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Shifting His Weight From Foot to Foot

Between Autobiography and Autofiction in the Poetry of Paul Muldoon

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A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
to the School of English at the University of Dublin, Trinity College

Supervisor: Professor Brian CLIFF

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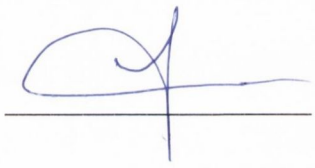

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SUMMARY

In his review of *Maggot* (2010), published in *The New York Times Book Review*, Richard Eder writes that 'Paul Muldoon is a shape-shifting Proteus to readers who try to pin him down' (n. pag.). Muldoon's poetic persona is, in fact, often evasive, unpredictable, and polymorphous, since the poet constantly navigates between the real and the fictional. This thesis examines Muldoon's poetic first-person voice in light of the concepts of autobiography and autofiction. My intent is not to put his poetry within specific theoretical strangleholds, but rather argue that theories of autobiographical poetry and of autofiction may open up new ways of reading his work and understanding the poetic 'I'. This thesis argues that, although Muldoon weaves unmediated autobiographical elements into his writing, he also creates a strategically fictional first-person voice in order to blur the frontiers between authenticity and artfulness.

Chapter One addresses the two key literary concepts—autobiography and autofiction—in order to provide a theoretical framework for the close reading that follows throughout the subsequent chapters. Since autobiography as a genre has already received a significant amount of critical attention, this chapter calls for the reconsideration of the issue regarding autobiography *and* poetry. My research then proceeds to place the focus on the recent changes that took place over the last three decades in the domain of literary self-representation. These changes have led to the birth of a new 'genre' blending fact and fiction called 'autofiction'. This study argues that some of the characteristics emerging from the interaction between autobiography and poetry echo some of the features delineating the autofictional enterprise. This opening chapter concludes with an overview of some paratextual criteria that are essential to any study of autobiography.

Chapter Two analyses the nature and development of the first-person voice in Muldoon's most autobiographical poems: family poems, failed romance poems, and elegies. What is at stake in all of these personal poems—all of which are bound together by the common theme of loss (or absence)—is the instability of the autobiographical self, the 'doubling' of the first-person voice, and the fracturing of identity. This chapter presents the limits of autobiography in verse and the impact of the autobiographical drive on the poetic voice.

Chapter Three traces the origins of this instability by analysing the process of recollection. It centres on the relationship between poetry and memory by placing the focus on the notions that are central to memory: time and space. This chapter first highlights the significant limits of the process of reminiscence when memory is mediated through poetry, since autobiographical poetry does not follow the linearity of the time sequence. As a result, these temporal discontinuities partly account for the fragmentation and uprooting of the 'I'. Chapter Three then turns to the theory called 'The Art of Memory' and argues that some *memori loci* ('places of memory') contribute to the instability of the lyric 'I'.

Following the analysis of Muldoon's autobiographical poems in the previous two chapters, Chapter Four breaks away from referential writing by exploring the ways in which Muldoon intentionally resorts to fiction to create *poetic autofictions*. Unlike some writers who use fiction to compensate for mnemonic failures, this chapter argues that Muldoon uses fiction as a characteristically elusive means to mythologise his origins and poetic self. This analysis examines multiple forms and degrees of fictionalisation, by focusing on key elements of personal writing: the personal landscape, family origins, and the self. Chapter Four explores several types of autofictional poems, ranging from the appearance of fiction (boyhood fantasies), to the blending of the real and the surreal (fantastic autofictions), and, finally, to the illusion of reality (biographical forgeries).

Chapter Five further explores Muldoon's autofictional artistry by arguing that, not only does the poet use fiction to reinvent his self and origins (Chapter Four), but he also explores a wide range of *metafictional* tropes. This final chapter concentrates on how Muldoon's Protean authorial interventions engage the reader and complicate the autobiographical or autofictional nature of the poems. This analysis initially examines how the *extradiegetic* author mischievously intervenes directly in his text, by analysing his multiple metalepses. The chapter then turns to a particular type of intrusive author, by focusing on the similarities between Muldoon's poetic practice and the tall tale tradition. More generally, this investigation of Muldoon's intrusiveness shows that these intrusive strategies are also central to reading his *œuvre* in general because they exemplify the ways in which the poet interacts with his readers. Chapter Five therefore pursues the analysis of autofiction and sheds light on the thesis in general.

Pour mes parents

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Finally, I would like to thank my brother and my parents for their love, understanding, and support during all these years.

ABBREVIATIONS

NW *New Weather*. London: Faber & Faber, 1973.
M *Mules*. London: Faber & Faber, 1977.
WBL *Why Brownlee Left*. London: Faber & Faber, 1980.
Q *Quoof*. London: Faber & Faber, 1983.
W *The Wishbone*. Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1984.
MB *Meeting the British*. London: Faber & Faber, 1987.
MM *Madoc: A Mystery*. London: Faber & Faber, 1990.
AC *The Annals of Chile*. London: Faber & Faber, 1994.
PQ *The Prince of the Quotidian*. Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1994.
H *Hay*. London: Faber & Faber, 1998.
MSG *Moy Sand and Gravel*. London: Faber & Faber, 2002.
HL *Horse Latitudes*. London: Faber & Faber, 2006.
Mt *Maggot*. London: Faber & Faber, 2010.

TII *To Ireland, I*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.
EP *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures*. London: Faber & Faber, 2006.

PMP Paul Muldoon Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University's Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

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A Note on the Text

Unless otherwise noted, the translations are my own. The original quotations are included in footnotes.

When you ask why I started to write, I honestly don't know, but I suppose at some level that's why I write. I write to make sense of myself.

(Muldoon, qtd. in Ingersoll and Rubin n. pag.)

'Do I see the narrators as being different parts of myself?'. I don't really think in those terms, but I suppose the narrators, they're always changing. One of the first things I try to work out when I'm reading a poem is who's speaking it? Who is that person, who's the speaker? The second thing I try to work out is, do I believe them? How am I to take them? To what extent do I trust this speaker? Now, that's a question that you have to ask yourself a lot with my poems, because they often say one thing and they don't mean that at all.

(Muldoon, qtd. in Noble n. pag.)

INTRODUCTION

'Adventures of the Letter I'

> Most writers' work reflects a small bunch of obsessions at the core of their personality. It may be presented in various ways, strategies may be developed for avoiding it, for making it seem different from the last time. That's just one of the things writers do to keep going—devise different strategies and vary the shots, to move around what's always there. The metaphor is perhaps inadequate—as all metaphors are finally—but there is a core, a core which is the self. I think that all writing is autobiographical at some level. (Muldoon, qtd. in Sherman 78)

Discussing T. S. Eliot's work and the oft-addressed issue of the distinction between a writer's personality and his or her work, Northern Irish writer Paul Muldoon argues that 'all writing is autobiographical at some level', that what lies at the core of most writers' work is the *self*.[1] This authorial comment provides the initial impulse for this thesis whose aim is to position Muldoon's poetry within the frameworks of autobiography and autofiction.[2]

This thesis therefore proposes to explore the representation of the self in Muldoon's poetry by examining the impact of the autobiographical drive on the lyric 'I'[3] and by analysing such a representation through the lens of a mode of

---

[1] Similarly, in *The End of the Poem*, Muldoon often insists on the autobiographical dimension of poetry. In his discussion of Ted Hughes's 'The Literary Life', the poet dwells on the 'notion of there being "no barriers" between the poem and the biography of its author' (*EP* 32). He further explains that Hughes's poem is 'impossible to read without a sense of the biographies of the main characters, without a regard for information available only well beyond the bailiwick of the poem, including such information about times, dates and places' (52). In the chapter dedicated to Robert Lowell's poem 'George III', he also insists on the fact that 'no poem may be read as a completely discrete construct, that no poem may be read without some autobiographical element coming into play' (171). Muldoon's readings of these poets (Hughes, Lowell, and others) shed light on the autobiographical dimension of his own poems examined in Chapter Two.

[2] The term 'autofiction' was coined by French academic and writer Serge Doubrovsky in his novel *Fils*, published in 1977.

[3] Throughout this thesis, I often refer to the autobiographical poetic 'I' as 'the lyric "I"'. I am using the term 'lyric' as characteristic of *personal* poetry. The first definition of 'lyric' listed in *The Oxford English Dictionary* reads: 'Of or pertaining to the lyre; adapted to the lyre, meant to be sung; pertaining to or characteristic of song. Now used as the name for short poems (whether or not intended to be sung), usually divided into stanzas or strophes, and directly expressing the poet's own thoughts and sentiments' ('Lyric').

writing rarely addressed in poetic studies, and which has never been used in relation to Muldoon: autofiction.[4] In fact, although the range of applications of this subversive genre crosses both spatial and temporal borders, since the corpus of texts it includes is extremely heterogeneous, this mode of writing has been labelled as being particularly French (Burgelin 7) and has mostly been commented upon in the field of French Studies. Given that theories of autofiction constitute a recent departure in literary studies, which has not been satisfactorily exploited to date in relation to non-French writers, my project's original contribution to the field results in applying the notion of autofiction to an Irish writer. Furthermore, since very few academic pieces have focused on autofictions written in verse, the challenge of this thesis also lies in applying this new term not just to an Irish writer, but to a *poet*.

The present study argues that, although the poet skilfully weaves a number of autobiographical elements (or, to use Roland Barthes's term, *biographèmes*)[5] into his writing, the poetic representation of the self is not an unmediated authentic portrait of the author: either the unity of the 'I' is fragmented by the autobiographical impulse or the 'I' is a strategically fictional first-person voice blurring the thin line between fact and fiction. In fact, the poet is no exception to his own rule in so far as he constantly 'devise[s] different strategies' to avoid a straightforward equation between his work and his life: 'Muldoon only very rarely presents material in a nakedly autobiographical way' (Goodby, 'Hermeneutic Hermeticism' 139); instead, he often resorts to a wide array of fictional schemes

[4] This literary term is, in fact, very often associated with prose, particularly contemporary French prose writing (Sidonie Gabrielle Colette, Hervé Guibert, Annie Ernaux, Doubrovsky, Camille Laurens, among others).

[5] This term was first used by Barthes in *Camera Lucida*: 'I like certain biographical features which, in a writer's life, delight me as much as certain photographs; I have called these features "biographemes"' (30).

so as to create poems that are poised on the border separating fact from fiction.[6] Commenting on a poem dedicated to Seamus Heaney, Muldoon highlights the ambivalent nature of the lyric 'I' in his poetry:

> The speaker, that 'I', in 'The Briefcase' is probably more like the historical character, 'Paul Muldoon', who lived for a while in New York City. The poem was describing a trip across town in a bus. I used to teach at Columbia. So that's partly what's going on there. But then even that 'I' is something of an invention, as all our 'I's are 'Adventures of the Letter I', in Louis Simpson's great phrase. We're all inventions of ourselves at some level. (qtd. in Ingersoll and Rubin n. pag.)

In 'The Briefcase', the speaker imagines that his eelskin briefcase has 'suddenly grown supple' and is about to metamorphose itself back into a fish. Although the 'I' is based on 'the historical character "Paul Muldoon"' waiting 'in line for the cross-town / bus' (*MM* 12), this surreal transformation indicates that the 'I' is not entirely an authentic representation of the author's self: the memory of that event has been mediated through the poet's imagination. Muldoon fantasises about what could have happened on this journey across town and transforms this memory into a surreal one, a fantastic autofictional image of the past.

This study therefore embarks on all these journeys of the 'I'—or, as Louis Simpson would have it, the 'adventures of the letter "I"'—whether the 'I' is an autobiographical or autofictional first-person voice. Reading Muldoon's poetry in light of recent theories of autobiography and autofiction allows us to explore the amplitude, the richness, and the complexities of Muldoon's poetic representation of the self.

This thesis focuses almost exclusively on Muldoon's poetry despite his wide-ranging prose and verse works (including libretti, translations, and prose

[6] 'Border' is a key term for Muldoon who 'learned at an early age to stand in the gap of borders and boundaries' (Mac Mathúna n. pag.). This leitmotiv is used throughout this thesis in relation to several types of borders (geographical, generic, psychological, *etc.*).

analyses, among others). In fact, the poet's autobiographical and autofictional strategies are mostly confined to his *verse*. However, the poet's critical prose—*To Ireland, I* and *The End of the Poem*, in particular—will be referred to throughout this thesis in order to better understand Muldoon's writing techniques and the role played by other writers in his writing development. In fact, discussing Edward Thomas's review of Robert Frost's *North of Boston*, Muldoon argues: 'As we know to be so often the case with writers' comments on other writers, the very insight Thomas affords into Frost's poetic practice affords an even greater insight into his own' (*EP* 89). This is also true of Muldoon's critical analyses of poets such as Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, Louis MacNeice, and Ted Hughes. For instance, in *The End of the Poem*, Muldoon discusses a number of so-called 'confessional' poets, thereby providing information on theories and practices of autobiography and autofiction with which Muldoon himself is familiar.[7]

In fact, autobiographical poetry written in the first-person voice necessarily brings to mind *confessional* poetry.[8] Although this study navigates

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[7] Furthermore, the relationship between topography and typography discussed by Muldoon in relation to Frost's 'The Mountain' and Bishop's '12 O'Clock News' also lies at the core of Muldoon's poem 'Come into My Parlour' analysed in Chapter Three. Moreover, his insistence on the 'covenant' between writer and reader in his chapter on Emily Dickinson's poetry sheds light on Muldoon's own relationship with his readership discussed in Chapter Five. As regards *To Ireland, I*, Muldoon's Clarendon Lectures are mostly referred to in relation to the influence of MacNeice's poetry and of James Joyce's short story 'The Dead'. In addition, the concept of the *féth fiáda* explained in great detail by Muldoon in this prose work is at the core of my analysis of Muldoon's autofictional poems in Part 4.3.

