

Classic Poetry Series

Paul Muldoon
- poems -

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Paul Muldoon(20 June 1951)

Muldoon was born on a farm outside Moy, County Tyrone, the eldest of three children. The family was Catholic in a largely Protestant area of Northern Ireland. His father worked as a farmer (among other jobs) and his mother was a school-mistress. In 2001, Muldoon said of the Moy; "It's a beautiful part of the world. It's still the place that's 'burned into the retina', and although I haven't been back there since I left for university 30 years ago, it's the place I consider to be my home. We were a fairly non-political household; my parents were nationalists, of course, but it was not something, as I recall, that was a major area of discussion. But there were patrols; an army presence; movements of troops; a sectarian divide. And that particular area was a nationalist enclave, while next door was the parish where the Orange Order was founded; we'd hear the drums on summer evenings. But I think my mother, in particular, may have tried to shelter us from it all. Besides, we didn't really socialise a great deal. We were 'blow-ins' - arrivistes - new to the area, and didn't have a lot of connections."

Talking of his home life, he continues "I'm astonished to think that, apart from some Catholic Truth Society pamphlets, some books on saints, there were, essentially, no books in the house, except one set, the Junior World Encyclopaedia, which I certainly read again and again. People would say, I suppose, that it might account for my interest in a wide range of arcane bits of information. At some level, I was self-educated." He was a "'Troubles poet" from the beginning.

In 1969, Muldoon read English at Queen's University Belfast, where he met Seamus Heaney and became close to the Belfast Group of poets which involved writers such as Michael Longley, Ciarán Carson, Medbh McGuckian and Frank Ormsby. Muldoon said of the experience, "I think it was fairly significant, certainly to me. It was exciting. But then I was 19, 20 years old, and at university, so everything was exciting, really." Muldoon was not a strong student at Queens. He recalls "I had stopped. Really, I should have dropped out. I'd basically lost interest halfway through. Not because there weren't great people teaching me, but I'd stopped going to lectures, and rather than doing the decent thing, I just hung around". During his time at Queens, his first collection *New Weather* was published by Faber and Faber. He met his first wife, fellow student Anne-Marie Conway, and they were married after their graduation in 1973. Their marriage broke up in 1977.

For thirteen years (1973–86), Muldoon worked as an arts producer for BBC arts

in Belfast, (including the most bitter period of the Troubles). During this time he published the collections *Why Brownlee Left* (1980) and *Quoof* (1983). After leaving the BBC he taught English and creative writing at Caius College, Cambridge, and the University of East Anglia where he taught such writers as Lee Hall (Billy Elliot) and Giles Foden (*Last King of Scotland*). In 1987, he emigrated to the United States, and teaches in the creative writing program at Princeton. He held the chair of Professor of Poetry at Oxford University for the five-year term 1999–2004, and is an Honorary Fellow of Hertford College, Oxford University.

Muldoon is married to novelist Jean Hanff Korelitz, whom he met at an Arvon writing course. He has two children, Dorothy and Asher, and lives in Griggstown, New Jersey.

Poetry and other works

His poetry is known for his difficult, sly, allusive style, casual use of obscure or archaic words, understated wit, punning, and deft technique in meter and slant rhyme. As Peter Davidson says in the *New York Times* review of books "Muldoon takes some honest-to-God reading. He's a riddler, enigmatic, distrustful of appearances, generous in allusion, doubtless a dab hand at crossword puzzles". The *Guardian* cites him as "among the few significant poets of our half-century"; "the most significant English-language poet born since the second world war" - a talent off the map.[4] (Notably, Seamus Heaney was born in 1939). Muldoon's work is often compared with Heaney, a fellow Northern Irish poet, friend and mentor to Muldoon. Heaney, who won the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature, is better known, sells widely and has enjoyed more popular success. Muldoon is more of 'the poet's poet', whose work is frequently too involved and opaque for a more casual readership. However, Muldoon's reputation as a serious poet was confirmed in 2003 with his winning of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. He has been awarded fellowships in the Royal Society of Literature and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; the 1994 T. S. Eliot Prize; the 1997 *Irish Times* Poetry Prize, and the 2003 Griffin International Prize for Excellence in Poetry. He was also shortlisted for the 2007 Poetry Now Award. Muldoon's poems have been collected into three books, *Selected Poems 1968-1986* (1986), *New Selected Poems: 1968-1994* (1996), and *Poems 1968-1998* (2001). In September 2007 he was hired as poetry editor of *The New Yorker* and is president of the British Poetry Society (UK).

Most of Muldoon's collections contain shorter poems with an inclusion of a long concluding poem. As Muldoon produced more collections the long poems gradually took up more space in the volume, until in 1990 the poem *Madoc: A*

Mystery took over the volume of that name, leaving only seven short poems to appear before it. Muldoon has not since published a poem of comparable length, but a new trend is emerging whereby more than one long poem appears in a volume.

Madoc: A Mystery, exploring themes of colonisation, is among Muldoon's most difficult works. It includes, as 'poetry', such non-literary constructions as maps and geometric diagrams. In the book *Irish Poetry since 1950*, John Goodby states it is "by common consent, the most complex poem in modern Irish literature [...] - a massively ambitious, a historiographical metafiction". The post-modern poem narrates, in 233 sections (the same number as the number of American Indian tribes), an alternative history in which Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey come to America in order to found a utopian community. The two poets had, in reality, discussed but never undertaken this journey. Muldoon's poem is inspired Southey's work *Madoc*, about a legendary Welsh prince of that name. Critics are divided over the poem's success. Some are stunned by its scope and many others, such as John Banville, have professed themselves utterly baffled by it - feeling it to be wilfully obscure. Muldoon says of it: "I quite enjoy having fun. It's part of how it is, and who we are."

Muldoon has contributed the librettos for four operas by Daron Hagen: *Shining Brow* (1992), *Vera of Las Vegas* (1996), *Bandanna* (1998), and *The Antient Concert* (2005). His interests have not only included libretto, but the rock lyric as well, penning lines for the band *The Handsome Family* as well as the late Warren Zevon whose titular track "My Ride's Here" belongs to a Muldoon collaboration. Muldoon also writes lyrics for (and plays "rudimentary rhythm" guitar in) his own Princeton-based rock band, *Rackett*.

Muldoon has also edited a number of anthologies, written two children's books, translated the work of other authors, and published critical prose.

He will also be partaking in the Bush Theatre's 2011 project *Sixty Six* where he has written a piece based upon a chapter of the King James Bible.

Awards

Muldoon has won the following major poetry awards:

1990: Guggenheim Fellowship

1992: Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize for *Madoc: A Mystery*

1994: T. S. Eliot Prize for *The Annals of Chile*

1997: Irish Times Irish Literature Prize for Poetry for *New Selected Poems*

1968–1994

2002: T. S. Eliot Prize (shortlist) for *Moy Sand and Gravel*

2003: Griffin Poetry Prize (Canada) for *Moy Sand and Gravel*

2003: Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for *Moy Sand and Gravel*

2004: American Ireland Fund Literary Award

2004: Aspen Prize for Poetry

2004: Shakespeare Prize

2009: John William Corrington Award for Literary Excellence

Selected Honors

Honorary Professor in the School of English at the University of St Andrews (Scotland)

Professor of Poetry at Oxford University 1999–2004 (England)

Honorary Fellow of Hertford College, Oxford University (England)

Fellowship with the Royal Society of Literature (England)

Fellowship with the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (U.S.)

A Dent

In memory of Michael Allen

The height of one stall at odds with the next in your grandfather's byre
where cattle allowed themselves to speak only at Yule
gave but little sense of why you taught us to admire
the capacity of a three-legged stool

to take pretty much everything in its stride,
even the card-carrying Crow who let out a war-whoop
now your red pencil was poised above my calf-hide
manuscript like a graip above a groop.

The depth of a dent in the flank of your grandfather's cow
from his having leaned his brow
against it morning and night

for twenty years of milking by hand
gave but little sense of how distant is the land
on which you had us set our sights.

Paul Muldoon

A HUMMINGBIRD

At Nora's first post-divorce Labor Day bash
there's a fluster and a fuss and a fidget
in the fuchsia-bells. "Two fingers of sour mash,
a maraschino cherry." "So the digit's
still a unit of measurement?" "While midgets
continue to demand a slice of the cake."
"A vibrator, you know, that kind of widget."
Now a ruby-throated hummingbird remakes
itself as it rolls on through mid-forest brake.
"I'm guessing she's had a neck-lift and lipo."
"You know I still can't help but think of the Wake
as the apogee, you know, of the typo."
Like an engine rolling on after a crash,
long after whatever it was made a splash.

