

**Paul Muldoon as a Political Poet:
A Critical Reading of His volume Horse Latitudes
Anwar Abdel Kaream Elsayed^(*)**

Abstract

This paper focuses on particular political issues, such as the political stasis on the international arena and Muldoon's attempt to stir that stasis or stagnation via his original use of language, the American military violence against Iraq and violence against horses which in Muldoon's view symbolize Irish people. The paper also deals with the issue of expatriation and Muldoon's dual position of being originally an Irish man living as an American citizen in the States. The paper further handles the civil riots in Ireland in the 1970's and Muldoon's reaction to them.

The method followed throughout the study depends on contextualizing the battles handled or just mentioned in the poems in their historical background, relating them to the current events, examining the language and the techniques used, and probing any possible relationship between poetic forms and political subject-matters.

(*) Assistant Professor in English Literature. Mansoura University

بول مالدون كشاعر سياسي:
"Horse Latitudes" قراءة نقدية لديوانه "
أنور عبد الكريم السيد(*)

الملخص

يركز هذا البحث على قضايا سياسية معينة مثل حالة السكون السياسي في الساحة الدولية ومحاولة مالدون تحريك هذا السكون أو الركود من خلال استخدامه المتفرد للغة. كما يركز البحث أيضا على العنف العسكري الأمريكي ضد العراق وكذلك العنف ضد الخيل والذي يرمز بها مالدون إلى بني قومه من الأيرلنديين. ويعالج البحث أيضا قضية الغربة حيث يعيش مالدون في أمريكا معانيا من ازدواجية ولاء لم يتمكن من التغلب عليها حيث انه ايرلندي الميلاد وأمريكي الجنسية. كما يعالج البحث أحداث الشغب التي وقعت في ايرلندا في سبعينات القرن العشرين وموقف مالدون منها.

وينتهج البحث طريقة وضع الحروب المعالجة أو المذكورة في القصائد في سياقها التاريخي وربطها بالأحداث الجارية ودراسة اللغة والأدوات الفنية المستخدمة وكذلك استبطان أي علاقة بين الأشكال الفنية والموضوعات السياسية المتناولة.

(*) أستاذ الأدب الإنجليزي المساعد بجامعة المنصورة.

Based on an exchange of personal emails between the present writer and the Irish-born poet Paul Muldoon (1951-) concerning the

poet's volume *Horse Latitudes*, the hypothesis of this paper, "Paul Muldoon as a Political Poet," was suggested by the poet himself who once said: "There's room for so-called political poetry. I don't mean by that propaganda or speech-making. I mean poetry that addresses the condition of being here and now" (*Contemporary Literature* 29). Though Guinn Batten emphasizes that *Horse Latitudes* is the "most politically expressive and far-reaching and, I would argue, successful of Muldoon's collections to date," the above hypothesis has not been thoroughly probed by critics, as most treatments of the volume are mere reviews or general commentaries. Hence, this paper focuses on particular political issues, such as the political stasis on the international arena and Muldoon's attempt to stir that stasis or stagnation via his original use of language, the American military violence against Iraq and violence against horses which in Muldoon's view symbolize Irish people. The paper also deals with the issue of expatriation and Muldoon's dual position of being originally an Irish man living as an American citizen in the States. Muldoon says, "I don't think of myself as an Irish or an American poet. I want to write poetry in which something of the two will combine" (*Seminar* 2004). The paper further handles the civil riots in Ireland in the 1970's and Muldoon's reaction to them.

The method followed throughout the study depends on contextualizing the battles handled or just mentioned in the poems in their historical background, relating them to the current events, examining the language and the techniques used, and probing any possible relationship between poetic forms and political subject-matters.

The title *Horse Latitudes* refers to that zone thirty degrees north and south of the Equator. Muldoon himself provides a lengthy quotation that sheds light on the meaning and political implication of the title:

Horse Latitudes is a term that refers to the area a few degrees both north and south of the equator where, in the sailing era when sailing ships were more a matter of course than they are now, where ships would become becalmed, an

A Critical Reading of His volume Horse Latitudes

area sometimes known as the doldrums ... but one theory has to do with the fact that when the ship became becalmed they [sailors] would throw the poor horses overboard to save a bit of water ... For whatever the reason, it was an area where it was rather dangerous to be a horse ... I suppose over the last few years in my adopted homeland, the USA, there was a sense that we were somewhat in the doldrums, the political doldrums I suppose one would say, a strong sense of that pervading the book. And also I might say something of that sense coming across from the Irish context also where we were in a kind of waiting room. (Interview with Ramona Koval).