[8] In 1959, Macha Louis Rosenthal coined the term 'confessional' in reviewing Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959). Although I choose to use the term 'confessional', it should be noted that it has been contested by critics such as Thomas J. Travisano in *Midcentury Quartet: Bishop, Lowell, Jarrell, Berryman and the Making of a Postmodern Aesthetic* (1999) and Steven Gould Axelrod in *Robert Lowell: Life and Art* (1978). Travisano devotes a chapter to the 'confessional paradigm' used as a 'prevailing model for assessing the poetry of the 1960s and 1970s' (32). He explains that, while Lowell is often considered to be 'the fountainhead of confessional poetry' (14), other poets—such as Elizabeth Bishop and Randall Jarrell—proved to be hard to categorise. Basing most of his argumentation on the similarities between Lowell and Bishop (often presented 'on opposite poles of some artistic antipodes', 37) and on the poets' own rejection of the term, Travisano presents the significant limits and excesses of the term 'confessional', and the damage it has caused. The critic describes this term as 'amorphous' (42), and chooses an alternative paradigm 'that attempts to specify those features of Lowell, Bishop, Berryman, and Jarrell that distinguishes [*sic*] their work from the personal poetry of the past' (43): the 'drive toward the self-*exploratory*', the '*exploration* of the problem of selfhood in the postmodern world' (66-67, my emphasis). Travisano argues that in the case of Lowell, Berryman, Bishop, and Jarrell, the 'fragmentary sense of self' emerged from

amongst a wide array of theories of autobiography and of autofiction, it should be stated from the start that it does not deal with confessional aesthetics. The present research agrees with the general consensus among critics, according to whom 'Muldoon's poetry could never be described as confessional, anecdotal or conventionally self-expressive in the manner of much contemporary lyric poetry' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 18). For instance, although '"Yarrow" is a guilt-ridden poem, struggling to allay a deep-seated hurt and atone for a difficult relationship between the poet and his mother' (Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 235), thus evoking the acute suffering and trauma lying at the core of confessional poems; this elegy alternates between passages of personal immediacy and raw emotion (the powerful recollection of the mother's '*râle*'), and others characterised by indirection and a distancing irony (the whimsical journeys of the young Muldoon). In fact, Muldoon's approach to personal and traumatic experiences is often oblique: his personal poems maintain 'an exquisite tension between sentiment and cynicism, yearning and a self-conscious suspicion of yearning' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 16). In other words, Muldoon's autobiographical poems do not present a full disclosure of his personal sphere as in so-called confessional poetry.

Furthermore, although most confessional poems are framed as a statement of truthfulness—the 'true voice of feeling' (Lerner 48)—Muldoon's first-person voice is at times deceitful. While poems written by some confessional poets (such as Anne Sexton) claim to authenticity by providing factual elements and

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'feelings of outsiderhood' (69), from 'early childhood traumas, and growing up amidst the fragmenting postmodern culture that emerged after World War II and took shape under the looming shadows of the Cold War, the atomic bomb, the emergence of global intercommunications, and the growth of a military-industrial complex' (68). As distinct from being due to the modern world, although Muldoon also *explores* the fragmentation of the self in his poetry, I believe that the origins of this instability are mostly related to the mediation of autobiography through poetry and to the poet's experimentations with the fictionalisation of the self (*i.e.* autofiction).

biographical details enabling the reader to identify the poet's persona and members of his or her family circle, Muldoon rarely presents factual truths and often deliberately mythologises his self and family. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that, by doing so, Muldoon bears similar traits to some of these so-called 'confessional' poets when they move away from authenticity and truthfulness: Robert Lowell's first-person voice, for example, is also at times deceitful and, like Muldoon, Lowell often mythologises his self and family circle.[9] The poem is, therefore, not always 'a reliable source of factual disclosure' (Travisano 68). Consequently, we may argue that Muldoon develops what Lowell did before him, and that he goes beyond it by playing with the reader, disguising his self, and putting on masks. However, what separates Muldoon from poets such as Lowell is that this Muldoonian 'slipperiness' does not go as far as offering a full-blown intimate disclosure.

The fact that Muldoon sheds doubt on the identity and trustworthiness of the first-person voice creates a real ambiguity. Are we reading an unmediated autobiographical poem or does it masquerade as autobiography? Some of Muldoon's personal poems could either read as autobiographical or fictional depending on the reader's knowledge of the author's biography:

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[9] This is also true of other confessional poets such as John Berryman, Delmore Schwartz, and Sylvia Plath. Travisano explains, for instance, that Berryman and Lowell—who, like their colleagues Bishop and Jarrell, are labelled 'confessional'—'compose poems that are significantly fictive': 'Their work involves a process of selection, borrowing, voicing, of invention or recasting of incident, of arrangement, rearrangement, and reinterpretation of fact, that goes far beyond "self-photography"' (37). The words 'self-photography' are quoted from Adrienne Rich's review of Berryman's *77 Dream Songs* (1964). Similarly, in his discussion of Hughes's personal poem 'The Literary Life', Muldoon insists on the fact that there is, to a certain degree, a 'reconstruction of the self': 'the "We" of the first line refers to two historical characters, Plath and Hughes, and the conceit of the poem is that there's almost no distinction between those historical characters and the characters who appear in the poem. I write "almost" because, in any account, formal or informal, there is necessarily an element of invention, of construction and reconstruction of the self, including what looks very much like a revision of the first impressions made on Plath and Hughes' (*EP* 34). This quote is particularly important because Muldoon's comments on so-called 'confessional' poets such as Hughes, Plath, and Lowell show that the practice of autobiography is complex since it necessarily involves an 'element of invention'. This reconstruction or invention of the self lies at the core of the present research.

> some poets such as the Irish-born American writer Paul Muldoon and the Polish American poet Diane Wakoski have engaged in apparently confessional aesthetics, only to later admit that they were either exploiting the confessional vein for experimental reasons or manifesting the poet's freedom to create fictional characters while still retaining a first-person narration. In lyrics that appear to be autobiographical, these two poets invented siblings they never possessed in real life, [...] thus breaking the unspoken rule that lyric poetry should always be truthful, authentic and non-fictional. (Martiny n. pag.)[10]

Erik Martiny is here referring to Muldoon's poem 'Cuba', set at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, and in which the Muldoon figure recollects a tense exchange between his father and his 'elder sister' May (*WBL* 13). In reality, Muldoon had a younger sister, whose name was Maureen. Nonetheless, although this sister character is a fake, 'May' is visually encoded in the first syllable of 'Maureen': this onomastic[11] game may be one of the poet's numerous strategies used to conceal, to some extent, a real event through the mediation of fiction. In fact, Muldoon did admit that 'the poem, in many ways, is historically accurate and in some ways happened', but 'not quite in the way that's suggested' (qtd. in Wilson, James n. pag.). As a result, 'Cuba' presents itself as a perfect

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[10] It is interesting that Martiny chooses to call Muldoon an 'Irish-born American writer' because this suggests that the poet is viewed by many as an American writer *of* Irish origin (and not an Irish or Irish-American writer). This surely reflects Muldoon's almost thirty-year-long residence in America, his being awarded a Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, and his long-established roles as Howard G.B. Clark '21 Professor at Princeton University and as Poetry Editor of *The New Yorker*. However, this identification as an 'Irish-born American writer' is neither entirely true nor, in fact, relevant. Although Muldoon's departure for the United States did change, to a certain extent, elements of his poetry (for instance, the use of American words such as 'faucet' in *The Annals of Chile*, the American spelling in *Horse Latitudes*, and the importance of suburban New Jersey in *Moy Sand and Gravel*); Muldoon, like his predecessors (W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice, for instance), will always be associated first and foremost with his native country due to the 'inescapability of home' in collections such as *Mules* (Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 44) and to the constant homecoming movement that pervades his work published after his departure from Ireland, especially *Moy Sand and Gravel*. This return to Ireland and the Moy, in particular, is further strengthened by the poet's recurrent (physical) journeys between Ireland and America, made easier nowadays by more affordable modes of transportation: as Muldoon once said, going back to Ireland is for him 'like getting on a bus' (qtd. in Sherman 79). Furthermore, whether or not Muldoon 'has finally "gone native" in America', as asked by Fran Brearton in her review of *Horse Latitudes* (n. pag.), is not important for this thesis because Muldoon himself often says that the question of nationality does not really matter to him: 'I don't myself go around thinking: "Oh, here I am, I am an Irish writer or I am an Irish-American writer, or I am, you know, a male writer". I don't really go around myself thinking in those terms, but I would like to be counted one if they'll have me. Poetry for me is about making sense of my life' (qtd. in Kelly n. pag.). Although the poet's dual citizenship is necessarily a part of who he is, it does not constitute a strategy to reinvent his self.

[11] The adjective 'onomastic' refers to something related to names or naming.

illustration of an autofictional poem—or, *amphibological* poem—that is partly autobiographical and partly fictional. This example proves that although Muldoon sometimes addresses personal experience in an oblique and at times mischievous manner (which does not correspond to the conventional aesthetics of confessional poetry), his weaving of fictional elements in his personal poems often hides an emotional core even if some critics have claimed otherwise.[12]

Several full-length monographs on Muldoon's work have been published since the mid-1990s—Tim Kendall's *Paul Muldoon* (1996), Clair Wills's *Reading Paul Muldoon* (1998), Jefferson Holdridge's *The Poetry of Paul Muldoon* (2008), and Ryoji Okuda's *Decoding Paul Muldoon: Poetics and Politics* (2009)—and a number of critical essays have been collected, for instance, in Kendall and Peter McDonald's *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays* (2004) and Elmer Kennedy-Andrews's *Paul Muldoon: Poetry, Prose, Drama. A Collection of Critical Essays* (2006). Since Muldoon rubbed shoulders with major Northern Irish poets in the Belfast Group organised by Philip Hobsbaum and was taught by Heaney at Queen's University (Belfast), most of these studies have provided detailed accounts of Muldoon's technical acumen, recurring themes, and aesthetics, situating his poetry within contemporary Northern Irish poetry and identifying its major influences. Muldoon has been compared with fellow Northern Irish poets such as Heaney, with whom he shares a Catholic and 'rural, farming background' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 18),[13] and MacNeice in relation to 'the creation of mythopoeic worlds' (19). These studies have also contrasted his work with that of

[12] Helen Vendler controversially deplored what she felt to be 'a hole in the middle [of Muldoon's poems] where the feeling should be' ('Anglo-Celtic Attitudes' 58).

[13] For instance, Muldoon's latest collection *Maggot* and Heaney's *Human Chain* (both published in 2010), feature alongside each other in the review of *The New York Times*: 'The Northern Ireland-born poets Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon published their first books in 1966 and 1971, and ever since, their verse has been compared and contrasted, often in facile ways, as if they were Tweedledum and Tweedledee' (Garner C26).

other contemporary poets such as Ciaran Carson and Paul Durcan concerning, for instance, the writer's 'poetic responsibility in time of violence' (Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 44). Critics such as McDonald, Wills, April Warman, and Richard Kirkland (to mention only a few) have, in fact, addressed Muldoon's oblique way of engaging with the Troubles in Northern Ireland and his avoidance of sectarian politics. Furthermore, they have also gauged the influence of international poets across the centuries, amongst them Lord Byron, John Donne, and Robert Frost, whose 'direct' influence can be seen in collections as early as *New Weather* (28). The breadth of Muldoon studies testifies to the accomplishments of this prodigy of Northern Irish poetry, his baffling erudition, his technical virtuosity, as well as the bewitching and exhilarating complexity of his work.

Among this ever-growing critical apparatus, Kendall's *Paul Muldoon* and Wills's *Reading Paul Muldoon* remain the main studies. Neither of these critics imposes a reading on the poems; instead, they provide insightful and in-depth readings of Muldoon's work reflecting the wide array of interpretations offered by his poetry. In particular, as argued by Holdridge in his review of *Reading Paul Muldoon*, Wills uses 'a variety of methods, formal and historical, etymological and topical, local and international' (205) that provide an exploration of the key concerns in Muldoon's poetry. Moreover, as made evident by the title of Wills's monograph, her emphasis is on a *close-reading* of Muldoon's poetry; this is also the backbone of the present research.

This thesis seeks to explore further certain claims (discussed below) made by these critics and to re-evaluate Muldoon's poetry in light of collections published after these two main studies were written (particularly *Moy Sand and Gravel*) and, even more importantly, in light of the recent evolutions regarding the debate on autobiography and poetry, on the one hand, and on the

autofictional practice, on the other. For this reason, this thesis does not dwell on some of the topics that critics have addressed in the last few decades, particularly the ways in which Muldoon deals with local and international politics; instead, the present research focuses on the unresolved and complex question of the 'referential' in his poetry. Although this study departs from some of the issues addressed in previous criticism, it does not attempt to undervalue the importance of these works: it argues that their analyses constitute solid points of departure for further explorations and considerations.