Paul Muldoon

A mayfly

A mayfly taking off from a spike of mullein
would blunder into Deichtine's mouth to become Cú Chulainn,
Cú Chulainn who had it within him to steer clear
of a battlefield on the shaft of his own spear,
his own spear from which he managed to augur
the fate of that part-time cataloguer,
that cataloguer who might yet transcend the crush
as its own tumult transcends the thrush,
the thrush that's known to have tipped off avalanches
from the larch's lowest branches,
the lowest branches of the larch
that model themselves after a triumphal arch,
a triumphal arch made of the femora
of a woman who's even now filed under Ephemera.

Paul Muldoon

Anseo

When the Master was calling the roll
At the primary school in Collegelands,
You were meant to call back Anseo
And raise your hand
As your name occurred.
Anseo, meaning here, here and now,
All present and correct,
Was the first word of Irish I spoke.
The last name on the ledger
Belonged to Joseph Mary Plunkett Ward
And was followed, as often as not,
By silence, knowing looks,
A nod and a wink, the Master's droll
'And where's our little Ward-of-court?'

I remember the first time he came back
The Master had sent him out
Along the hedges
To weigh up for himself and cut
A stick with which he would be beaten.
After a while, nothing was spoken;
He would arrive as a matter of course
With an ash-plant, a salley-rod.
Or, finally, the hazel-wand
He had whittled down to a whip-lash,
Its twist of red and yellow lacquers
Sanded and polished,
And altogether so delicately wrought
That he had engraved his initials on it.

I last met Joseph Mary Plunkett Ward
In a pub just over the Irish border.
He was living in the open,
In a secret camp
On the other side of the mountain.
He was fighting for Ireland,
Making things happen.
And he told me, Joe Ward,
Of how he had risen through the ranks

To Quartermaster, Commandant:
How every morning at parade
His volunteers would call back Anseo
And raise their hands
As their names occurred.

Paul Muldoon

As

As naught gives way to aught
and oxhide gives way to chain mail
and byrnie gives way to battle-ax
and Cavalier gives way to Roundhead
and Cromwell Road gives way to the Connaught
and I Am Curious (Yellow) gives way to I Am Curious (Blue)
and barrelhouse gives way to Frank'N'Stein
and a pint of Shelley plain to a pint of India Pale Ale
I give way to you.

As bass gives way to baritone
and hammock gives way to hummock
and Hoboken gives way to Hackensack
and bread gives way to reed bed
and bald eagle gives way to Theobald Wolfe Tone
and the Undertones give way to Siouxsie Sioux
and DeLorean, John, gives way to Deloria, Vine,
and Pierced Nose to Big Stomach
I give way to you.

As vent gives way to Ventry
and the King of the World gives way to Finn MacCool
and phone gives way to fax
and send gives way to sned
and Dagenham gives way to Coventry
and Covenanter gives way to caribou
and the caribou gives way to the carbine
and Boulud's cackamamie to the cock-a-leekie of Boole
I give way to you.

As transhumance gives way to trance
and shaman gives way to Santa
and butcher's string gives way to vacuum pack
and the ineffable gives way to the unsaid
and pyx gives way to monstrance
and treasure aisle gives way to need-blind pew
and Calvin gives way to Calvin Klein
and Town and Country Mice to Hanta
I give way to you.

As Hopi gives way to Navaho
and rug gives way to rag
and Pax Vobiscum gives way to Tampax
and Tampa gives way to the water bed
and The Water Babies gives way to Worstward Ho
and crapper gives way to loo
and spruce gives way to pine
and the carpet of pine needles to the carpetbag
I give way to you.

As gombeen-man gives way to not-for-profit
and soft soap gives way to Lynn C. Doyle
and tick gives way to tack
and Balaam's Ass gives way to Mister Ed
and Songs of Innocence gives way to The Prophet
and single-prop Bar-B-Q gives way to twin-screw
and the Salt Lick gives way to the County Line
and "Mending Wall" gives way to "Build Soil";
I give way to you.

As your hummus gives way to your foul madams
and your coy mistress gives way to "The Flea";
and flax gives way to W. D. Flackes
and the living give way to the dead
and John Hume gives way to Gerry Adams
and Television gives way to U2
and Lake Constance gives way to the Rhine
and the Rhine to the Zuider Zee
I give way to you.

As dutch treat gives way to french leave
and spanish fly gives way to Viagra
and slick gives way to slack
and the local fuzz give way to the Feds
and Machiavelli gives way to make-believe
and Howards End gives way to A Room with a View
and Wordsworth gives way to "Woodbine
Willie" and stereo Nagra to quad Niagara
I give way to you.

As cathedral gives way to cavern

and cookie cutter gives way to cookie
and the rookies give way to the All-Blacks
and the shad give way to the smoke shed
and the roughshod give way to the Black Horse avern
that still rings true
despite that T being missing from its sign
where a little nook gives way to a little nookie
when I give way to you.

That Nanook of the North should give way to Man of Aran
as ling gives way to cod
and cod gives way to kayak
and Camp Moosilauke gives way to Club Med
and catamite gives way to catamaran
and catamaran to aluminum canoe
is symptomatic of a more general decline
whereby a cloud succumbs to a clod
and I give way to you.

For as Monet gives way to Juan Gris
and Juan Gris gives way to Joan Miró
and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer gives way to Miramax
and the Volta gives way to Travolta, swinging the red-hot lead,
and Saturday Night Fever gives way to Grease
and the Greeks give way to you know who
and the Roman IX gives way to the Arabic 9
and nine gives way, as ever, to zero
I give way to you.

Paul Muldoon

Brock

Small wonder
he's not been sighted all winter;
this old brock's
been to Normandy and back

through the tunnels and trenches
of his subconscious.
His father fell victim
to mustard-gas at the Somme;

one of his sons lost a paw
to a gin-trap at Lisbellaw:
another drills
on the Antrim hills'

still-molten lava
in a moth-eaten Balaclava.
An elaborate
system of foxholes and duckboards

leads to the terminal moraine
of an ex-linen baron's
croquet-lawn
where he's part-time groundsman.

I would find it somewhat infra dig
to dismiss him simply as a pig
or heed Gerald of Wales'
tall tales

of badgers keeping badger-slaves.
For when he shuffles
across the esker
I glimpse my grandfather's whiskers

stained with tobacco-pollen.
When he piddles against a bullaun
I know he carries bovine TB
but what I see

is my father in his Sunday suit's
bespoke lime and lignite,
patrolling his now-diminished estate
and taking stock of this and that.

Paul Muldoon

Chunkey

A game about which we've got next to nothing straight,
it seems to have been a mash-up of buzkashi and road bowls.
As I try to anticipate a spear-thrower trying to anticipate
the spot where the chunkey-stone rolls

to a standstill, I hear a ten thousand strong shout
go up over the abandoned chunkey-yard at Cahokia, in support,
maybe, of the idea Cahokia will win out.
Maybe we should accept our understanding must fall short

as a spear falls short of this sandstone disk
some take to represent the sun.
Maybe we should accept our grand ambitions as grandiose

and our aversion to averting risk
merely rash. Maybe we should support the idea that having won
will mean merely 'to have come close.'

Paul Muldoon

Cows

Even as we speak, there's a smoker's cough
from behind the whitethorn hedge: we stop dead in our tracks;
a distant tingle of water into a trough.

In the past half-hour—since a cattle truck
all but sent us shuffling off this mortal coil—
we've consoled ourselves with the dregs

of a bottle of Redbreast. Had Hawthorne been a Gael,
I insist, the scarlet A on Hester Prynne
would have stood for 'Alcohol.'

This must be the same truck whose taillights burn
so dimly, as if caked with dirt,
three or four hundred yards along the boreen

(a diminutive form of the Gaelic bóthar, 'a road,'
from bó, 'a cow,' and thar
meaning, in this case, something like 'athwart,'

'boreen' has entered English 'through the air'
despite the protestations of the O.E.D.):
why, though, should one taillight flash and flare

then flicker-fade
to an afterimage of tourmaline
set in a dark part-jet, part-jasper or -jade?