As a matter of fact, the title sequence, composed of nineteen sonnets which are concerned with battles all beginning with the letter B as if to suggest a 'missing' Baghdad, refers to global political hot spots and places of historical interest. It also introduces readers to riddles of modern life, its ceaseless yet useless political controversies which make that life a site of battle taking people one step forward yet two steps back or two steps forward and one step back, thus producing something amounting to a political stasis. The major tool by which Muldoon tries to stir that stasis is his playful, intricate and allusive language. The sequence further deals with the battle of Muldoon's former beloved, "proud-fleshed Carlotta," with cancer. Commenting on that "intermeshing" of the political and the persona/ emotional, Neil Corcoran writes, "Muldoon's politics is bound together with sexuality, in a poetry which is, in any case, frequently the scene of a rich textualization of the sexual and the erotic" (xi).

In the first poem of the sequence entitled "Beijing," Muldoon's goes back in history to 1215 when the Mongols under the leadership of Genghis Khan defeated the Jin Dynasty and conquered China. He "could still hear the musicians / cajoling those thousands of clay / horses and horsemen" (HL 3).¹ However, he suddenly jumps into a moment in the present, waking up in a hotel in Nashville beside his beloved Carlotta who fights "Hypersarcoma". In an imagistic manner, the speaker talks about some war possessions of Carlotta's grandfather

who got them from "Roma" in a battle in the Second World War. Such spatial leaps (from China to Nashville to Roma) and temporal shifts (from the past to the present) reflect one major characteristic of Muldoon: being at once everywhere and almost nowhere. They also reflect the universality and permanence of his subject-matters of war and death. In his online article, Holly Williams comments on that practice, "Muldoon's poetry is so full of strange leaps and connections, constantly surprising the reader, and he confirms that this is partly the intention: 'I want to be doing something unexpected, so that when you read it you think 'Ah Heaven! I would never have expected that'".

In fact, the thousands of clay horses and horsemen, the Chinese cavalry tomb figures which are made of life-size terra cotta, as well as the sky that has a terra cotta frieze, are associated with the nearly-sounding name Carlotta (*italic is mine*) whose death looms nearby. Thus, Muldoon relates mass death brought by wars to the individual probable death of Carlotta brought by cancer. The repetition of the rhyme of the first three lines (abc) in the final three lines of this sonnet shows Muldoon's circulatory thought: things move in one direction, keep moving, and in the end they go back to the initial point, thus forming a sort of stasis. Hence, rhyme becomes an incitement to meaning. Providing another meaning to such a repetition of rhyme, Maria Johnston suggests, "The repetition of the opening *abc* rhymes to conclude each sonnet ... might imply nostalgia for the way things were, before the cancer, before the wars – a return to a life easy as *abc*". This idea can be supported by Muldoon's wish, expressed in the last three lines, to seize that light by which he can illuminate humanity's life. Moreover, Muldoon uses line length to produce certain effects not only in this sonnet but also in other ones: he usually begins with rather shorter lines (tetrameter) to be followed by longer ones in the middle (pentameter) which are in turn followed by shorter ones at the end. This takes the reader back to Muldoon's circulatory thought and his idea of a political stasis echoed by rhythms and technical aspects. Thus, forms reflect his dominant thematic preoccupations.

In "Baginbun," an ancient battle site, Muldoon relates the Norman invasion of Ireland in 1170 when the Normans, mostly

A Critical Reading of His volume Horse Latitudes

mercenaries, stampeded dozens of cows to the "freebooters" who now attack people on the streets of Nashville, a city lying within the area of horse latitudes. Muldoon's aim behind this association is double: first, to show that the Irish identity is absorbed into a larger global formation; second, to show that man does not progress towards modernity or even keep the standards of the past. Modern man, in a sense, moves one step forward and sometimes two steps back, thus showing a cultural and political stasis. Clair Wills comments on this idea, "Muldoon's suggestion that the late twentieth century is not necessarily more enlightened than the [twelfth], here the related concern is about whether the contemporary father can become different, can progress" (117). In the second half of the sonnet, Muldoon further relates the political invasion of nations to men's invasion of women: white horses, symbolizing men, stretch their hips against purple horses, symbolizing women. For ages, he thinks, men have been traducing "this inescapable flaw / hidden by Carlotta's close-knit wet suit". In "Blaye," Muldoon elaborates on the idea of Carlotta's wet bathing suit. He shows that men's gluttonous gazes at her almost naked body denote, from their point of view, seductiveness. They regard her as a sex-object to be used, enjoyed and also degraded. In a master stroke, Muldoon relates Carlotta's tight clothes and men's rapist looks to tight coats worn by French knights in the middle ages when "abduction and seduction / went hand in glove" (HL 7). By this association, Muldoon implies that man is in a state of moral, cultural and political stasis, and that mankind does not progress. In this context, Wills observes, "Muldoon undercuts a teleological narrative of progress, by suggesting that in America 'modernity' has brought intolerance and repression for women and sexual minorities rather than enlightened attitudes" (112).

