 'cantle' and 'cattail' swelling the possible cast of slips. The missing 'plovers', from the Latin *pluvia* ('rain'), recall a little two-line poem from *Hay* with which they share a title: 'The plovers come down

[69] Genesis 6:11, King James Version.
[70] William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, Vol 4*, eds. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958 [1947]), 191, l. 267; my emphasis.

hard, then clear again, | for they are the embodiment of rain.' ('Plovers', *P*, 401) Just as these avian plovers have 'embodied' their etymological roots, so 'Noah & Sons' glides back to biblical narratives of correction, as well as the Freudian 'feud' which seems to originate with his parents.

'Recalculating' offers a further turn on correction and revision, plumbing the depths of analogy with an exhaustive formula that owes something to the clipped lines of 'Errata':

> Arthritis is to psoriasis as Portugal is to Brazil.
> Brazil is to wood as war club is to war.
> War is to wealth as performance is to appraisal.

Soon, the poem comes to revise its calculations:

> Wait. Isn't arthritis to psoriasis as Brazil is to Portugal?
> Portugal is to fado as Boaz is to Ruth.
> Ruth is to cornfield as wave is to particle.
> (*OT*, 45)

As the title suggests, things aren't adding up. Much of this gnomic poem is written with a nod to Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', on what is apparently an 'all ye need to know' basis: 'Earth is to all ye know as done is to dusted.' The text's eccentric, sometimes indecipherable churnings in which 'X is to Y as A is to B' expose the limits of systematic writing, and highlight potential glitches in the machine. The play of self-correction has almost ground to a standstill.

Glitches return in the long concluding poem, 'Dirty Data', a title like 'Recalculating' clearly inspired by the slippage and linguistic corruptions of the Internet age. The poem is addressed to Lew Wallace, author of the 1880 novel *Ben Hur: A Tale of the Christ*. Muldoon relocates Wallace's American-written historical Roman tale 'from Judea to an army outpost | near Jonesborough or Cullaville' as if to deliberately fudge the poem's contexts, intercutting the events of Bloody Sunday with those of *Ben Hur* and the book's 1959 film adaptation (*OT*, 103). Like the channel-surfing 'Yarrow', the cinematic variations of 'Dirty Data' also dip into the scenery of epic: the poem opens on 'Slieve Gullion', the mystical mountain in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, on which the Irish hero Cúchulainn slew the hound of Culann and thereby gained his name (99). This is the first of several acts of re-naming in the poem, though more often than not these take the form of unexplained mis-appellations, as when the hero Ben Hur is repeatedly referred to as 'Ben Hourihane', and the antagonist Messala as 'Miss Sally' (100). The 'bracken leaf' of Slieve Gullion – inspiration, we're dubiously informed, for the Roman sword design –

is then curiously exchanged for a species of 'ponderosa pine', a tree native to the western United States. When the 'men from Crossmaglen put whisky in our piñon tea', the confusions and deceptions of Roman, British and American imperialists are revealed as the subject of this text, in which the historical data – like the tea – has been spiked (99).

Muldoon's first poem about Bloody Sunday was the sequence that concluded *New Weather*, 'The Year of the Sloes, for Ishi'. An oblique reflection on the Derry massacre, it was at first glance an elegy for Ishi, the last member of a now extinct tribe of Californian Indians, whose brothers were imagined lying 'One beside the other | Right across the Great Plains'.[71] But where 'The Year of the Sloes' remapped the events of Bloody Sunday onto the Plains of California, that Transatlantic crossing is reversed in 'Dirty Data', with Wallace's book and the American film of *Ben Hur* explicitly framing the history of the 'Troubles' after the Derry shootings. Wallace completed *Ben Hur* in 1880, having worked on the novel around his duties as governor of New Mexico, and the poem finds a parallel between the internecine conflict in Northern Ireland and the Old West conflict that Governor Wallace was tasked with resolving. 'The Lincoln County War, in which you tried to intervene, was another tit-for-tat | war fought between Prods and Papes', the poem observes of the warring factions, who were indeed at odds along Catholic and Protestant lines (106). Muldoon goes on casting Irish actors in American roles, noting how Messala was 'played by a Belfast boy' named Stephen Boyd, and how 'Seosamh Mac Grianna would follow word for word | your purple-inked prose | as he rendered *Ben Hur* into Gaelic' (102, 104).

These Irish-American exchanges suggest continuities with 'Yarrow', but the effect in the later poem is very different. Despite shuttling between the Ancient Rome of *Ben Hur*, its film production in Hollywood, the Bloody Sunday massacre in Derry, Winston Churchill's funeral cortege on the Thames River and the violent vigilantism of 1880s New Mexico (where Wallace famously parleyed with Billy the Kid), the poem's slips of identity and place are carried out with little of pranksterish delight seen in Muldoon's earlier serial forms of error. Like *Horse Latitudes* and *Maggot*, the pleasure principle is simply not so much to the fore here as it was in *Hay* and *Annals*. 'Dirty Data' drops Muldoon's characteristic first-person voice, and pitches its mashed-up political vision in almost documentary style. Indeed, the whole Muldoon machinery here seems to be operating slightly apart from the autobiographical, and therefore slightly apart from the playful, with error now taking on a more serious political role in his writing. After 'the

[71] Paul Muldoon, *New Weather*, 2nd edn. (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 47. This comes in the final stanza, which was later cut from the poem in Muldoon's *Poems: 1968-1998*.

crowd the paratroopers strafe | on Bloody Sunday' in 1972 – an event Muldoon has described as a costly mistake, 'one of the gravest miscalculations by both sides in the history of the "Troubles"'[72] – the poem lists the politicians who have held the British cabinet post of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland before the 1998 signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Like 'Easter 1916', in which Yeats wrote out the names of the Rising leaders executed by the British, Muldoon names 'the Roman tribune' of British cabinet ministers for Northern Ireland under whose watch the 'Troubles' intensified: 'Whitelaw. Pym. Rees. Mason. | Atkins. Prior. Hurd. King. Brooke. Mayhew' (101). Whether by coincidence or not, these names are written exactly as they appear in Ken Bloomfield's suggestively entitled *A Tragedy of Errors: The Government and Misgovernment of Northern Ireland* (2007).[73] Indeed, their 'botched job' encompasses the errors and abuses of governing powers, which the poem tragically and at times ferociously renders.

Governmental 'half-truths' and 'disinformation about a dawn swoop' (111) represent error as a form of political calculation, but the poem also trades in less deliberate manifestations of the slip. Charlton Heston 'wearing an anachronistic Rolex' (113) is one of several film bloopers recorded in the poem, oversights which invite us to question the legitimacy of what we see. (As in the foreword poem to *Madoc*, 'The Key', where the post-production worker is 'having trouble matching sound to picture' (*MM*, 3), Muldoon implies an anorak's interest in spotting such mistakes.) Wondering whether 'Christ offer[ed] Ben water from an 1858 army canteen | or the 1874 model' (*OT*, 105), the poem displays Muldoon's keen eye for miscalculations made visible under the hand of the director, with whom the poet implicitly equates himself in this cinematic text. The poem's lines are comparably littered with malapropisms and slippery miswritings: 'the Magna Mater' (107), 'your bird is your wand' (115), 'With her bawdy she thee warshipped' (116), 'the Mescalero girl who refers to moral turpitude as moral *turpentine*' (117). The term 'dirty data' refers to computer records that are inaccurate, incomplete, or erroneous, and these solecisms point to further corruptions in the volume's verbal hard-drive. But spooneristically breaking 'your word is your bond', or mistaking 'worship' for 'warship', also hints at more insidious gubernatorial, religious or military mistakes which roll between the poem's imperial subjects: Rome's persecution of Christ and Judah, Britain's rule in Northern Ireland, and America's expansion into Mexican territory. These slips are politically

[72] Andy Kuhn, 'Interview with Paul Muldoon', *Katonah Poetry Series*, 28 Nov. 2016, last accessed 23 Oct. 2017 at http://katonahpoetry.com/interviews/interview-paul-muldoon. To be published in Andy Kuhn, *How a Poem Can Happen: Conversations With Twenty-One Extraordinary Poets* (Red Spruce Press, forthcoming).
[73] Ken Bloomfield, *A Tragedy of Errors: The Government and Misgovernment of Northern Ireland* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 72.

charged, as are the misquotations of Winston Churchill's notorious comments about Ireland: 'such is the integrity of their kraal', or later, 'their limestone coral' (101, 117). As in the earlier slip of 'Freud' and 'feud', violent quarrelling is threaded through the play with error and errata, which relate here to 'Tragedies of Error' rather than the autobiographical sagas that pervade *The Annals* and *Hay*.

'Dirty Data' ends with the provocative image of Father Daly waving his handkerchief 'as a flag of truce on Bloody Sunday', a gesture which erringly 'swerves as a morning' and represents what the poem enigmatically calls 'a wickiup call' (117). Wikipedia, of course, now provides unprecedented access to information, as a free-to-use internet encyclopaedia which is constantly updating itself through an online medium that anyone can edit. WikiLeaks, too, might be lurking behind this 'wickiup call', an anonymous forum for whistle-blowers to publish classified information which is, like Wikipedia, dangerously open to misuse. 'Dirty Data' then raises questions about the potential dumping of misinformation, or even *dis*information, and the corruptibility of whatever advertises itself as 'worth knowing'. The volume as a whole pitches factual morsels such as the wax moth's ability to 'detect sound | frequencies up to 300kHz', or the quirk of the church clock in Crimond having 'sixty-one minutes | to the hour', against more sensational counterfactuals: 'the BNM stamped on those peat | briquettes stands not for Bord na Móna | but Banca Națională a Moldovei' (5, 35, 107). The last of these 'facts' is blatantly false: Bord na Móna has been harvesting Irish peat since the 1940s, whereas Moldova was only recognised as an independent nation in 1991 (when its National Bank was also established). Not for the first time, Muldoon's mistakes are inviting questions about trust and suspicion, and the suspiciousness of suspicion itself – with those questions posed here in an expressly political, even conspiratorial context.

The miswritings of 'Dirty Data' also tell dirty stories, with 'Lew' frequently an outlet for the poem's lewdness. Muldoon makes a holy show of the marriage vow, for instance, pulling a line from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer ('With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship') into a more boisterous Joycean register: 'With her bawdy | she thee warshipped, Lew, there in the nether reaches' (*OT*, 116). As we saw in the previous chapter, Muldoon's writings are highly attuned to what Freud calls 'the great chance similarity between […] words',[74] and the slips of 'Dirty Data' are riffing on these opportune similarities, with the title itself perhaps punning on 'Dirty *Daughter*' or the pornographically Joycean 'dirty book'.

[74] Freud, *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol 5: The Interpretation of Dreams*, 375.

The poem also implies a databank of traumatic Freudian material, returning to the 'Troubles' as primal scene via a 'Hollywood sword-and-sandals movie like *Ben Hur*', which Muldoon 'absolutely loved' as a child 'going to the cinema in Moy in the late 1950s and early 60s', as he said in a 2007 interview.[75] Muldoon also loves a striking coincidence, and it's with this in mind that we note the appearance of *Ben Hur* in Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, where a young woman undergoes analysis to find out why she had forgotten the title:

> The girl herself realised that she had forgotten the name because it contains an expression that neither I nor any other young girl would wish to employ, particularly in front of young men. […] In short, she unconsciously equated uttering the title of *Ben Hur* out loud with offering sexual favours ['Ich bin Hure' – I am a whore], and consequently her inability to remember it amounted to rejecting any unconscious temptation of that kind.[76]

Freud's reading of her memory lapse and the self-censoring of sexual suggestion strikes a chord with errors of 'Yarrow' (for 'aureoles' read 'areolae') and the mother's bowdlerisation of *The Golden Ass*, another suggestive literary title that is promptly forgotten. With Freud and Muldoon's shared allusion to *Ben Hur*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* is what Muldoon as lecturer would call a 'crypto-current' in his own long poem. And as this chapter has shown, Freud and Joyce's works writ large offer a model for tracing the 'verbal bridges' that connect the serial slips in Muldoon's Transatlantic writing, where scenes of American conflict are overlaid – or underwritten – by 'primal scenes' in the Northern Ireland of his early life.

7

Conclusion

Muldoon's forms of error now seem to be set within, or rather *against*, a politics of correction. After the autobiographical erotics of the slip in *Annals* and the perverse prodigality of *Hay*'s self-made errata, Muldoon's later collections raise questions about error and correction within a more avowedly U.S. context, even if those questions very often return to Northern Irish (and Catholic) concerns. 'Horse Latitudes' demonstrates the insidious censorship of the

[75] Nicholas Wroe, 'Invisible Threads', *Guardian*, 24 Mar. 2007, last accessed 23 Oct. 2017 at https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/mar/24/featuresreviews.guardianreview12.
[76] Freud, *Everyday Life*, 43.

corrective hand, both family and military, while 'The Side Project' challenges that corrective authority, condemning the papal *Syllabus of Errors* and its attack on liberalism, theological modernism, and secularism. Like these later long poems, 'Dirty Data' reflects an increasing politicization of error in his work: Muldoon's interpretation of Lew Wallace explicitly frames *Ben Hur* as an American Civil War book, and transplants it into a Northern Irish context of the 1960s and 70s.

For all that the Irish-American transplantations of these longer forms reflect Muldoon's life as Transatlantic professor at Princeton, the poet seems able to enjoy 'the rootless and changeable mash of contemporary culture,' as Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin puts it, 'without becoming deracinated himself.'[77] Indeed, the encyclopaedic *One Thousand Things* reflects both the domestic and the digital mash, but impresses its varied material with a new kind of order that also trades on familiar texts and themes, building a complex network of dirty-data points which plot a backwards line through Muldoon's earlier life and writings. Muldoon's mistakes seem themselves rooted in the corrective Catholic culture of his Northern Irish childhood, and *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* – the title of a practical handbook he associates with his father, *le nom du père* – is another indication that he has learned from his mistakes only to repeat them in new, political, and ever more inventive ways.

[77] Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, 'Rousing the Reader', in *Dublin Review of Books*, 66 (2015), last accessed 18 Sep. 2017 at http://www.drb.ie/essays/rousing-the-reader.

'An overwhelming sense of déjà vu': Muldoon's Rhyming Memory

shadow-lines, projections,
Things at once apparent and transparent,
Clean-edged, fine-drawn, drawn-out, redrawn, remembered…

—Seamus Heaney, 'An Architect'

Apprehending a rhyme involves a miniature moment of recollection. Like memories, rhymes hold within them the possibility of return and relation: they 'bring things back', writes Gillian Beer, 'raising again words that might die out in the mind and straining them across lines as echoes, deformations, recurrences'.[1] The composition of memory, and remembering as a form of composition, are enduring principles in Muldoon's writing – even if the poems we met in the previous chapter make a peculiar virtue of misremembering. 'Yarrow', for one, trades on slips of the mind as well as the tongue, and explores the creative possibilities which arise when memory and comprehension break down.

Muldoon's most striking study of poetic memory is a formal one. Dreamt up in America and drawn out across his entire U.S. career, it is an ambitious, large-scale architectural framework of rhyme which repeats and extends across multiple poems and volumes. The blueprint for this expanding architectural form is first set down in *The Annals of Chile* (1994), a book that uses the same sequence of ninety rhyme-sounds across two long poems, 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata'. 'Incantata' is an elegy for Mary Farl Powers, the American-born printmaker who was Muldoon's friend and ex-lover, and 'Yarrow' an elegiac epic of childhood, commemorating the poet's relationships with his mother and an anonymous lover known only as 'S—'. These ninety rhymes originated in 'Yarrow',[2] where they are arranged into what Muldoon has since described as 'a series of twelve intercut, exploded sestinas' – a complex and highly irregular form of his own devising.[3] In 'Incantata', the ninety-rhyme sequence is re-deployed in octave-stanzas, rhyming *aabbcddc*, a form borrowed from Yeats's 'In Memory of Major Robert Gregory'. Riffing

[1] Gillian Beer, 'Rhyming as Resurrection', in *Memory and Memorials, 1789-1914*, eds. Matthew Campbell, Jacqueline M. Labbe and Sally Shuttleworth (London: Routledge, 2000), 191.
[2] Tim Kendall first spotted the continuous rhyme scheme between 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata', but Clair Wills was first to claim that these rhymes originated in 'Yarrow', in *Reading Paul Muldoon* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1999), 208. In our personal correspondence, Muldoon has confirmed that 'Yarrow' was written before 'Incantata'.
[3] Earl G. Ingersoll and Stan Sanvel Rubin, 'The Invention of the I: A Conversation with Paul Muldoon', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 37.1 (1998), last accessed 10 Aug. 2017 at http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0037.106.

first on the sestina and then the Yeatsian octave-stanza, *The Annals* set down the foundations for a new poetic form which has since been extended on an extraordinary scale.