That smoker's cough again: it triggers off from drumlin
to drumlin an emphysemantiphon
of cows. They hoist themselves onto their trampoline

and steady themselves and straight away divine
water in some far-flung spot
to which they then gravely incline. This is no Devon

cow-coterie, by the way, whey-faced, with Spode
hooves and horns: nor are they the metaphysicattle of Japan
that have merely to anticipate

scoring a bull's-eye and, lo, it happens;
these are earth-flesh, earth-blood, salt of the earth,
whose talismans are their own jawbones

buried under threshold and hearth.
For though they trace themselves to the kith and kine
that presided over the birth

of Christ (so carry their calves a full nine
months and boast liquorice
cachous on their tongues), they belong more to the line

that's tramped these cwms and corries
since Cuchulainn tramped Aoife.
Again the flash. Again the fade. However I might allegorize

some oscaraboscarabinary bevy
of cattle there's no getting round this cattle truck,
one light on the blink, laden with what? Microwaves? Hi-fis?

Oscaraboscarabinary: a twin, entwined, a tree, a Tuareg;
a double dung-beetle; a plain
and simple hi-firing party; an off-the-back-of-a-lorry drogue?

Enough of Colette and Céline, Céline and Paul Celan:
enough of whether Nabokov
taught at Wellesley or Wesleyan.

Now let us talk of slaughter and the slain,
the helicopter gunship, the mighty Kalashnikov:
let's rest for a while in a place where a cow has lain.

Paul Muldoon

Extraordinary Rendition □

I.

I gave you back my claim on the mining town
and the rich vein we once worked,
the tumble down
from a sluice box that irked

you so much, the narrow gauge
that opened up to one and all
when it ran out at the landing stage
beyond the falls.

I gave you back oak ties,
bully flitches, the hand-hewn crossbeams
from which hung hardtack

in a burlap bag that, I'd surmise,
had burst its seams
the last night we lay by the old spur track.

II.

You gave me back your frown
and the most recent responsibility you'd shirked
along with something of your renown
for having jumped from a cage just before it jerked

to a standstill, your wild rampage
shot through with silver falderals,
the speed of that falling cage
and the staidness of our canyon walls.

You gave me back lake skies,
pulley glitches, gully pitches, the reflected gleams
of two tin plates and mugs in the shack,

the echoes of love sighs
and love screams
our canyon walls had already given back.

Paul Muldoon

Gathering Mushrooms

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?

*

He looked about. He remembered her palaver
on how both earth and sky would darken-
'You could barely tell one from the other'-

while the Monarch butterflies passed over
in their milkweed-hunger: 'A wing-beat, some reckon,
may trigger off the mother and father

of all storms, striking your Irish Cliffs of Moher
with the force of a hurricane.'
Then: 'Milkweed and Monarch 'invented' each other.'

*

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.

Paul Muldoon

Hedgehog

The snail moves like a
Hovercraft, held up by a
Rubber cushion of itself,
Sharing its secret

With the hedgehog. The hedgehog
Shares its secret with no one.
We say, Hedgehog, come out
Of yourself and we will love you.

We mean no harm. We want
Only to listen to what
You have to say. We want
Your answers to our questions.

The hedgehog gives nothing
Away, keeping itself to itself.
We wonder what a hedgehog
Has to hide, why it so distrusts.

We forget the god
under this crown of thorns.
We forget that never again
will a god trust in the world.

from 'Poems 1968-1998'

Paul Muldoon

Holy Thursday

They're kindly here, to let us linger so late,
Long after the shutters are up.
A waiter glides from the kitchen with a plate
Of stew, or some thick soup,

And settles himself at the next table but one.
We know, you and I, that it's over,
That something or other has come between
Us, whatever we are, or were.

The waiter swabs his plate with bread
And drains what's left of his wine,
Then rearranges, one by one,
The knife, the fork, the spoon, the napkin,
The table itself, the chair he's simply borrowed,
And smiles, and bows to his own absence.

Paul Muldoon

Horse Latitudes

Beijing

I could still hear the musicians
cajoling those thousands of clay
horses and horsemen through the squeeze
when I woke beside Carlotta.
Life-size, also. Also terra-cotta.
The sky was still a terra-cotta frieze
over which her grandfather still held sway
with the set square, fretsaw, stencil,
plumb line, and carpenter's pencil
his grandfather brought from Roma.
Proud-fleshed Carlotta. Hypersarcoma.
For now our highest ambition
was simply to bear the light of the day
we had once been planning to seize.

Baginbun

The Nashville skyline's hem and haw
as the freebooters who freeboot
through their contractual mire and murk,
like Normans stampeding dozens
of cows into their Norse-Irish cousins,
were balking now at this massive breastwork
they themselves had thrown up. The pile of toot
on a mirror. The hip-hirple
of a white horse against purple.
Age-old traductions I could trace
from freebasers pretending they freebase
to this inescapable flaw
hidden by Carlotta's close-knit wet suit
like a heart-wound by a hauberk.

Bannockburn

Though he was mounted on a cob
rather than a warhorse, the Bruce
still managed to sidestep a spear

from Henry de Bohun and tax
de Bohun's poll with his broad-based poleax
and leave de Bohun's charger somewhat leer.
Her grandfather had yet to find a use
for the two-timing partisan
his grandfather brought man-to-man
against all those Ferdinandies
until he saw it might come in handy
for whacking the thingammybobs
off pine and fir, off pine and fir and spruce
and all such trees as volunteer.

Berwick-Upon-Tweed

Off the elm, the ancient pollard
that a Flemish painter might love,
that comes to shun the attention
of its headstrong days, so is proof
against the storm that takes its neighbor's roof.
Her nonno collects his pension
knowing that when push really came to shove
he had it within him to wrap
his legs in puttees and backslap
those pack mules down that moonlit deck,
Carlotta now wearing a halter-neck
under the long-sleeved, high-collared
wet suit whereof . . . whereof . . . whereof . . . whereof
I needs must again make mention.

Blaye

Her wet suit like a coat of mail
worn by a French knight from the time
a knight could still cause a ruction
by direct-charging his rouncy,
when an Englishman's home was his bouncy
castle, when abduction and seduction
went hand in glove. Now Carlotta would climb
from the hotel pool in Nashville,
take off her mask, and set a spill
to a Gauloise as one might set
a spill to the fuse of a falconet

and the walls of her chest assail.
The French, meanwhile, were still struggling to prime
their weapons of mass destruction.

Bosworth Field

It was clear now, through the pell-mell
of bombard- and basilisk-mist,
that the Stanleys had done the dirt
on him and taken Henry's side.
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

Blackwater Fort

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.
There was a distant fanfaron
in the Nashville sky, where the wind
had now drawn itself up and pinned
on her breast a Texaco star.
'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?'

Benburb

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. However jerry-built,
those chevaux-de-frise have embogged
the horses whose manes they had hogged
so lovingly and decked with knots
of heather, horses rooted to the spots
on which they go down on their knees
as they unwind their shoulder plaids and kilts,
the checkered careers of their guts.

Boyne

The blood slick from the horse slaughter
I could no longer disregard
as Carlotta surfaced like barm.
My putting her through her paces
as she kicked and kicked against the traces
like a pack mule kicking from a yardarm
before it fell, heehaw, in the dockyard.
A banner's frittering tassel
or deflating bouncy castle
was something to which she paid heed
whereas that vision of a milk-white steed
drinking from a tub of water
and breathing hard, breathing a little hard,
had barely set off an alarm.

Blenheim

Small birds were sounding the alert
as I followed her unladen
steed through a dell so dark and dank
she might have sported the waders
her grandfather had worn at the nadir
of his career, scouring the Outer Banks
for mummichog and menhaden.
Those weeks and months in the doldrums
coming back as 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.

Bunker Hill

Carlotta took me in her arms
as a campfire gathers a branch
to itself, her mouth a cauter
set to my bleeding bough, heehaw.
Her grandfather sterilizing his saw
in a tub of 100-proof firewater,
a helper standing by to stanch
the bleeding in some afterlife.
No looking daggers at the knife.
She'd meet the breast-high parapet
with the nonchalance, the no fucking sweat
of a slightly skanky schoolmarm
though the surgeon was preparing to ganch
her like What's-his-face's Daughter.