Linguistically, in this poem Muldoon plays upon words as in the alliterated "hem" and "haw"; "mire" and "murk" and "hip" and "hirple". Such a playfulness carries his irony on common expressions which have been rendered meaningless, or static, by their collocation, while the irony itself aims at reviving language in an age of stagnation. Part of his strategy to revive the English language is

through using far-fetched images resembling metaphysical conceits, excessive allusions, puns, startling juxtapositions and symbolism. For instance, likening the "freebooters who freeboot" through the streets of Nashville to the Normans who stole the cows of their "Norse-Irish cousins" is a sort of conceit that tries to connect two different events in different times and places. In a similar way, he associates the transgression of one nation on another in the old times to the transgression of the onlookers, whom he calls "the freebasers," on Carlotta's privacy by peeping on her naked body under a wet bathing suit. The phrase "Age-old traductions" epitomizes a history of wars, while the phrase "inescapable flaw" symbolizes Carlotta's incurable cancer.

Christian Ward sheds light on the historical background of "Bannockburn," suggesting that the poem alludes to "the 14th century Scottish war with England". In 1314, Robert Bruce, King of Scotland, was fighting Henry de Bohun, King of England near a river called Bannock. Muldoon admires the courage of the Scottish King though he was poorly armed:

Though he was mounted on a cob
rather than a war-horse, the Bruce
still managed to side-step a spear
from Henry de Bohun and tax
de Bohun's poll with his broad-based pole-ax
and leave de Bohun's charger somewhat leer
(HL 5).

Though just riding a little pony and armed with just an axe, Bruce could manage to avoid a stab by Bohun's spear, overthrow him off his war-horse and hit him a deadly stroke on the head. As also seen, horses had been badly manipulated in ancient battles: they had been exposed to dangers, even slain, just as they had been thrown overboard of ships in the horse latitudes to conserve fresh water for sailors. Thus, Muldoon criticizes human violence not only against human beings but also against noble animals like horses. In addition, he condemns human violence through ages, ancient and modern. To go back to the idea of violence in "Blaye," Muldoon satirizes the

A Critical Reading of His volume Horse Latitudes

fourteenth-century French people who "were still struggling to prime / their weapons of mass destruction" (HL 7). Humorously, he relates the medieval machines of death, represented by falconet, canon, iron maiden and bombard, to cancer that destroys Carlotta's chest when she lights a cigarette. Also, he uses the political words "tax" and "poll" in a military context, thus creating a smart pun which enriches the meaning of the poem. The last phrase "weapons of mass destruction" alludes to the American war against Iraq, which originally incited Muldoon to write this volume.

In "Bosworth Field," Muldoon handles the battle of Bosworth, which was regarded as a victory of good over evil. According to Wikipedia, "It was the penultimate battle of the Wars of the Roses, the civil war between the House of Lancaster and the House of York that raged across England in the latter half of the 15th century" (21, Feb., 2011). Muldoon poeticizes how Richard III, King of York who usurped the throne from his twelve-year-old nephew Edward V and was involved in the death of his wife, was killed by Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond:

Now Richard's very blood seemed to have
shied
away from him, seemed to sputter and spurt
like a falcon sheering off from his wrist
as he tried to distance himself
from the same falchioneer who'd pelf
the crown from his blood-matted brow
and hang it in a tree. Less clear was how
he'd managed not to crack the shell
of the pigeon-egg the size of a cyst
he'd held so close inside his shirt (HL 8).

In his characteristic linguistic oddity and playfulness, Muldoon likens the gushing of the shed blood of Richard III to a falcon that tries to distance itself from its own falchioneer. Odd as it sounds, this conceit makes the meaning difficult to understand because the two objects – Richard's blood and the falcon – are completely different. Moreover, what is more obscure is "the shell / of a pigeon-egg the size

of a cyst" which Richard kept under his clothes without breaking. In fact, the difficulties of these images, as Muldoon contends, are "meant to be equal to the difficulties that surround us in this era of extraordinary complexity" (Talk with Jeffrey Brown). However, personifying Richard's blood and making it shy away from him tell the reader that Richard III was a symbol of evil who deserved death. Moreover, the heavy use of the plosives /b/ and /p/, especially at the beginning of the poem, echoes the "pell-mell" of the falling "bombard" on Richard's head, while the hissing /s/ sounds as in "sputter and spurt" echo the gushing of his blood. Thus, the sound echoes the sense.