These studies have praised Muldoon's linguistic dexterity, his baffling erudition and 'technical aplomb', his 'bold, inventive rhymes' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 9), and his treatment of poetic forms, particularly the sonnet. However, although the poet's technical virtuosity has been acknowledged, there has not been enough attention drawn to the disruptive impact of the autobiographical drive on some of these poetic patterns and on the instability of the first-person voice. Even though Kendall argues that *New Weather* is characterised by 'unity and division' and a 'simultaneous two- and one-ness' describing the end of a relationship, one should explore how this fracturing goes beyond Muldoon's early collections and how this instability is reflected in the poetic form, the placement of pronouns, and the progressive fracturing of the 'I', particularly in failed romance poems and elegies. After describing the most applicable theories of autobiography and of autofiction in Chapter One, Chapter Two concentrates on the evolution of the 'I' across Muldoon's collections by focusing on his most apparently personal poems—family poems, failed romance poems, and elegies—bound together by the common theme of loss or absence. This chapter explains why it is *characteristically* in failed romance poems and elegies that the 'I' is at his most vulnerable and that identities are most contingent

and unstable. This analysis therefore focuses on the limits of autobiography when mediated through poetry and argues that what is at stake in all of these personal poems is the fragmented nature of the autobiographical self and the disruption of the identification between speaker, author, and character, a defining feature of Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact.

Furthermore, Kendall's claim that '"Yarrow" may be, among other things, a tribute to the salvaging powers of memory' (*Paul Muldoon* 238) overlooks the limits of the process of remembering and the impact of the process of reminiscence on the lyric 'I'. Chapter Three turns to the analysis of memory in order to find the *causes* for the fragmented nature of the autobiographical 'I', as discussed in Chapter Two. It argues that the process of anamnesis (the recalling of things past) is thwarted when memory is mediated through poetry. This third chapter focuses on the impact of the poetic form and associative logic on the disruption of time and chronology, which is an important cause for the fragmentation of the lyric 'I'. Since this chapter hinges on two key notions that are central to the analysis of memory—time and space—it also argues that, although Muldoon's poetry is 'filled with signposts' (Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 36), the association of places with memories put forth by 'The Art of Memory' falls short when memories are mediated through poetry.

While Kendall argues that '*The Annals of Chile*, Muldoon's most elegiac collection to date, is also his most candidly autobiographical' (208), the candour of this volume has to be modulated because of the multiple levels of fictionalisation at play in poems such as 'Yarrow' and 'Brazil': the overlapping of spatial, temporal, and textual layers on memories creates the appearance of fiction. These autobiographical poems are, therefore, not authentic, unmediated personal pieces. The layering of fantasies over memories constitutes a first level of

fictionalisation. Chapter Four is entirely dedicated to Muldoon's autofictional practice: it explores in detail the various fictional strategies devised by Muldoon to mythologise his self and family, and progresses according to their various degrees of intensity. After exploring the overlaying of childhood fantasies on memories, this chapter turns to a greater level of fictionalisation, which corresponds to poems where Muldoon resorts to the surreal. Although past studies have discussed Muldoon's 'fascination with special worlds' (Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 38-39) and his fondness for the creation of alternative lives (particularly in *Why Brownlee Left*), these studies have overlooked the influence of a key Irish tradition: the *féth fiáda*.[14] Chapter Four argues that, while in some poems the superimposition of various narrative layers creates the illusion of fiction (childhood fantasies); in collections such as *Hay* and *Moy Sand and Gravel*, it is the creation of a two-dimensional world—the real world, on the one hand, and a surreal otherworld, on the other—that pushes the process of fictionalisation to another level, creating 'fantastic autofictions' based on the *féth fiáda*. The final part of this chapter focuses on some of Muldoon's 'fake' personal poems, particularly those anticipating his father's death. This fourth chapter therefore explores the complexity of Muldoon's mythopoetics by analysing his autofictional strategies, ranging from those creating the illusion of fiction (boyhood fantasies) to those presenting the illusion of reality (biographical forgeries). This chapter argues that it is through multiple degrees of fictionalisation that the poet reinvents his self and personal origins.

Finally, although Muldoon has been compared to a mischievous shape-shifting Proteus and a Trickster figure, there has not been a thorough analysis of

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[14] There is one study that addresses the *féth fiáda* tradition in Muldoon's poetry and which is referred to in Chapter Four: Dillon Johnston, 'Next to Nothing: Uses of the Otherworld in Modern Irish Literature', *New Irish Writing: Essays in Memory of Raymond J. Porter*, ed. James D. Brophy and Eamon Grennan (Boston: Twayne, 1989), 121-140.

the variety of Muldoon's playful metalepses and the wide range of authorial masks—or *personnages d'auteur* (to use Charline Pluvinet's term for writer-characters)—behind which this trickster poet hides in his text. Chapter Five further explores Muldoon's autofictional strategies, focusing, in particular, on the *metafictional* dimension of some of his poems. In fact, while Chapter Four discusses the fictionalisation of the *diegetic* speaker, Chapter Five explores the multiple facets of the *extradiegetic* author. The final chapter first places the emphasis on two types of autofictions—intrusive and specular autofictions—that are used as tools to explore the richness and complexity of Muldoon's authorial intrusions. After offering a detailed overview of the poet's various metalepses, Chapter Five then proceeds to analysing a particular type of intrusive author: the storyteller. In fact, while Heaney 'has described reading Muldoon's poetry as akin to being faced with two informants, one who always tells the truth and one who always lies' (qtd. in Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 209), to date, no study has fully developed this key idea nor set out to compare Muldoon's poetic idiosyncrasies with the storyteller's artistry. Moreover, while the influence of American culture has been discussed in several studies, it is curious that his poetry has never been compared in any detail to the American storytelling tradition: the tall tale. The final chapter of this thesis focuses on the extent of Muldoon's authorial control by first exploring the various forms of authorial intrusions across his *œuvre* and by then focusing on the similarities between Muldoon and the tall tale narrator. Chapter Five is particularly important because, while Muldoon's various authorial intrusions are mostly visible in his autofictional poems, they are also central to reading his broader work. In fact, these intrusive strategies emphasise the ways in which Muldoon engages his readers and plays with the reception of his poems. As

a result, while further exploring Muldoon's autofictional artistry, this concluding chapter also sheds light on his work more broadly and on the rest of this thesis.

Past and present studies have acknowledged both the extent to which biography pervades Muldoon's work and the fact that the poet fictionalises his life. However, there are fundamental aspects of his poetry that need to be further explored and re-examined: the impact of the autobiographical drive on the first-person voice and the poetic pattern (Chapter Two), the limits of the remembering process when mediated through poetry (Chapter Three), the amplitude and complexities of Muldoon's autofictional strategies (Chapter Four), and his interference with, and control over, the reception of his personal poems (Chapter Five). Muldoon's poetry therefore needs to be reassessed in light of recent theoretical debates on autobiography and autofiction.

Muldoon's work does not need specific theoretical theories to be read and understood. Nonetheless, his poetry problematises the relationship between autobiography and poetry, and brings up a number of autofictional issues that contemporary theoreticians have addressed in recent years. An awareness of autofictional theories is crucial since they allow us to appreciate more fully the scope of Muldoon's strategies devised to blur the line between fact and fiction in his most personal writings.

Chapter One provides a theoretical framework necessary for the close reading that is adhered to throughout the thesis. In this opening chapter, the focus is first placed on a reconsideration of the relationship between autobiography and poetry, and is then directed to an exploration of the various autofictional modes that have been highlighted by French theoreticians over the past few decades, particularly Vincent Colonna. The latter triggered a debate on

what autofiction stands for with his Ph.D. *L'autofiction. Essai sur la fictionnalisation de soi en littérature* (1989) and, later, with *Autofiction et autres mythomanies littéraires* (2004). He did so by moving away from Serge Doubrovsky's discourse, according to which an autofictional text is 'less the writing of an adventure than the adventure of a writing', and in which events and facts are 'strictly real' (back cover of *Fils*). Contrary to Doubrovsky, Colonna argues that an autofiction is a text in which the author invents for him- or herself a new personality, a fictionalised self. His definition is broader that Doubrovsky's: it proposes multiple ways of reading a variety of texts that would otherwise simply (and sometimes, wrongly) be labelled 'personal writings', 'autobiographies', or 'fictions'. By offering four different types of autofictions—*l'autofiction biographique*, *l'autofiction fantastique*, *l'autofiction spéculaire*, and *l'autofiction intrusive*—Colonna emphasises both the fact that setting these texts down in a single category is a far more complex enterprise than one thought, and that these generic straitjackets ('autobiography' and 'fiction') have permeable frontiers. Although these studies of autofiction have mostly been discussed in French studies, they constitute a fundamental contribution to the domain of literary self-representation. The key aspect to this opening chapter lies in the comparisons drawn between the characteristics and issues of autobiography written in verse and those of the autofictional enterprise.

These theories form a solid basis and inform a number of my critical analyses in the rest of the thesis. However, it is important, at this juncture, to acknowledge Muldoon's position *vis-à-vis* theory. Even though the poet sees 'some value in a great many of the theories that come floating by', he describes himself as 'antiprescriptive' and resists 'very strenuously [...] any kind of *ism*' (qtd. in Keller 8). In fact, while bringing up a number of theoretical issues,

Muldoon's poetry evades theoretical labels and eludes these generic straitjackets: 'It seems to me that any decent writer eschews labels' (22). It is, therefore, important to state that the following critical readings do not subscribe to narrowly defined theoretical strangleholds; instead, they navigate throughout the thesis among several theoretical positions, opening up new ways of reading Muldoon's *œuvre* and emphasising the limitless possibilities of interpreting his poetry instead of compartmentalising it.

From Chapter Two to Chapter Five, my analyses explore the broader structures and recurrent motifs of each collection, and the key evolutions across Muldoon's work. This meticulous reading offers a concrete illustration of the general theoretical patterns analysed in Chapter One: for instance, the expansive scope of Muldoon's autofictional practices analysed in Chapters Four and Five is revealed out of a close, attentive, and open-minded reading of his work through a wide variety of theories discussed in Chapter One. Not only does this close-reading methodology rely on a strong theoretical basis, but it is also dependent on a close examination of manuscript drafts and a good knowledge of the poet's biographical context.

Muldoon states that 'you could piece together quite a lot of [his] life from the poems if you were starting from that end' (qtd. in Noble n. pag.), thus re-creating the poet's portrait by assembling pieces of an autobiographical puzzle across his collections. Nonetheless, he also argues that starting from the poems themselves can be a dangerous venture if the reader does not know the poet's biographical history:[15] 'You see, the other side of that is that if you were relying on

[15] The whole passage reads: 'It seems to me that you could piece together quite a lot of my life from the poems if you were starting from that end—just from the poems themselves. A number of them are spoken by a character who is—let's put it like this—not unlike the historical character known as Paul Muldoon who writes these poems under the pseudonym of Paul Muldoon. So that one would be able to divine that I was born in Armagh, brought up there in this particular region, that I was brought up under a certain cultural tradition, in a certain religion, for example. You could

the poems to write that biography you could get yourself into terrible trouble [...] because though very often the poems are operating, what they're aiming to do is to give this sense of physical as well as psychological verifiability'. This is particularly the case with poems such as 'Cuba', discussed previously. In fact, the reader might think that this older sister called 'May' is one of the missing pieces necessary to complete the author's family history if s/he does not know the poet's biography. In the absence of an autobiography or a biography on Muldoon, the reader may turn to several documents that offer a rather comprehensive biographical context. This study therefore relies on Muldoon's autobiographical writings, particularly 'A Tight Wee Place in Armagh' and 'Notes for *Chez Moy: A Critical Autobiography*'; a number of his selected interviews, such as with John Haffenden in *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation* (1981), Jennifer Noble (1990), Earl G. Ingersoll and Stan Sanvel Rubin in the *Michigan Quarterly Review* (1998), and James S. F. Wilson in *The Paris Review* (2008); and personal documents collected in the Muldoon Archive at Emory University, particularly personal correspondence, family photographs, and drafts, in order to support (wherever relevant) a genetic approach to the text.

Amongst these documents, 'Notes for *Chez Moy*' stands out as the main source of biographical information since it provides essential key information woven across the poet's work. I do not intend to offer an exhaustive biography of Muldoon, but I wish to highlight the key biographical elements on which the present study is based. Muldoon was born 'on June 20th, 1951 in a hospital in Portadown, County Armagh' to 'Patrick Muldoon (1910-1985) and Brigid Muldoon, nee Regan (1919-1974)' (n. pag.). The poet's parents often feature in his

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work out then that I lived in Belfast, you could work out that I worked for the BBC, that I'd been married once or twice, that I'd been involved with other people once or twice, that I now live in America. You could work all that out. I don't think you could write a *Times* obituary based on it, but you could work that out'.

poetry and are usually portrayed in very different ways in a manner reminiscent of D. H. Lawrence's portrayal of the Morels in *Sons and Lovers* (Haffenden 131).[16] While his mother 'trained as a teacher', his father held many jobs including 'farm labourer', 'cauliflower- and mushroom-grower', and 'received no secondary education'.[17] Particular places also feature in the poetry. Muldoon's family lived in 'Eglish, County Tyrone, where two other children, Maureen and Joseph, were born in 1953 and 1954 respectively'. In 1954, they then moved to 'Collegelands, County Armagh', 'a little enclave of Roman Catholics living within the predominantly Protestant parish of Loughgall'. Muldoon explains that he and his siblings were also isolated partly because of their 'mother's reluctance to allow [them] to mix with the local children', as illustrated in passages from 'Yarrow'. The village of the Moy also holds a central place across Muldoon's collections, constituting one of his fundamental *memori loci* ('places of memory'), which are at the core of a number of my analyses, particularly in Chapter Three.[18] The pun 'Chez Moy' illustrates perfectly the importance of this place name in relation to the *self* (in French, *moi*): the poet seems to claim that this village is interrelated with the self and that the two are almost co-dependent. Muldoon's love relationships also form the backdrop of a number of poems. When studying in

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[16] This is particularly the case of the early poem 'The Mixed Marriage', in which the parents' portraits establish a clear distinction between Patrick and Brigid who are compared to the Morels—the 'working man' and the 'aspirational mother' (Muldoon qtd. in O'Callaghan): 'My father was *a* servant-boy. [...] / / My mother was *the* school-mistress, / The world of Castor and Pollux. [...] / / She had read one volume of Proust, / He knew the cure for farcy' (*M* 42, my emphasis). The indefinite 'a' and the definite 'the' contribute to emphasising the parents' different social 'status'.