After the mobility of Muldoon's forms of the slip discussed in Chapter 3, this meta-rhyming scheme represents a more conservative formal principle – the serial form as mnemonic machine. From *Annals* onward, at least one long poem in each of his collections has been underpinned by, and rhymed back to, this same sequence of ninety end-words. If writing a series of longer poems requires a basic structure or foundation, then Muldoon's architectural principle is not only rhyme, but a template of rhymes already set down elsewhere. The series appears to have broken down, however, in the most recent volume: there is no ninety-rhyme poem in *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* (2015). This chapter then marks the first attempt to chart and evaluate this grand formal endeavour in its entirety. Muldoon has since clarified that the series came to an end with 'The Side Project' in *Maggot* (2010), a long poem about a U.S. travelling circus. In *The New Yorker* he called 'The Side Project' 'the last of a series of longer poems written over the past fifteen years in which, like the members of the circus taking on different roles, the same ninety end-words have rung the changes on a range of emotionally charged themes. It's now time for another tack and tactic.'[4] Before considering these new formal and thematic tactics, this chapter will first examine Muldoon's rhyming repetitions as a form of remembering and working-through the poetic afterlives of his extended American forms. These are often, as we shall see, explorations of the afterlives of his early memories, which return to primal losses and desires as well as earlier rhymes.

1

'Being led by rhyme'

It is a truth universally acknowledged that Muldoon's use of rhyme is devilishly elastic, and that 'bold, inventive rhymes are a definite mark of the Muldoon style'.[5] The point while frequently made is nevertheless a significant one, since knowing what counts as rhyme in Muldoon's writing is the first step toward recognising how his long forms work. Interviewers and critics interested in these matters rely on terms like 'slant', 'half' or 'off rhyme', but come up short when faced with the poet's willingness, as in 'Quoof', to rhyme 'English' with 'language'

[4] See *The Best American Poetry 2011*, ed. David Lehman and Kevin Young (New York: Scribner Poetry, 2011), 183.
[5] Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon*, 9.

(*P*, 112). In a landmark essay on 'Muldoon's Fuzzy Rhymes', Andrew Osborn points to 'a commitment to conventional terms of prosody [that] may inhibit one from recognizing that *toe-hold–delight*, *catapult–goblets*, *John Field–inviolate*, *hidalgo–stalks*, and *Lucozade–locust* – to cite a few of Muldoon's more outrageous pairs – ought to be considered rhymes at all.'[6] Establishing his own prosodic terminology to account for these eccentric techniques, Osborn identifies trends in Muldoon's rhyming practice which, often ignoring vowels, have to do with consonantal repetitions and their selective substitution at the end of the line (for example, /p/, /b/ and /t/, /d/, which allow Muldoon to rhyme 'slip' with 'slab', 'font' with 'find').[7] Although Osborn's analysis stops short of tackling the serial long-form procedures of Muldoon's U.S. career, it provides exemplary insights on the poet's rhyming mind, and on prosody in general terms.

Muldoon's rhymes are highly flexible, and their appearance in the ninety-rhyme scheme is also characteristically 'fuzzy'. This owes partly to the sestina model on which the original ninety end-words in 'Yarrow' are based. The twelve sestinas of 'Yarrow' are broken into sections of two, three and four tercets (or six, nine and twelve lines), which repeat the same end-rhymes – though not always the same end-*word*, as one would find in a conventional sestina. While this chapter discusses Muldoon's 'rhymes' then, it might as accurately speak of his 'repetends' or 'teuletons', technical terms for the sestina's end-words which the scheme expands from six to ninety. Not unlike the conventional sestina, these incremental repetitions and variations adhere to some rather finicky rules, documented in a three-page footnote in Osborn's essay.[8] Rather than repeat those rules here, I offer instead two illustrative snapshots from Muldoon's early drafts. Down the left-hand margin in Fig. 6 (overleaf), alternate lines are marked with letters A to F denoting the six end-rhymes that will change places according to standard sestina rules: A moves to B, B to D, C to F, and so on, while the middle-line rhymes not allocated a letter remain in the same place. The complexities of the system are compounded when we realise that the letter 'A' in the right-hand corner identifies the 'set' to which this group of end-words belongs (this 'A' set, for instance, repeats ten times over the course of the poem). The numerous three-tercet sections of the poem (of which the one pictured is an example) belong to three different sestina 'sets', with rhyme words only traded and shuffled within groups of the same set.

[6] Andrew Osborn, 'Skirmishes on the Border: The Evolution and Function of Paul Muldoon's Fuzzy Rhyme', *Contemporary Literature*, 41.2 (2000), 323.
[7] Osborn, 'Skirmishes on the Border', 336-339.
[8] Osborn, 'Skirmishes on the Border', 347-349fn.

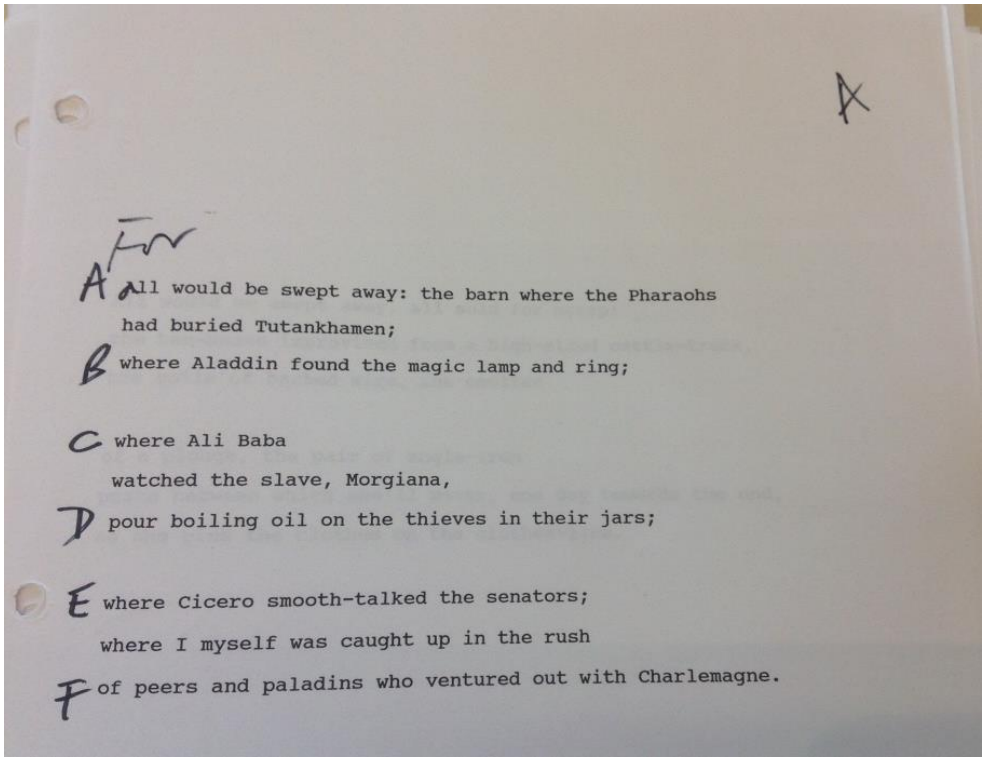
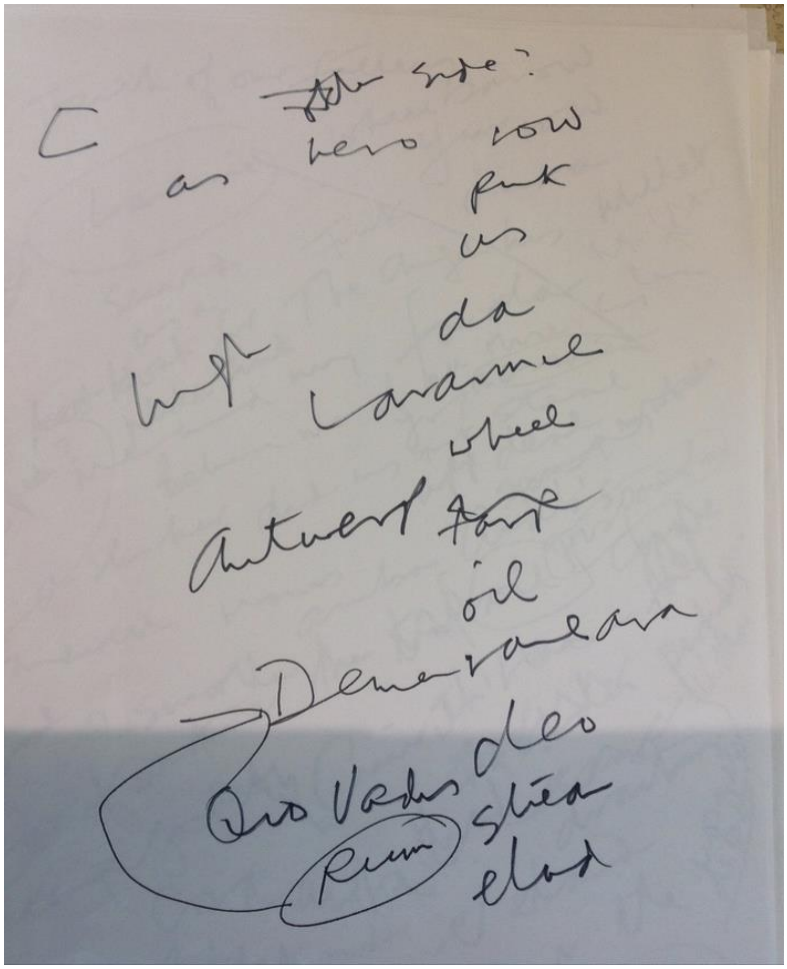


Figure 6. 'Yarrow', Typescript draft. Folder 21, Box 22.

Figure 7 (overleaf) belongs to the poem's opening page, its four tercets giving twelve initial end-words. For reference, I have listed next to them the opening twelve end-words as they appear in the printed poem. As this template illustrates, these handwritten words are emerging from (or rhyming back to) a set of end-words already written elsewhere. The 'Yarrow' papers contain several freehand notes like this one on which Muldoon has listed combinations of end-rhymes; though whether the poet is composing lines on the back of these end-word suggestions, or simply noting down previous end-words for reference going forward, is impossible to say. In any case, the lists show Muldoon not only mulling over his end-rhymes but working *in* and *through* them – his thinking about the form becoming its own form of thinking, and perhaps a working illustration of Simon Jarvis's ideas about rhyme as a form of cognition.[9] A long process of revising his rhymes, perhaps turning and returning to previous pages, provides an impression of how the process of composition might have been translated into the reticulations and repetitions of the poem's formal patterning.

[9] See Simon Jarvis, 'Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody', *Paragraph*, 28.2 (2005): 57-71.



First twelve end-words

row

pink

us

da

arm

fly-wheel

tarp

oil

rare

Deo

stream

land

Figure 7. 'Yarrow', Holograph notes. Box 22, Folder 6.

Originating in 'Yarrow', the intertextual rhymes of this long poetic series are not only a *storehouse* of recollections and 'emotionally charged themes', as Muldoon calls them, but also a great *generator* of poetic material. That is to say, the serial rhyming that returns and builds upon its previous forms also seems to catalyse creative activity for Muldoon – on the one hand *remembering* forms of the past, and on the other hand compulsively *repeating* them, as in Freud's model of the repetition compulsion in 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through'.[10] 'Remembering and repeating attempt to turn the future into a version of the past, something supposedly already experienced,' writes Adam Phillips, elaborating on Freud's essay, 'while working through is a way of seeing the future *through* the past, and not as the past'.[11] Muldoon's serial forms are using past rhymes as the model going forward; but whether the future poem is

[10] Sigmund Freud, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through', in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 12*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 150.

[11] Adam Phillips, 'On "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through," Again', *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 52.3 (2016), 379 (my emphasis).

reproducing the same version of that past, or producing variations on it, is open to question. Either way, Muldoon's fascination with the tension between repetition and variation suggests a formal performance of 'working through' that has compelling implications for how these long poems and Muldoon's rhyming mind can be read. As the ninety end-words originate in two elegies, 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata', the two poems share an esoteric bond as well as a heightened preoccupation with memory (one, 'Incantata', remembering in order to resurrect, the other demonstrating a compulsive inability to forget). Memory, then, inheres in the architecture of the 90-rhyme series from the outset. Remembering is always a reconstructive process, and these rhymes and repetitions become a terrific engine for producing new forms from earlier material.

One helpful comparison for Muldoon's rhyming template is John Ashbery's *Flow Chart* (1992), a book-length poem in free verse. Towards the end of that work, Ashbery smuggles in a double sestina that uses the same twelve end-words as Charles Algernon Swinburne's double sestina, 'The Complaint of Lisa' (1870). The intertextual continuity between Swinburne's double sestina and Ashbery's in *Flow Chart*, or the superimposition of one form over another, is not far away from the play between 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata' – though crucially in Muldoon's case, he is not recasting the end-words of a different poet but remembering and repeating *himself*. The basic principle however is the same: improvising on end-words cast elsewhere, and using the sestina as a model of repetition. Riffing on the end-words of other poems has become its own genre for the Australian poet John Tranter, who makes extensive use in *Studio Moon* (2003) of an innovative form Brian Henry calls 'the terminal'.[12] As in the double sestina of *Flow Chart*, Tranter's terminals take the end-words of a previously published poem and overwrite the rest of the text around them. In an exemplary case, Tranter borrows his line-endings from 'Ode on Melancholy', encoding the source-text in his title with an anagram of the author's name, John Keats ('Thanks, Joe'). These coded terminals are, as Henry argues, both 'conservative and destructive', with 'Tranter overwrit[ing] … his source poem while retaining the anchoring points'.[13] Muldoon's series of long poems might fit this description, at once preserving the memory of the predecessor poem, and using the anticipatory energy of the previous rhyme-pattern as a jump-start to new writings embedded in the old. In 2004 Muldoon spoke of rhyme as a kind of vehicle, 'an engine that is most useful in the composition of the poem. In fact I find it quite revelatory. I don't mind being led by rhyme.'[14] But being 'led by rhyme' really means

[12] Brian Henry, 'John Tranter's New Form(alism): The Terminal', *Antipodes* 18.1 (2004), 36-43.
[13] Henry, 'John Tranter's New Form(alism)', 36.
[14] Paul Muldoon, 'The Art of Poetry No. 87', interview by James S. F. Wilson, *Paris Review*, 169 (2004), 70.

'choosing to follow' it, and in following these patterns as he does, Muldoon has hitched his longer forms to an aesthetic in which remembering and repeating are paramount.

At the end of his essay on 'Rhyme and Reconciliation', Michael Allen observes the 'predictive force of previous rhyme-words' in Muldoon's serial long-forms. Allen's primary case study is 'Third Epistle to Timothy', a poem about Muldoon's father, in which he says the end-words 'have a valency determined by the cumulative force of predecessor rhymes in the template set up by "Yarrow".'[15] In both a thematic and paradigmatic sense then, 'Yarrow' is Muldoon's Mother poem; and in subsequent uses of its 'template', the end-words are significantly determined and coloured by their origins in that poem. But what else, besides the past, can be made out of such overdetermined forms of repetition? By inventing this intertextual rhyming blueprint, what else is Muldoon looking to bring back, or in Freud's terms, work through? These serially repeating structures are a mysterious phenomenon for which there seems to be no direct precedent in modern or classical verse. They are, besides much else, *virtuosic performances*, and their virtuosity seems related to the kinds of messy, emotional, private original material they are framing and collectively re-making. Muldoon's rhyming practice is an area treated by Osborn and Allen, and in a wider context by Matthew Campbell's essay on 'The Irish Longing for Rhyme'.[16] Building on their observations – especially Allen's, which go only as far as *Hay* (1998) – I want to bring the story of Muldoon's serial rhyming up to date with his most recent work in *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing*, and to investigate the origins of this expansive formal project in America.

Muldoon's blueprint for rhyme allows us to refocus the ways in which his longer U.S. poems revisit, and are visited by, their textual pasts. If a shared rhyme can trigger the synapses of memory, then Muldoon's rhymes are portals through which these mnemonic returns might occur. The borders separating his texts are made porous, admitting the audio-visual vestiges of words from poem to poem. The result, as I will show, is a dynamic richness of rhyme as self-reference, in which the echoes of past poems tremor in and out of earshot. This chapter, then, addresses the ways in which poetic memory is constructed through a continuous form which repeatedly updates itself, and how Muldoon's rhyming mind develops in the nature of a

[15] Michael Allen, 'Pax Hibernica/Pax Americana: Rhyme as Reconciliation in Muldoon', in *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 90.
[16] Matthew Campbell, 'The Irish Longing for Rhyme', in *Post-Ireland?: Essays on Contemporary Irish Poetry*, eds. Jefferson Holdridge and Brian Ó Conchubhair (Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University Press, 2017), 25-54.

palimpsest, working through layers of the 'echoes, deformations, recurrences' Gillian Beer attributes to rhyme.

2

Architectural Forms: 'Making a mark'

The signs in Muldoon's early American works from *Madoc: A Mystery* (1990) onwards point to a growing fascination with new forms of engineering. *Madoc* is significant for its publication of Muldoon's first sestina, 'Cauliflowers' – one of the flurry of technical innovations in the volume discussed in Chapter 1. The title poem, 'Madoc: A Mystery', is also invested in striking forms of serial order. Its headings are taken from an encyclopaedic list of Western thinkers, their names ordered by date of birth, and its 233 sections correspond to fourteenth number in the Fibonacci sequence – an exponential, upwardly spiralling numerical series on which the poem establishes its foundations:

> '[Fibonacci]'
>
> Up a spiral staircase with precisely two hundred and thirty-three
> steps, each conjured from the living rock.
> (*MM*, 62)

With echoes of Yeats's 'Winding Stair', this spiral staircase appears in the poem as a Daedalian construction 'conjured' from stone, and is the entryway through which the character of Coleridge is dragged through 'the formal gardens and unfathomable fountains' of its hallucinatory 'summer palace' (*MM*, 61). Within the wider mathematical and encyclopaedic models of 'Madoc', these lines give some indication as to the scale and surreal serialism at play in Muldoon's rapidly developing architectural forms in America.