Brandywine

I crouched in my own Little Ease
by the pool at the Vanderbilt
where Carlotta crouched, sputter-sput,
just as she had in the scanner
when the nurse, keen-sighted as a lanner,
picked out a tumor like a rabbit scut
on dark ground. It was as if a fine silt,
white sand or silicate, had clogged
her snorkel, her goggles had fogged,
and Carlotta surfaced like flot
to be skimmed off some great cast-iron pot
as garble is skimmed off, or lees
painstakingly drained by turnings and tilts
from a man-size barrel or butt.

Badli-Ke-Serai

Pork barrels. Pork butts. The wide-screen

surround sound of a massed attack
upon the thin red cellulose
by those dust- or fust- or must-cells
that cause the tears to well and well and well.
At which I see him turning up his nose
as if he'd bitten on a powder-pack
like yet another sad Sepoy
who won't fall for the British ploy
of greasing with ham the hammer
or smoothing over Carlotta's grammar:
'On which . . . On which Bush will come clean.'
Her grandfather a man who sees no lack
of manhood in the lachrymose.

Bull Run

While some think there's nothing more rank
than the pool that's long stood aloof
from the freshet, I loved the smell
of sweat and blood and, sí, horse dung
Carlotta shouldered like an Aqua-Lung
as she led me now through that dewy dell
and spread her House of Tartan waterproof.
As we lay there I could have sworn,
as I stared through unruffled thorns
that were an almost perfect fit
to each side of the gravel pit
where she and I'd tried to outflank
each other, I traced the mark of a hoof
(or horseshoe) in her fontanelle.

Bronkhorstspruit

I traced the age-old traduction
of a stream through a thorn thicket
as a gush from a farthingale.
Skeffington's Daughter. Skeffington.
Attention. Shun. Attention. Shun. Shun. Shun.
We lay in a siding between two rails
and watched an old white horse cross the picket
of himself and trek through the scrub
to drink from an iron-hooped tub

with the snore-snort of a tuba.
His winkers and bellyband said scuba,
while his sudden loss of suction
Carlotta knew meant a pump whose clicket's
failed in the way a clicket fails.

Basra

'The way to relieve the tension
on the line to a windjammer
is to lubricate the bollard
so it's always a little slack . . .'
Her nonno giving us the inside track
on how the mule drivers whooped and hollered
on the dock. No respite from his yammer
on boundlessness being a bind
and the most insidious kind
of censorship self-censorship
while he took Carlotta for a quick whip
through conjugation, declension,
and those other 'crannies of the crammer'
in which she'd been 'quite unscholared.'

Bazentin

As I was bringing up her rear
a young dragoon would cock a snook
at the gunners raking the knob
of High Wood. Tongue like a scaldy
in a nest. Hadn't a Garibaldi
what might lie behind that low-level throb
like a niggle in her appointment book.
Dust? Fust? Must? The dragoon nonplussed
by his charger taking the rust
and, despite her recalcitrance,
Carlotta making a modest advance
when the thought of a falchioneer
falling to with his two-faced reaping hook
now brought back her grandfather's job.

Beersheba

Now summoned also the young Turk
who had suddenly arisen
from that great pile of toot, heehaw,
as from one of Beersheba's wells.
Like the sail that all of a sudden swells
on the yawl that all of a sudden yaws,
a wind finding meaning in a mizzen
and toppling a bouncy castle.
Her grandfather fain to wrastle
each pack mule to a rubber mat
whereat . . . whereat . . . whereat . . . whereat . . . whereat . . .
he would eftsoons get down to work,
reaching into its wide-open wizen
while a helper clamped back its jaws.

Burma

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 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.'

Paul Muldoon

Lunch with Pancho Villa

I

'Is it really a revolution, though?'
I reached across the wicker table
With another \$10,000 question.
My celebrated pamphleteer,
Co-author of such volumes
As Blood on the Rose,
The Dream and the Drums,
And How It Happened Here,
Would pour some untroubled Muscatel
And settle back in his cane chair.

'Look, son. Just look around you.
People are getting themselves killed
Left, right and centre
While you do what? Write rondeaux?
There's more to living in this country
Than stars and horses, pigs and trees,
Not that you'd guess it from your poems.
Do you never listen to the news?
You want to get down to something true,
Something a little nearer home.'

I called again later that afternoon,
A quiet suburban street.
'You want to stand back a little
When the world's at your feet.'
I'd have liked to have heard some more
Of his famous revolution.
I rang the bell, and knocked hard
On what I remembered as his front door,
That opened then, as such doors do,
Directly on to a back yard.

II

Not any back yard, I'm bound to say,
And not a thousand miles away

From here. No one's taken in, I'm sure,
By such a mild invention.
But where (I wonder myself) do I stand,
In relation to a table and chair,
The quince tree I forgot to mention,
That suburban street, the door, the yard—
All made up as I went along
As things that people live among.

And such a person as lived there!
My celebrated pamphleteer!
Of course, I gave it all away
With those preposterous titles.
The Bloody Rose? The Dream and the Drums?
The three-day wonder of the flowering plum!
Or was I desperately wishing
To have been their other co-author,
Or, at least, to own a first edition
Of *The Boot Boys and Other Battles*?

'When are you going to tell the truth?'
For there's no such book, so far as I know,
As *How it Happened Here*,
Though there may be. There may.
What should I say to this callow youth
Who learned to write last winter—
One of those correspondence courses—
And who's coming to lunch today?
He'll be rambling on, no doubt,
About pigs and trees, stars and horses.

Paul Muldoon

Milkweed And Monarch

The rain comes flapping through the yard
like a tablecloth that she hand-embroidered.
My mother has left it on the line.
It is sodden with rain.
The mushroom shed is windowless, wide,
its high-stacked wooden trays
hosed down with formaldehyde.
And my father has opened the gates of Troy
to that first load of horse manure.
Barley straw. Gypsum. Dried blood. Ammonia.
Wagon after wagon
blusters in, a self-renewing gold-black dragon
we push to the back of the mind.
We have taken our pitchforks to the wind.

All brought back to me that September evening
fifteen years on. The pair of us
tripping through Barnett's fair demesne
like girls in long dresses
after a hail-storm.
We might have been thinking of the fire-bomb
that sent Malone House sky-high
and its priceless collection of linen
sky-high.
We might have wept with Elizabeth McCrum.
We were thinking only of psilocybin.
You sang of the maid you met on the dewy grass-
And she stooped so low gave me to know
it was mushrooms she was gathering O.

He'll be wearing that same old donkey-jacket
and the sawn-off waders.
He carries a knife, two punnets, a bucket.
He reaches far into his own shadow.
We'll have taken him unawares
and stand behind him, slightly to one side.
He is one of those ancient warriors
before the rising tide.
He'll glance back from under his peaked cap

without breaking rhythm:
his coaxing a mushroom-a flat or a cup-
the nick against his right thumb;
the bucket then, the punnet left or right,
and so on and so forth till kingdom come.

We followed the overgrown tow-path by the Lagan.
The sunset would deepen through cinnamon
to aubergine,
the wood-pigeon's concerto for oboe and strings,
allegro, blowing your mind.
And you were suddenly out my ken, hurtling
towards the ever-receding ground,
into the maw
of a shimmering green-gold dragon.
You discovered yourself in some outbuilding
with your long-lost companion, me,
though my head had grown into the head of a horse
and shook its dirty-fair mane
and spoke this verse:

Come back to us. However cold and raw, your feet
were always meant
to negotiate terms with bare cement.
Beyond this concrete wall is a wall of concrete
and barbed wire. Your only hope
is to come back. If sing you must, let your song
tell of treading your own dung,
let straw and dung give a spring to your step.
If we never live to see the day we leap
into our true domain,
lie down with us now and wrap
yourself in the soiled grey blanket of Irish rain
that will, one day, bleach itself white.
Lie down with us and wait.

1983

Paul Muldoon

News Headlines From The Homer Noble Farm

I

That case-hardened cop.
A bull moose in a boghole
brought him to a stop.

II

From his grassy knoll
he has you in his crosshairs,
the accomplice mole.

III

The sword once a share.
This forest a fresh-faced farm.
This stone once a stair.

IV

The birch crooks her arm,
as if somewhat more inclined
to welcome the swarm.

V

He has, you will find,
two modes only, the chipmunk:
fast-forward; rewind.

VI

The smell, like a skunk,
of coffee about to perk.
Thelonius Monk.