[17] The whole passage reads: 'My father's parents were Hugh Muldoon, a thatcher, and Mary Hamill, a housewife, while my mother's were Francis Regan, a tailor, and Mary Donnelly, also a housewife. Both families were poor. After his mother died when he was seven and his father remarried an unsympathetic woman, my father was forced to hire himself out as a farm labourer at the age of eleven or twelve, and therefore received no secondary education. He could read and write only with difficulty, needing help to manage official documents and forms. He continued to work as a shepherd, navvy, farm-worker, builder's labourer, cauliflower- and mushroom-grower' ('Notes for *Chez Moy*' n. pag.). See poems such as 'Gathering Mushrooms', featuring the 'mushroom shed' (*Q* 7), or 'The Fox': 'You seem engrossed, / as if I'd come on you / painfully writing your name / with a carpenter's pencil / / on the lid / of a mushroom-box. / You're saying, *Go back to bed*' (*MB* 24).

[18] These places are called *memori loci* because they are the repository of memories.

Queen's University, he met his first wife Anne-Mary Conway, whom he married 'during the Ulster Workers' Council strike in 1974', when his mother was dying of cancer. He then had a relationship with 'the artist Mary Farl Powers (1948-1992)', to whom 'Incantata' is dedicated. In 1985, shortly after his father's death, he met his future wife 'the poet and novelist Jean Hanff Korelitz (1961-)', whom he married in August 1987, and with whom he has two children, Dorothy and Asher. All of these biographical facts are important in the rest of this study.

The present thesis, then, argues for a new consideration of Muldoon's poetry through the lens of two interrelated notions—autobiography and autofiction—and is articulated around the poetic representation of the self. The overarching argument is that what lies at the core of Muldoon's poetry is not the unmediated, wholeness of the self characterising autobiography in prose (Linda Anderson), but the inherent 'doubleness' of the poetic self. I hope that this thesis proves to be a strong contribution to Muldoon studies and, more generally, to autofictional studies and to the debate regarding poetry and autobiography.

CHAPTER ONE: Theoretical Framework

MULDOON: Basically, I'm a person who can see some value in a great many of the theories that come floating by. What I resist very strenuously is the superimposing of any particular world picture, any kind of -ism, that insists on everything falling into place very neatly—as in some great cookie cutter from the sky, or some magician's trunk that will include any mannequin that happens to swim into its ken (what a mixed metaphor!) and all the legs and arms, if they don't fit in, are going to be chopped off. I'm antiprescriptive.

INTERVIEWER: And your work thwarts that: the way in which you insist on mysteries or open-endedness works counter to that simplification.

MULDOON: Well, it's not as if I get up in the morning and say, 'Today I'm going to...'

INTERVIEWER: 'Thwart those Lacanians'.

MULDOON: Right. I don't think my job in life is to do that. No. I suppose I am interested in exciting myself, amusing myself, disturbing myself.

(qtd. in Keller 8)

1.1. Introduction

As the aim of my Ph.D. research is to position Muldoon's poetry within the concepts of autobiography and autofiction, this first chapter addresses these two key literary concepts, by providing a theoretical framework necessary for the close reading that is adhered to throughout the subsequent chapters.

Chapter One is divided into two parts. Part 1.2 provides a summary of the most applicable *theories* of autobiography and of autofiction. Part 1.3 identifies the key *peritextual elements* that are equally essential to any study of autobiography and autofiction.[19] This combination of theories and textual elements constitutes the theoretical framework of this thesis, which is crucial to support the analysis of Muldoon's poems in the next chapters. Part 1.2 introduces the various theories of autobiography and poetry, on the one hand, and of autofiction, on the other. The point is not to offer an exhaustive account of the wide array of theories that exist in the fields of autobiography and autofiction; instead, Part 1.2 presents the main theoretical issues and identifies the most applicable methods and principles in order to address Muldoon's poetry, while bearing in mind his reluctance towards 'any kind of -ism'. For this reason, although some of the following theories are used as tools to read his poetry, they are not applied without a number of conditions, to avoid 'legs and arms' being 'chopped off' (to use Muldoon's metaphor). This is the case, in particular, with theories of autofiction. Part 1.3 focuses attention on key elements of the 'peritext' (or, to use Gérard Genette's term, *le péritexte*), which are essential when researching on autobiography and autofiction, because they provide important

[19] As explained in Part 1.3, the peritext corresponds to elements surrounding the text (such as titles and dedications).

information on the referential nature of some poems and, sometimes, of entire collections. Part 1.3 focuses on three peritextual criteria—prefaces, dedications, and titles—which are necessary to support my reading of the autobiographical and autofictional elements in Muldoon's poetry. These textual elements and the theories discussed in the next part are woven into the analyses of the subsequent chapters.[20]

1.2. Autobiography and Autofiction

As autobiography as a genre has already received a significant amount of critical attention, Part 1.2 calls for the reconsideration of the issue regarding autobiography *and* poetry. In fact, the debate on whether poetry has a place in autobiographical writing has profoundly changed the theoretical reception of autobiography as a genre. Although it is still an on-going process, this debate has delineated some of the main features of autobiographical poetry, which come to light in my discussions of Muldoon's personal poems in Chapters Two and Three.

My analysis then proceeds to place the focus on the recent changes that have taken place over the last three decades, particularly in France, in the domain of literary self-representation. These changes have given rise to a new term, 'autofiction', also called 'faction', 'factual fiction', or 'fiction of facts' in English (Gasparini, *Est-il je?* 313).[21] The more this new 'genre' gets written about, the less

[20] This first chapter focuses on theories of autobiography and of autofiction (Part 1.2) and on the peritext (Part 1.3). Other theories related to mourning and loss, memory, and storytelling (to mention only a few) are discussed in Chapters Two, Three, and Five, respectively.

[21] Arnaud Schmitt sums up the different terms for the autofictional practice in his article on 'Self-Narration': 'As far as naming the blend is concerned, several options are available: French theorists (Doubrovsky, Genette, Colonna, or Lejeune, for instance) have, more or less enthusiastically, endorsed *autofiction*. The North American response offers more options, although as recently as the nineteenth century, *autobiographical novels* (Gasparini, *Est-il Je?*

consensus there seems to be on what it actually means, and what literary works it includes. Furthermore, as the inverted commas around the term 'genre' show, there is also little agreement on whether or not autofiction constitutes a new genre. Part 1.2 provides a complete understanding of this multifaceted term in order to lay the foundations for Chapters Four and Five, which are dedicated to Muldoon's autofictional practice. More generally, this study of autofiction calls for a reconsideration of the 'autobiography' and 'autofiction' labels, as well as emphasises the impact of autofiction on literary genres. It also highlights the fact that some of the concerns raised by the autofictional enterprise echo some of the issues that emerge from the following discussions on autobiography and poetry.

Autobiography and Poetry

> There is an 'inevitable inability' to analyse the link between autobiography and poetry that stems from the gap that exists between these two terms—a gap that each of their manifestations produces. A gap that is also widened by this apparently insignificant conjunction 'and'.
>
> (Laugier 33)[22]

The relation between autobiography and poetry has always been a highly contested issue and has drawn great critical attention over the past few decades. Kate Hamburger famously said that the lyric 'I' (as opposed to the 'I' of fiction) is

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313) seemed to be the official term for a genre very loosely defined, sometimes including deeply heterogeneous texts. Avrom Fleishman used *autobiographical fiction* in 1976, stressing the *fiction* element in order to refute referential readings of controversial pieces such as *Portnoy's Complaint*. For Paul John Eakin all first-person narratives qualified as *autobiographical narratives* since they are the result of a process of self-invention resorting as much to imagination as to memory. Over the last decades of the twentieth century, new substantives appeared in the North American theoretical landscape, like *surfiction*, *factual fiction*, *fiction of facts*, or *faction*' (123-124). The term used in this thesis is 'autofiction' since it encompasses a wide array of practices and is used by the various theories referred to in this opening chapter.

[22] The original reads: 'Il y a une "inhabilité fatale" à penser entre autobiographie et poésie: parce qu'il y a un écart entre ces deux noms—un écart que chacune de leur expérience produit. Un écart que ce petit "et" conjonctif redouble également'.

the true subject of enunciation. As a result, it has often been equated with the autobiographical 'I' by many critics.[23] In fact, according to Sébastien Hubier, following the theories of Swiss literary critic Jean Starobinski, autobiography and poetry are not dissimilar. Firstly, autobiographies (in verse or in prose) are, necessarily, reconstructions in themselves, so that the only difference between an autobiography written in prose and one written in verse is 'a question of degree and not of nature' (50). Secondly, 'poetry—in verse or in prose—is also a means to understand the real and one's self and, for that reason, it coincides with what is at stake in autobiography'.[24]

However, although poetic works are now listed among autobiographical writings since boundaries between genres have shrunk,[25] there is still little agreement among critics as to the exact nature of the relation between poetry and autobiography. The debate on autobiography and poetry has been fuelled since the early 1970s by a constant exchange between Philippe Lejeune, a leading critic and theorist in autobiographical studies, and other French critics.

Philippe Lejeune's Definition of Autobiography

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In 2004, a group of academics and writers led by Éric Audinet and Dominique Rabaté resolved to get to the heart of the matter regarding the relationship between poetry and autobiography: they decided to examine Lejeune's definition

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[23] Schmitt explains that, in *The Logic of Literature*, Hamburger 'differentiates between the real author, the "I-origo", and the fictional narrator, the "I-origines"' ('Making the Case for Self-Narration' 124). According to Schmitt, Hamburger's theory is not suited to hybrid texts (*i.e.* autofictional texts) because the 'I-origo' and the 'I-origines' cannot be differentiated.

[24] Originally: 'Au premier rang des objections, on notera d'une part que, comme nous l'avons déjà évoqué à la suite de J. Starobinski, l'autobiographie porte toujours peu ou prou les traces de cette élaboration, de cette reconstruction qu'elle est. Il n'y aurait donc entre une autobiographie versifiée et une autobiographie en prose qu'une différence de degré et non de nature. D'autre part, la poésie—versifiée ou non—est aussi une forme de connaissance du réel et de soi-même et, en cela, elle rejoint la plupart des enjeux de l'autobiographie'.

[25] William C. Spengemann mentions Wordsworth's *Prelude*, as well as Eliot's and William C. William's poetry as examples of autobiographical poems and cites lyric poetry as 'the most ancient form of self-representation' (171).

of 'autobiography' and, in particular, his exclusion of poetry from autobiographical writing. A brief return to the main arguments put forward by Lejeune in 1971 is necessary in order to shed light on this debate, which has remained lively to this day.

In his first published work on autobiography, *L'Autobiographie en France*, Lejeune states that, in order for a text to be autobiographical, the author, narrator, and character must share the same identity (23). This identification corresponds to what Genette calls *le protocole nominal* (qtd. in Colonna, *L'autofiction* 37-38) or to Dorrit Cohn's 'nominal signpost' (*The Distinction of Fiction* 32). It is also in this seminal book that Lejeune defines the pragmatic dimension of autobiographical writing by introducing his now famous autobiographical pact (or contract), which, to this day, remains the corner-stone of his theory. This contract—which is not necessarily written in the first-person voice (with an autodiegetic narrator in Genette's terms), but can also be written in the third-person voice—revolves around the notion of *authenticity* and *faithfulness*, as opposed to the 'fictional pact' (*pacte romanesque*) that asserts the fictitious nature of the narrative in which the narrator-character is not nominally identified with its author (*Signes de vie* 31).[26] On the notion of authenticity, Lejeune argues in his famous work *Le Pacte autobiographique* (1975) that

> [c]ontrary to all forms of fiction, biographies and autobiographies are referential texts: just like scientific or historical discourse, they claim to bring information on a 'reality' that is external to the text, and are therefore subject to a verification test. Their goal is not mere verisimilitude, but resemblance to truth. It is not about 'looking real', but being the image of the real. (36)[27]

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[26] A third pact, which Lejeune calls 'unspecified' (*indéterminé*), refers to a narrative in which the character has no name (*Le Pacte* 29).

[27] In the original text: 'Par opposition à toutes les formes de fiction, la biographie et l'autobiographie sont des textes référentiels: exactement comme le discours scientifique ou historique, ils prétendent apporter une information sur une "réalité" extérieure au texte, et donc se soumettre à une épreuve de vérification. Leur but n'est pas la simple vraisemblance, mais la ressemblance au vrai. Non "l'effet de réel", mais l'image du réel'.