In his usual multi-dimensional leaps, Muldoon in "Blackwater Fort" relates the seizure of Blackwater Fort in the Tyrone Rebellion ("an uprising in Ireland in the period 1595–1603 in protest against the colonization of the country by England")² to the seizure of Iraq in 2003 at the hands of Bush and his administration to the seizure of Carlotta by the devastating cancer at the present:

As I had held Carlotta close
that night we watched some Xenophon
embedded with the 5th Marines
in the old Sunni triangle
make a half-assed attempt to untangle
the ghastly from the price of gasoline (HL 9).

Denying that the Gulf War was really fought to thwart any Iraqi attempt to develop weapons of mass destruction, Muldoon exposes the American scheme which aims at seizing an important economic resource of one of the richest oil-exporting countries, "the old Sunni Triangle". The word "Sunni" could also allude to the fact that the war was waged on religious foundations and as a crusade against a powerful Islamic nation that could have threatened other regional powers (Israel, in particular). Also, the phrase, "half-assed attempt" shows Muldoon's repugnance of the American malicious intentions behind waging such a war. This idea is substantiated by the concluding lines of the sonnet:

"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)

According to Muldoon, Iraq, "the House of Tar," is invaded because Bush and his administration wanted to "come clean on" the "gross / imports of crude oil" and the treasures of different civilizations which flourished on the banks of the Tigris. For him, this is a sort of economic, cultural and political liquidation of a nation which was thought by westerners to threaten the regional balance of powers. He further tries to expose that fiasco of the American interference in the internal affairs of many nations, a stance that has helped arouse international feelings of anti-Americanization. "However," Williams contends, "Muldoon was keen to make the distinction between the country, which is "not a terrible place, not at all", and the current administration (the "idiots who are running the country"). Technically, Muldoon's fast leaps from a battle in the past to the contemporary condition of Carlotta's disease take the reader one step forward but two steps back, leaving a constant impression of a stasis, not a progression or a retrogression. Sam Muson comments, "This rapid, circular motion of image and rhythm, coupled with the sharp juxtaposition of the past and the present, is characteristic of the poems in "Horse Latitudes".

In "Benburb," Muldoon reminds his readers of what happened between the Scots and the Irish in 1646. The use of the present perfect tense to describe a battle in the past shows the interpenetration of the past and the present:

Those impromptu chevaux-de-frise
into which they galloped full tilt
and impaled themselves have all but
thrown off their balance the banner-.
bearing Scots determined to put manners
on the beech mast- and cress- and hazelnut-
eating Irish (HL 10).

The Scots are powerful, well-equipped and enthusiastic; they are "determined to put manners" on the Irish, but the courageous Irish

manage to achieve a decisive victory over them. Using chevaux-de-frise as protective tools, the Irish manage to embog the galloping horses and throw off the balance of the proud Scottish soldiers. Structurally, the first sentence extends over seven lines, an enjambment echoing the galloping horses which run "at full tilt" towards their doomed death. The sentence comes to a full stop when these horses are stopped by the courageous Irish.

Ironically, Muldoon, originally Irish, seems to be neutral and not biased to his Irish kins. He himself justifies his neutrality in his interview with **Williams**, "We certainly understand the terms 'American poet' or 'Irish poet', but honestly I'm not too interested in any of it, particularly when we live in a world, which, for better or worse, is so much smaller". Though Muldoon openly attacks many American stances and practices, he rarely shows emotional involvement in the politics of his original country. This idea is supported by Elmer Andrews who argues that Muldoon's work conveys his "skepticism about 'truth' and enacts his retreat from any fixity, including taking up any fixed position on the Troubles in Ireland" (120).

The poem "Basra" alludes to the Battle of Basra which took place between the British infantry troops and the Ottomans cavalry troops in 1914. After two days (November 9-11) of a fierce war, the British troops managed to occupy the city of Basra. For Muldoon, the battle is not so important in itself as much as it suggests the fall of the missing city of Baghdad and the invasion of Iraq in general. In fact, such a leap from the First World War to the Second Gulf War testifies to his preoccupation with global political stasis or chaos echoed by the penetration of the past into the present and the void accumulation of the events of history. Langdon Hammer comments:

The ship of state, he seems to be saying, has entered the becalmed waters of a new war from which there is no exit. It is a place of stagnation and brutality where civilization has been stuck before. We throw overboard "live cargo" – in the form of human lives – without moving forward.