After the formal experiments of 'Madoc', a turn to libretti reflects Muldoon's ambition to broaden his technical range on another large canvas. *Shining Brow* (1993), written for the U.S. composer Daron Aric Hagen, is an opera about the early life of Frank Lloyd Wright, involving an affair with the wife of a client, Mamah Cheney, and an artistic rivalry with his former teacher Louis Sullivan. The libretto tells the story of this precociously gifted architect, and is itself a precocious poetic upstaging of the operatic form – a musical text with its own ambitions as a

literary structure, which the blurb invites us to read 'as a dramatic poem in its own right'.[17] Building on the thematic material of *Madoc*, it touches on founding narratives of America, the myths and architecture of the Native Americans, and the nation's architectural rebirth at the hands of Wright himself. Indeed, '*Shining Brow* reflects Muldoon's physical transplantation to the States,' as Paul Driver observes, 'and confirms the diverse American and Indian interests of his poetry: its concern is with America's foundation.'[18] Originally with Louis Sullivan, and now with Mamah at his side, the figure of Lloyd Wright vows that 'Together we would make our mark | on the clean slate of America.' (*SB*, 14)

That ambition is also Muldoon's, of course, a poet then relatively fresh out of Northern Ireland, for whom the United States represents both a 'clean slate' and an opportunity to 'make his mark'. Rhyming 'mark' with 'America' is a clue to the prominence of rhyme in this U.S. enterprise, which is also an architectural one. Alastair Fowler's study of *Structural Patterns in Elizabethan Poetry* (1970) refers to the common 'architectural analogy between rhyme and masonry bonds',[19] and the analogy is pertinent to the 'extra dimension' Muldoon brings to his developments in the poetry of architecture:

> The poetry of architecture
> is the poetry of tension;
> we take as our theme
> the brick and the beam
> and we add an extra dimension.
>
> But the poetry of architecture
> is not without its laws;
> there's someone at the bottom
> of every totem-
> pole: you can't make bricks without straw.
> (*SB*, 3)

Wright's draughtsmen are brooding here on the raw materials of craftsmanship, and on their own position 'at the bottom of the totem-pole'. But for the man at the top, Wright himself, 'It all goes back to those Froebel blocks | my mama gave me as a child.' (9) When Muldoon goes

[17] Paul Muldoon, *Shining Brow* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993).
[18] Paul Driver, 'Upstaging', *London Review of Books*, 15.16 (1993), 22-23: 22.
[19] Alastair Fowler, *Triumphal Forms: Structural Patterns in Elizabethan Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 19n.

back to his own 'mama' as a child in 'Yarrow' where he sets out on his rhyming enterprise, the significant toy is 'the rocking-horse' whose 'halter fast-forwards through my hands' (*P*, 356) – a woodcraft toy which is all about *rhythm* and the joys of repetition.

In thinking about the origins of Muldoon's edifice of end-words in 'Yarrow' and the importance of the sestina as model, we might consider the musical reprises of *Shining Brow* as an operatic prototype – as well as a return to the groundings of architecture after the free-floating formal giddiness of *Madoc*. Wright's soliloquy at the end of *Shining Brow* 'gropingly resumes the libretto's themes and key phrases,' Driver writes, 'as though it were the conclusion of a giant sestina. And that in a sense is what the opera has been: a sestina accommodating within itself a whole host of prosodic and rhetorical forms.' Through its verbal tags – 'a pencil in my hand', 'form and function are one', 'it follows the curve', and so on – the libretto 'facilitates the composer's use of the leitmotif,' as Driver says, with Muldoon 'adapting a Wagnerian idea for the sake of an innovation in his own verse.'[20] Wagner, significantly, referred to his *Leitmotiven* as 'motifs of reminiscence'; they facilitate palimpsestic memories across works like the *Ring* and *Tristan and Isolde*, which 'seek to establish a higher unity across the whole'.[21] Like the sestina in this respect, the leitmotif is endlessly turning back on itself, remembering and repeating in an elongated series of reminiscences.

Taking Frank Lloyd Wright as the protagonist for an opera – then an unfamiliar musical form for Muldoon, in which the instruments of construction, 'the brick and the beam', are naturally heightened – was a compelling and revealing decision. Given Wright's role as an icon of American architectural modernism, it is surely significant that the structure put together in *Shining Brow* is Wright's Wisconsin studio-home: although a definitive work of modernist architecture, Taliesin is not a 'proud and soaring' skyscraper but a personal domestic dwelling (*SB*, 1). '[T]his house that hill | might marry' (48) is, as Driver states, 'the realisation of a concept of architecture as integral to American landscape and life.'[22] But for Wright, whose mother's family (the Lloyd Joneses) were Welsh, it was also representative of an imported European heritage. 'Taliesin' is the name of a sixth century Welsh bard who appears in *To Ireland, I*, and a word in Wright's maternal Welsh which means 'shining brow', as noted in Meryle Secrest's 1992 biography of Lloyd Wright (a book presumably consulted by Muldoon when writing the libretto

[20] Driver, 'Upstaging', 23.
[21] See Arnold Whittall, 'Leitmotif.', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Grove Music Online (Oxford University Press), last accessed 18 Oct. 2017 at http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/ grove/ music/O902888.
[22] Driver, 'Upstaging', 23.

that year). Secrest also notes that the house was 'constantly rebuilt, revised and expanded, the result of the artist's restless imagination as well as successive calamities'.[23] Muldoon's architectural pattern may have begun to set in here, the constant rebuilding of Taleisin not only inspiring the *leitmotiven* and serial reminiscences of the opera itself, but also the 'revised and expanded' rhyme-scheme of 'Yarrow' – a scheme which remakes itself, as Taliesin was remade, against 'successive calamities' in domestic settings.

When Mamah in *Shining Brow* dies in a fire that takes the children and the house with it, Wright gives voice to his memorialising ambition at the end of the opera:

> That Mamah is dead and gone
> is itself a grand illusion;
> she'll be both key- and corner-stone
> of a newly built Taliesin.
> She is the house. She is the hill.
> She is the house that hill might marry.
> I will dedicate both field and hall
> to Mamah's memory.
> (*SB*, 85)

As well as Wright's lover, Mamah is 'both mother | and muse' (51). Disavowing her death and at the same time resolving to resurrect her in architectural form is also the paradoxical model seen in Muldoon's long poems, which can be as morbidly self-regarding as they are self-reproducing. Here the rhyme of 'marry' and 'memory', which marries the operative terms, is a striking identification of the Muldoonian bond between rhymes and relationships. A melodious architecture of rhyme and reminiscence is already beginning, then, in *Shining Brow*; and it comes not long before 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata' established it as a serial intertextual construction, where the architectural form underwent a remarkable poetic renovation in which the dead mother and lover are figured as 'key- and corner-stone'.

3
'Secret Correspondences'

[23] Meryle Secrest, *Frank Lloyd Wright: A Biography* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1992]), 9.

Discussing the opera the day after its April 1993 première in Madison, Wisconsin, in the year before 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata' would be published in *The Annals*, Muldoon mentioned 'certain carry-overs from *Shining Brow* to what I'm doing now. One of the things I've been working on is a very complex poem ['Yarrow'] involving nine or ten [in the end, twelve] intercut exploded sestinas. It uses repetition in a way that wouldn't have occurred to me before *Shining Brow*.'[24] Formally, we can see a clear progression from the musical architecture of *Shining Brow* to the ninety-rhyme scheme that emerges in 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata', hot on the heels of this opera.[25] Tim Kendall was earliest to comment on the correlation of end-words between 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata', and Clair Wills the first to elaborate upon its implications.[26] Since these words originated in a text haunted by the figure of the mother, Wills proposes that 'a kind of ghostly maternal template is now structuring Muldoon's work – the mother is an invisible frame or presence, even in the poems which are ostensibly about the father.'[27] Indeed, the single continuous form of Muldoon's long poems suggest that similar encounters are being performed or replayed in different scenarios. By placing sole emphasis on 'Yarrow' and the mother as 'frame' in these poems, however, Wills is ignoring the primary significance of 'Incantata' and *Shining Brow*, and leaving the lover out of the picture. Muldoon's female ghosts are not only numerous but – like Mary Powers's jumpsuit – multiform; and 'That Mamah,' or a returning version of the lost artistic lover, 'is dead and gone' is perhaps the 'grand illusion' in these subsequent poems. The mother is surely an invisible presence felt in the long poems after 'Yarrow', as Wills suggests she is, but so too is the illusion or apparition of the absent lover, who slips in and out of his writing.

The intimate and indeed familial relation of 'Yarrow' to 'Incantata' must be our starting point if we are to examine the palimpsestic layers between them. As well as the slips and guilty secrets discussed in Chapter 3, these are poems about family and romantic attachments; and when the rhymes of mother and lover are transposed across the two poems, those maternal and erotic ties interweave. We can see this if we look more closely at the rhyme-patterns. The following lines from 'Yarrow' refer to the herb of the title, where botanical description gives way to a teasing evocation of the poem's formal operations:

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[24] Lynn Keller, 'An Interview with Paul Muldoon', *Contemporary Literature*, 35.1 (1994): 3-29, 9.
[25] The structural continuity with 'Yarrow' is first spotted by Tim Kendall, who gives it a passing mention in his chapter on Muldoon's libretto. In *Paul Muldoon*, 175.
[26] See Kendall, *Paul Muldoon*, 221, and Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon*, 180-183, 207-209.
[27] Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon*, 208.

its tight little knot *a*
of a head, *b*
it's like something keeping a secret *c*
from itself, something on the tip of its own tongue. *d*
(*P*, 348; rhymes indicated *a* to *d*)

'Yarrow' is in many ways a deeply secretive, self-policing text, and one of its secrets is the obsessive pleasure it takes in structural pattern. Teasing, though not really teased *out*, that secret obsession is left unspoken here – though the end-words themselves are knottily suggestive of it, pitching the self-censoring 'knot' and 'secret' against the faint eroticism of 'head' and 'tongue'.

'Incantata' imports the same four end-words from 'Yarrow', harking back to the flower's guilty secrets and revealing others in this would-be confessional exchange with Powers:

Hamm and Clov; Nagg and Nell; Watt and Knott; *a*
the fact is that we'd been at a standstill long before the night
things came to a head, *b*
long before we'd sat for half the day in the sweltering heat
somewhere just south of Killnasaggart
and I let slip a name—her name—off my tongue *d*
and you turned away (I see it now) the better to deliver the sting
in your own tail, to let slip your own little secret. *c*
(*P*, 333-334)

The question once again here is what sex and the secrecy contained in a name might be revealing. 'I could name names—I could be indiscreet' was the warning issued in 'Kissing and Telling' (123), and later acted on in 'The Little Black Book' which delights in the naming of names (444), but here the anonymous 'name—her name' tells us precious little. Names are left in equally enigmatic suspension in 'Yarrow', another chapter of Muldoon's semi-fictive autobiography, where almost every character has a fictional alias and the name of 'S—' is, like the flower's secret, mysteriously redacted. The prospect of letting slip these identities raises the stakes of the Freudian *Fehlleistung*, or slip of the tongue, discussed in Chapter 3. But as the end-words themselves slip from 'Yarrow' to 'Incantata', that air of suggestiveness goes with them. Gillian Beer suggests that '[Freud's] categories for slips of the tongue come revealingly close to the disturbances rhyme produces in words: transpositions, … anticipations, … preservations';[28] and

[28] Beer, 'Rhyming as Resurrection', 195.

the traces of Muldoon's rhyming memory seem to be emerging here from the same set of disturbances, in the 'transpositions' and 'preservations' of end-words as they slip from poem to poem.

Open passage between these texts is extended and continuously realised at the ends of the line. Later in 'Yarrow', the erotics of the earlier end-rhymes are repeated in a scene of passionate betrayal:

> Ten years after Plath set the napkin under her head *b'*
> I got out from under S—'s cheese-cloth skirt *c'*
> where what I'd taken for a nutmeg-clove
> tasted now of monk's-hood, or aconite: *a'*
> '*No tengo*,' the salamander fumed, '*no tengo* *d'*
> *mas que dar te*'; and I saw red, red, red, red, red.
> (*P*, 384)

The end-word 'head' remains as 'head' here, but 'secret' becomes 'skirt', 'knot' is now 'aconite', and 'tongue' now '*tengo*'. An echo of that 'secret' in the woman's 'skirt' plays into the poem's erotics of withholding, where the unseeable and unsayable are fetishized for the over-disciplined child seeking transgressive forms of fulfilment in adulthood. The earlier suggestiveness of 'heads' and 'tongues' is now tangled up with resentment about a break-up ('*No tengo mas que darte*' meaning 'I have nothing more to give you'), and that same bitterness presides over the corresponding lines in the second half of 'Incantata':

> Of how mordantly hydrochloric acid must have scored and scarred,
> of the claim that boiled skirrets *c'*
> can cure the spitting of blood, of that dank
> flat somewhere off Morehampton Road, of the unbelievable stink *d'*
> of valerian or feverfew simmering over a low heat,
> of your sitting there, pale and gaunt,
> with that great prescriber of boiled skirrets, Dr John Arbuthnot, *a'*
> your face in a bowl of feverfew, a towel over your head. *b'*
> (*P*, 339)

'Ten years after Plath set the napkin under her head' we find another artist, Powers, with a 'towel' over hers. Memories of rhyme and olfaction are also connected here, with the searing 'taste' of 'monk's-hood, or aconite' translated here into the 'stink' of other homeopathic plants

and skirrets. In Powers and Sylvia Plath, the poem frames the tragic ends of two Transatlantic female artists 'determined to cut [themselves] off in [their] prime' (336).

Moving along the end-rhyme sequence, the following lines from "Yarrow' remain invested as they were earlier in botanical evocations:

> Would that I might take comfort in the vestigial scent *e*
> of a yarrow-sprig, a yarrow-spurt *f*
> I've plucked from the somewhat unorthodox *g*
> funerary vase *h*
> (*P*, 348).

This 'vestigial scent' and its bitter-sweet 'comfort' has a Proustian signature, conjuring memories of the mother in his childhood home. 'Vestige' is defined in the *OED* as 'a mark, trace, or visible sign *of* something … which no longer exists or is present', and these rhymes leave their own audible vestiges on the corresponding rhymes of 'Incantata':

> I thought of you again tonight, thin as a rake, as you bent
> over the copper plate of 'Emblements', *e*
> its tidal wave of army-worms into which you all but disappeared:
> I wanted to catch something of its spirit *f*
> and yours, to body out your disembodied *vox*
> *clamantis in deserto*, to let this all-too-cumbersome device
> of a potato-mouth in a potato-face *h*
> speak out, unencumbered, from its long, low, mould-filled box. *g*
> (*P*, 334)

A wish to 'take comfort' in the past, whether in remembering the mother or the lover, is apparent in both poems. The earlier 'yarrow-spurt' and its familiar verdant 'scent' returns here in the earthiness of the potato and moulding box, which now rhyme with the 'spirit' of Powers's 'Emblements' – a name suggesting an assemblage of emblems into which the spirit of the artist, Powers, has 'all but disappeared'. This last phrase may itself be signalling 'all but disappearing' rhymes – not only the fading couplet within the poem ('disappeared | spirit'), but also the end-words of 'Yarrow' overwritten by the end-words of 'Incantata'.

John Kerrigan has written persuasively about Muldoon's formal border-crossings as 'zones of muddle',[29] but these intersecting lines of rhyme and replication are pointing less towards confusion than careful Wagnerian orchestration. 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata' are connected on a structural level by the same ninety rhymes, and make of sex, secrets, smells and herbal roots a series of leitmotifs for the private recollections of rhyme words transported *between* these poems, as well as *within* them. The same is true of 'roads', 'paths' and 'tracks' which pervade these poems as rhyme words and rhyming images. Such terms of conveyance provide a way of thinking about rhymes as routes, or supply chains – points of imaginative contact and mnemonic transaction. Earlier material is picked up through the reticulations of rhyme, and it returns in later lines and line-ends postmarked with its original provenance in Muldoon's writing. As in Freud's account of palimpsestic memory outlined 'The Mystic Writing-Pad', Muldoon's formal system provides 'not only a receptive surface that can be used over and over again, like a slate, but also permanent traces of what has been written' in previous texts.[30]

These readings are themselves only touching the surface of the deep-rooted tessellations of rhyme and self-quotation in Muldoon's serial form, which might be mined to much greater depth.[31] If we were to read these poems in full and back-to-back, many of the felicitous conjunctions and echoes between the end-words of 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata' – not to mention the other seven poems in this inter-rhyming series – would escape even the most patient reader at a single sitting. Rhyme, as Gillian Beer says, is a form of remembering, but nobody could possibly retain all of these rhyming riffs and repetitions. Muldoon is stretching the concept of the sestina (or whatever serial order a long poem might be organized around) beyond the point at which its iterations and incantations can be immediately perceived. Whether the reader hears them or not, however, these repetitions suggest unfinished (or unfinishable) business. What's more, they raise the question as to why Muldoon should write long poems in this way. Is his model of rhyming in these texts an acknowledgement of the power of psychoanalytic memory? Does it represent Muldoon as Joycean tribute act testing his professional audience, or indeed, as John Lyon suspects, 'affording the critics yet more opportunities for "discovering" semantic

[29] John Kerrigan, 'Paul Muldoon's Transits: Muddling Through after *Madoc*', in *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, 140.