In this work, Lejeune refines his definition of autobiography, which clearly rejects verse: '*A retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his or her own existence, focusing on his or her individual life, in particular, on the development of his or her personality*' (14).[28]

Among all these criteria, it is not the focus on the 'individual life' or the 'retrospective' criterion that Lejeune's detractors wanted to pick up on here, but rather the term 'prose'. In fact, the only place allotted to poetry is in what Lejeune calls the 'autobiographical space' (*espace autobiographique*) (41), which refers to works of fiction (novels and poems) that incorporate autobiographical elements (Benoit 23).[29]

The Characteristics of Autobiographical Poetry

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Despite criticising Lejeune's exclusion of poetry from autobiography in his early work, Audinet confesses in a prologue to *Poésie et autobiographie* that the participants did not confront poetry and autobiography but rather evaded the topic ('Après-coup' 13). However, some insightful remarks clarify the relationship between autobiography and poetry and are central to my analyses in Chapters Two and Three.

Jean-Michel Maulpoix's comments are particularly illuminating. He explains that autobiography tends to centre the subject, whereas poetry scatters

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[28] The definition in French reads: '*Récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité*'. In italics in the original text. Later, in 1992, Lejeune created *L'Association pour l'autobiographie*, which also excluded both poetry and fiction.

[29] Consequently, critics such as Benoit, for example, argue that 'poetry is not strictly speaking *autobiography*, yet it can be *autobiographical* insofar as it can be included in what Lejeune calls "the autobiographical space"' (22-23). The original reads: 'la poésie n'est pas *autobiographie* à proprement parler, elle peut cependant être *autobiographique* dans la mesure où elle peut s'inscrire dans ce que Lejeune appelle "l'espace autobiographique"'.

and *disfigures* it ('Table ronde' 25).[30] As a result, a poetic autobiography offers not so much an 'identity card' of the poetic subject (*une carte d'identité*), but an 'alterity card' (*une carte d'altérité*) (24), stressing the 'otherness' of the poetic 'I': the first-person voice is an ever-changing 'other' to him- or herself.[31] According to Maulpoix, an autobiographical poem would therefore strive towards *alterity* ('Table ronde' 27), a *deconstruction* of the subject.[32] These observations are particularly important in order to understand the 'split' nature of the 'I' in Muldoon's autobiographical poems discussed in Chapter Two, particularly his failed romance poems and elegies. Maulpoix's observations are also very useful for my third chapter since he further argues that a poetic autobiography is necessarily incomplete and written in broken lines: the lyric 'I' is the megaphone of a *plurality*, whose *origins are scattered* by the poetic process (25-26, my emphasis). Chapter Three analyses in detail the scattering of personal origins and argues that, despite the importance of memory in autobiographical writing, the mediation of memories through poetry participates in the uprooting of the 'I'.

In 2005, thirty years after writing *Le pacte autobiographique*, Lejeune published *Signes de vie: Le pacte autobiographique 2*, conscious of the new theories of autobiography and poetry that had arisen in the wake of *Le pacte autobiographique*. He addresses the criticisms made towards his previous works by mentioning explicitly those in *Poésie et autobiographie* and those voiced against his insistence on the autobiographer's commitment to tell the truth (*engagement de vérité*). He re-affirms that, in an autobiography, the writer

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[30] Originally: 'Là où l'autobiographie tend à centrer la figure, la poésie l'émiette, la disperse et la dé-figure'.

[31] As summed up by Rabaté, this vision of poetry and autobiography breaks from the notion of continuity and the romantic lyric 'I' of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Les Confessions,* 'the inaugural text of modern autobiography' (Marcus 180).

[32] The original reads: 'S'il existe une autobiographie poétique, une autobiographie du poème, ou "dans la poésie", elle constitue moins la carte d'identité d'un sujet spécifique, que l'hypothétique *carte d'altérité* de ses transactions avec les autres qu'il porte en lui. Les péripéties d'une altération. Les déboires d'un être altéré. Autant dire l'autobiographie d'une soif. [...] Il s'agit d'une écriture lyrique tendue par et vers l'altérité (épreuve de l'altérité en soi et au-dehors de soi)'.

abides by the truth in the tradition of Rousseau (9) and that the nature of the autobiographical pact is that of a contract between the author and the reader (15).[33] Yet, in a baffling reversal, Lejeune offers a violent refutation of some of his most adamant affirmations: he acknowledges that it was pure 'heresy' on his part to have said that autobiographies had to be written in *prose* (*Signes de vie* 45).[34] Furthermore, although he was intransigent on the notion of identity ('an identity is or is not') he admits that ambiguities and intermediaries may exist (25).[35] This means that the *protocole nominal* no longer has to be strictly applied, opening the gates to poetry, in which poet's name rarely features. In Chapter Two, the analysis of some father-and-son poems (Part 2.2) focuses on the speaker's difficulty in naming himself in the poem.

Éric Benoit welcomed Lejeune's significant volte-face and, with a group of French academics, decided to continue pondering what characterised autobiography in verse. In fact, since *Moi aussi* and *Signes de vie: Le pacte*

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[33] Rousseau famously stated in the preface to his *Confessions*: 'This is the only portrait of a man, painted exactly according to nature and in all its truth, that exists and will probably ever exist' (31). The original reads: 'Voici le seul portrait d'homme, peint exactement d'après nature et dans toute sa vérité, qui existe et qui probablement existera jamais'. In *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, a sequel to the *Confessions*, Rousseau explains that, in both of these works, he has been faithful to reality: 'Yes, I can say and feel with a proud, uplifted soul that in this work I took good faith, truthfulness, and openness as far as, or even further than, any other man has ever done, or at least I believe so; feeling that the good surpassed the bad, it was in my interest to tell the whole truth, and so I told the whole truth' (44). Nonetheless, he has also modified or 'embellished' memories, as later discussed in Chapter Three.

[34] Originally: 'dans *Le pacte autobiographique*, j'ai dit—hérésie!—que l'autobiographie était "en prose"'. Lejeune even entitled one of his chapters in *Signes de vie*, 'Autobiography and Poetry'.

[35] In French: 'dans le *Pacte*, j'explique froidement que l'identité est une question de tout ou rien: une identité est ou n'est pas. Dans le "Pacte (bis)", j'adoucis les choses, je montre les ambiguïtés et transitions qui peuvent exister...'. Lejeune also concedes that, although his first definition of autobiography only took into account works written after 1770, he should not have restricted his study to what happened *after* Rousseau. Although *Signes de vie* is a corner-stone in Lejeune's study of autobiography, we should not forget that he had already mentioned the possibility of including poetry in his definition of autobiography in *Moi aussi* in 1986. In the chapter entitled 'Le Pacte autobiographique (bis)', he states that, instead of giving a definition that excluded verse in *Le pacte*, he should have put 'the tension between referential transparency and the aesthetic quest' at the centre of his research. He further argues that, within autobiographical writing, texts range from the 'platitude of the *curriculum vitae*' to 'pure poetry' (qtd. in Benoit 23). Originally: 'Aussi, plutôt que de proposer une définition qui, sèchement, exclut les vers, aurais-je dû désigner comme centre du système actuel cette tension entre la transparence référentielle et la recherche esthétique, et montrer [...] que, de part et d'autre d'un point d'équilibre, il existait une gradation continue de textes allant, d'un côté, vers la platitude du *curriculum vitae*, et, de l'autre, vers la poésie pure'.

autobiographique 2, the debate on poetry and autobiography has not died down. In 2007, a new book, *L'irressemblance: Poésie et autobiographie*, brought together other writers and critics who tried to grapple head on with this problem.[36] Following in the footsteps of Maulpoix's comments in *Poésie et autobiographie*, the participants decided to further explore the instability of the poetic 'I', arguing against what Linda Anderson stated about autobiographical practice: '[autobiography] offers an unmediated and yet stabilizing wholeness for the self. [...] it offers the possibility of alleviating the dangers and anxieties of fragmentation' (3). They reasserted that modern poetry has become a paradigm of the tension between the lyric 'I' and the autobiographical subject (the empirical 'I'), and that this tension was particularly exemplified in the works of major nineteenth-century French poets. These poets argued that the 'I' was 'split' (*dédoublé*), as in the work of surrealist writer Comte de Lautréamont (pseudonym of Isidore Lucien Ducasse), or that the 'I' was 'an other' ('*JE est un autre*'), as famously stated by symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud (maybe taking his cue from Gérard de Nerval's similar '*Je suis l'autre*').[37] Rabaté argues that in

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[36] It is however unfortunate that we are not given in this book a sense of what these critics felt towards Lejeune's volte-face in *Le pacte 2*. In fact, the conference proceedings, collected in *L'irressemblance*, were published following a conference that took place on 17-19 March 2005, exactly the same month as the publication of *Le pacte 2*. It is hoped that in the near future another book on the topic will discuss the full impact of Lejeune's new definition.

[37] Nerval scribbled *Je suis l'autre* ('I am the other') under a portrait of himself engraved by Eugène Gervais and used as a frontispiece for *L'âge du romantisme*, published by Maurice Tourneux and Philippe Burty. Michel Collot argues that, with this sentence, Nerval anticipated the 'subsequent evolution of the relationship between autobiography and fiction' (qtd. in Hugotte and Braud 8). This portrait is reproduced in *Album Nerval*, ed. Éric Buffetaud and Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1993). In *Aurélia*, Nerval also wrote: 'A terrible idea came to me. / "Man is double", I said to myself. / A Father of the Church has written: "I feel two men in me"' (26). The original passages read: 'chaque homme a un *double*' and 'Une idée terrible me vint: l'homme est double,—me dis-je.—"Je sens deux hommes en moi", a écrit un Père de l'Église' (Nerval, *Œuvres Complètes* 701, 717). Another famous example of the author's duality is Jorge Luis Borges's piece 'Borges y yo' (translated as 'Borges and Myself' or 'Borges and I'). This short story is about the Argentinian author looking out at the life of his 'double', the internationally famous writer: 'It's to the other man, to Borges, that things happen. [...] It would be an exaggeration to say that we are on bad terms; I live, I let myself live, so that Borges can weave his tales and poems, and those tales and poems are my justification. [...] Little by little, I have been surrendering everything to him, even though I have evidence of his stubborn habit of falsification and exaggerating. [...] Which of us is writing this page I don't know' (Borges 282-283). The emphasis on telling 'tales' and the 'habit of falsification' finds an echo in Chapter Five in my analysis of Muldoon as a trickster figure.

autobiographical texts, the subject 'tends towards the other, is the other' ('Énonciation poétique' 68).[38] In a similar vein to Rabaté, discussing Nerval's *Les Chimères* and Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, Dominique Combe explains that the identification of the 'I' with 'The Other' in the work of these two poets could constitute a 'double reference' (*référence double*) or a 'split reference' (*référence dédoublée*) (62–63). This is particularly relevant to Muldoon's personal writings, especially in relation to the split 'I' in 'Yarrow', discussed in Chapter Two (Part 2.4).

Rabaté goes even further than the opposition between the 'I' and the 'other' by insisting on the dispersion of the 'I' and referring to a *pluralisation* of the images of the self that is induced by the more or less distorting mirror of autobiography ('Poésie et autobiographie' 44, 46). This characteristic of autobiographical poetry is illustrated in Chapter Two, particularly in my analysis of failed romance poems (Part 2.3).

Autobiographical Poetry and Fiction

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While these comments are similar to those already put forward by Maulpoix, some critics went even further and focused on the links between autobiographical poetry and *fiction*. Benoit states that poetry is about *irréférence*, non-resemblance, and differences between the empirical 'I' and the lyric 'I' (29). He further argues that, although Lejeune's definition of autobiography is strictly predicated on an avowal of sincerity and truthfulness, autobiographical prose tends to be referential whereas autobiographical poetry seems more fictional (24). In fact, the lyric 'I' becomes progressively less stable and the poet is led to use

[38] The original reads: 'Le sujet, singulier, dans la plus grande singularité de sa parole, rejoint l'autre, est l'autre'.

fiction in order to reinvent the subject and rewrite his or her history. This observation is very useful to the present study, since not only is the lyric 'I' particularly unstable in some of the poet's most autobiographical poems, but it often slips in and out of referentiality. Benoit goes even further by arguing that a poetic autobiography resembles 'the autobiography of a fictional "I", an imaginary "I"' (qtd. in Braud and Hugotte 11). The critic therefore establishes an interesting parallel between autobiographical poetry and *autofiction*. Chapter Four illustrates Benoit's theories by examining the extent to which Muldoon's autofictional poems feature a partly referential, partly fictional first-person voice, to the point of creating autobiographies of a fictional 'I'.

Benoit then goes on to argue that autobiographical poetry revolves around a temporal and syntactic discontinuity (32), which is illustrated by the positioning of the poems on the page, and in which the treatment of temporality breaks away from chronological continuity (34). This fragmentation encourages the resonance between events rather than their chronological sequence, and favours epiphanic moments to the continuum of real life (32). Benoit's theory, combined with the one put forward by Maulpoix on the 'scattering' of personal origins (discussed previously), is at the core of my third chapter on how memory creates a fragmented and a-chronological narrative due to the poetic form. This chapter also highlights the fact that when memories are mediated through verse, they do not follow the linearity of the time sequence; instead, they favour lines of association that create splinters of memories, disrupting the autobiographical impetus, particularly in longer poems ('Yarrow', for instance).