A Critical Reading of His volume Horse Latitudes

To get out of this dilemma of political strife and military invasion, Muldoon suggests to "relieve the tension" among the nations of the international community:

"The way to relieve the tension
on the line to a windjammer
is to lubricate the bollard
so it's always a little slack ... " (HL 18).

Intercultural dialogue is here proposed as the only way to help relieve the tension among the nations of the world. Symbolically, the windjammer (the ship of international affairs) tugging at a dry bollard (tense, if not severed international relationships) must be slackened by lubricating the bollard (establishing solid foundations of peaceful dialogue).

In a decisive moment not only in the poem but also in the entire sequence, Carlotta's grandfather symbolically appears as a wise man from the past who whips her for her inadequate ability to learn language or censor her speech. He teaches the "unscholared" Carlotta (who stands here for modern man) how to use language instead of arms to establish the foundations of dialogue and how to use proper "conjugations," "declensions" and intricacies of grammar, or what he calls "the crannies of crammer," to communicate peacefully with others.

In his typically ambiguous way, Muldoon concludes the sonnet sequence with a poem entitled "Burma". In it, he introduces readers to the strange career of Carlotta's grandfather whose "job was to cut / the vocal chords of each pack-mule / with a single, swift excision" while his helper "standing by to wrench / the mule's head fiercely to one side and drench / it with hooch he'd kept since Prohibition" (HL 21). Taking this barbarous act for its literal meaning, Carlotta assumes that that "fearsome tool" aims at concealing the fighting horses' positions in battles in case they bray. However, the present writer reads it as a symbolic act: the grandfather here stands for any dictator who would spare no means to silence his opponents either by cutting their throats or hushing their speaking voices. This reading is supported by the final lines of the sonnet:

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).

"Testing a blade" is a threatening gesture to protestors or opponents, while the sound of "snapping" symbolizes the awaited-for breaking of their necks. The rhyming words "shade" and "blade" show that whoever dares speak will be slain and carried beyond this life; he will be shaded by death. Moreover, the verbs "see" and "hear" convey the certainty of the speaker.

In "Medley for Morin Khur," Muldoon condemns violence against horses not only in wars but also in peace. The morin khur is a Mongolian violin whose
sound box is made of a horse's head.
The resonator is horse skin.
The strings and bow are of horsehair (HL 89).

Taken in other volumes of Muldoon to symbolize immigrant Irish people who worked hard and died in the construction of roads in America in the nineteenth-century, horses are here killed to produce useful things for people. Their heads become the sound boxes of violins; their skins become resonators, while their hair becomes strings and bows. They thus become victims of man's violence. However, such violins originating from horse bodies produce sweet melodies which attract "the stallion to the mare," "jinn to jinn" and "kin to kin". Muldoon's sympathy with horses, and by implication Irish victims, reaches its climax in the final tercet where dead horse bodies are assembled in a central square:

A square in which they'll heap the horses'
heads
by the heaps of horse skin
and the heaps of horsehair (HL 90).

The repetition of the words "heap" and "heaps" reflects the great number of victimized horses, while insisting on mentioning horse

A Critical Reading of His volume Horse Latitudes

body parts (horses' heads, horse skin and horsehair) puts in relief not just the killing of horses but the mutilation of their bodies. Muldoon's deep sympathy with the dead horses is reflected in his use of the rhyming "jinn to jinn" and "blood kin to kin"; it is as if he is trying to combine the animalistic to the human in an empathetic union.

It is not surprising that in "Glaucus" Muldoon warns people against frustrated horses by presenting a clear example from Greek mythology. According to the myth, Glaucus owned a team of mares which he handled in a very special way to win game races:

It went without saying that a king of Corinth
should keep his prize fillets out of the fray
and, rather than have them enmesh
themselves in horse toils, horse rattle,
set them up, each on a plinth,
and fillet their manes with knots and nosegays
and feed them the choicest human flesh
to give them a taste for war (HL 91).

The initial cliché "It went without saying" bears Muldoon's lashing mockery of the king's practice of depriving the mares of the stallions (for fear of copulation) so as to keep the "fillets" fit for winning races, since the king believed that frustrated mares make the fastest runners. According to Muldoon, keeping them separate is unnatural; what is also very weird is feeding them on human flesh. The natural result when Glaucus lost the race and punished his mares by depriving them of fodder was his being devoured by his own man-eating mares. The heavy alliterations, quick rhythms and enjambments create internal music which mimics the horses' gallops, while the harsh sound /g/ dominating the last two stanzas echoes the fierce state to which the mares had come. For Muldoon, this symbolic anecdote is meant to show the explosive consequences of repression imposed upon his Northern Irish people, who are identified as deprived and frustrated mares. If politically and socially pressed, Irish people, Muldoon implies, are likely to revolt against their own oppressors.