VII

They're the poker work

of some sort of woodpecker,
these holes in the bark.

VIII

My new fact checker
claims that pilus means 'pestle.'
My old fact checker.

IX

Those Rose and Thistle.
Where the hummingbird drops in
to wet his whistle.

X

Behind the wood bin
a garter snake snaps itself,
showing us some skin.

XI

Like most bits of delf,
the turtle's seen its best
on one's neighbor's shelf.

XII

Riding two abreast
on their stripped-down, souped-up bikes,
bears in leather vests.

XIII

The eye-shaded shrike.
BIRD BODIES BURIED IN BOG'S
a headline he'll spike.

XIV

Steady, like a log
riding a sawmill's spillway,

the steady coydog.

XV

The cornet he plays
was Bolden's, then Beiderbecke's,
this lonesome blue jay.

XVI

Some fresh auto wreck.
Slumped over a horn. Sump pool.
The frog's neck-braced neck.

XVII

Brillo pads? Steel wool?
The regurrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrgitations, what,
of a long-eared owl?

XVIII

The jet with the jot.
The drive-in screen with the sky.
The blood with the blot.

XIX

How all seems to vie,
not just my sleeping laptop
with the first firefly.

Paul Muldoon

The Birth

Seven o'clock. The seventh day of the seventh month of the year.
No sooner have I got myself up in lime-green scrubs,
a sterile cap and mask,
and taken my place at the head of the table

than the windlass-woman ply their shears
and gralloch-grub
for a footling foot, then, warming to their task,
haul into the inestimable

realm of apple-blossoms and chanterelles and damsons and eel-spears
and foxes and the general hubbub
of inkies and jennets and Kickapoos with their lemniscs
or peekaboo-quiffs of Russian sable

and tallow-unctuous vernix, into the realm of the widgeon—
the 'whew' or 'yellow-poll', not the 'zuizin'—

Dorothy Aoife Korelitz Muldoon: I watch through floods of tears
as they give her a quick rub-a-dub
and whisk
her off to the nursery, then check their staple-guns for staples

Paul Muldoon

The Frog

Comes to mind as another small
upheaval
amongst the rubble.
His eye matches exactly the bubble
in my spirit-level.
I set aside hammer and chisel
and take him on the trowel.

The entire population of Ireland
springs from a pair left to stand
overnight in a pond
in the gardens of Trinity College,
two bottle of wine left there to chill
after the Act of Union.

There is, surely, in this story
a moral. A moral for our times.
What if I put him to my head
and squeezed it out of him,
like the juice of freshly squeezed limes,
or a lemon sorbet?

Anonymous submission.

Paul Muldoon

The Grand Conversation

She. My people came from Korelitz
where they grew yellow cucumbers
and studied the Talmud.

He. Mine pored over the mud
of mangold- and potato-pits
or flicked through kale plants from Comber
as bibliomancers of old
went a-flicking through deckle-mold.

She. Mine would lie low in the shtetl
when they heard the distant thunder
stolen by the Cossacks.

He. It was potato sacks
lumped together on a settle
mine found themselves lying under,
the Peep O'Day Boys from Loughgall
making Defenders of us all.

She. Mine once controlled the sugar trade
from the islets of Langerhans
and were granted the deed
to Charlottesville. He. Indeed?
My people called a spade a spade
and were admitted to the hanse
of pike- and pickax-men, shovels
leaning to their lean-to hovels.

She. Mine were trained to make a suture
after the bomb and the bombast
have done their very worst.

He. Between fearsad and verst
we may yet construct our future
as we've reconstructed our past
and cry out, my love, each to each
from his or her own quicken-queach.

She. Each from his stand of mountain ash
will cry out over valley farms
spotlit with pear blossom.

He. There some young Absalom
picks his way through cache after cache
of ammunition and small arms
hidden in grain wells, while his nag
tugs at a rein caught on a snag

Paul Muldoon

The Loaf

When I put my finger to the hole they've cut for a dimmer switch
in a wall of plaster stiffened with horsehair
it seems I've scratched a two-hundred-year-old itch

with a pink and a pink and a pinkie-pick.

When I put my ear to the hole I'm suddenly aware
of spades and shovels turning up the gain
all the way from Raritan to the Delaware

with a clink and a clink and a clinky-click.

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

with a stink and a stink and a stinky-stick.

When I put my eye to the hole I see one holding horse dung to the rain
in the hope, indeed, indeed,
of washing out a few whole ears of grain

with a wink and a wink and a winkie-wick.

And when I do at last succeed
in putting my mouth to the horsehair-fringed niche
I can taste the small loaf of bread he baked from that whole seed

with a link and a link and a linky-lick.

The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants

At four in the morning he wakes
to the yawn of brakes,
the snore of a diesel engine.
Gone. All she left
is a froth of bra and panties.
The scum of the Seine
and the Farset.
Gallogly squats in his own pelt.
A sodium street light
his brought a new dimension
to their black taxi.
By the time they force an entry
he'll have skedaddled
among hen runs and pigeon lofts.

The charter flight from Florida
touched down at Aldergrove
minutes earlier,
at 3.54 a.m.
Its excess baggage takes the form
of Mangas Jones, Esquire,
who is, as it turns out, Apache.
He carries only hand luggage.
'Anything to declare?'
He opens the powder-blue attaché-
case. 'A pebble of quartz.'
'You're an Apache?' 'Mescalero.'
He follows the corridor's
arroyo till the signs read Hertz.

He is going to put his foot down
on a patch of waste ground
along the Stranmillis embankment
when he gets wind
of their impromptu fire.
The air above the once-sweet stream
is aquarium-
drained.
And six, maybe seven, skinheads

have formed a quorum
round a burnt-out heavy-duty tyre.
So intent on sniffing glue
they may not notice Gallogly,
or, if they do, are so far gone.

Three miles west as the crow flies
an all-night carry-out
provides the cover
for an illegal drinking club.
While the bar man unpacks a crate
of Coca-Cola,
one cool customer
takes on all comers in a video game.
He grasps what his two acolytes
have failed to seize.
Don't they know what kind of take-away
this is, the glipes?
Vietnamese. Viet-ma-friggin'-knees.
He drops his payload of napalm.

Gallogly is wearing a candy-stripe
king-size sheet,
a little something he picked up
off a clothes line.
He is driving a milk van
he borrowed from the Belfast Co-op
while the milkman's back
was turned.
He had given the milkman a playful
rabbit punch.
When he stepped on the gas
he flooded the street
with broken glass.
He is trying to keep a low profile.

The unmarked police car draws level
with his last address.
A sergeant and eight constables
pile out of a tender
and hammer up the stairs.
The street bristles with static.

Their sniffer dog, a Labrador bitch,
bursts into the attic
like David Balfour in Kidnapped.
A constable on his first dawn swoop
leans on a shovel.
He has turned over a
new leaf in her ladyship's herb patch.
They'll take it back for analysis.

All a bit much after the night shift
to meet a milkman
who's double-parked his van
closing your front door after him.
He's sporting your
Donegal tweed suit and your
Sunday shoes and politely raises your
hat as he goes by.
You stand there with your mouth open
as he climbs into the still-warm
driving seat of your Cortina
and screeches off towards the motorway,
leaving you uncertain
of your still-warm wife's damp tuft.

Someone on their way to early Mass
will find her hog-tied
to the chapel gates—
O Child of Prague-
big-eyed, anorexic.
The lesson for today
is pinned to her bomber jacket.
It seems to read Keep off the Grass.
Her lovely head has been chopped
and changed.
For Beatrice, whose fathers
knew Louis Quinze,
to have come to this, her perruque
of tar and feathers.

He is pushing the maroon Cortina
through the sedge
on the banks of the Callan.

It took him a mere forty minutes
to skite up the M1.
He followed the exit sign
for Loughgall and hared
among the top-heavy apple orchards.
This stretch of the Armagh/Tyrone
border was planted by Warwickshiremen
who planted in turn
their familiar quick-set damson hedges.
The Cortina goes to the bottom.
Gallogly swallows a plummy-plum-plum.

'I'll warrant them's the very pair
o' boys I seen abroad
in McParland's bottom, though where
in under God—
for thou art so possessed with murd'rous hate—
where they come from God only knows.'
'They were mad for a bite o' mate,
I s'pose.'
'I doubt so. I come across a brave dale
o' half-chawed damsels. Wanst wun disappeared
I follied the wun as yelly as Indy male.'
'Ye weren't afeared?'
'I follied him.' 'God save us.'
'An' he driv away in a van belongin' t'Avis.'