[30] Sigmund Freud, 'A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad', in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 19*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 230.

[31] 'Yarrow' alone is dizzyingly copious, and has attracted a wealth of exegesis. For the purposes of studying some of the less studied, or less understood poems, I will take it as read that the reader has some grasp of the poem beyond these offerings, and move on shortly to the later poems in Muldoon's rhyming series.

and thematic connections'?[32] Neither answer quite hits the mark – although Joyce, as we saw in *To Ireland, I*, offers a compelling parallel in prose.

In *Joyce Effects* (2000), Derek Attridge argues that an internal principle of Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* is the courting of coincidence. By 'intentionally [building] a machine of such complexity that unforeseen connections are bound to arise', Attridge writes, Joyce's works trouble the distinction between accident and intention:

> The chimings and echoes that criss-cross *Ulysses*, gradually revealing themselves to the assiduous reader and re-reader, and the extraordinary multiplication of such effects in the *Wake*, invite a relishing of coincidence while constituting the network of detail that makes possible an infinite series of new coincidences.[33]

Muldoon's long forms involve comparable 'chimings and echoes', criss-crossing multiple volumes of poetry, and thrive on the coincidences that their self-replicating rhyme scheme generates. But as Attridge tellingly adds, 'part of the fascination of coincidence is that it always *may not be* a coincidence – it thrills or chills us with a sense of hidden connections, loops in time, secret correspondences'.[34] The uncanny reticulations across Muldoon's long forms are so compelling precisely because they share this possibility, this fascination with what might be hidden, which, as we saw in Chapter 2, also inspires the poet as a reader. Exuding a comparable aura of 'secret correspondences', Muldoon's longer forms are built, as they are in Joyce, around memories of the author's early life in Ireland.

Joyce's influence is keenly felt in these two poems about Muldoon's pre-American life. The crucial middle stanza of 'Incantata' is trying to 'make sense of … that potato-mouth' and 'its "Quoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiq",' as the dumb say in *Finnegans Wake* (*FW*, 195.06), while 'Yarrow' pitches itself as a 'supremely Joycean object, a nautilus | of memory jammed next to memory' (*P*, 380, 336). Those lines from 'Yarrow' are in fact a quotation, taken from Robert Hughes's *The Shock of the New* (1980), in which Hughes describes Kurt Schwitters's *Merzbau* (also known as *Kathedrale des erotischen Elends*, or, as the poem translates, 'Cathedral of Ero- | tic Misery') as a Joycean object. A legendary work of Dada art begun in 1923 and, as Hughes tells us, 'destroyed by an Allied bomb in 1943,' Schwitters's *Kathedrale* was 'a reliquary construction

[32] John Lyon, '"All that": Muldoon and the Vanity of Interpretation', in *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, 121.
[33] Derek Attridge, *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 121, 122.
[34] Attridge, *Joyce Effects*, 123.

that spread through two floors of [the artist's Hanover] house.'[35] Having this 'supremely Joycean object' crop up in 'Yarrow' is powerfully playful mimesis. The house is a fitting replica of the poem's 'exploded' sestinas as both a lived-in and worked-through form, and a surreal reflection of family life and the family home reduced to ruin. Schwitters's *Kathedrale* and the childhood farm in 'Yarrow' are, like Lloyd Wright's Taliesin, both works of art and domestic spaces – and are further examples of Muldoon's architectural forms brought to destruction, and later reconstructed.

Joyce, Lloyd Wright and Schwitters in their different fields are figureheads of modernist culture, and the rich 'oratorios' of 'Incantata' suggests a further parallel in music. The poem ends with the image of another artist, Powers, making 'row upon row' of etchings, her overlaying rows reminiscent of the 'tone rows' of Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-note serialism. Originating with Schoenberg in the 1920s, as recorded by *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 'serial music is that in which a structural "series" of notes governs the total development of the composition.' In the strictest application of Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique, as in Muldoon's ninety-rhyme version, 'the order of the series [of notes] remains unaltered throughout the work, with certain permitted modifications.'[36] With this interest in music as an almost *spatial* form, Schoenberg offers another fascinating modernist counterpart to Schwitters and Lloyd Wright in reading these ninety-rhyme structures as serial architecture – as part of Muldoon's experiments with the 'exploded sestina', and his own innovative serialist forms of composition.

4

Palimpsests and 'Pararhymes'

The title of Muldoon's 1994 volume *The Annals of Chile* implies a book of historical record kept for future consultation. 'Annals' figure in *Finnegans Wake* and *To Ireland, I* as Irish sources[37] – and while the title of Muldoon's collection transposes them to South America, they are crucial historical documents for Irish culture. Muldoon's long poems in this volume and after make us conscious of the workings of memory and its embeddedness in his own early

[35] Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1980), 64.
[36] 'Serialism.' *The Oxford Dictionary of Music, 6th ed.*, ed. Tim Rutherford-Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), last accessed 11 Aug. 2017 at http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e9301.
[37] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguin, 1992), 013.22-31 (passim.); Paul Muldoon, *To Ireland, I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 90.

cultural life in Ireland, with the Joycean 'nautilus' of 'Yarrow', like the serial rhymes and their call-backs in 'Incantata', providing traces of a collective memory at work. In a notebook held by the Stuart A. Rose Archive there is another page of handwritten notes which sheds light on the workings of Muldoon's rhyming mind. The note is marked 'Japan, Sept-Oct 1994', presumably referring to a visit the poet took that year,[38] and beneath some roughly sketched ideas, Muldoon has written: 'Same end-words as "Incantata"' (see Fig. 8).

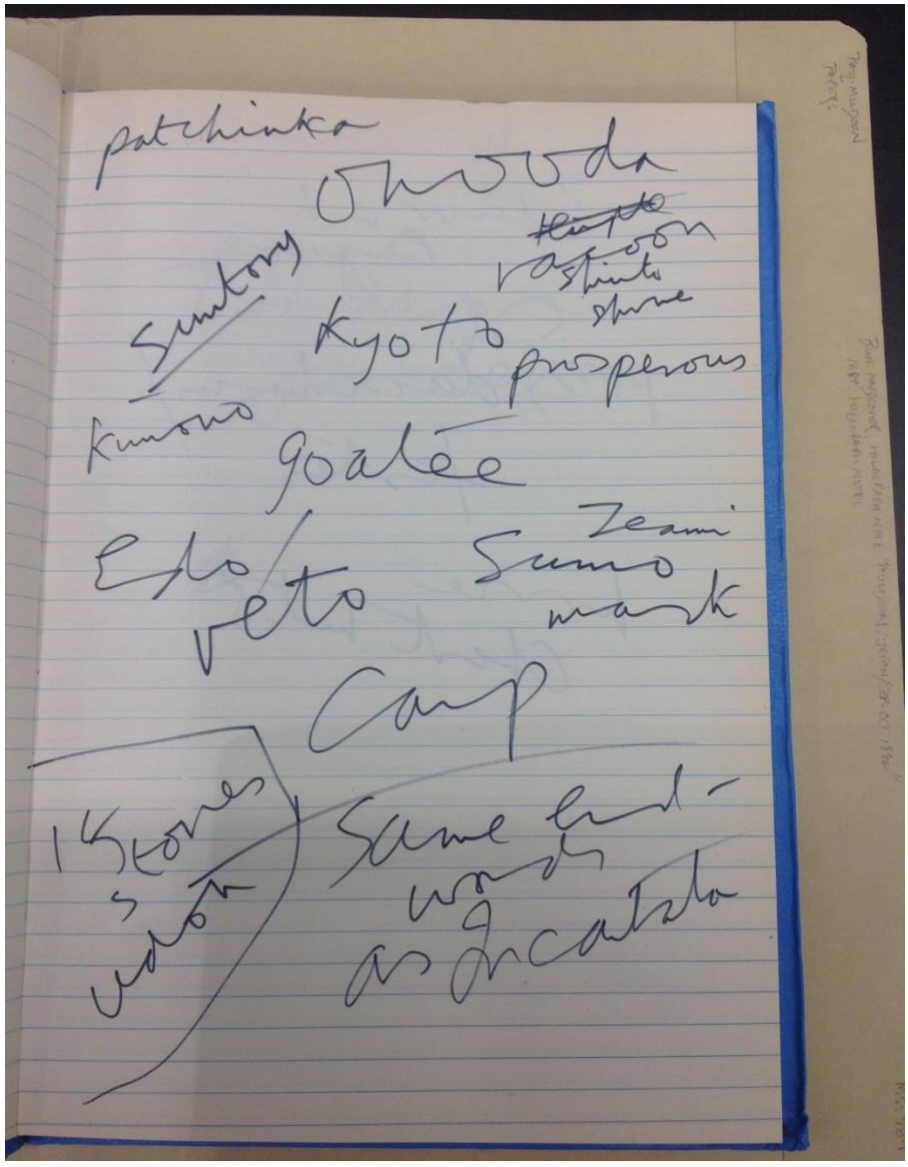

Figure 8. Blue Hardcover Holograph Notebook, 'Muldoon / Japan / Sep-Oct 1994'. Box 30, Item 331.

The words under which the instruction appears are of mostly Japanese origin: 'patchinko' is a form of pinball originating in Japan, 'Onooda' a famous Japanese soldier, 'Suntory' a brand of

[38] Muldoon's 1994 visit to Japan is mentioned by Clair Wills in *Reading Paul Muldoon*, 187.

Japanese whiskey, and 'Zeami' a fourteenth-century playwright and developer of Japanese Noh. These names accompany more recognisable references to Japanese places and culture: 'Kyoto', 'kimono', 'udon', 'shinto', 'shrine', 'sumo', and the ornamental 'carp'.

Even with Muldoon's forewarning in mind, it is striking how uniformly these end-words align with the end-words of 'Incantata'.[39] Of the first four rhyme-pairs in that poem, for instance, *Kyoto* rhymes with 'barrow', *patchinka* with 'Inca', *prosperous* with 'nautilus', and *goatee* with 'indeedy' (*P*, 331). Several words on the list arise sporadically as end-rhymes across the 1998 volume *Hay*, such as 'Zeami' in 'Long Finish', 'mask' in 'Third Epistle to Timothy', and 'veto' in 'Errata'. Six of them – 'raccoon', 'shrine', 'carp', 'zeami', 'sumo' and 'mask' – appear in 'Hopewell Haiku', also in *Hay*. The extent to which these words are replicating *beyond* the ninety-rhyme poems here is telling. It's as if Muldoon's shorter lyrics are being pulled into the gravitational field of the rhyming template, which colours them. Longer poems have always been cornerstones in Muldoon's collections, a foundational principle which has intensified since his U.S. debut, *Madoc*, upset the customary balance between shorter lyrics (*Madoc* contains only seven) and the gargantuan *tour de force* of its title poem. *Hay* contains six long poems, of which the longest three also share the same series of rhymes as 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata'. As Sarah Bennett observed in 2011, 'The long poem … has become increasingly integral to his poetics,' now coming to underwrite the themes of individual lyrics as well as the motifs reprised throughout the collection.[40] But *The Annals* established a new connection between the cornerstone long poems themselves across multiple volumes, built as they are from the same architectural rhyming blueprint.

Several words on the list above appear in 'The Mudroom', the opening poem in *Hay*, which also conforms to the rhyming template. Arranged in alternating couplets, the poem alternates between following the high-jinks of a figure-skating 'she-goat' as it capers through 'a valley in the Jura', and a domestic family setting shifted from Ireland to the U.S. via the European mountain range. Those mountains are a dreamlike extension of the 'mud room' itself, an entry-space common in North American homes where muddy outdoor-wear may be left, and where the remnants of Muldoon's earlier life and poetry – 'the bow and quiver,' 'the hubcap from a Ford Sierra | blown up … in Belfast,' 'twenty copies of *The Annals of Chile*,' 'a pair of my

[39] It is striking, too, that this handwritten note should refer not to 'the same end-words as Yarrow' where the words originate, but to 'Incantata' where the end-words are first repeated. For Muldoon, the *interability* of the rhyming template seems to be one of its most powerful and useful qualities.
[40] Sarah Bennett, 'Corrupt to Maggots' (2011), in *Tower Poetry Reviews 2004-2014*, sel. and introd. by Peter McDonald (Oxford: Tower Poetry, 2015), 182.

da's boots' – are gathered up with boxes from K-Mart and other everyday clutter (*P*, 395, 398, 396). Another of Muldoon's domestic architectural forms, like Wright's Taliesin, the mud room also serves a mnemonic function, storing old texts and records ('Abba to Ultravox') and other personal keepsakes – some of them, like his da's old boots, reminders of the father and the farm.

Elmer Kennedy-Andrews reads this poem as a 'quasi-autobiographical investigation into the experience of displacement, dispersion and transculturalism,' and is persuasive until he suggests that the figure of the poet seems 'cut off from the homelands of tradition'.[41] 'The Mudroom' does indeed position itself 'between worlds'[42] – the Old World and the New, the house and the great outdoors, the Catholic Irish and the Jewish American – but it remains in touch with them both, not cut off from the homeland but rather taking stock of his geographical displacement without leaving all remnants of his early life behind.

The she-goat which 'delights to tread upon the brink | of meaning' is a curious escort through this collection of Muldoon memorabilia. 'The poem is actually addressed to a wife,' Michael Allen observes, 'but a child-presence (like that in one of the "Dorothy Aoife" poems, "The Birth") is suggested by the tone as well as the mode of narrative – an adventure tour of a domestic interior like *Alice Through the Looking Glass*,' with the adventurous girl as goat.[43] Both the mother and ex-lover are missing in this poem, replaced by his wife as travel companion and by the daughter as goat whose capricious stunts and pirouettes through the Jura point us towards the poet's own performative ambitions. Drawing on the end-rhymes of *The Annals*, 'The Mudroom' revisits early family memories – especially Belfast in the seventies, the father and farming – as well as new memories of family life in America. The farming father was the subject of Muldoon's first sestina, the aforementioned 'Cauliflowers' in *Madoc*, and 'The Mudroom' returns to an elegiac portrait of the father in the ninety-rhyme form – as he does again in 'Third Epistle to Timothy' and 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', also collected in *Hay*.

In these poems, the rhyme scheme establishes itself as an enduringly familial form; and while 'The Mudroom' plays on its rhymes with improvisatory brio, Muldoon announces his intention to continue in the family line:

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[41] Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *Writing Home: Poetry and Place in Northern Ireland, 1968-2008* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 113, 114.
[42] Kennedy-Andrews, *Writing Home*, 114.
[43] Michael Allen, 'Pax Hibernica/Pax Americana: Rhyme as Reconciliation in Muldoon', in *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 84.

> We followed the narrow track, my love, we followed the narrow
> track through a valley in the Jura…
> (*P*, 395)

These repetitive opening lines are instructive, starting the poem and then almost starting it again with the wife or child ('my love') brought into the frame. It's as if the poem is registering its uncanny re-framing of 'Incantata', where the opening couplet first addressed the absent companion in Irish as 'my child' ('*a leanbh*'):

> I thought of you tonight, *a leanbh*, lying there in your long barrow
> colder and dumber than a fish by Francisco de Herrera…
> (331)

The 'narrow' track of 'The Mudroom' emerges from and rhymes back to this image of Powers's 'long barrow', with this and the original 'rows' of 'Yarrow' setting the course for what follows. Like the 'seed-catalogue' in 'Yarrow', 'the folding skating-rink' of 'The Mudroom' is representative of Muldoon's penchant for portable foldaway objects: the rink is a pop-up space for acrobatic self-performance, the kind of performance which is never far from other forms of self-satisfaction (as when 'I practiced my double backflip between her legs' in 'The Little Black Book' (*P*, 444)). The circular quest in 'The Mudroom' is finally for a 'wheel | of Morbier' cheese, a gastronomic journey which rhymes back to the agricultural motors – both the opening 'fly-wheel' and closing 'cog-wheel' – in 'Yarrow' (*P*, 395, 346, 392). A sense of the cheesemaker 'spread[ing] a layer of bland | curds on the blue-green seam' points to the formal 'layers' and 'seams' in play here (395); and in this vein, the end-words of the poem continue to gloss or supervene the end-words of 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata'. Elegy, looking back, is now setting the pattern for going forward in an avowedly capricious manner, as the capering she-goat announces. 'The Mudroom' shades towards palimpsest, and in this case, towards a condition of palimpsest born out of earlier palimpsestic forms.