In "Turtles," Muldoon mockingly records the intense political and

sectarian riots that rocked Northern Ireland in 1969. During that year, there had been severe violence between the Catholics and Nationalists on one hand and the Protestants and Loyalists on the other hand. Feeling discriminated against by the Government, the Catholics and Nationalist launched protesting marches which were met by severe repression by the Protestant police forces, known as the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), especially in Belfast where some people were killed and hundreds wounded. Moreover, many houses and businesses owned by Catholics were looted and burned down, leaving the inhabitants without shelter. According to Wikipedia (3/3/2011) "The British Army was deployed to restore order and peace lines began to be built to separate the two communities. The events of August 1969 are widely seen as the beginning of the thirty-year conflict known as the Troubles".

Seeing a large turtle by the side of a canal and imagining its shield to be like the protective dustbin lids which were worn by the loyalist crowds in their attempt to defend themselves against the attacks of the Nationalists, Muldoon "conjures those Belfast nights I lay awake, putting in a bid / for the police channel" (HL 50). In a flashback, he remembers himself at the age of eighteen when he was curious to follow up those events on television, which displayed some Catholic protestors attacking an RUC base with petrol bombs. That act was met by the RUC sending out riot police with armored cars which tried to run over the protestors and enter their residential areas. The protestors in turn set fire into cars and pushed them on the way of the RUC to prevent them from entering their areas; meanwhile, fires flared almost everywhere. After these events, new paramilitary forces were founded because the old ones were found faulty and some individual officers acting wrongly. Muldoon records those changes in the armed forces:

So many of those former sentries and scouts

have now taken up the lyre

I can't be sure of what is and what is not (HL 50).

Mysteriously associating turtles with bloody loyalists, Muldoon

A Critical Reading of His volume Horse Latitudes

sees turtles as symbols of espionage and plotting:

Nor am I certain, given their ability to smell
the rot
once the rot sets in,
that turtles have not been enlisted by some
police forces
to help them recover corpses (HL 50).

As seen, Muldoon's deep cynicism is reflected in personifying turtles, making them secret forces enlisted to help the loyalist police against the Catholics and the Nationalists. Besides their intriguing nature, those loyalist forces, symbolized by turtles and their ability to smell the rot from a distance, are also stigmatized by rotten acts against their Northern Irish Catholic fellow citizens.

Just as this volume deals with a deep sense of political stasis and historical crisis, it also presents Muldoon's personal trauma due to his feeling of expatriation, because he is an Irish man living in the United States as an American citizen. Though he immigrated to the States out of his free will, he nevertheless occasionally feels exiled and detached from his beloved "Old Country". Despite the modern trend of globalization, or what Muldoon considers the Americanization of the planet, he sometimes feels emotionally attached to his birth place. Johnston argues, "Now it is as though the erosion of place has gone so far that exile is a hopeless conceit; if all places are interchangeable, with a McDonald's on every corner, there is no margin left to haunt". However, he at other times feels assimilated into the mainstream cultural life of America, accepting his hybridity and even hailing his American citizenship. In a sense, he seems to accept the anthropologist James Clifford's view that "roots are less significant than routes" and that "identity is contingent on mobility". At other times still, he feels alienated from his original country, a natural feeling that sometimes sweeps indigenous natives even within their countries.

Though living in America and enjoying its cultural and social

Anwar Abdel Kaream Elsayed

life, Muldoon in "Eggs" is emotionally attached to Tyrone, the Irish county of his birth and childhood:

I was unpacking a dozen eggs
into the fridge when I noticed a hairline crack
at which I pecked
till at long last I squeezed
into a freshly whitewashed
scullery in Cullenramer (HL 33).

Though he is taken away from his origins, they are never taken away from him. The American culture, here represented by packed eggs and "fridge," cannot erode liminal memories of his original places and people. Tracking a hairline crack on one of the eggs, he remembers a "freshly whitewashed / scullery" in his childhood home. This sensory imagery, rich in colors and smells, is deeply-inscribed in his consciousness. And when he later remembers his maternal grandmother trading in fresh-laid eggs in Dungannon, he imagines himself to be emerging out of one of these eggs as a chic that pokes its little beak . Thus, the past looms over the present, while the present cannot obliterate the past, a fact revealing the poet's dual position as an Irish expatriate living in America. Technically, the lack of full rhymes in this poem shows Muldoon's feeling of a lack of harmony with his new adopted country. For example, "smashed," "cash" and "hush" are eye rhymes that appear funny, but they also, as Wills suggests, "serve to give the poems a conversational feel, which is emphasized too by the colloquial diction" (114-115).