The grass sprightly as Astroturf
in the September frost
and a mist
here where the ground is low
He seizes his own wrist
as if, as if
Blind Pew again seized Jim
at the sign of the 'Admiral Benbow'.
As if Jim Hawkins led Blind Pew
to Billy Bones
and they were all one and the same,
he stares in disbelief
at an aspirin-white spot he pressed
into his own palm.

Gallogly's thorn-proof tweed jacket
is now several sizes too big.
He has flopped
down in a hay shed
to ram a wad of hay into the toe
of each of his ill-fitting
brogues, when he gets the drift
of ham and eggs.
Now he's led by his own wet nose
to the hacienda-style
farmhouse, a baggy-kneed animated
bear drawn out of the woods
by an apple pie
left to cool on a windowsill.

She was standing at the picture window
with a glass of water
and a Valium
when she caught your man
in the reflection of her face.
He came
shaping past the milking parlour
as if he owned the place.
Such is the integrity
of their quarrel
that she immediately took down
the legally held shotgun
and let him have both barrels.
She had wanted only to clear the air.

Half a mile away across the valley
her husband's U.D.R. patrol
is mounting a check-point.
He pricks up his ears
at the crack
of her prematurely arthritic hip-
joint,
and commandeers one of the jeeps.
There now, only a powder burn
as if her mascara had run.
The bloody puddle
in the yard, and the shilly-shally

of blood like a command wire
petering out behind a milk churn.

A hole in the heart, an ovarian
cyst.
Coming up the Bann
in a bubble.
Disappearing up his own bum.
Or, running on the spot
with all the minor aplomb
of a trick-cyclist.
So thin, side-on, you could spit
through him.
His six foot of pump water
bent double
in agony or laughter.
Keeping down-wind of everything.

White Annetts. Gillyflowers. Angel Bites.
When he names the forgotten names
of apples
he has them all off pat.
His eye like the eye of a travelling rat
lights on the studied negligence
of these scraws of turf.
A tarpaulin. A waterlogged pit.
He will take stock of the Kalashnikov's
filed-down serial number,
seven sticks of unstable
commercial gelignite
that have already begun to weep.
Red Strokes. Sugar Sweet. Widows Whelps.

Buy him a drink and he'll regale you
with how he came in for a cure
one morning after the night before
to the Las Vegas Lounge and Cabaret.
He was crossing the bar's
eternity of parquet floor
when his eagle eye
saw something move on the horizon.

If it wasn't an Indian.
A Sioux. An ugly Sioux.
He means, of course, an Oglala
Sioux busily tracing the family tree
of an Ulsterman who had some hand
in the massacre at Wounded Knee.

He will answer the hedge-sparrow's
Littlebitofbreadandnocheese
with a whole bunch
of freshly picked watercress,
a bulb of garlic,
sorrel,
with many-faceted blackberries.
Gallogly is out to lunch.
When his cock rattles its sabre
he takes it in his dab
hand, plants one chaste kiss
on its forelock,
and then, with a birl and a skirl,
tosses it off like a caber.

The U.D.R. corporal had come off duty
to be with his wife
while the others set about
a follow-up search.
When he tramped out just before twelve
to exercise the greyhound
he was hit by a single high-velocity
shot.
You could, if you like, put your fist
in the exit wound
in his chest.
He slumps
in the spume of his own arterial blood
like an overturned paraffin lamp.

Gallogly lies down in the sheugh
to munch
through a Beauty of
Bath. He repeats himself, Bath,
under his garlic-breath.

Sheugh, he says. Sheugh.
He is finding that first 'sh'
increasingly difficult to manage.
Sh-leeps. A milkmaid sinks
her bare foot
to the ankle
in a simmering dung hill
and fills the slot
with beastlings for him to drink.

In Ovid's conspicuously tongue-in-cheek
account of an eyeball
to eyeball
between the goddess Leto
and a shower of Lycian reed cutters
who refuse her a cup of cloudy
water
from their churned-up lake,
Live then forever in that lake of yours,
she cries, and has them
bubble
and squeak
and plonk themselves down as bullfrogs
In their icy jissom.

A country man kneels on his cap
beside his neighbour's fresh
grave-mud
as Gallogly kneels to lap
the primrose-yellow
custard.
The knees of his hand-me-down duds
are gingerish.
A pernickety seven-
year-old girl-child
parades in her mother's trousseau
and mumbles a primrose
Kleenex tissue
to make sure her lipstick's even.

Gallogly has only to part the veil
of its stomach wall

to get right under the skin,
the spluttering heart
and collapsed lung,
of the horse in Guernica.
He flees the Museum of Modern Art
with its bit between his teeth.
When he began to cough
blood, Hamsun rode the Minneapolis/
New York night train
on top of the dining-car.
One long, inward howl.
A porter-drinker without a thrapple.

A weekend trip to the mountains
north of Boston
with Alice, Alice A.
and her paprika hair,
the ignition key
to her family's Winnebago camper,
her quim
biting the leg off her.
In the oyster bar
of Grand Central Station
she gobbles a dozen Chesapeakes—
'Oh, I'm not particular as to size'—
and, with a flourish of Tabasco,
turns to gobble him.

A brewery lorry on a routine delivery
is taking a slow,
dangerous bend.
The driver's blethering
his code name
over the Citizens Band
when someone ambles
in front of him. Go, Johnny, go, go, go.
He's been dry-gulched
by a sixteen-year-old numb
with Mogadon,
whose face is masked by the seamless
black stocking filched
from his mum.

When who should walk in but Beatrice,
large as life, or larger,
sipping her one glass of lager
and singing her one song.
If he had it to do all over again
he would let her shave his head
in memory of '98
and her own, the French, Revolution.
The son of the King of the Moy
met this child on the Roxborough
estate. Noblesse, she said. Noblesse
oblige. And her tiny nipples
were bruise-bluish, wild raspberries.
The song she sang was 'The Croppy Boy'.

Her grand'mère was once asked to tea
by Gertrude Stein,
and her grand'mère and Gertrude
and Alice B., chère Alice B.
with her hook-nose,
the three of them sat in the nude
round the petits fours
and repeated Eros is Eros is Eros.
If he had it to do all over again
he would still be taken in
by her Alice B. Toklas
Nameless Cookies
and those new words she had him learn:
hash, hashish, lo perfido assassin.

Once the local councillor straps
himself into the safety belt
of his Citroën
and skids up the ramp
from the municipal car park
he upsets the delicate balance
of a mercury-tilt
boobytrap.
Once they collect his smithereens
he doesn't quite add up.
They're shy of a foot, and a calf

which stems
from his left shoe like a severely
pruned-back shrub.

Ten years before. The smooth-as-a
front-lawn at Queen's
where she squats
before a psilocybin god.
The indomitable gentle-bush
that had Lanyon or Lynn
revise their elegant ground plan
for the university quad.
With calmness, with care,
with breast milk, with dew.
There's no cure now.
There's nothing left to do.
The mushrooms speak through her.
Hush-hush.

'Oh, I'm not particular as to size,'
Alice hastily replied
and broke off a bit of the edge
with each hand
and set to work very carefully,
nibbling
first at one
and then the other.
On the Staten Island ferry
two men are dickering
over the price
of a shipment of Armalites,
as Henry Thoreau was wont to quibble
with Ralph Waldo Emerson.

That last night in the Algonquin
he met with a flurry
of sprites,
the assorted shades
of Wolfe Tone, Napper Tandy,
a sanguine
Michael Cusack
brandishing his blackthorn.

Then Thomas Meagher
darts up from the Missouri
on a ray
of the morning star
to fiercely ask
what has become of Irish hurling.

Everyone has heard the story of
a strong and beautiful bug
which came out of the dry leaf
of an old table of apple-tree wood
that stood
in a farmer's kitchen in Massachusetts
and which was heard gnawing out
for several weeks—
When the phone trills
he is careful not to lose his page—
Who knows what beautiful and winged life
whose egg
has been buried for ages
may unexpectedly come forth? 'Tell-tale.'

Gallogly carries a hunting bow
equipped
with a bow sight
and a quiver
of hunting arrows
belonging to her brother.
Alice has gone a little way off
to do her job.
A timber wolf,
a caribou,
or merely a trick of the light?
As, listlessly,
he lobs
an arrow into the undergrowth.