In the 2004 T.S. Eliot Lecture entitled 'The Dark Art of Poetry', Don Paterson discussed the practice of 'pararhyme', another means of setting the pattern for going forward:

> In order to find pararhymes, unlike other kinds of rhyme, they have to be sought out much earlier than usual. In fact they can actively prefigure the whole poem. The ear can hear them, but not hunt for them – so the brain must find them out first. Having generated your pararhymes, you can write the poem around them, and use them as

> strange stations that the argument or the story of the poem must naturally visit. This defines its structure; thus rhyming becomes a wholly structural device.[44]

As Muldoon's typescript lists of possible rhyme-words suggest, he too is seeking them out 'much earlier than usual'. Indeed, Paterson identifies Muldoon as a pararhyming enthusiast: 'In our own time, [pararhyme] is to Paul Muldoon what feedback was to Jimi Hendrix – that's to say an infinitely flexible strategy that allows him to articulate his genius.' His allusion to Hendrix is well chosen, since Hendrix's improvised studio-track 'Voodoo Child (Slight Return)' suggested the title and improvisatory style of Muldoon's concluding poem in *Hay*, 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', to which we'll turn later.

In the ways Paterson describes, Muldoon's template of ninety rhymes seems to 'prefigure the whole poem', like structural signposts which allow the text to develop around them. Rhyming one poem with another, retracing old lines and recasting their endings, is a deeply superstitious way of writing – an almost 'mystical' process, as Paterson remarks, with the poem conjured out of something cast elsewhere. It is also, however, based on an intuitive investment in the rich materiality of language as memory bank and provocation. Muldoon's fixation with the 'same end words as "Incantata"' suggests a spooky fascination with that poem, and a compulsion to repeat it. As Freud explains in 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through', the compulsion to repeat is 'a way of remembering' which 'replaces the impulsion to remember',[45] of holding on to the past without having to confront it. The difficulty of 'holding on' to an elusive figure, like the never-caught she-goat in 'The Mudroom', is a common motif in these long poems – a motif which may go back to 'Incantata' as well as 'Yarrow', and the multiform woman (Mary Powers, the mother, 'S—') who ghosts in and out of his long serial poems with unsettling regularity.

If this suggests the *lover*, as much as the mother, is uppermost in Muldoon's rhyming mind, this is surely important: the erotic or romantic are overlaid upon the familial and maternal. But it does not tell us why the poet first adopted, and has since endlessly adapted, this extraordinary rhyming model. The same scheme now persists in updated forms, a model of repetition with difference: the structure has mutated into seriality. Samuel Beckett remarked that the cyclical Viconian model of *Finnegans Wake* was 'clearly adapted by Mr Joyce as a structural

[44] Don Paterson, 'The Dark Art of Poetry', Southbank Centre T.S. Eliot Lecture, 30 Oct. 2004, last accessed 18 Jul. 2017 at http://www.poetrylibrary.org.uk/news/poetryscene/?id=20.
[45] Freud, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through', 150-151.

convenience – or inconvenience',[46] and in Muldoon's case, too, Beckett's suggestion may be close to the mark. On one level, the rhyme scheme is a conveniently familiar (and abidingly familial) cyclical form; on another level, it is a complex compositional restriction which seems strangely inspirational. 'The restriction of rhyme obliges the poet to resort to the unpredictable,' Primo Levi wrote in a 1985 essay on the virtues of rhyme; '[it] compels him to invent, to "find", and to enrich his lexicon with unusual terms; bend his syntax; in short, to innovate.'[47] But if rhyme compels the poet to find or invent 'unusual terms', it also involves a *return*; as Beer reminds us, rhymes 'bring things back'. A productive tension is at play here, in which Muldoon's scheme of 90 rhymes can be understood as essentially conservative – feeding in, or feeding off, parts of earlier poems – but also dependably innovative, casting the old scheme into new places and new projects.

After 'The Mudroom', Muldoon's rhyming template appears on two further occasions in *Hay*. The first, 'Third Epistle to Timothy', imagines an eleven-year-old Patrick Muldoon (the poet's father) and his introduction to working life as a farm hand in Co. Tyrone. Again, the scheme is associated with early family memories and the home-world of Collegelands. It is a hundred-line poem in ten-line stanzas; when all 90 end-words have been used up by the end of the ninth stanza, the rhymes circle back to the beginning of the sequence. Here, in its tenth and final section, the poem reflects on the formal seriality it embodies internally as well as intertextually, providing a dark vision of the future as a version of the past:

> That next haycock already summoning itself from windrow after wind-weary windrow
> while yet another brings itself to mind in the acrid stink
> of turpentine. There the image of Lizzie,
> Hardy's last servant-girl, reaches out from her dais
> of salt hay, stretches out an unsunburned arm
> half in bestowal, half beseechingly, then turns away to appeal
> to all that spirit-troop
> of hay-treaders as far as the eye can see, the coil on coil
> of hay from which, in the taper's mild uproar,

[46] Samuel Beckett, 'Dante… Bruno. Vico… Joyce', in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 22.
[47] Primo Levi, 'Rhyming on the Counterattack', in *The Mirror Maker: Stories and Essays*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 113; quoted by David Caplan, *Questions of Possibility: Contemporary Poetry and Poetic Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5.

they float out across the dark face of the earth, an earth without form, and void.
(*P*, 454-455)

The ninety-rhyme scheme is itself a visual serial order – and it is worth noting how many repetitions are contained within these lines, which seem to stretch 'as far as the eye can see'.[48] The idea of 'the next haycock', 'summoning' and 'yet another' all reflect a rhyming structure which is arranging row upon row, 'coil on coil', 'windrow after wind-weary windrow', like the tone rows of Schoenberg's musical serialism. But here Muldoon's serial form is pulling structural harmony from the blankness that ends the poem, pitching itself *against* that closing line from Genesis, 'an earth without form, and void.'

Without a sense of the rhyming template undergirding it, the poem seems at first glance a grandly expansive, assured performance in free verse. But as Michael Allen notes, 'the assurance of "Third Epistle to Timothy" would not have been possible without the long stretch and stride of "Yarrow" and "Incantata",' or the 'rhyming master-plan' from which its long lines draw 'such confidence and energy of tone'.[49] And as the end-rhymes shared with 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata' slip across the lines into 'Third Epistle', so too do their images. The 'line | of chafers or cheeselips that have scaled the bed legs' of Patrick Muldoon's bunk in the fourth stanza recalls another hostile legion of insects, the 'army-worms' of 'Incantata' that invade Powers's home and 'shinny down the stove-pipe' (*P*, 452, 331). Echoes of 'lips' and 'legs' in one poem, 'arms' and 'shins' in the other, give fleshy substance to these lines about bodies under attack. After his earlier comments, Allen then rather strangely suggests that the rhyming template imported from 'Yarrow' has become 'a semi-insulated past event' here, 'so that its activating stresses and strains in the new poem are almost invisible.'[50] But corrosion and bodily invasion are two of these 'activating stresses', and both are inscribed in the rhyming memory of these poems: as with the warlike 'row upon row' of army-worms in 'Incantata', or the 'larva … gnawing at her "most secret and inviolate" | rose' in 'Yarrow', the chafers and cheeselips of 'Third Epistle' corrosively 'overthrow as they undermine' from the inside out (*P*, 341, 377, 454).

These palimpsestic layers of invasion and infection are multi-directional, and bear witness to the overlapping 'coils' of rhyme and self-reference that frame them. When the father as a boy finds a 'bud of farcy' on the horse's hock in 'Third Epistle', the infectious equine growth

[48] Among them 'windrow … windrow', 'half in bestowal, half beseechingly', 'hay … hay', 'coil on coil', and 'earth … earth'.
[49] Allen, 'Rhyme and Reconciliation', 89.
[50] Allen, 'Rhyme and Reconciliation', 90.

recalls the 'tumorous jardon' in 'Incantata' where 'the horse's hock suddenly erupted in those boils and buboes' (*P*, 451, 340). The horse infection itself goes back as far as 'The Mixed Marriage' and its brief history of the mother and father in *Mules* (1977): 'She had read one volume of Proust, | He knew the cure for farcy' (*P*, 60). That 'bud of farcy' in 'Third Epistle' is drawing on these earlier parental concerns, harking back to an earlier poem which raises Proust as a comparative model in Muldoon's autobiographical American writings about memory and Irish family lore.

When the father in 'Third Epistle' climbs up to a 'thistle-strewn vantage point, | the point where two hay ropes cross', the crossing ropes of the poem's ninety rhymes are brought sharply into focus (*P*, 454). After this penultimate stanza, the end-rhymes dutifully coil round as Cummins and his crew 'move on to mark out the next haycock', with the tenth and final stanza starting again from the top of the sequence at rhyme 1 of 90. Marking out the next haycock is a way of resetting the form, and the crossing ropes are a figure for the rhymes that bind them. These formal parallels and self-reflections not only suggest that Muldoon is highly conscious of the scheme he's working with, but that the scheme itself has become deeply influential in the thematic development of his writing. Memory, the father and the crucial idea of the harvest are overlaid with the form in 'Third Epistle', where another agricultural model has been superimposed on the 'Yarrow' home-scape, and where the father joins the mother (and the poet himself as a boy) in Muldoon's U.S. recollections of familial forms of the farm.

5
'Slight Returns'

The multiple narratives of 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', the third and last of Muldoon's ninety-rhyme poems in *Hay*, stray far from the Northern Ireland farmhouse – though the farming father is again the protagonist. A travelogue of his father's counterfactual emigration to find work 'in the canefields north of Brisbane' (459), the poem is also partly set in a swanky Parisian restaurant, where Muldoon's gastronomic over-indulgence frames an imagined series of events and memories that end up repeating on him. Rhyming *ababcdcdeafeaf*, each sonnet-length stanza uses only six rhymes, of which the last two are repeated at the start of the next, like a hybrid form of sestina-sonnet. Once we reach the middle sonnet when all 90 rhymes have been used, the pattern is repeated in reverse, as first documented by Clair Wills.[51] As such, the

[51] Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon*, 209.

poem's closing tercets are sonically intertwined with the first quatrain, providing the lattice-work of a sequence similarly intertwined in its rhymes throughout. These are the 'Slight Returns' alluded to in the title, though the poem is also 'a more-than-slight return to an earlier short poem called "The Bangle",' as John Redmond notes, 'itself partly set in a restaurant, "Le Petit Zinc".'[52]

'The Bangle (Slight Return)' begins on auditory overdrive, hearing 'the tink | of blade on bone', with 'tink' one among a great jangling of end-words – Maro, skinnymalinks, jackaroos, alalales, daddle-dade, Iulus, Ida – that rounds off the opening lines. This acoustic plurality is largely in keeping with the 'song' of 'The Bangle', the earlier *Hay* poem that Redmond refers to, which 'ranges from a boom to a kerplink | reminiscent of the worst excesses of Conlon Nancarrow' (402). The intra-textual rhymes of 'tink' and 'kerplink', 'Nancarrow' and 'Maro', are bridging the two 'Bangle' poems and not by accident: the eight rhymes of 'The Bangle' are the same as the first eight of 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', as if this short poem were a musical overture to the longer improvisatory piece. Conlon Nancarrow, a Mexican composer of experimental cacophonies,[53] offers a different model of musical architecture than Schoenberg's (although his auto-play Studies for Player Piano are a comparably avant-garde model of the 'row upon row', as the name 'Nancarrow' itself suggests). That Nancarrow's compositions are dismissed here as his 'worst excesses' suggests Muldoon sees his own style of acoustic programming very differently from what Kyle Gann calls the composer's 'harsh, bristling timbres';[54] and perhaps that his own musical forms, despite their precast rhythms, are resisting those ideas of pre-programmed performance.

A further clue to the poem's extemporizations is found in the 'Slight Return' of the title, which after Jimi Hendrix refers to an improvised version of, or variation on, the original studio track. Extemporization is both thematic and paradigmatic in Muldoon's poem, which abounds with spontaneous bouts of neology, off-the-cuff revisions ("'For '*demain*,' Virgil began to sing | … | "read '*de Main*'"'), and *ad lib* clichés: "'A gift horse is soon curried," | Virgil would improvise' (*P*, 471, 474). As these slight returns imply, the poem echoes familiar patterns of speech, song and myth, and riffs on them in principles that are musical as much as architectural.

[52] John Redmond, 'Auden in Ireland', in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, ed. Peter Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 438.
[53] Kyle Gann, *The Music of Conlon Nancarrow* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.
[54] Gann, *The Music of Conlon Nancarrow*, 5.

Although the poem 'repeatedly emphasises happenstance and serendipity,' as Shane Alcobia-Murphy contends, 'its rigidly set form […] and structure that echoes "Yarrow" suggests utter predetermination and control on the poet's part.'[55] But 'happenstance' and 'serendipity' needn't be *entirely* divorced from 'predetermination' and 'control', and most models of improvisation (especially musical models like jazz) conform to some kind of structure. Performers generally work from set parts which are then 'embellished or varied within narrow limits', as explained in the *Grove Dictionary of Jazz*.[56] A sense of structure is often essential to an improvised form, and can be used as a gateway to material thought to be forgotten – or, as John Ashbery says of the sestina, 'a device for getting into remoter areas of consciousness'. Ashbery describes the sestina as 'rather like riding downhill on a bicycle and having the pedals push your feet […] into places they wouldn't normally have taken'.[57] Seamus Heaney's take on the sestina, which I lift from his discussion of Elizabeth Bishop's 'Sestina' in *The Redress of Poetry*, is that 'The poem circles unspoken sorrows, and as it circles them, it manages to mesmerize them and make them obedient to creative will.'[58] Sestinas for Heaney's Bishop are about control, 'obedience to creative will', a standpoint from which Ashbery's notion of the sestina looks more like a joyride through unfamiliar territory.

'The Bangle (Slight Return)' registers these formal tensions, and raises its own question about the relationship between order and improvisation:

> a groundswell that seemed as likely to overturn as uphold
> the established order, such order as we decipher
> while we sit and play, or are played by, our toccatas,
> stately at the clavichord.
> (*P*, 468-469)

Browning's lines from 'A Toccata of Galuppi's' – 'While you sat and played Toccatas, stately at the clavichord' – are at the forefront here,[59] though staying true to their improvisatory spirit, Muldoon's lines work in a suggestive inversion of Browning: does the poet 'play' or is he

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[55] Alcobia-Murphy, *Sympathetic Ink*, 17.
[56] James Lincoln Collier, 'Jazz (i).' *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz, 2nd ed.*, Grove Music Online (Oxford University Press), last accessed 17 Aug. 2017 at http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/ grove/music/J223800.
[57] Janet Bloom and Robert Losada, 'Craft Interview with John Ashbery', in *The Craft of Poetry: Interviews from the New York Quarterly*, ed. William Packard (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 111-132, 124.
[58] Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 170.
[59] Robert Browning, *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning, Vol. 5*, ed. Ian Jack (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 58.

'played'? Toccatas are musical exercises that give 'the air of an improvisation', as the *OED* informs us; and the riddle of whether we play, or are played by them, raises a concern about the illusion of improvisation in predetermined forms, whether musical or poetic. Is Muldoon conducting these rhymes, or conducted by them? And where does this leave the reader – the hero of the Oxford lectures – as he or she seeks to 'decipher' such order?

Browning's 'A Toccata of Galuppi's' is about an English pianist playing Baldassare Galuppi's 'old music', and the capacity of that music to transport the performer back to the luxurious Venetian carnivals of Galuppi's era. But as the music fades and the poem ends, so too the reverie of the carnival dissolves into the silence that the music leaves behind:

> Dear dead women, with such hair, too—what's become of all the gold
> Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old.[60]

'The Bangle (Slight Return)' is another poem about an imaginary past, in which Muldoon's 'Dear dead women' are a comparably haunting presence. As in Browning, these women abandon him at the end of the poem, where Muldoon's speaker faces his own '*crise | d'un certain âge*' (*P*, 467). This archly exaggerated midlife crisis takes the poet back to the fancies of youth – although the imagined return is notably to his *father's* youth, as it was in 'Third Epistle to Timothy', rather than his own.

The opening voyage of 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', from Belfast to Stranraer, begins in conversation with another dear dead figure, Virgil. Virgil's Aeneas is guided by his father's visions and apparitions on his journey from Troy to Italy, but it is Virgil himself who becomes the poet's guide in this poem (as in Dante), leading the father's vessel through headwinds from the Sea of Moyle. Shifting these epic registers into Irish waters, the Virgilian backdrop becomes a framework for Muldoon's own brand of mythology. The poem is a bricolage of would-be origin stories: an account of his father's alternative life in Australia is intercut with scenes from *The Aeneid* and a swanky Parisian restaurant somewhere off the Champs-Élysées, in which Muldoon encounters the lookalike of 'a reporter | I knew in Belfast' (460). Across the three narrative arcs, Redmond observes that the poem 'meditates on the large consequences of single decisions –Aeneas choosing to turn back to Troy, Muldoon's father choosing (or not choosing) to head for Australia, and Muldoon in the restaurant choosing or not choosing to connect with an old flame that he spots there.'[61]

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[60] Browning, *The Poetical Works*, 61.
[61] Redmond, 'Auden in Ireland', 438.