In "The Outlier," Muldoon elaborates on the idea of expatriation. As a geological term, the "outlier" means a rock found at a distance from a formation of rocks. Hence, it refers to the poet as an alienated person, or an outsider, living separated from the others:

In Armagh or Tyrone
on a morning in June
in 1951
I fell between two stones.
In Armagh or Tyrone
on a morning in June

A Critical Reading of His volume Horse Latitudes

in 1951
I fell between two stones
That raised me as their own (HL 47).

The poet's attachment to his original country is defined by both place and time. He cannot forget the places where he was born and brought up; nor does he forget his birth date (1951). Repetition plays an important role, since "the cumulative effect of the repeated lines," Johnston suggests, "which has each stanza building on the last as another line is added, could also be mimetic of a 'rolling stone'". The last line has two meanings: the two stones either raised him as solid as a rock, or that they brought him tenderly as parents. The first meaning is substantiated by the following lines:

I had one eye, just one,
they prised and propped open
like a Fomorian's (HL 47).

In Irish mythology, Fomorians are a semi-divine race said to have inhabited Ireland in ancient times. They were known for their strength and wildness. Hence, Muldoon sees himself as a descendent of a great prehistoric race. Brought up as solid as a stone, and seeing himself as a mythological creature, Muldoon concludes the poem saying, "all I looked upon / would itself turn to stones" (HL 48).

Despite the above sense of self-assurance, Muldoon in "It Is What It Is" feels alienated from "the foreshore / of a country [Ireland] towards which I have been rowing / for fifty years" (HL 49). For him, things are what they used to be: things just "pop" up without effecting remarkable changes in the social, cultural, commercial, religious or even personal aspects of life. He sees that the Irish life is an "imperspicuous game" which he tries to "mull over," but he finds out that the game has turned into an unresolved riddle. The only thing he really misses is the sweet voice of his dear mother who "shipped out for good". Muldoon seems to be arguing here that many Irish people experience alienation within their country itself.

In "The Mountain Is Holding Out," Muldoon reflects on his feeling of expatriation in America. Not only does he feel alienated

from people in his new-adopted country, but he also feels ignored by natural forces. The mountain refuses to understand him, while the "plain won't level" with him because it is "nonaligned". In addition, the forest "won't fill me in / now it, too, is nonaligned / and its patience wearing thin" (HL 87); likewise, the lake and the river "confess" their impatience towards his attempt to mingle with them or to find solace in them. In order not to sound like someone who is relating a personal experience, Muldoon finally engages an absent addressee in this feeling of expatriation:

For the river not coming clean
is only one of the issues on which
you and I've faced off across a ditch (HL 87- 88).

Personifying the nonchalant natural elements dramatizes Muldoon's feeling of loss in a country where all factors are working against him, be they human or natural. Choosing the word "ditch" as a site of confrontation shows his feeling of being tightened down, as well as his being in a state almost amounting to war. Also, the negation in "not coming clean" reflects the river's indifference, if not animosity.

This paper shows that Muldoon is a political poet of a special kind; he does not advocate a specific ideology or propaganda, but he addresses contemporary political issues. In his volume, *Horse Latitudes*, he handles the issue of political stasis where man does not progress or regress. In order to prove that sense of stasis, Muldoon resorts to a portrayal of ancient wars that still haunt modern man, while the current wars, represented by the American invasion of Iraq and Carlotta's war with cancer, extend backward, and imprint their effects on the past. Thus, Muldoon believes in the interpenetration between the past and the present. Muldoon further condemns human violence not only against other humans but also against animals, especially horses which, according to him, symbolize repressed Irish people. He proposes intercultural dialogue as the only way to help relieve the tension among the nations of the world. As this paper also shows, Muldoon does not stand cuff-handed before such a stasis, but he tries to stir that stagnation via the use of a unique language

A Critical Reading of His volume Horse Latitudes

characterized by multi-dimensional leaps, word play, punning, intended ambiguity which sometimes comes close to metaphysical conceits, heavy alliteration, illusive allusions, teasing juxtapositions of disparate objects, purposeful uses of rhymes and rhythms, ellipsis and irony.

This paper further shows how Muldoon records the intense political and sectarian riots that rocked Northern Ireland in 1969. Though he is concerned with the political stability of Northern Ireland in general, he seems to take the side of the Catholics to whom he is affiliated. The paper finally handles Muldoon's personal trauma because of his living as an Irish expatriate in the United States. He seems to suffer from a divided loyalty between his original country of birth and childhood and his adopted country of citizenship and maturity. However, neither makes him blind to note and record their political defects. For example, the global Americanization of the planet does not blind him to see the fiasco of the American invasion of Iraq and the liquidation of one of Iraq's important economic resources ("gasoline").