Had you followed the river Callan's
Pelorus Jack
through the worst drought
in living memory
to the rains of early Autumn

when it scrubs its swollen,
scab-encrusted back
under a bridge, the bridge you look down from,
you would be unlikely to pay much heed
to yet another old banger
no one could be bothered to tax,
or a beat-up fridge
well-stocked with gelignite,
or some five hundred yards of Cortex.

He lopes after the dribs of blood
through the pine forest
till they stop dead
in the ruins of a longhouse
or hogan.
Somehow, he finds his way
back to their tent.
Not so much as a whiff of her musk.
The girl behind the Aer Lingus
check-in desk
at Logan
is wearing the same scent
and an embroidered capital letter A
on her breast.

Was she Aurora, or the goddess Flora,
Artemidora, or Venus bright,
or Helen fair beyond compare
that Priam stole from the Grecian sight?
Quite modestly she answered me
and she gave her head one fetch up
and she said I am gathering musheroons
to make my mammy ketchup.
The dunt and dunder
of a culvert-bomb
wakes him
as it might have woke Leander.
And she said I am gathering musheroons
to make my mammy ketchup O.

Predictable as the gift of the gab
or a drop of the craythur

he noses round the six foot deep
crater.
Oblivious to their Landrover's
olive-drab
and the Burgundy berets
of a snatch-squad of Paratroopers.
Gallogly, or Gollogly,
otherwise known as Golightly,
otherwise known as Ingoldsby,
otherwise known as English,
gives forth one low cry of anguish
and agrees to come quietly.

They have bundled him into the cell
for a strip-
search.
He perches
on the balls of his toes, my my,
with his legs spread
till both his instep arches
fall.
He holds himself at arm's
length from the brilliantly Snowcem-ed
wall, a game bird
hung by its pinion tips
till it drops, in the fullness of time,
from the mast its colours are nailed to.

They have left him to cool his heels
after the obligatory
bath,
the mug shots, fingerprints
et cetera.
He plumps the thin bolster
and hints
at the slop bucket.
Six o'clock.
From the A Wing of Armagh jail
he can make out
the Angelus bell
of St Patrick's cathedral
and a chorus of 'For God and Ulster'.

The brewery lorry's stood at a list
by the Las Vegas
throughout the afternoon,
its off-side rear tyres down.
As yet, no one has looked agog
at the smuts and rusts
of a girlie mag
in disarray on the passenger seat.
An almost invisible, taut
fishing line
runs from the Playmate's navel
to a pivotal
beer keg.
As yet, no one has risen to the bait.

I saw no mountains, no enormous spaces,
no magical growth and metamorphosis
of buildings, nothing remotely like
a drama or a parable
in which he dons these lime-green dungarees,
green Wellingtons,
a green helmet of aspect terrible.
The other world to which mescaline
admitted me was not the world of visions;
it existed out there, in what I could see
with my eyes open.
He straps a chemical pack on his back
and goes in search of some Gawain.

Gallogly pads along the block
to raise his visor
at the first peep-hole.
He shamelessly
takes in her lean piglet's
back, the back
and boyish hams
of a girl at stool.
At last. A tiny goat's-pill.
A stub of crayon
with which she has squiggled
a shamrock, yes,

but a shamrock after the school
of Pollock, Jackson Pollock.

I stopped and stared at her face to face
and on the spot a name came to me,
a name with a smooth, nervous sound:
Ylayali.

When she was very close
I drew myself up straight
and said in an impressive voice,
'Miss, you are losing your book.'
And Beatrice, for it is she, she squints
through the spy-hole
to pass him an orange,
an Outspan orange some visitor has spiked
with a syringe-ful
of vodka.

The more a man has the more a man wants,
the same I don't think true.
For I never met a man with one black eye
who ever wanted two.
In the Las Vegas Lounge and Cabaret
the resident group—
pot bellies, Aran knits—
have you eating out of their hands.
Never throw a brick at a drowning man
when you're near to a grocer's store.
Just throw him a cake of Sunlight soap,
let him wash himself ashore.
You will act the galoot, and gallivant,
and call for another encore.

Gallogly, Gallogly, O Gallogly
juggles
his name like an orange
between his outsize baseball glove
paws,
and ogles
a moon that's just out of range
beyond the perimeter wall.
He works a gobbet of Brylcreem

into his quiff
and delves
through sand and gravel,
shrugging it off
his velveteen shoulders and arms.

Just
throw
him
a
cake
of
Sunlight
soap,
let
him
wash
him-
self
ashore.

Into a picture by Edward Hopper
of a gas station
in the Midwest
where Hopper takes as his theme
light, the spooky
glow of an illuminated sign
reading Esso or Mobil
or what-have-you—
into such a desolate oval
ride two youths on a motorbike.
A hand gun. Balaclavas.
The pump attendant's grown so used
to hold-ups he calls after them:
Beannacht Dé ar an obair.

The pump attendant's not to know
he's being watched by a gallowglass
hot-foot from a woodcut
by Derricke,
who skips across the forecourt
and kicks the black

plastic bucket
they left as a memento.
Nor is the gallowglass any the wiser.
The bucket's packed with fertilizer
and a heady brew
of sugar and Paraquat's
relentlessly gnawing its way through
the floppy knot of a Durex.

It was this self-same pump attendant
who dragged the head and torso
clear
and mouthed an Act of Contrition
in the frazzled ear
and overheard
those already-famous last words
Moose ... Indian.
'Next of all wus the han'.' 'Be Japers.'
'The sodgers cordoned-off the area
wi' what-ye-may-call-it tape.'
'Lunimous.' 'They foun' this hairy
han' wi' a drowneded man's grip
on a lunimous stone no bigger than a ...'

'Huh.'

Paul Muldoon

The Old Country

I

Where every town was a tidy town
and every garden a hanging garden.
A half could be had for half a crown.
Every major artery would harden

since every meal was a square meal.
Every clothesline showed a line of undies
yet no house was in dishabille.
Every Sunday took a month of Sundays

till everyone got it off by heart
every start was a bad start
since all conclusions were foregone.

Every wood had its twist of woodbine.
Every cliff its herd of fatalistic swine.
Every runnel was a Rubicon.

II

Every runnel was a Rubicon
and every annual a hardy annual
applying itself like linen to a lawn.
Every glove compartment held a manual

and a map of the roads, major and minor.
Every major road had major roadworks.
Every wishy-washy water diviner
had stood like a bulwark

against something worth standing against.
The smell of incense left us incensed
at the firing of the fort.

Every heron was a presager
of some disaster after which, we'd wager,

every resort was a last resort.

III

Every resort was a last resort
with a harbor that harbored an old grudge.
Every sale was a selling short.
There were those who simply wouldn't budge

from the Dandy to the Rover.
That shouting was the shouting
but for which it was all over—
the weekend, I mean, we set off on an outing

with the weekday train timetable.
Every tower was a tower of Babel
that graced each corner of a bawn

where every lookout was a poor lookout.
Every rill had its unflashy trout.
Every runnel was a Rubicon.

IV

Every runnel was a Rubicon
where every ditch was a last ditch.
Every man was "a grand wee mon"
whose every pitch was another sales pitch

now every boat was a burned boat.
Every cap was a cap in hand.
Every coat a trailed coat.
Every band was a gallant band

across the broken bridge
and broken ridge after broken ridge
where you couldn't beat a stick with a big stick.

Every straight road was a straight up speed trap.
Every decision was a snap.

Every cut was a cut to the quick.

V

Every cut was a cut to the quick
when the weasel's twist met the weasel's tooth
and Christ was somewhat impolitic
in branding as "weasels fighting in a hole," forsooth,

the petrol smugglers back on the old sod
when a vendor of red diesel
for whom every rod was a green rod
reminded one and all that the weasel

was nowhere to be found in that same quarter.
No mere mortar could withstand a ten-inch mortar.
Every hope was a forlorn hope.

So it was that the defenders
were taken in by their own blood splendour.
Every slope was a slippery slope.

VI

Every slope was a slippery slope
where every shave was a very close shave
and money was money for old rope
where every grave was a watery grave

now every boat was, again, a burned boat.
Every dime-a-dozen rat a dime-a-dozen drowned rat
except for the whitrack, or stoat,
which the very Norsemen had down pat

as a weasel-word
though we know their speech was rather slurred.
Every time was time in the nick

just as every nick was a nick in time.
Every unsheathed sword was somehow sheathed in rime.