Benoit's observations are important because they establish a number of parallels between autobiographical poetry and autofiction: for instance, this

temporal fragmentation is a shared feature with the autofictional practice.[39] In fact, according to Philippe Gasparini, the *autofictionneur* (the practitioner of autofictions) differs from the autobiographer because s/he does not write a linear reconstruction of his or her life (*Autofiction* 307).[40] Although this is one of the characteristics of autofiction, as we are now going to see, there has been little agreement as to how to define this new 'genre'. Since the term 'autofiction' is not widely used outside of French studies, it is necessary to explain why and when the term 'autofiction' was coined, and how it was received by critics and writers. After explaining the genesis and reception of this new term, the next section offers an overview of the main theories of autofiction in order to appreciate the significance of this concept for reading Muldoon's poetry in Chapters Four and Five.

[39] These similarities between autobiographical poetry and autofiction are developed and further explored as this thesis progresses.

[40] Although a late contributor to the debate on autofiction, Gasparini wrote two influential books on autofiction: *Est-il je? Roman autobiographique et autofiction* (2004) and *Autofiction. Une aventure du langage* (2008). Towards the end of *Est-il je?*, Gasparini shows some concern for the future of autofiction. He says that the polysemy that surrounds the term may herald its premature death (311). However, only four years later, in his second book on the topic, Gasparini not only mentions this new 'genre', but he dedicates the whole book to the autofictional practice.

Lejeune, Doubrovsky and the 'empty square'

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Name of the character-hero → *Pact* ↓	≠ name of the author	= O	= name of the author
fictional	1a NOVEL	2a NOVEL	
= O	1b NOVEL	2b Indeterminate	3a AUTOBIOGRAPHY
autobiographical		2c AUTOBIOGRAPHY	3b AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Fig. 1. Philippe Lejeune's chart of autodiegetic narratives

In *Le Pacte autobiographique* (28), Lejeune drafts a chart of the different narrative possibilities (Fig. 1). In the third column, he states that the fact that the name of the character-hero is the same as that of the author 'rules out the possibility of fiction' (30). When he attempts to interpret the two blank squares, he proceeds to ask whether the character-hero of a novel could share the same name as the author. He then immediately dismisses this idea by arguing that, although this would be an interesting case and could exist in theory, nothing similar has ever been written (31). As to the blank square in the bottom-left corner of the chart, Lejeune argues that if the name of the character-hero in an autobiographical work is not that of the author (pseudonyms excluded) then the reader will always wonder whether s/he is reading a piece of fiction. In these two

examples, we are therefore faced with a 'Pirandellian game of ambiguities'. To his knowledge, 'this is a game that we hardly ever play *for real*' (32).[41] The empty square in the top-right corner of Lejeune's chart was soon to be filled out two years later by Doubrovsky.

As Lejeune's ideas were only beginning to be disseminated, French academic and writer Serge Doubrovsky wrote in October 1977 to Lejeune stating that he wished to put a name on this 'empty square'.[42] His neologism 'autofiction' first appeared in red and in italics in the back cover blurb of his novel *Fils*, published in 1977.[43] In response to Doubrovsky's neologism, Lejeune argues that, in order for the reader to see the fictional status of a seemingly autobiographical text and call it 'autofiction', elements of the story have to be impossible or incompatible with information s/he already has in his or her possession (*Moi aussi* 65).[44] As recently as 2007, Lejeune stated that he had a profound dislike for this term and that, although he liked fiction and autobiography, he preferred not to mix them together, as he did not believe that one could read 'sitting on the fence' ('Le journal' 3). Lejeune is not the only critic who has been reluctant to accept this new term.

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[41] In the original: 'À ma connaissance, c'est un jeu auquel on ne joue pratiquement jamais *pour de bon*'. Lejeune refers to Luigi Pirandello's style characterised by the notion of appearance and mirrors, the illusion of reality, the speaker's multifaceted masks, *etc.*

[42] Lejeune mentions Doubrovsky's letter in *Moi aussi* (1986) and Gasparini refers to it in *Autofiction. Une aventure du langage* (2008).

[43] Actually, the first use of the term 'autofiction' appears in the drafts of *Fils*, which was originally called *Le Monstre* (*The Monster*) (Gasparini, *Autofiction* 11-12). There are a few controversies surrounding the identity of the inventor of the term. It was, for instance, wrongly attributed by Marc Weitzmann to Polish-American novelist Jerzy Kosinski, as explained by Philippe Vilain in *Défense de Narcisse* (2005) (qtd. in Gasparini, *Autofiction* 8-9). Furthermore, Swiss writer Paul Nizon claimed that he used the term around 1983, without knowing that it already existed (qtd. in Gasparini, *Autofiction* 124).

[44] The original reads: 'Pour que le lecteur envisage une narration apparemment autobiographique comme une fiction, comme une "autofiction" il faut qu'il perçoive l'histoire comme impossible, ou comme incompatible avec une information qu'il possède déjà'.

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Ever since this neologism was created, it has attracted a number of criticisms. As early as 1969, a journalist stated that 'novel reviewers who complain about the mongrel genre of "faction" books have only themselves to blame' ('Faction'). In academic circles, the term is received with suspicion and autofictions are usually dismissed as 'brushes that sweep up all around them' (Lejeune, *Signes de vie* 170).[45] As reported by some critics, they are the sign of a narcissist (Burgelin 6), or exhibitionist and self-centered writing (Colonna, *Autofiction* 199; Burgelin 8; Cusset 35) that is symptomatic of a tendency towards '*extimité*' (the public display of one's private life), as in reality television (Colonna, *Autofiction* 13).

At the other end of the scale, some writers see this new exhibitionist practice as 'the realm of a new and forbidden pleasure' (Doubrovsky, *Autobiographiques* 70),[46] going as far as describing autofiction as a 'masturbatory genre' whose practice arouses a 'shady pleasure' (qtd. in Burgelin 6).[47] These 'rebel', 'transgressive' (Laouyen n. pag.), or 'wild' autobiographies (Lecarme and Lecarme-Tabone, *L'autobiographie* 268),[48] for better or for worse, play havoc with traditional literary boundaries since autofiction is a 'hybrid monster that eludes the literary scholar's test tube' (Laouyen n. pag.).[49] By questioning such boundaries, this new 'genre' turns traditional autobiography on its head and fundamentally questions the naïve practice of autobiography, past reading practices, and the presence of the author in the work (Darrieussecq 379). For the most enthusiastic critics, autofictions enable the writer to 'offer a new

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[45] In French: 'une voiture-balai qui ratisse large'.
[46] The original reads: 'l'espace d'une jouissance interdite et inédite'.
[47] In the original French text: 'L'autofiction, un genre masturbatoire, suscitant, *dixit* récemment encore une journaliste du *Monde*, un "plaisir louche"'. The critic is here quoting a journalist from *Le Monde*.
[48] In French: 'autobiographie déchaînée'.
[49] In French: 'monstre hybride qui échappe à l'éprouvette du poéticien'.

orchestration to old tunes' (Burgelin 20)[50] and to give movement to a freeze frame (Lucot 75).[51] Furthermore, not only do autofictions question the role of the author in the work (Darrieussecq), but the autofictional enterprise enables us to explore in depth the plurality of the lyric 'I' and the different 'strata of the *moi*' (Hubier 123, 125). Hubier's analysis is important in so far as it ties up with what has been said in the afore-mentioned theories of autobiography in verse. The question of the role of the author in his or her text is also addressed in this thesis. I develop Hubier's and Marie Darrieussecq's views in Chapters Four and Five, respectively on the different facets (or strata) of the autofictional persona and on the presence of the poet in his text.

The *origins* of autofiction are also a source of debate and of staunch disagreements among critics and academics. Although Colonna argues at the beginning of *Autofiction et autres mythomanies littéraires* that debates around the notion of autofiction arise in an age in which ordinary people's intimacy and privacy are laid bare before mass audiences, he believes that autofictions are not a result of the rise of individualism or modernity, as they date back to Lucian of Samosata (AD 120-AD 180) and to the Second Sophistic (19, 70).[52] Although Lejeune does not go back as far as the second century AD, he also argues that autofiction is the 'avatar of an old genre' and, more precisely, that of 'the autobiographical novel' (qtd. in Gasparini, *Autofiction* 75).[53] By contrast, for

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[50] Originally: 'Pratiquer l'autofiction, c'est [...] donner de nouvelles orchestrations à d'anciennes musiques'.

[51] The original reads: 'donner du mouvement à ce qui serait photographique'.

[52] Samosata had an important influence on writers such as Jonathan Swift, for example. In fact, his work entitled *A True Story*, which starts with a sea-voyage and parodies fantastic voyage tales, inspired Swift when he set out to write *Gulliver's Travels*. Although Swift's 1726 satirical novel is not an autofiction, it does engage with some autofictional devices: even if the portrait that is drawn of Gulliver is not exactly that of the author, some of Gulliver's 'fantastic experiences are clearly allegorical versions of Swift's own life' (Baines n. pag.). Swift's work therefore flirts with the notion of *seuils* ('thresholds') that lies at the core of the autofictional practice. The motif of the journey is explored in Chapter Four in relation to Muldoon's fantastic autofictions.

[53] In the entry for 'Autobiography' of *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, John A.B. Cuddon states that in the eighteenth century, the relatively new form of the

Doubrovsky, Jacques Lecarme, and Régine Robin, it is a 'new phenomenon' related to the postmodern era. Doubrovsky and Mounir Laouyen further argue that it is directly linked to psychoanalysis.

Finally, critics also disagree on whether autofiction is a genre or not, since it does not lend itself particularly well to a generic approach. To Lejeune's question 'Is it really a genre?' ('Autofictions et Cie' 8), some critics, such as Colonna, believe that it is not, whereas others, such as Laouyen, argue that it could potentially become a genre if (and only if) autofiction became accepted by readers and imposed its own hermeneutic code (n. pag.).[54]

A Referential or Fictional Enterprise? Theories of Autofiction

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Raphaële Rérolle argues in *The Guardian* that '[t]he controversies that arose when autobiographical fiction, or "autofiction", began to establish itself [...] have more or less subsided' (n. pag.).[55] However, the debate surrounding autofiction in academic circles is still lively: although it took more than a decade after the publication of *Fils* to see the first academic pieces written on the subject of

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novel is to a certain extent connected with autobiography so that novels such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768) 'are taken to be a kind of autobiographical fiction, or fictionalized autobiography' (65).

[54] Lecarme was the first academic to consider the fact that autofiction could actually constitute a literary genre in 'L'autofiction: un mauvais genre?', published in 1993 (Gasparini, 'De quoi l'autofiction est-elle le nom?' n. pag.).

[55] She further argues: '"autofiction", which introduces a character sharing the same name as the author, in situations which are more or less fictitious, has an almost incestuous relationship with the real world. As a result, this bold genre, which has given French literature some of its most interesting books in the last few years, is not neutral—and this is undoubtedly one of its strengths. However, autofiction no longer sparks the same passions as it did ten years ago. In the case of Angot's latest, which has not had the anticipated impact on readers, it has taken a lawsuit to rouse the literary world from its torpor: one brought by the ex-girlfriend of the man Angot shares her life with, and from whom the writer drew inspiration in her book'. Rérolle's article highlights the fact that the consequences of writing autofictions should not be underestimated. In fact, the impact of such practice can go well beyond the immediate literary or academic circles since autofiction has become a widely known name in the media. The author of *The Help* (2009), a book based in the early 1960s and dealing with the lives of African-American maids working for white families in Jackson (Mississippi), was also involved in a lawsuit. Kathryn Stockett was sued in February 2011 by Ablene Cooper, who worked as a housekeeper for the author's brother and who recognised herself as the character 'Aibileen Clark'. This onomastic change (Ablene/Aibileen) is a recurrent feature in autofictional texts and is explored in Chapters Four and Five.

'autofiction', an impressive body of work has emerged in the past thirty years or so under the influence of Lecarme, Lejeune, Genette, and Colonna (to mention only a few).[56] As very little has been written on this new concept outside of France, this thesis necessarily revolves around the theories of French academics.[57]

There are two different schools of thought in autofictional studies. As autofictions oscillate between fact and fiction (Forest 137), between the autobiographical contract and the fictional one, some critics favour the fictional aspect over the referential one—the 'fiction' over the 'auto' (Colonna)—while others insist on the referential nature of this new 'genre' (Doubrovsky).[58] Colonna's definition is therefore opposed to Doubrovsky's stricter definition and it is around these two theoretical positions that the debate on autofiction has developed in France. This dichotomy between the two central elements of this practice, 'auto' and 'fiction', calls for a more detailed analysis of the different theories put forward by writers and academics.

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[56] The first conference on 'autofiction', organised by Doubrovsky, Lejeune, and Lecarme took place on 20-21 November 1992 in the University of Nanterre (Paris) and resulted in a book *Autofictions et Cie* (1993). Since then, a website created by Isabelle Grell and Arnaud Genon has been dedicated to the autofictional practice (http://autofiction.org).

[57] Despite this ever-growing body of research in autofictional studies, the very few (and narrow) definitions offered in dictionaries should not be taken at face value. In France, the *Larousse* compares autofiction to the autobiographical novel; in contrast, the *Robert* gives such a wide definition that it encompasses all fictional writings of the self (Colonna, *Autofiction* 15). In English, the term 'faction', combining 'fact' and 'fiction', is also used to refer to autofiction. However, few dictionaries mention this neologism: no entry for the word 'faction' (nor 'autofiction', for that matter) appears in the *Literary Encyclopedia*; it is only mentioned in passing in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* but is not given a full entry; and *The Oxford English Dictionary* only gives a short and incomplete definition of it: 'A literary genre in which fictional narrative is developed from a basis of real events or characters; documentary fiction; similarly, in film-making, *etc.*; an instance of this' ('Faction'). The first example given of the use of 'faction' dates back to 1967 and is mentioned in one of the publisher's footnotes to Hugh Atkinson's *Games*: 'This is the great work of faction of 1967—fiction based on fact, the novel form of our time' ('Faction'). These inadequate or incomplete definitions mirror the current confusion in autofictional studies regarding the definition of the term 'autofiction'.