The figure of the poet is captivated by this old flame and the possible consequences of his decision to reconnect with her. She and Creusa – Aeneas's wife – combine into a single figure whom the speaker ogles from across the restaurant: 'I could but gawk | at Creusa, could but gape at her prim, | at her prissy-prim | little mouth' (467). An emphasis on the mouth and the prominence of 'prim' – twice a rhyme-word – points back to the corresponding rhyme in 'Incantata', where Powers's mouth is 'as prim | and proper as it's full of self-opprobrium', and to the prim-and-proper mother in 'Yarrow' whose 'mouth was smoother than oil' (336, 357). Thus 'The Bangle (Slight Return)' juggles female identities, drawing together the Belfast reporter, her possible 'lookalike', and Aeneas's Creusa into the same elusive figure. Powers and the mother emerge as 'prissy-prim' female archetypes, with family memories – and erotic or romantic ones – crossing in the restaurant as site of consumption.[62]

'The Bangle (Slight Return)' imagines what *might* have happened in order to take stock of things as they are, or could be, as Muldoon marvels at the contingency of family history. In a poem about the father, Mary Powers and Muldoon's mother cast long shadows, with recollections of their 'death throes' fading into the poem's patchwork of mythic and counterfactual female partings. Clair Wills sees the poems' shared rhymes as a template imbued with maternal traces; but as this poem goes to show, focussing only on the mother ignores the significance of other female afterlives in Muldoon's work. These competing romantic and maternal influences are felt in 'The Bangle (Slight Return)' from the beginning, where 'two winds vied | for supremacy in the air' (459). Muldoon's poem negotiates these winds – the mother on one side as 'a glimmer from across the divide', and the lover on the other side as 'a glimmer from across the chasm' – with 'divide' and 'chasm' resonating deeply in a context of prior poems and their contrasting teleologies. In 'Yarrow' he imagines his mother's appeals 'to some higher power, some *Deo*' (rhymed with 'divide'), and at the same point in 'Incantata', remembers Powers's belief in a blind watchmaker which represents her 'own version of Thomism' (rhymed with 'chasm'). Their contrary appeals to the divine come down to a shared belief that 'in everything there is an order' (332), and Muldoon's serial order of rhyme in these elegiac poems might be a way of ratifying that faith in hidden coherences – or positing against 'an earth without form, and void' as we saw in 'Third Epistle to Timothy'.

[62] The relation in Muldoon's writing between food, rhyme and flavour is an extensive topic, as I am addressing in a forthcoming article on 'Paul Muldoon's Recipe for Rhyme'.

6

'Déjà vu'

Domestic interiors and homely appetites are setting a familiar pattern in these long poems. 'Incantata' began in the kitchen with the poet cutting potatoes, 'Yarrow' in his childhood home with the father as vegetable farmer, and 'The Mudroom' in the porch of his New Jersey house with a hunt for cheese. The 2002 volume *Moy Sand and Gravel* concludes with another ninety-rhyme poem, 'At the Sign of the Black Horse, September 1999', which returns to this domestic New Jersey set-up on the occasion of a family barbecue. The poem begins 'the morning after Hurricane Floyd', with the poet and his baby son outside their house, sitting on the bank of the flooded Delaware and Raritan Canal (*MSG*, 73). The Formal Uncanny of his ninety-rhyme scheme seems to be drawing on an architectural template as well as a culinary one, as Muldoon's new family house is set against – or superimposed upon – memories of his parents' home.

'Yarrow' is in this sense providing the original blueprint, but Wright's Taliesin in *Shining Brow* – a house devastated by fire, as the farmhouse in 'Yarrow' is devastated by weeds – was perhaps the first architectural model of the scheme's serial reincarnations of home. As Wright sings to himself at the end of the opera, 'I think of the balsam-fir | that springs up a hundredfold | in the aftermath of a forest fire' (*SB*, 85) – his determination to rebuild anticipating the vegetative vitalism of 'Yarrow', and the ninetyfold model of rhyme that develops out of these domestic sites of loss and memory. Also set amidst the wreckage of disaster, the poet's New Jersey home in 'Black Horse' becomes part of this domestic architectural palimpsest of ruin – even if the Muldoon family remains 'high and dry', the house standing firm against hurricane and flood on its 'two-hundred-and-fifty-year-old slab' (*MSG*, 73). A little earlier in *Moy Sand and Gravel,* 'The Loaf' is another architectural poem about the history of this house and its survival. Examined through house walls and 'the hole they've cut for a dimmer switch' during renovations, 'When I put my nose to the hole I smell the floodplain | of the canal after a hurricane | and the spots of green grass where thousands of Irish have lain' (*MSG*, 47). These Irish navvies, many of them indentured, dug the Raritan canal in the 1830s under desperate conditions; and they are elegized in 'The Loaf', as in 'Black Horse', as beleaguered representatives of Muldoon's Irish heritage in America. With the millrace sweeping by, this house in 'Black Horse' and 'The Loaf' becomes 'a locus for remembering,' as Anne Karhio

suggests – 'not in the form of a monument, a site of static memorial or elegiac images, but as an ongoing process' of building and rebuilding.[63]

In Muldoon's architectural imagination, homes are often places of consumption, as well as destruction and rebuilding. Setting up here 'in a corner of the garage', a feast is prepared for the family gathering:

> [I] tear another leaf from Edward Bulwer-Lytton's
> *King Poppy* to light the barbecue, the barbecue shortly to be laden
> with Dorothy's favorite medallions of young rat
>
> and white-lipped peccary taken this morning not with old-fashioned piano wire
> but the latest in traps. I'll rake the ashes of the fire
> on which they'll cook […]
> having taken down from the attic the ancient Underwood
> with its one remaining black ribbon[.]
> (*MSG*, 74)

Bulwer-Lytton's epic *King Poppy* here plays a suggestively Bloomian role, its pages ripped out to feed not only Muldoon's family, but also his antique typewriter. The 'herd of peccaries' in 'Yarrow' is echoed in this feast, as is an earlier poem from *Meeting The British* (1987), 'Crossing The Line', in which two rival commanders dine by candle-light 'on medallions of young peccary' as their attendants hand out napkins 'torn from the script of a seven-part series | based on the *Mabinogion*' (*P*, 161). Cannibalizing his own earlier 'script', Muldoon again represents cooking and eating, as in 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', as the occasion for writing.

'At the Sign of the Black Horse' is also a kind of vision poem, conjuring up a family of revenants who appear 'in Asher's glabrous face' (*MSG*, 84). The son's features rhyme back to the father's in 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', his hair 'all glabrous' (*P*, 460); but while fatherhood and ancestry are abiding concerns in 'Black Horse', Muldoon's own father is markedly absent from the poem. Family on his wife's side skips more recent generations, calling up his son's great-grandparents and other historical relatives – most notably his wife's 'distant cousin' Helene Hanff and the Prohibition-era mobster Arnold Rothstein, or 'Uncle Arnie', who infamously

[63] Anne Karhio, 'Place, Experience and Estrangement in the Poetry of Paul Muldoon', in *Recovering Memory: Irish Representations of Past and Present*, eds. Hedda Freiberg, Irene Gilsenan Nordin, and Lene Yding Pedersen (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), 216.

fixed the 1919 World Series (*MSG*, 78, 75). The poem's four '-da' rhymes, too, avoid any hint of the father, drawing instead on nonce-words ('deh-dah'), a colonial Indian place-name ('Perinda'), and awkward off-rhyme ('day'). In a text which resurrects old family members, his mother and father are conspicuous absentees – and in their absence, 'Black Horse' foregrounds Muldoon as the father of his own family.

His son's face is the aperture through which the poem's historical flashbacks are seen, a narrative frame with echoes of the soliloquized 'potato-face' in 'Incantata' (*P*, 334). The two poems also share a stanza-form as well as the ninety rhymes themselves, each replicating the *ababcddc* octaves that Yeats borrowed from Abraham Cowley.[64] Yeats used this octave-form in his own meditation on fatherhood, 'A Prayer for My Daughter', a text quoted liberally in this poem (which is a kind of prayer for Muldoon's son). 'Incantata' and 'Black Horse' are identical in length, their forms differing only in that 'Black Horse' reverses the original order of rhymes.[65] While this structural rejigging may seem incidental, it reflects the fact that the rhyming template – Muldoon's model for elaborating and reinventing old material – is itself being played with in increasingly elaborate and inventive ways.

While the 90-rhyme sequence is in one sense retained, its re-arrangement points to an unresolved tension in Muldoon's long poems between returning to a particular form of the past and moving away from it. A lightness of being is evident in 'Black Horse' from the beginning, with Muldoon assuring himself that 'if need be, we might bundle a few belongings into a pillow slip | and climb the hill and escape' the flooded canal (*MSG*, 73). Compared with the 'long-flooded valley' of 'Incantata', where the 'Pompeii reliquaries' lie entombed and 'submerged', the speaker of 'Black Horse' is rather buoyant amidst the surrounding wreckage, 'happy for once to be left high and dry' (*P*, 335; *MSG*, 73). Again the form brings with it – or is brought to bear on – questions of ruination and survival. The flooded canal on his doorstep calls to mind not what lies submerged at the bottom, however, but the rich assortment of debris floating along the millrace: 'the freezer bag | into which we've bundled the carry-out from the Sahara, | the sign-post […], Hump, No Shoulder, No Rail,' are 'all borne along' (87).

[64] See Helen Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline: Yeats and Lyric Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 293.

[65] Where 'Incantata' advances from rhyme 1 → 90 and 90 → 1, rhyming forwards and then backwards through the same set of rhymes, 'Black Horse' reverses this route, running from 90 → 1 and 1 → 90. In other words, the sequence begins and ends at what would be the rhyming midpoint in 'Incantata'. See Appendix for the full list of Muldoon's ninety rhymes.

Much of the poem is spent preparing the feast. Roasting the 'white-lipped peccary', or wild musk-pig, in the 'autoclave' (a kind of pressure cooker), the themes of loss and feasting are brought together as they were in 'The Bangle (Slight Return)'. But the poem's concern with cooking is drawn into sharp relief in the following section, where the half-baked peccary pig morphs horrifyingly into the figure of his stillborn son:

> Now Helene leaves off rubbing cornstarch
> into the arch
> of whatever lies in the autoclave, sets the little beak of her Colibri
>
> wobblingly to a cigarette, Pull To Open,
> and reaches into a drawer for the poultry shears. The hacking through a babby bone.
> No obstacle but Gregory's wood
> and one bare hill, Slippery When Wet,
> bringing back the morning Dr Patel had systematically drawn
> the child from Jean's womb…
> (*MSG*, 88).

This is an example of Muldoon at his most evocative and provocative. These harrowing suggestions of surgical 'hacking' are all the more powerful for the echo of Yeats's 'Prayer for my Daughter': 'Gregory's wood', its 'one bare hill' and 'the great gloom' on Yeats's mind are all bundled into Muldoon's loss and 'Jean's womb'.

The miscarriage calls up memories of an earlier poem about Muldoon's firstborn, 'The Birth', in which the midwives 'ply their shears | and gralloch-grub | for a footling foot' as a baby girl is 'haul[ed]' out (*P*, 343). The rest of the poem comprises a rich alphabetic sweep through 'the inestimable realm of apple-blossoms and chanterelles and damsons and eel-spears', a list brimming with life and zest, to which his daughter is celebrated as the latest addition. That scene is overwritten in 'Black Horse' where the child's delivery is upsettingly mirrored, and those midwives who 'ply their shears' now echo ominously in Helene's 'poultry shears'. The verbal giddiness of his daughter's arrival in 'The Birth' – 'ply', 'grub', 'footling', 'haul' 'rub-a-dub' – is grimly redrawn in 'Black Horse' as a 'bare', 'systematic' procedure surrounded by sanitized markers of the public world ('Pull To Open', 'Slippery When Wet').

'Open' | 'bone' is perhaps the most striking and unsettling rhyme of the 'Black Horse' sequence, and its appearance here is haunted by earlier poems. In the surgical context, 'open'

takes us back to 'Yarrow' where the surgeon 'slic[es] through the right Fallopian', and an image of his mother 'after they sliced her open' (*P*, 387, 388). The 'Fallopian' | 'open' rhyme traces death and fertility to the same ovarian source – a prospect drawn upon with ghastly implications in 'Black Horse', where fertility and death are similarly linked. This uncannily forceful connection between fertility and death is a common thread in many of these 90-rhyme poems. Grimly echoing 'The Operation', Anne Sexton's confessional poem about her ovarian cancer, 'death too is in the egg'.[66]

All this amounts to what is described in 'Black Horse' as 'An overwhelming sense of *déjà vu*' (*MSG*, 84), conforming to the serial structural repetition of a formal scheme that is both *déjà vu* and *déjà entendu*. Surgery in these poems plays a prominent role in the lives of Muldoon's family and friends, and the textual traces have developed over time into a palimpsest of procedures taken and (in Powers's case) not taken. The operation in 'Black Horse' calls up the full range of surgical experience addressed in these texts (mostly drawn from *The Annals*): an image of the mother 'sliced open' in 'Yarrow', 'the phantom "a" in Cesarian' in 'Footling', his daughter 'haul[ed]' into the world in 'The Birth', Powers's refusal to 'let some doctor cut [her] open' in 'Incantata'.[67] 'Cradle Song for Asher', a short prelude poem to 'Black Horse' in *Moy Sand and Gravel*, begins with 'they' who 'cut your birth cord yesterday' (72). Even the 'autoclave' in which the peccary cooks in 'Black Horse' is also a term for the sterilization units used for surgical equipment. Since *The Annals*, Muldoon's poems have been remarkably open about medical histories, and the repeated encounters with surgeons – especially in the presence of cancer, as Iain Twiddy has shown – are catalogued in these poems with disturbing regularity.[68]

The so-called 'confessional' poets of the 1960s wrote often of surgeries, which they framed as moments of radical self-exposure. 'Surgery is an act of penetration,' Deborah Nelson writes, and '[u]nless the confessional poets had an unusual number of surgical procedures, it seems obvious that the operation poem is meant to reveal something about the poetry of private life'.[69] In revealing these private details, Muldoon's poems situate themselves in a confessional, autobiographical mode that professes authenticity. Indeed, it is striking how often Muldoon's poems represent loved ones at their most naked – as patients on the operating table, in the grip of addiction or disease. But there is something invasive, as well as self-exposing, about the

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[66] Anne Sexton, *Anne Sexton: The Complete Poems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999 [1981]), 56.
[67] *P*, 388, 342, 343, 335.
[68] See Iain Twiddy, 'Paul Muldoon: Cancer and the Ethics of Representation', in *Cancer Poetry* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 144-162.
[69] Deborah Nelson, 'Confessional Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry Since 1945*, ed. Jennifer Ashton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 41.

disclosure of these medical histories. The 'operation poems' of the confessional poets were mainly about the poets themselves as patients, Nelson notes, but Muldoon more commonly represents the bodies of others – his family most prominently – in these stark medical contexts.[70] Is this perhaps the poet as virtual surgeon, or sadist? Exposed family bodies might, in Nelson's terms, 'literalize the metaphorical opening [up]' that Muldoon's autobiographical rhyming poems appear to exemplify; but with the poet as surgeon rather than patient, the body or open wound is not only exhibited but examined and performed upon. As signifiers of openness, these operations also allow Muldoon to dissect his own poetic procedures as well as explore the anatomy of loss in an intimate, painful, but also clinically distancing form.

The awkward autobiographical openness evident in the 90-rhyme series is carried over in the same morbid, self-reflecting vein in Muldoon's following volume. *Horse Latitudes* (2006) concludes with ninety-rhyme poem in *terza rima* called 'Sillyhow Stride', an elegy for Muldoon's friend Warren Zevon. Taking stock of Zevon's musical life, addictions, and eventual death from cancer, 'Sillyhow Stride' is also an elegy for Muldoon's sister, who died of ovarian cancer in the same year as Zevon. This is the 'same cancer' that brought about 'our mother's death … thirty years ago' (*HL*, 99), a memory first recorded in 'Yarrow' that has itself become a palimpsest of multiple memories, overlaid by the ovarian contexts of 'Black Horse' and other poems in the ninety-rhyme series.

'Sillyhow', from the German *Glückshaube*, 'cap of luck', refers to the 'inner membrane enclosing the foetus before birth' (*OED*) – a maternal, ovarian object which once again links death with fertility. A private performance of mourning for his late sister is overlaid and mediated here by a more public form of commemoration for Zevon. The pervasiveness of elegy in Muldoon's recent poetry is a characteristic that seems to vex him in 'Sillyhow Stride' – as if the poet were concerned about having become dependent on loss as the occasion for writing, especially in the ninety-rhyme series. Muldoon's serial scheme, which has its roots in loss and remembrance and so often returns to elegiac forms, is surely related to what Freud calls the 'work of mourning'. As Freud describes it, this work occurs when 'the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged [after death]', and 'the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object [are] brought up', or brought back, over time.[71] Peter Sacks began with these Freudian ideas when he declared in *The English Elegy* (1985) that elegy is a 'working

[70] Deborah Nelson, *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 117.
[71] Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 14*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 245.

through of an impulse or experience – the sense that underlies Freud's phrase "the work of mourning".'[72] In Muldoon, the form itself seems to be enabling that messy (and often unsettlingly libidinous) work of mourning to develop, 'bringing things back' or prolonging them over multiple collections in serially productive and mnemonically provocative ways.