Every cut was a cut to the quick.

VII

Every cut was a cut to the quick
what with every feather a feather to ruffle.
Every whitrack was a whitterick.
Everyone was in a right kerfuffle

when from his hob some hobbledehoy
would venture the whitterick was a curlew.
Every wall was a wall of Troy
and every hunt a hunt in the purlieu

of a demesne so out of bounds
every hound might have been a hellhound.
At every lane end stood a milk churn

whose every dent was a sign of indenture
to some pig wormer or cattle drencher.
Every point was a point of no return.

VIII

Every point was a point of no return
for those who had signed the Covenant in blood.
Every fern was a maidenhair fern
that gave every eye an eyeful of mud

ere it was plucked out and cast into the flame.
Every rowan was a mountain ash.
Every swath-swathed mower made of his graft a game
and the hay sash

went to the kemper best fit to kemp.
Every secretary was a temp
who could shift shape

like the river goddesses Banna and Boann.
Every two-a-penny maze was, at its heart, Minoan.

Every escape was a narrow escape.

IX

Every escape was a narrow escape
where every stroke was a broad stroke
of an ax on a pig nape.

Every pig was a pig in a poke

though it scooted once through the Diamond
so unfalt—so unfalteringly.

The threshold of pain was outlimened
by the bar raised at high tea

now every scone was a drop scone.
Every ass had an ass's jawbone
that might itself drop from grin to girn.

Every malt was a single malt.
Every pillar was a pillar of salt.
Every point was a point of no return.

X

Every point was a point of no return
where to make a mark was to overstep the mark.
Every brae had its own braw burn.
Every meadow had its meadowlark

that stood in for the laverock.
Those Norse had tried fjord after fjord
to find a tight wee place to dock.
When he made a scourge of small whin cords,

Christ drove out the moneylenders
and all the other bitter-enders
when the thing to have done was take up the slack.

Whin was to furze as furze was to gorse.
Every hobbledehoy had his hobbledyobbyhorse.

Every track was an inside track.

XI

Every track was an inside track
where every horse had the horse sense
to know it was only a glorified hack.
Every grain of gratitude was immense

and every platitude a familiar platitude.
Every kemp of hay was a kemp tossed in the air
by a haymaker in a hay feud.
Every chair at the barn dance a musical chair

given how every paltry poltroon
and his paltry dog could carry a tune
yet no one would carry the can

any more than Samson would carry the temple.
Every spinal column was a collapsing stemple.
Every flash was a flash in the pan.

XII

Every flash was a flash in the pan
and every border a herbaceous border
unless it happened to be an
herbaceous border as observed by the Recorder

or recorded by the Observer.
Every widdle stemmed from a willow bole.
Every fervor was a religious fervor
by which we'd fly the godforsaken hole

into which we'd been flung by it.
Every pit was a bottomless pit
out of which every pig needed a piggyback.

Every cow had subsided in its subsidy.
Biddy winked at Paddy and Paddy winked at Biddy.

Every track was an inside track.

XIII

Every track was an inside track
and every job an inside job.
Every whitterick had been a whitrack
until, from his hobbledehob,

that hobbledehobbledehoy
had insisted the whitterick was a curlew.
But every boy was still "one of the boys";
and every girl "ye girl ye";

for whom every dance was a last dance
and every chance a last chance
and every letdown a terrible letdown

from the days when every list was a laundry list
in that old country where, we reminisced,
every town was a tidy town.

Paul Muldoon

THE ROWBOAT

I

Every year he'd sunk
the old, clinker-built rowboat
so it might again float.
Every year he'd got drunk

as if he might once and for all write off
every year he'd sunk,
kerplunk, kerplunk,
one after another into a trough

no water would staunch.
Like a waterlogged tree trunk,
every year he'd sunk
just as he was about to launch

into a diatribe on the chunk
of change this bitch
was costing him, the debt into which
every year he'd sunk.

II

The old, clinker-built rowboat
with its shrivelled strakes
would be immersed in the lake,
the lake that itself rewrote

many a stage play for the big screen.
The old, clinker-built rowboat
in which he'd stashed the ice-tote
from L.L. Bean

for Crested Ten on the rocks
(one part Crested Ten, two parts creosote),
the old, clinker-built rowboat
he'd threatened to leave on the dock

and give a coat
of varnish that would somehow clinch the deal,
that would once and for all seal
the old, clinker-built rowboat.

III

So it might again float
the possibility one must expand
with Coutts and Co. (without the ampersand),
misquoting them as one might misquote

the price of Paramount stock
so it might again float.
More than once he'd written a promissory note
and put himself in hock

more than once to assuage
the fears for a property expressed by the Coutthroats
so it might again float
from the big screen to the stage

and gain by losing something of its bloat,
taking as he did the chance
it might be imbued with some new significance
so it might again float.

IV

Every year he'd got drunk
and railed at this one and that,
the baseball-birdbrain, the basketball-gnat,
the gin-soaked punk

he threatened with a punching out of lights
every year he'd got drunk,
the Coutts & Co. quidnunc
whose argument was no more watertight

than any by which he might inure

himself against the basketball-gnat's slam dunk.
Every year he'd got drunk
but resisted taking a cure

just as every year he'd shrunk
from the thought, kerpow,
he'd most likely go under given how
every year he'd got drunk.

Paul Muldoon

Turkey Buzzards

They've been so long above it all,
those two petals
so steeped in style they seem to stall
in the kettle

simmering over the town dump
or, better still,
the neon-flashed, X-rated rump
of fresh roadkill

courtesy of the interstate
that Eisenhower
would overtake in the home straight
by one horsepower,

the kettle where it all boils down
to the thick scent
of death, a scent of such renown
it's given vent

to the idea buzzards can spot
a deer carcass
a mile away, smelling the rot
as, once, Marcus

Aurelius wrinkled his nose
at a gas leak
from the Great Sewer that ran through Rome
to the Tiber

then went searching out, through the gloam,
one subscriber
to the other view that the rose,
full-blown, antique,

its no-frills ruff, the six-foot shrug
of its swing-wings,
the theologian's and the thug's
twin triumphings

in a buzzard's shaved head and snood,
 buzz-buzz-buzzy,
its logic in all likelihood
 somewhat fuzzy,

would ever come into focus,
 it ever deign
to dispense its hocus-pocus
 in that same vein

as runs along an inner thigh
 to where, too right,
the buzzard vouchsafes not to shy
 away from shite,

its mission not to give a miss
 to a bête noire,
all roly-poly, full of piss
 and vinegar,

trying rather to get to grips
 with the grommet
of the gut, setting its tinsnips
 to that grommet

in the spray-painted hind's hindgut
 and making a
sweeping, too right, a sweeping cut
 that's so blasé

it's hard to imagine, dear Sis,
 why others shrink
from this sight of a soul in bliss,
 so in the pink

from another month in the red
 of the shambles,
like a rose in over its head
 among brambles,

unflappable in its belief

it's Ararat
on which the Ark would come to grief,
abjuring that

Marcus Aurelius humbug
about what springs
from earth succumbing to the tug
at its heartstrings,

reported to live past fifty,
as you yet may,
dear Sis, perhaps growing your hair
in requital,

though briefly, of whatever tears
at your vitals,
learning, perhaps, from the nifty,
nay thrifty, way

these buzzards are given to stoop
and take their ease
by letting their time-chastened poop
fall to their knees

till they're almost as bright with lime
as their night roost,
their poop containing an enzyme
that's known to boost

their immune systems, should they prong
themselves on small
bones in a cerebral cortex,
at no small cost

to their well-being, sinking fast
in a deer crypt,
buzzards getting the hang at last
of being stripped

of their command of the vortex
while having lost
their common touch, they've been so long

above it all.

Paul Muldoon

Why Brownlee Left

Why Brownlee left, and where he went,
Is a mystery even now.
For if a man should have been content
It was him; two acres of barley,
One of potatoes, four bullocks,
A milker, a slated farmhouse.
He was last seen going out to plough
On a March morning, bright and early.

By noon Brownlee was famous;
They had found all abandoned, with
The last rig unbroken, his pair of black
Horses, like man and wife,
Shifting their weight from foot to
Foot, and gazing into the future.

Paul Muldoon