[58] French writer Marie Darrieussecq offers a parallel view to that of Doubrovsky. In her opinion, an autofiction is 'a narrative written in the first-person, that presents itself as fictitious (the generic tag *novel* is often found on the cover), but in which the author appears under his or her own name, and in which the verisimilitude at stake in the text is maintained by various "effets de vie"' (369-370). The original reads: 'je dirais que l'autofiction est un récit à la première personne, se donnant pour fictif (souvent on trouvera la mention *roman* sur la couverture) mais ou l'auteur apparait homodiégétiquement sous son nom propre, et ou la vraisemblance est un enjeu maintenu par de multiples "effets de vie"'. Darrieussecq mentions in a note Barthes's 'effects of reality', on which she based the phrase 'effets de vie'.

For the inventor of the term, an autofiction is less the writing of an adventure than 'the adventure of a writing', in which events and facts are 'strictly real' (back cover of *Fils*).[59] In 1988, Doubrovsky offered a new definition: an autofiction is a 'fiction that I have decided, as a writer, to make about myself and by myself' (*Autobiographiques* 77).[60] More precisely, it 'is a form of writing in which autobiographical and fictional elements are intertwined in a creative activity linked to psychoanalytical experience' (Sadoux 174). Doubrovsky's neologism, with his subsequent publications, progressively became even more synonymous with 'autobiography' (Lecarme, 'L'autofiction: un mauvais genre?' 227-228).

Colonna's voluminous work on autofiction marks a decisive step away from Doubrovsky's theories and requires a more extensive treatment, particularly because his approach to autofiction is the most relevant to Muldoon's autofictional practice. Colonna wrote his Ph.D. thesis *L'autofiction. Essai sur la fictionnalisation de soi en littérature* under the supervision of Genette and provided an illuminating explanation of this new 'genre' that was to have a profound impact on the subsequent theories of autofiction in France. As far as Colonna is concerned, '*an autofiction is a literary work through which the writer invents a new personality and existence for him- or herself while keeping his or her real identity (i.e. real name)*' (*L'autofiction* 30).[61] He includes works as diverse as Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and

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[59] In the original: 'Fiction, d'évènements et de faits strictements réels; si l'on veut, *autofiction*, d'avoir confié le langage d'une aventure à l'aventure du langage'. Schmitt argues that, while the autofictional definition put forth by Doubrovsky is not flawed, the term 'autofiction' does not suit Doubrovsky's type of writing: '*autofiction* as a substantive lays stress on the non-referential part of personal discourse, whereas Doubrovsky's textual practice went rather in the opposite direction' ('Making the Case for Self-Narration' 126).

[60] The original reads: 'L'autofiction, c'est la fiction que j'ai décidé, en tant qu'écrivain, de me donner de moi-même et par moi-même'.

[61] Originally: '*une autofiction est une œuvre littéraire par laquelle un écrivain s'invente une personnalité et une existence, tout en conservant son identité réelle (son véritable nom)*'. In italics in the original text.

Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*.[62] Colonna sums up this theory by arguing that the *autofictionneur* either becomes an imaginary being by inventing a new life based on his or her experience, or even goes further by losing touch with reality and creating for him- or herself a whole new existence while disregarding his or her past (*Autofiction* 145).[63] In the first possibility, while the author creates a new self for him- or herself, s/he keeps his or her real experience/past as the basis of the narrative. In the latter case, in contrast, the author makes a clean break with his or her past. Genette, whose perceptions of the autofictional enterprise are 'wholly in keeping with his student Vincent Colonna's conception of the term' (Gasparini, *Autofiction* 110, 116), famously (and ironically) said that these two possibilities are based on the following 'deliberately contradictory pact': 'I, the author, will now tell you a story of which I am the hero but which never happened to me' (*Fiction* 161).[64]

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[62] His list of thirty-two autofictional writers also includes: 'Molière, Diderot, Chateaubriand, Proust, Kafka, Céline, Genet, and Gombrowicz' (11). Colonna mentions, for instance, Chateaubriand's *René*: although he does not consider this work as purely autofictional, he highlights the fact that there is a 'coefficient of fictionalisation' (347) and that the protagonist's name is 'René', which is similar to the author's first-name, 'François-René'. However, Colonna's decision to include Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* in his list is questionable. Genette, for instance, considers Dante's *Divine Comedy* as 'authentically' fictive and yet, he calls it a 'real autofiction' (see footnote n°64 below). Furthermore, although Colonna mentions the importance of the presence of the author's 'real' name in the text (*L'autofiction* 43), Dante, for example, never uses his name in *The Divine Comedy*. Similarly, it is important to mention that, while Proust's first name appears in *Remembrance of Things Past*, there is a textual ambiguity about the use of the name 'Marcel'. It appears only once in *Albertine Disparue*—'My darling dear Marcel'—and the mentions of the author's first name in *La Prisonnière* were late additions that Proust subsequently deleted: 'scholars have explored how, in both published text and manuscript, "Marcel" as a first name for the narrator was caught up in a process of attribution and deletion, the naming sometimes eliminated, sometimes allowed to stand, as if Proust were constantly trying to make up his mind as to what the relationship between author and narrator is, and how, if at all, to declare it' (Prendergast 35). For this reason, although a number of critics—such as Genette in *Palimpsestes* and *Figures IV*—argue that Proust's novel is an autofiction, others disagree. See, for instance, Nathalie Mauriac Dyer, 'À la recherche du temps perdu, une autofiction?', *Genèse et autofiction*, ed. Jean-Louis Jeannelle and Catherine Viollet (Louvain-La-Neuve: Bruylant-Academia, 2007), 69-87. It is however important to mention that it is in relation to Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* that Genette first used the term 'autofiction' in *Palimpsestes* (1982).

[63] Originally: 'Soit l'artiste s'irréalise, fabule à partir de la matière de son vécu; soit il se déréalise et s'invente une nouvelle existence, en faisant fi de son passé'.

[64] The original reads: 'Moi, auteur, je vais vous raconter une histoire dont je suis le héros mais qui ne m'est jamais arrivée'. Nonetheless, in a footnote, Genette shows real annoyance towards the autofictional practice. He distinguishes between two types of autofictions: 'real autofictions', when all the contents of the narrative are 'authentically' fictional like Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and 'false

Colonna's ideas convinced several critics (Philippe Vilain, Laurent Jenny, among others) who also agreed on equating 'autofiction' with the invention of one's self (*fabulation* or *affabulation de soi*).[65] They highlighted the importance of his impressive work since it opened up literary theory to new ways of perceiving old and contemporary texts that were caught up in literary straitjackets ('fiction', 'autobiography', etc.). Colonna singles out four types of autofictions (or *fabulations de soi*): *l'autofiction biographique*, in which the author is the character-hero and the facts are mostly real (*Autofiction* 93); *l'autofiction fantastique*, in which the author is still the hero but the hero is like a shaman figure and the facts are imaginary (75);[66] *l'autofiction spéculaire*, in which only a reflection of the author or of his or her work is present in the text (Colonna uses the metaphor of the mirror) (119); and *l'autofiction intrusive*, in which the author's avatar is a storyteller and the narrative (unlike the first three types) is written in the third-person singular (135). Three of these four categories are discussed in my final two chapters on Muldoon's autofictional poems.[67] Chapter Four focuses, in particular, on *l'autofiction fantastique* in relation to Muldoon's autofictional poems published in *Why Brownlee Left*, *Hay*, and *Moy Sand and*

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autofictions', which he compares to shameful autobiographies. Originally: 'Je parle ici des *vraies* autofictions—dont le contenu narratif est, si j'ose dire, authentiquement fictionnel, comme (je suppose) celui de *La Divine Comédie*—, et non des fausses autofictions, qui ne sont "fictions" que pour la douane: autrement dit, autobiographies honteuses'. Similarly, in a short article which appeared in *Page des libraries*, Jacques Lecarme and Éliane Lecarme-Tabone separate 'false fiction' from '*autofabulation*': the former is 'an autobiography without censorship or reticence' and whose autofictional devices prevent any legal repercussions, while the latter is a text governed by an ambiguous contract that 'gives room for fantasy and mythomania' (qtd. in Gasparini, *Autofiction* 176). The first type could be equated to Genette's 'false autofiction', while the second type draws heavily on Colonna's *affabulation de soi*.

[65] Laouyen, who favours Colonna's definition, argues that the latter ironically uses Doubrovsky's neologism to build a theory of autofiction that eventually excludes Doubrovsky's works from its scope (n. pag.). In other words: the one-time student surpassing his master.

[66] This type of autofiction is a direct rival of the novel, which, according to Colonna, appeared around the same time.

[67] Biographical autofictions include works such as Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*. These autofictions are characterised by the author's desire to create a heroic double for him- or herself and by the fact that it is the literary effects/impressions that matter, more so than the truthfulness of the account (Rathé 44). Muldoon's autofictional poems are closer to Colonna's other types of autofictions, which is the reason why this thesis does not discuss biographical autofictions.

Gravel (Part 4.3). Chapter Five uses Colonna's *autofiction spéculaire* and *autofiction intrusive* as analytical tools in discussing Muldoon's authorial intrusions. The final two chapters therefore illustrate the wide array of autofictional mechanisms employed by Muldoon in his weaving of fact and fiction.

Nonetheless, while Colonna's theories best illustrate Muldoon's autofictional practice, some of the critic's definitions cannot be directly applied to Muldoon's poetry without some nuance. In fact, since my intention is not to impose a theoretical grid on Muldoon's poems but to highlight the poet's autofictional idiosyncrasies, I relate Colonna's *autofiction fantastique* to Muldoon's re-appropriation of the *féth fiáda* in Chapter Four. More importantly, I do not unconditionally apply Colonna's definition of *l'autofiction intrusive* in Chapter Five: although the critic states that this type of autofiction is narrated by a third-person narrator who does not take part in the story, these criteria are not compatible with Muldoon's intrusive autofictions. In my discussion of Muldoon's tall tale devices (Part 5.3), I place the emphasis on the speaker as storyteller in poems narrated in the *first-person* voice and in which the speaker plays a *central* role.[68]

[68] Colonna dramatically changed the meaning of 'autofiction' and received some criticisms for that reason. Gasparini believes that even if Colonna's definition is more 'specific', 'coherent', and 'stable' than that of Doubrovsky, by focusing so narrowly on fiction, 'Colonna significantly limits the generic domain of autofiction' (*Autofiction* 114); and so, for the sake of clarity, he should have used a new term such as 'auto-novel' (*auto-roman*), which would have formed a generic pair with 'auto-biography' (113). In French: 'en exigeant l'absence de toute référence autobiographique, Colonna restreint considérablement le champ générique de l'autofiction'. However, the 'absence of any autobiographical reference' mentioned by Gasparini is hardly sustainable. Although Colonna places the emphasis on the fictional, his first category (*autofiction biographique*) allows space for a number of texts that are more referential than fictional. As a result, his position does not limit the scope of autofiction. Furthermore, using the term 'auto-novel' would narrow even more Colonna's definition since it would necessarily exclude *poetry*.

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At this juncture, it is important to state that, although theories of autofiction have flourished in recent years, they have mostly discussed the use of autofiction in *prose* works. Since the specificities of autofictional poetry have not yet been addressed, as argued previously, some of these theories cannot be strictly applied to poetry. For instance, while Colonna states that the presence of the author's name is a common feature of autofictions, Gasparini argues that the homonymy between author and narrator cannot always be sustained. Although Gasparini does not mention that this is, in fact, particularly the case in poetry, it is important to state that his less rigid position is a welcome contribution to autofictional studies when dealing with poetry.[69] As a result, his position supports a discussion of autofictional elements in the work of Muldoon, in which the name of the author rarely appears. To compensate for the absence of the author's name in some texts, Gasparini argues that we should focus on other criteria (professional, physical, *etc.*) that may enable the reader to identify the character with the author (*Est-il je?* 25).[70] The profession of the writer, for instance, is

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[69] Similarly, Schmitt disregards the onomastic criterion in his discussion of *Mercy of a Rude Stream* by Henry Roth (qtd. in Gasparini, *Autofiction* 312). According to him, this criterion does not guarantee the referentiality of the text. Schmitt is the inventor of the term *l'autonarration* (self-narration), which he prefers to 'autofiction', and which is illustrated in his essay 'Making the Case for Self-Narration'. His theory is based on Hamburger's 'quasi-real' criterion: the writer is allowed to make up fragments of his or her referential narrative ('La perspective' 24). Schmitt argues that the fact of 'being autobiographical is a prerequisite for self-narration' ('Making the Case for Self-Narration' 132-133). Although his concept is interesting, the various models he presents do not correspond to Muldoon's autofictional practice. For a helpful illustration of these theoretical models, see Arnaud Schmitt, 'La perspective de l'autonarration', *Poétique* 149:1 (Feb. 2007), 16.