Like the Wagnerian *leitmotif*, musical forms are another means by which Muldoon's long rhyming poems bring things back. The title track of Zevon's eleventh studio album, 'My Ride's Here', was written in collaboration with Muldoon in 2002, and the pair had drafted the script of a musical, *A Honey War*, before Zevon's diagnosis put production on hold.[73] Rackett, the Princeton-based rock band for which Muldoon wrote song lyrics, was set up in 2004, though according to his earlier poem 'Sleeve Notes', Zevon's musical influence goes back as far as 'the wild and wicked poems in *Quoof*' (*P*, 413). Despite its elegiac subject, the text of 'Sillyhow Stride' is all strung-out rocker jargon and 'Fender Vibratones', with a generous helping of song lyrics from Zevon and quotations from John Donne (who is Zevon's kindred spirit in the poetry business, as Muldoon's poem seems to suggest). The 'Stride' of the title is listed in *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* as 'a solo jazz piano style' which 'called for fast tempos, full use of the piano's range and a wide array of pianistic devices,' with emphasis on improvisation.[74] Stride developed in New York and the East Coast U.S. in the 1920s; and like the Hendrix-style riffs of 'The Bangle (Slight Return)' or the U2-inspired Vegas setting of his libretto *Vera of Las Vegas* (2001), Muldoon's improvisatory strides are drawing heavily on an American musical culture that includes Zevon. Overlaying this jazz for piano, Stephen Regan notes of the poem that 'Muldoon's own artistic power is repeatedly figured through a changing array of guitars and amps' – including the suggestively named 'Gibson Les Paul' – in a keyed-up performance of what he terms the 'rock elegy'.[75]

As 'Black Horse' borrowed freely from Yeats's 'A Prayer for My Daughter', 'Sillyhow Stride' lifts numerous lines from Donne, intensifying the sense of the scavenger-poet aligned with the carrion-feeding turkey vultures who 'wait for you to eclipse and cloud them with a

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[72] Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 1.
[73] Dinita Smith, 'Times Are Difficult, So Why Should The Poetry Be Easy?', *New York Times*, 19 Nov. 2002, last accessed 2 Aug. 2017 at http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/19/books/times-are-difficult-so-why-should-poetry-be-easy-paul-muldoon-continues-create.html. Partial and complete typescripts of *A Honey War* are held by the Stuart A. Rose Archive in the Paul Muldoon papers, Box 74, Folders 4-7.
[74] J. Bradford Robinson, 'Stride.', *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press), last accessed 2 Aug. 2017 at http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/26955.
[75] Stephen Regan, 'Irish Elegy After Yeats', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry*, eds. Fran Brearton and Alan Gillis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 606.

wink' (*HL*, 106). The vulture's dependence on carrion draws a dark veil over the poem's elegiac subject, though some consolation is being drawn – ironically or not – from the vulture's Latin name, '*Cathartes aura*'. The name implies that the bird's scavenging is also an act of cleansing and part of a wider biological equilibrium, in which the relation between bird and roadkill is ultimately harmonious, and, potentially at least, cathartic.

Questions of catharsis, commemoration and life's continuation after death are also present in the poem on a formal level. Issues of how a life might end as its legacy extends are bound up with the poem's *terza rima* structure, in which consecutive stanzas are linked together in a manner that's at once closed off and open-ended. Unusually for Muldoon, though, the poem ends on an emphatic rhyming triplet, with an accompanying image of Zevon's body offered up to the birds:

> belly-up on a Space Lab scaffold where the turkey buzzards pink *b*
> Matsuhisa-san's seared *toro*, *a*
> turkey buzzards waiting for you to eclipse and cloud them with a wink *b*
>
> as they hold out their wings and of the sun his working vigor borrow *a*
> before they parascend through the Viper Room or the Whisky A Go Go, *a*
> each within its own 'cleansing breeze,' its own *Cathartes aura*. *a*
> (*HL*, 106)

'Sillyhow Stride' makes a Dantesque ascension from the 'hell' encountered in the first line, that is, 'the hell of a kick' Zevon might've had on 'Grammy night' when his music received two posthumous awards (96). Muldoon's previous long elegies have summarily rejected the possibility of consolation, and it's striking that this one should end with a 'cleansing breeze' on an unexpectedly uplifting note. Zevon's quip about what his condition had taught him about life and death – 'Enjoy every sandwich'[76] – may be in the air, floating irreverently like the vultures themselves. Nobu Matsuhisa's famous fusion cuisine – here his 'seared *toro*' – is a running allusion in the poem, which revolves around Muldoon and Zevon's shared tastes. That 'seared *toro*' may be representing the musician's body of work as well as the physical body, served up to those who circle the L.A. Rock and Roll scene of 'the Viper Room' and 'Whisky A Go Go'. A sense of music as nourishment suggests that the poem, despite its rawer moments, finds

[76] Jon Pareles, 'Warren Zevon's Last Waltz', *New York Times Magazine*, 26 Jan. 2003, accessed 1 Aug. 2017, at http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/26/magazine/warren-zevon-s-last-waltz.html.

consolation in the world of physical as well as acoustic appetites, and the feast of music that was Zevon's contribution.

Muldoon's previous two long-rhyming sequences, 'The Bangle (Slight Return)' and 'At the Sign of the Black Horse', were poems about feasting, and both riffed on the 90-rhyme scheme – the first through a sestina-like sonnet form, and the second through a Yeatsian octave-stanza that reversed the original rhyme-order. 'Sillyhow Stride' introduces another virtuosic constraint into the mix, turning the series through a demanding trellis of *terza rima*. Beginning at rhyme ninety ('kick') and ending with rhyme one ('borrow'), the original order of rhyme is also reversed, with the tercets themselves described by Regan as 'a series of jazz riffs'.[77] First sensed in 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', the spirit of improvisation appears to have overtaken Muldoon's ninety rhymes, with the same notes now producing different tunes. With yet another highly wrought inversion of the original rhyme-order, Muldoon seems to be seeking out new ways of re-inventing old forms. 'Sillyhow Stride' gives us an impression of how deeply Muldoon's longer forms are now steeped in U.S. musical culture – of Zevon, Muldoon's Princeton rock bands (first Rackett, then Wayside Shrines and now Rogue Oliphant), his libretto *Vera of Las Vegas*, and 'Stride' as a U.S. musical term. The volume itself, *Horse Latitudes*, shares the name of a track from The Doors' album *Strange Days*, the lyrics of which are 'a spatchcocking of Jim Morrison's poem to a few lines from Nostradamus's prophetic Centuries', as Deryn Reese-Jones observes.[78] Connecting back to Robert Browning's 'Toccatas' and the cantatas of 'Incantata', improvisation now seems the dominant mode of Muldoon's rhyming template in America, bringing together musical structure and U.S. architecture from the 'Black Horse' tavern and Wright's Taliesin house to the Rock and Roll venues and 'Space Lab scaffold' of 'Sillyhow Stride'.

7

'A New Tack and Tactic'

The long poem has provided the concluding soundtrack to Muldoon's earlier collections, and its appeal seems to have only increased as his poetic career has progressed. The 2010 volume *Maggot* is punctuated by eight long poetic sequences, among which 'The Humors of Hakone' and 'The Side Project' are the last of Muldoon's 90-rhyme poems. The centrepiece

[77] Regan, 'Irish Elegy After Yeats', 605.
[78] Deryn Reese-Jones, review of *The End of the Poem* and *Horse Latitudes* by Paul Muldoon, *The Independent*, 15 Dec. 2006, last accessed 20 Oct. 2017 at http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-end-of-the-poem-by-paul-muldoon-horse-latitudes-by-paul-muldoon-428438.html.

of the volume is 'The Humors of Hakone', a poem in alternating couplets that follows the original order of end-rhyme from beginning ('narrow') to end ('quag'). The dustjacket informs us that 'The Humors' is 'an outlandish meditation on a failed poem', in which a decomposing woman is perversely reimagined as a figure for the disintegrations of poetic composition. Baudelaire's corpse poem, 'Une Charogne' ('A Carcass'), is a hymn to maggots and the process of putrefaction, taking strange delight in how his lover will become a picture of this rot ('semblable à cette ordure'), and comparing himself to the maggots who devour her with kisses ('Qui vous mangera de baisers').[79] Foregrounding 'the rot in erotica', as Muldoon puts it elsewhere in *Maggot*, Baudelaire's 'Une Charogne' is surely behind Muldoon's gruesomely styled 'poem cadaver', in which the text and the female body are drawn into alignment – 'the poem decomposing around a quill', and the girl's 'stomach contents, ink.' (*M*, 98, 71, 68, 63)

These rhyme-words 'quill' and 'ink', the antiquated tools of a poet's craft, have a rich backstory in Muldoon's writing. The 'ink-stained hands' of Mary Powers furnish the final scene of 'Incantata', a title with its own echoes of 'ink'. The 'quill' also features in that poem, where the body is again a memorable surface for writing:

> That last time in Dublin, I copied with a quill dipped in oak-gall
> onto a sheet of vellum, or maybe a human caul,
> a poem for *The Great Book of Ireland*…
> (*P*, 334)

The Great Book of Ireland is written on vellum not a 'human caul', though the suggestion of 'oak-gall' ink on skin has new resonance in a poem like 'The Humors of Hakone', where the body becomes an 'outlandish meditation' on the text. The 'oak-gall' and 'caul' rhymes of 'Incantata' have seeped through into 'The Humors', where 'quill' and 'skull' are their equivalents in the shared order of rhyme. Muldoon did contribute a poem, 'Meeting the British', to *The Great Book of Ireland* in 1990; but what 'Incantata' doesn't mention is that Powers made her own contribution on the facing page, with a design that dovetails beautifully with his inscription of 'Meeting the British' (Fig. 9).

[79] Charles Baudelaire, *The Complete Verse, vol. 1*, ed. Francis Scarfe (London; Wolfeboro, NH: Anvil Press, 1986), 91.

Figure 9. 'Meeting the British', with art by Mary Powers, in The Great Book of Ireland *(1990).*

Those potato-shapes in the top-left corner, so typical of Powers's work as to be her signature (which, we note, is absent in written form), also make their way into 'Incantata', like the delicate dotted borders and repeated lines along the bottom edge that appear at the end of the poem as 'row upon row | of army-worms', a regiment of ink-marks over which the great fork of blue-black makes a jaggedly beautiful cut. This fork is perhaps her representation of 'two streams coming together', as it's put in 'Meeting the British' (*P*, 160); but it's also a reminder of the surgical incisions in Muldoon's poems, which include the autopsy carried out in 'The Humors of Hakone' (the telling wound like a 'corduroy road with its maggot brood' (*M*, 67)). Moreover, the pink spots and ink-streams of Powers's work here broadly anticipate how 'ink' in Muldoon's poems is associated with fluid female forms, and perhaps with that of her own 'pink-spotted torso' – Powers having been an etcher and lithographer, whose stock in trade was ink.

Powers's 'death-mask' and the girl's 'steel-blue mask' in death is one of several rhymed associations between 'Incantata' and 'The Humors' which suggest that the identities of these women may well be related in Muldoon's rhyming mind (*P*, 335; *M*, 69).[80] The woman's body in the later poem remains unidentified, a further incarnation of the phantom female figure

[80] Maggots are of course a central theme in this volume, and the Japanese woman 'beleaguered by pupae' rhymes back to the 'pupa' of pestilent army-worms that gathered in Powers's apartment (*M*, 65; *P*, 332).

whom Muldoon seems unable to forget, and who haunts the serial 90-rhyme poems from his U.S. years. Another woman named 'Human Chimera' is the lover mourned in 'The Side Project', the last in Muldoon's family of 90-rhyme poems. Like 'The Humors of Hakone', it comprises exactly 180 lines and 90 rhyme-pairs – though it inverts that poem by following the order of rhymes backwards.

'The Side Project' is another U.S. musical term, described in 2013 by the *New York Times* as 'a break from the other band members, a chance to toy with different genres and recording methods, a fling with no long-term commitment.'[81] Casually insinuating a love affair as well as a musical spin-off, the title of 'The Side Project' also alludes to Muldoon's formal hobbyhorse, the show that has run and run: a rhyming series that is now drawing to an end. The poem is about the American circus, and it opens with a musical number:

> Forty years of Jumbo doing a one-handed handstand while some geek
> simultaneously bites the head off a Wyandotte cock
> and the band plays a Hungarian dance by Brahms…
> (*M*, 93)

Not only a sense of the scale but its *orchestration* is conveyed in this breathless opening, in which the band keeps time, the geek 'simultaneously' bites a chicken-head, and the elephant holds an impossible pose. The American band playing a Hungarian dance testifies to the musical freedoms of the title, 'toying with different genres' as Muldoon here returns to the setting of 'Duffy's Circus' (*Mules*) with a Barnumite twist. Indeed, the circus setting of 'The Side Project' seems less an attempt to 'ring the changes', as Muldoon has said, than to thematise the poetic showmanship of his American forms. The opening dance by Brahms is '[t]he tune that will come to haunt | me' (98), and might double as a commentary on the hauntings of the 90-rhyme scheme itself. Like the earworm, or 'Ohrwurm' – the Germanic title of another *Maggot* poem – it suggests a catchy tune that is compulsively hummed and replayed in the mind's ear. Muldoon writes in 'Ohrwurm' of his 'suspicion' that 'this low-level hum's a soundtrack | and everything I've seen so far I've seen so far in flashback' (72), as if the same sounds and images were playing on a loop. As in Freud's account of the repetition compulsion in 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through', the 'flashback' sets the pattern for going forward.

[81] Jon Pareles, 'The Season When the Sides Take Center Stage', *New York Times*, 22 Feb. 2013, last accessed 3 Aug. 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/24/arts/music/postal-service-and-breeders-on-spring-tours.html.

Most of Muldoon's serial rhyming poems can be read as flashbacks or re-runs of 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata', though other poems in the series cast interesting shadows; and in this case, the goat-related capers of 'The Mudroom' seem to anticipate the capricious, bestial pageantry of 'The Side Project'. The speaker of the later poem, 'Frog Boy', is like many of its circus acts suggestively part-animal. The stage-name of his lover, 'Human Chimera', derives from the Greek for 'she-goat', recalling the she-goat that accompanied the speaker and his wife through the precarious byways of 'The Mudroom'. Jumbo in 'The Side Project' is another of Muldoon's acrobatic animals; a real elephant of that name was sold in 1882 by London Zoo to P.T. Barnum, and paraded across the Atlantic as an animal-superstar in Barnum's circus. Figured in the first line 'doing a one-handed handstand', Jumbo's impossible stunts are reminiscent of the figure-skating goat in 'The Mudroom' – whose role, as the poet intimated in 'Between Takes', might be 'standing in for myself, my own stunt double' (*P*, 410).

Muldoon's nine inter-rhyming poems are replete with doublings and stunts, reaching back to past lines and rhymes with gymnastic elasticity, as the same performance is repeated and remade in new regalia. Ultimately, though, Muldoon's circus animals, like Barnum's, either turn violently on their handlers or, as in Yeats's 'Circus Animals' Desertion', leave them behind. The salient question in Yeats's late great circus poem – 'What can I but enumerate old themes?' – is doubly pertinent to 'The Side Project', in which Muldoon falls back on old themes and the familiar formal template.[82] Demonstrating the dangers of one-too-many repeat performances, Muldoon's 'Norwegian bareback artiste' is 'trampled' by her own Appaloosa, Jumbo 'succumbed to a rogue train in a marshalling yard', and 'Arachne', the spider-woman aerialist, 'fell to her death in a hippodrome in St Louis' (102). The 'joint funeral' held at the end of the poem marks 'the end of an era' (102), commemorating the long rhyming series and its interchangeable band members who may yet return in later projects.

Ending with this rhyme of 'era' and 'Chimera', Muldoon's version of Yeats's Circus looks back to where the ladders start: 'the big field near the Moy' of the poet's childhood, on which 'Duffy's Circus had shaken out its tent' in the 1977 volume *Mules*:

> I had lost my father in the rush and slipped
> Out the back. Now I heard
> For the first time that long-drawn-out cry.

[82] W. B. Yeats, *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1989), 471.

It came from somewhere beyond the corral.
A dwarf on stilts. Another dwarf.
I sidled past some trucks. From under a freighter
I watched a man sawing a woman in half.
('Duffy's Circus', *P*, 66)

A 'lost' father links the circus with ideas of pain ('that long-drawn-out cry') and of course *performance*, as in all these virtuosic serialist improvisations. 'The Side Project' returns to this poem's childhood parable of lost innocence, the Bearded Lady repeatedly 'sawn in half' as the woman is here (with the sexual in uneasy proximity to the violent), and the high-wire stunts of 'A dwarf on stilts'. Indeed, a re-run of this very episode from 'Duffy's Circus' may be in mind when The Missing Link and Human Alligator of Muldoon's later poem find themselves 'going off behind the generator truck | to work up their new trick' (*M*, 99).