Notes

- 1- Any other reference to the text is taken from Muldoon's volume Horse Latitudes, which is here abbreviated as HL, while the number provided beside the text is that of page number(s).
- 2 - According to the Free Dictionary online 23-2 2011:

The rebellion was led by the Irish clan leaders Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone, and Hugh Roe O'Donnell, lord of Tyrconnel. The rebellion was widely supported by the masses in the provinces of Ulster and Munster. The rebels won a series of victories over the English, even defeating a 16,000-man army commanded by the earl of Essex in 1599. In 1600, English ground and naval forces under command of the lord deputy of Ireland, Mountjoy, began a war of extermination against the Irish. In December 1601 the rebel army was defeated.

While suppressing the rebellion, English forces devastated entire regions of Ulster. The leaders of the rebellion were compelled to submit to the English in 1603. After the defeat of the rebellion, the English government initiated a policy of massive land confiscations in Ulster.

Appendix

The following is a copy of the emails exchanged between the present writer and the poet Paul Muldoon:

On Nov 1, 2010, at 4:18 PM, Anwar Kariem wrote:

Dear Mr. Muldoon,

I am an Associate Professor in English Literature from Egypt. I am reading your volume *Horse Latitudes* and planning to write a paper on it. Do you have any suggestion of an original topic to search? Hopefully you can respond soon.

Dr. Anwar Abdel kaream

Mansoura University, Egypt.

Wednesday, November 10, 2010 5:22 PM

From:

"Paul Muldoon" <muldoon@princeton.edu>

[Add sender to Contacts](#)

To:

"anwar kariem" <anwar_kariem@yahoo.com>

Dear Anwar, "Paul Muldoon as Political Poet." PM

PAUL MULDOON
CHAIR

TEL 609.258.4708

FAX 609.258.2230

MULDOON@PRINCETON.EDU

PETER B. LEWIS CENTER FOR THE ARTS
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
185 NASSAU STREET
WWW.PRINCETON.EDU/ARTS

Works Cited

- Andrews, Elmer. "Some Sweet Disorder' – the Poetry of Subversion: Paul Muldoon, Tom Paulin and Medbh McGuckian" *British Poetry from the 1950s to the 1990s*. Gary Day and Brian Docherty (ed.). London: Macmillan Press LTD, (1997): 118-142.
- Batten, Guinn. A book of Many Pleasures (Book Review). *Irish Literary Supplement* (Magazine/Journal) Volume: 25 Issue: 1 Page: 28(2) September 22, 2005. (Digital).
- Clifford, James. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Corcoran, Neil. *Poets of Modern Ireland: Text, Context, Intertext*. Wales: University of Wales Press, 1999.
- Hammer, Langdon. Gamesmanship.
http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/18/books/review/Hammer.t.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print. 10-3-2011.
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1969_Northern_Ireland (3, 3, 2011).
- <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Tyrone+and+Tyrconnel+Rebellion> (23-2-2011).
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Bosworth_Field (21, Feb., 2011).
- Johnston, Maria. "Tracing the Roots of Metastasis".
<http://www.cprw.com/Johnston/muldoon.htm> 11 Feb., 2011.
- Muldoon, Paul. Jeffrey Brown talks with Paul Muldoon, winner of this year's Pulitzer Prize for poetry.
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/jan-june03/muldoon_05-26.html 12-3-2011.
- *Interview with Ramona Koval* on a radio program (14 March, 2008).

A Critical Reading of His volume Horse Latitudes

- *Horse Latitudes*. New York: Farrar, Straus And Giroux, 2006.
- Seminar: *Irish Studies*. 535 (December 3, 2004).
- *Contemporary Literature*. 35, 1 (Spring 1994).
- Muson, Sam. "The End of the Poem (A Book Review)". *The Magpie Artist* (December 5, 2006).
<http://www.nysun.com/arts/magpie-artist/44569/> 10-3-2011.
- Ward, Christian. "Review of Horse Latitudes".
<http://www.rattle.com/ereviews/muldoon,paul.htm> 10-3-2011.
- Williams, Holly Talks to Pulitzer-Winning Poet Paul Muldoon about his new Collection, *Horse Latitudes: The Political Poet: from Ireland to Iraq*. <http://www.nouse.co.uk/10-3-2011>.
- Wills, Clair. "Paul Muldoon: The Annals of Chile".
Essays and Studies 1996: Poetry and Politics. Kate Flint (ed.). New York: D.S. Brewer, (1996): 111-139.