'The Side Project' is itself a poem about 'working up new tricks', exploring new imaginative territory for a different formal phase in Muldoon's American career. *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* is the latest full volume, published in 2015, and its approach to rhyme signals a move away from the strained 'pararhyming' formula that has been a regular feature in Muldoon's U.S. collections. The rhymes of *One Thousand Things* are noticeably fuller ('Exchange | range', 'Aga | raga', 'car | bar' are typical (*OT*, 25)), and in longer poems like the opening 'Cuthbert and the Otters', the rhyme scheme mirrors itself: first stanza rhymes with last, the second stanza with the second last, and so on. This echoes the inner workings of the sestina described in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, though in a more static, non-serial form, where 'each successive stanza takes its pattern from a reversed (bottom-up) pairing of the lines of the preceding stanza (i.e., last and first, then next to last and second, then third from last and third).'[83] But rather than positioning whole poems in rhyming relation across a series of volumes, as in Muldoon's original sestina-based template, the formal elaborations of *One Thousand Things* are comparatively self-contained. Poems are no longer set up like mirrors to reflect one another's rhymes, but now inwardly mirror themselves. Despite these formal involutions, as opposed to their earlier extensions, Muldoon's most recent volume is one of his *least* self-regarding in an autobiographical sense. Where his 90-rhyme poems offered elaborated forms of life writing, *One Thousand Things* is strikingly short on Muldoon's characteristically slippery brand

[83] A. Preminger, C. Scott and D. Caplan, 'Sestina', *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, 4th Edition*, general ed. Roland Greene (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1296.

of autobiography – with the possible exceptions of 'Charles Emile Jacques: *Poultry Among Trees*' and 'Cuba (2)'.

Before we conclude, it is worth addressing these two poems in more detail. The first, '*Poultry Among Trees*', begins with a return to the shop his father kept in Eglish (also the childhood village setting of 'The Right Arm' in *Quoof* (1983)). The poem flits between a 'childhood memory' of his father's shop- and poultry-keeping in Northern Ireland and Muldoon's newfound ambition as a poultry keeper in America, like 'Robert Frost, | cooped up … | with some 300 Wyandottes' (*OT*, 14, 16). Determined to build his own chicken coop 'in New Jersey's rough-and-tumble', the coop suggests a further extension of Muldoon's architectural ambitions, and an intention to follow his father's example. In the end though, rather than build on the old blueprint, Muldoon's speaker opts to make his own way:

> Though I might have taken the blueprint of a shack
> from *Poultry Keeping for Dummies*,
> I'd fancied myself more an Ovid in Tomis –
> determined to wing it, to tack
>
> together Jahangiri Mahal from a jumble
> of 2x4 studs…
> (*OT*, 15)

Picturing himself, like Ovid in Tomis, as an exile far from home, he takes displacement from his childhood home as an opportunity to rebuild, and build better, as Wright does in *Shining Brow*.

Later in the volume, 'Cuba (2)' dwells on a recent trip to Havana with his daughter, and recycles two earlier titles from the 1980 book *Why Brownlee Left*, 'Cuba' and 'Anseo':

> I'm hanging with my daughter in downtown Havana.
> She's worried people think she's my mail-order bride.
> It might be the *Anseo* tattooed on her ankle.
> It might be the tie-in with that poem of mine.
> (*OT*, 71)

Those 'tie-ins' with previous poems intensify the sense of belatedness; Muldoon is now going further back than the well-mined material of *The Annals*, reaching into the pre-American

volumes that consolidated his place in the Irish canon during the early 1980s. Cuba, like 'The Old Country' in *Horse Latitudes*, seems a nation trapped in earlier days: between 'The '59 Buicks. The '59 Chevys' and those health tourists flying in 'for a nose job', 'So much has been submerged here since the Bay of Pigs' (*OT*, 71, 72, 74).

These two poems have an autobiographical edge, but the private elegiac strains that might have held them together in Muldoon's earlier collections are now played down, overshadowed by concerns with American life, parenthood, and his 'workaday art', as in '*Poultry Among Trees*' (18). That poem, like the collection's title, goes back to memories of the father without dwelling on family losses, seeking practical advice 'on "how to remove the merry-thought of a fowl" | from *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing*'; likewise, 'Cuba (2)' returns only to the title of 'Cuba', not its stinging family associations of Catholic persecution and 'My father … pounding the breakfast table' (*P*, 78). These poems about the father and Muldoon's grown-up family in America frame a picture from which that early familial hostility – the Freudian family feud, and the ghosts of the mother and ex-lover – are markedly absent. Muldoon's template of ninety rhymes has always been associated with one or both of these 'dear dead women', and the absence of this template now seems to signal a less burning sense of these earlier absences.

8

Conclusion

Clair Wills in an essay on 'Muldoon and the Dead' describes 'Muldoon's abiding preoccupation with the spectral,' and ghostly revenants or the echoes of the dead seem to resonate through this series of inter-rhyming poems from the very beginning.[84] The poet-speaker of 'Incantata' sees the haunting image of Mary Powers everywhere, and finds himself 'thinking you were some kind of ghost | who might still roam the earth in search of an earthly delight' (*P*, 335). Like 'the disembodied voice of Mamah Cheney' in *Shining Brow*, the 'spirit troop of hay-treaders' in 'Third Epistle', or 'Creusa brush[ing] | like an incendiary | through your arms' in 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', these spirit-figures suggest a ghost in the machine (*SB*, 84;

[84] Clair Wills, 'Muldoon and the Dead', in *Paul Muldoon: Poetry, Prose, Drama*, ed. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2006), 194.

P, 455, 461). There is something eerily and unmistakably perverse about their otherworldly languor, and the long-term lingering of the form itself seems no less eerie.

Asked in 2000 about the extraordinary, trans-textual proliferation of his ninety-rhyme scheme, Muldoon explained: 'I could tell you how I wrote "Incantata", for example, was to just simply, physically, take all the rhyme words, rhyme endings, from "Yarrow", start it again and just repeat it.' Pressed as to why he would want to do this, his stilted reply was revealing: 'I knew it was going to be such a hard poem to write, that if I didn't… I mean, I find myself even getting heavy-chested, heavy-hearted about it… that if I didn't have some sort of […] rail through it, that I could probably not do it at all, you know. […] I do find extraordinary release in these forms.'[85] Muldoon's ninety-rhyme technique then begins as a technique for remembering, as a mobile 'rail' through this raw, messy, emotionally charged material about loss and desire that might otherwise derail his attempts to account for it. If the structure is, as he says, 'releasing', what it seems to release is not only a creative force, but the ability to bridge between the present and memories of the past by which these poems are on some level underwritten. And as the technical ambitions of his longer poems suggest, the more challenging or troubling the original material, the more elaborate the bridgework.

These long, spun-out forms are not only representative of the distinctly serial, elegiac, autobiographical, multi-directional poetics Muldoon has developed over his American career, but stand in my opinion as his greatest technical achievement. It is not overstated, I think, when Mick Imlah suggests that Muldoon may have 'reinvented the possibilities of rhyme for our time.'[86] His prolonged ninety-rhyme scheme is at once an architectural blueprint – overlaying Lloyd Wright's American designs with visions of his own domestic environments – and a vast symphonic performance of *leitmotifs*, 'cantatas', 'slight returns', 'strides' and 'side projects'. A chamber of echoes worked out over an unprecedented scale, Muldoon's rhyming mind frames a mobile, endlessly adapting architectural skein by which the contradictions of loss might be upheld, and in which the dead are, in the words of Seamus Heaney's 'An Architect', 'fine-drawn, drawn-out, redrawn, remembered'.[87]

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[85] 'Paul Muldoon in Conversation with Neil Corcoran', in *Paul Muldoon: Poetry, Prose, Drama*, 185-186.
[86] Mick Imlah, '*Hay*, by Paul Muldoon', *The Observer*, 15 Nov. 1998; qtd. in Jefferson Holdridge, *The Poetry of Paul Muldoon* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2008), 8.
[87] Seamus Heaney, *The Spirit Level* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 58.

Coda

In the course of this critical immram, we have focused on Muldoon's American period, dwelling on his expansive structural imagination, his investment in eros and errors, the nimbleness of his allusive practice as both a reader and writer, and his commitment to repeatable forms of autobiographical writing. Since his opening performance on the larger U.S. stage of *Madoc*, Muldoon's protean Transatlantic departures have taken his work in consistently new directions. If there is a sense in Muldoon's later work that Ireland has become his Ithaca, his place of departure and return, his move to the States has also intensified his wanderlust in the New World as well as triggering a different scale of formal experiment. With this expanded notion of mobility has come a greater sense of structural determination, and a turn towards polymorphous, trans-textual architectural forms. The ninety-rhyme series which has bridged the poetry of Muldoon's American career from *The Annals of Chile* on, as we have seen in the last chapter, testifies to the extraordinary scale and intricacy of his architectural ambitions. This tension between heightened states of formal control and the often transgressive migrations of Muldoon's poetic imagination in the U.S. has been immensely productive, as I hope I have shown. His last volume, *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* (2015), breaks from the mould of the ninety-rhyme form to be found in the preceding collections, but even there his obsessions with engineering and the autobiographical voyage remain central to the volume's peregrinations. The book brims with references to sailing and shipbuilding, from the Viking sail-makers and shipyard men of 'Cuthbert and the Otters' to the dock cranes of 'Dirty Data', as Muldoon's sense of construction takes to water. Following on the invitations to voyage in his pre-American 'Immram' and post-American *Madoc*, the poem 'Catamaran' is about a very distinctive – indeed structurally unique – form of vehicle and will be our final port of call, raising as it does questions about the persistence of long-haul American voyages in Muldoon's later work, and the formally inventive architectural compass which continues to guide their composition.

The poem begins with Muldoon and his son whale-watching off the coast of South America, listening over a 'hydrophone' for the whale-calls which might give away their position:

> Between Dominica and Martinique
> we go in search of sperm whales, listening for their tink-tink-tink
> on a hydrophone
> hooked up to a mini-speaker. A prisoner's tap
> on a heating pipe…

The one faint hope by which he's driven.
(*OT*, 62)

These fugitive 'tinks' and 'taps' are mechanically transmitted, fed through a mini-speaker (a small-scale figure for the poem as mouthpiece) which amplifies a soundscape of otherwise imperceptible echoes from the world below the surface. A sense of sounds just out of earshot, resonating below the level of ordinary hearing, is a teasing emblem of Muldoon's formal craft, which illustrates itself with a characteristic display of rhyming virtuosity we have to strain ourselves to hear ('Martinique | tink', 'tap | pipe', 'hydrophone | driven').

Though 'Catamaran' is not conceived on a grand scale, Herman Melville's great American epic *Moby Dick* resonates strongly in this poem about pursuing the echoes of whales. The allusion draws us back to the root of Muldoon's architectural modelling in his American period, *Shining Brow* (1993), his libretto about Frank Lloyd Wright. After Wright's lover Mamah and her children are lost in the terrible fire at Taliesin, Wright imagines himself as Melville's mythical whale: 'I myself am the whale; | I am both Ahab and Ishmael' (*SB*, 78-79). Before he vows to rebuild Taliesin from the rubble, the architect's mournful identification with the whale anticipates a comparable identification in 'Catamaran':

Now I imagine lying by my dead wife
just as a sperm whale lies by its dead mate as if
it might truly be said to mourn.
A corruption of the Tamil term for 'two logs
lashed together with rope or the like,'
the word we use is 'catamaran.'

Muldoon's longer architectural American poems are, as we have seen, about personal relationships and the reluctance to let go of the dead, and here the 'lashing together' of logs forms a new construction whose seaworthiness depends entirely on the artfulness of its tethering. The 'corruption' of the Tamil term *katta-maram* is a translingual form of the slip – though the *katta* (meaning 'bond') survives the importation into English, and stays true to its original sense. 'Logs' and the 'logos' are not so far removed, and the formal binding between the logs, as between husband and wife, English and Tamil, sperm whales and humans, are like rhymes, triumphs of poetic connection in the face of loss and potential disorientation.

In *The End of the Poem*, Muldoon speaks about 'trying to pry below the surface of the poem to the crab world which lies submerged far, or not so far, below,' as he turns toward 'a

Freudian reading' of the sea poems of H.D.'s *Sea Garden*. The American H.D. was a Freudian poet, like Moore and Bishop a laureate of the sea's depths, who wrote, as Muldoon records, of her 'own forays into the "deep" in what she describes as the "long and slimy process … of un-UNKing the UNK".' (*EP*, 269) The unk-conscious Freudian 'crypto-currents' of Muldoon's Oxford lectures are themselves a distinctly nautical way of representing the poet's conscious and unconscious flows, which both buffet the poem as vessel and, as I have shown, connect it to the vast, dynamic intertextual world below the surface. *To Ireland, I* pursues the intertextual world beneath Joyce's 'The Dead', which Muldoon reads as 'carried along by strong crypto-currents' of other Irish texts (*TI*, 109) – and in 'Catamaran', a poem in search of echoes and the enduring bonds of the Dead, Muldoon brings his protean trans-textual model of reading back into American territory. The Oxford lectures are instances of the self-reflexive, self-mythologizing long-voyage forms of stunt-reading that spill over into the writing of Muldoon's American period, and the redoubled structure of 'Catamaran' may reflect the doubleness of his formal imagination, in which his creative and critical sensibilities are bound together.

The poem plays on rhyme, place and transplantation as a way of broaching the subject of loss, as if the sea were an associative space of memory, and transits related to taking stock. Muldoon's original American elegy of travel, 'Yarrow', grieves both for the mother and the motherland, and in 'Catamaran' we find bereavement and displacement are comparably entwined, with the twin-hulled craft pitched against an imagined act of mourning the poem finally glides away from. This sense of the expatriated poet traversing the depths of what may have been left behind, transplanted to the States and yet returning to the primal losses of early life, is a defining feature of Muldoon's later American works. Transatlantic routes complement and cut through the global allusive traffic which is now central to his autobiographical, trans-textual odyssey in the United States. In that sense the 'Catamaran' can be seen as a neat and mobile paradigm for the late Muldoon's questing and questioning formal imagination.

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Appendix

List of first 90 rhymes in 'Yarrow'	First 90 rhyme-pairs in 'Incantata'	
1. row	barrow	Herrera
2. pink	Inca	pink
3. us	nautilus	Lugh's
4. da	indeedy	potato
5. arm	Arm	army-worms
6. fly-wheel	seal	steel
7. tarp	*herbe*	rope
8. oil	foil	avail
9. rare	'R and R'	Demerara
10. deo	widow	'viduity'
11. stream	rums	doldrums
12. land	land	blind
13. Montezuma's	Thomism	Summa
14. aorta	order	oratorio
15. Ignatius	*Nausée*	Nessus
16. bucket	Bethicket	Baggot
17. *Major*	*mhóir*	amour
18. which	such	ditch
19. Pharaohs	furze	universe
20. Tutankhamun	Roscommon	kimono
21. ring	*Ding*	wing
22. Baba	pupa	pooh
23. Morgiana	Estragon	dragoons
24. jars	jars	manger
25. senators	sundry	*suantrai*
26. rush	crush	brush
27. Charlemagne	legerdemain	domain
28. scrap	crap	scrap
29. cattle-truck	intrigues	truck
30. coulter	Calder	'*égalitaire*'
31. angle-iron	ironies	arena

32. end	end	trident
33. clothes-line	lion	line
34. seed-catalogue	Dalkey	Tolka
35. Moy	*polloi*	joy
36. craven	Corofin	craven
37. rake	rake	arc
38. stone	stone	one
39. overalls	Wahl	will
40. hands	hand	hand
41. browse	'Enterprise'	Powers
42. classed	least	bomb-blast
43. leaf	leaf	Clov
44. red	Red	Red
45. knot	Knott	night
46. head	head	heat
47. secret	Killnasaggart	secret
48. tongue	tongue	sting
49. scent	bent	'Emblements'
50. yarrow-spurt	disappeared	spirit
51. unorthodox	*vox*	box
52. vase	device	potato-face
53. grate	great	inaccurate
54. methane-gas	second-guess	cause
55. methane	even	'Polyurethane'
56. apple-butt	put	poet
57. coal	oak-gall	caul
58. follow	low	swallow
59. Serra	Pissarro	sorrow
60. back	*L'Estaque*	mud-pack
61. Real	'Hurly Burly'	Riley's
62. path	homeopath	acid-bath
63. rain*	portfolio	valley
64. fallow*	strain	rain
65. peccaries	bakeries	reliquaries

66. musk-	death-mask	music
67. beaten	between	beaten
68. cabbage-field	Field	inviolate
69. clabair	clabber	Calaber
70. bridge	breach	perish
71. hazel-wood	woods	weeds
72. open	Quabbin	open
73. turn	Derain	turn
74. byre	mire	wire
75. Kelton's	Culloden	leaden
76. herd	hurt	heart
77. Kid	potato-cut	Quito
78. Schaefer	hemisphere	sweet-severe
79. hold	toe-hold	delight
80. request	aghast	ghost
81. ale	vale	vapour-trail
82. over	over	cloud-cover
83. slip*	Minne-	sky-mines
84. Mines*	slab	slip
85. 1:43	betray	arbitrary
86. clock	clock	clackety-clack
87. bound*	Cross	Cross
88. across*	bonnet	bound
89. Librium	prime	abrim
90. flutter-kick	Belacqua	Acacacac-

* signifies where consecutive end-words from 'Yarrow' have swapped positions in 'Incantata', e.g. 'slip | Mines' (Yarrow) becomes 'Minne- | slab' and 'sky-mines | slip' (Incantata).