[70] The original reads: 'En réalité, peu de cas d'homonymie auteur-narrateur répondent à la double exigence posée par Colonna de production et réception strictement fictionnelles. Pour que le concept d'autofiction débouche sur la définition d'une catégorie consistante, il faut sans doute dépasser le cadre étroit de l'homonymie. Pourquoi ne pas admettre qu'il existe, outre les nom et prénom, toute une série d'opérateurs d'identification du héros avec l'auteur; leur âge, leur milieu socioculturel, leur profession, leurs aspirations, *etc.*? [...] ces opérateurs sont utilisés à discrétion par l'auteur pour jouer la disjonction ou la confusion des instances narratives'. Gaparini supports

fundamental to my analysis of Muldoon's authorial intrusions in Chapter Five, particularly in relation to his *personnages d'auteur* (Part 5.2).

Furthermore, Gasparini's discussions of the autofictional practice are particularly insightful because his definition of autofiction even draws parallels between *autobiographical* poetry and *autofiction*. The critic isolates two main features of autofiction—namely, fragmentation and heterogeneity—and argues that the more these features are present in the text, the less autobiographical the text is (*Autofiction* 309). These two criteria echo the issues raised by the debate on poetry and autobiography, particularly the ways in which autobiographical writing tends to fragment the lyric 'I'. Gasparini then gives a much more detailed definition of autofiction and argues that it corresponds to an '*autobiographical and literary text that presents numerous oral features, formal innovation, narrative complexity, fragmentation, alterity, contrast, and auto-commentary that tend to problematise the relationship between writing and life experience*' (311).[71] Not only does Gasparini's inventory give an idea of the inexhaustible amount of lines of research autofiction offers, but, as seen throughout this thesis, each of these elements characterises both Muldoon's autobiographical and autofictional poems.

Even though these criteria have been highlighted by researchers in relation to Muldoon, critics have not analysed these features through the lens of autofiction nor have they pointed out the fact that these features constitute a bridge between autobiography in verse and autofiction. Chapters Four and Five offer a new perspective on autofiction by presenting the characteristics of

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this point with a chart, in which he clearly states that homonymy between author and narrator is necessary in an autobiography and optional in an autofiction (24).

[71] Originally: '*Texte autobiographique et littéraire présentant de nombreux traits d'oralité, d'innovation formelle, de complexité narrative, de fragmentation, d'altérité, de disparate et d'autocommentaire qui tendent à problématiser le rapport entre l'écriture et l'expérience*'. In italics in the original text.

autofiction mediated through *poetry*, and by echoing the results of my analyses in Chapters Two and Three.

Author, Narrator, and Protagonist

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Before drawing this overview of autofictional theories to a close, there is one final aspect to autofictional writing that needs to be mentioned, particularly because it informs some of my analyses in Chapter Four (Part 4.4) and in Chapter Five. In *L'autobiographie* (1997), Lecarme and Lecarme-Tabone dedicate one of their chapters to Genette's position towards the autofictional practice. As discussed previously, though Genette shares similar views to those of his former student, he nevertheless expresses some reservations towards some aspects of the autofictional practice, specifically the relationship between author and narrator. To understand the importance of Genette's reticence in relation to my analyses in Chapters Four and Five, I have reproduced Lecarme and Lecarme-Tabone's diagrams representing the relationship between author (A), narrator (N) and protagonist (P) (Fig. 2):[72]

[72] These diagrams are on p.270 of *L'autobiographie* and are reproduced from Genette's *Fiction et Diction*.

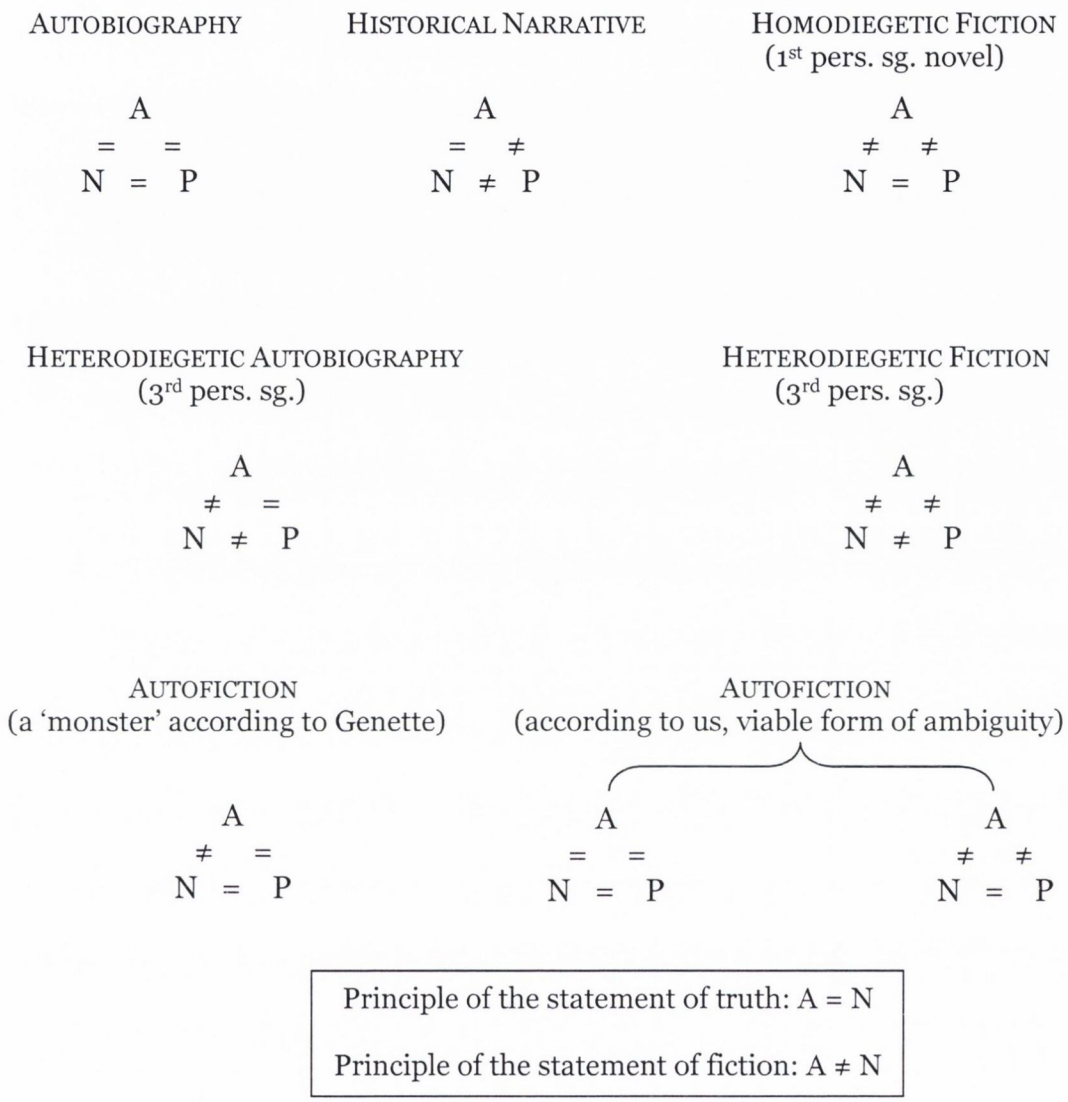

Fig. 2. Essay on the formalisation of narratives[73]

[73] According to these diagrams, autofiction is either based on the autobiographical model, in which A/N/P are all equivalent, or on the homodiegetic fictional model, in which N and P are equivalent but A stands apart. This theory establishes once again a distinction between a referential position (Doubrovsky's) and a fictional position (Colonna's).

The authors emphasise, in particular, the last three A/N/P autofictional formulae and argue that, '[b]y referring to the author as A, the narrator as N, the protagonist as P, we are given a little monstrous triangle (cf. *supra*), about which [Genette] notes that it is not more absurd than when the author hesitatively stutters: "This is me and this is not me"' (271). In this passage, Lecarme and Lecarme-Tabone refer to Genette's criticism of some forms of autofictional practice in *Fiction et diction* (1979). Suggesting the autofictional model above (in which A ≠ N, but A = P and N = P), Genette says that it is a 'logically contradictory formula' (161).[74] He further explains that the equals sign (=) does not have the same value on each side of the triangle: it is a legal identity between A and P (civil status) and a linguistic identity between N and P. However, the identity between A and N is slightly more complex. Although the identity between A and N is what lies at the core of this thesis, it is particularly in the final chapter that the complexity of this relationship is discussed at length. According to Genette, the equals sign symbolises the 'serious commitment' of the author: 'when A = N, *exit* N' (162). In other words, it is the author (A) who narrates the events.[75] More importantly, in a footnote, Genette explains that this neither guarantees the veracity of the text nor prevents the author from lying: a gullible reader might think that A = N, while the dishonest writer knows that A ≠ N. In the same vein, Darrieussecq very insightfully argues that an autofiction offers a double-faceted act of language—we might go further and suggest that it is a *two-faced* genre—as it 'asks to be believed *and* not to be believed' (377). This is very important because the notion of playing tricks on the reader is addressed in Part 4.4 (when analysing

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[74] He suggests that the other two contradictory formulae could either be: A = N, N = P, A ≠ P or A = N, N ≠ P, A = P. However, Genette says that these seem impossible because an author cannot 'seriously' offer a coherent contract with his or her reader if A equals N.

[75] This is, therefore, similar to Colonna's fourth autofictional type, *l'autofiction intrusive*, referring to a text in which the author narrates the events.

Muldoon's 'fake' personal poems) and the analysis of the author as narrator is examined in Part 5.3 (in relation to Muldoon's tall tale artistry).

Finally, Lecarme and Lecarme-Tabone argue that, in some cases, autofictional texts invite the reader 'to question the relation of identity (=) or alterity (≠) between author and narrator even when the proper noun is *the same*' (*L'autobiographie* 271).[76] In their discussion of the onomastic criterion (triple identity), they include the use of initials and heteronyms (only if there are connections with the name of the author within the text). Chapter Five builds on this analysis and goes even further by exploring the ways in which Muldoon plays with his first and/or family name(s) or borrows the name of another writer in order to complicate the relationship between author, narrator, and protagonist (Part 5.2).[77]

Conclusion

Theorists of autofiction are far from being in agreement. Nonetheless, these instructive theories reflect how slippery, yet exhilarating, autofiction is. This introductory section has identified the main defining features of autofiction and has shown that critics and writers now tend to agree on a few factors, such as the non-necessity of having a triple identity between author, narrator, and protagonist. Yet, this hybrid 'genre' is too elusive to allow for any rigorous categorization. As it is the result of a cross-fertilization of fact and fiction,

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[76] They explain that, according to Lejeune, it is this textual criterion that differentiates autobiographical writing from fictional writing and that fiction starts when 'this rigid designator is altered' (279). As explained previously, this onomastic feature is rarely present in poetry; nonetheless, whenever relevant, emphasis is placed on the occurrence of Muldoon's name and/or initials, and on the various forms of onomastic encoding.

[77] Once again, the lack of research on autofiction and poetry is made obvious by the fact that the authors retain as one of the main criteria of autofiction the label *novel* (or any other peritextual device indicating the fictional status of the work).

autofiction undermines the difference between reality and fiction and, consequently, crosses conventional boundaries. What emerges from these theories is a relentless impulse to investigate the thin line separating fact from fiction, since the autofictional text presents both 'the "fictionalisation" of the factual and the "factualisation" of the fictional' (Darrieussecq 378). The reader does not know whether or not s/he should believe what the narrator says and is forced to engage in a 'double and simultaneous reading' of the autofictional text (Gasparini, *Est-il je* 13). In fact, there is no autobiographical pact that would assert the truthfulness of the narrative, only an 'oxymoronic pact' (Laouyen n. pag.) or a 'contradictory pact' (Lecarme 242), which is half-fictional, half-authentic. Therefore, writing autofiction is a schizophrenic enterprise: the *autofictionneur* can sometimes be compared to an Epimenides-like figure who can only tell the truth when s/he tells lies (Laouyen n. pag.).

These theories also highlight the problematic relationship between author, speaker, and protagonist. In fact, if autobiography, according to Georges Gusdorf in 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography' (1956), is 'the mirror in which the individual reflects his or her own image' (33), then the reflection given in the autofictional mirror does not offer an image of the self but a distorted version of it. However, as argued by Muldoon in relation to translation, a distorted or 'funhouse mirror, is meant to include some clarification' (*When the Pie Was Opened* 9).[78] Chapter Four illustrates the extent to which the autofictional enterprise may reveal a wealth of autobiographical elements.

For the purpose of this thesis, the theory of autofiction that is most applicable to Muldoon's poetry is Colonna's. Although Muldoon's work does not always comply with the onomastic criterion and has never been labelled

[78] This quotation calls forth the title of John Barth's short story collection *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968). Barth is 'widely considered to be the preeminent American metafictionist' (Worthington 114). Chapter Five discusses Muldoon's metafictional tropes and the notion of authorial control.

'autofictional', his poetry hovers between fiction and reality, since the poet weaves a web between his writing, his life, and his imagination. What is at stake in this thesis is to use theories of autofiction to open up new ways of reading his poetry and to show that Muldoon's autobiographical and autofictional poems raise similar issues, particularly in relation to the fragmented nature of the 'I'.

Identifying the most applicable theories of autobiographical poetry and of autofiction is crucial to support my analyses in the next chapters. However, using these theories as tools to discuss Muldoon's poems is not enough to assess the autobiographical or autofictional nature of his work. Before applying some of these theories in the next chapters, it is in fact important to provide a brief list of some key textual elements that are often used in studies of autobiography. These elements are all part of what Genette calls '*paratexte*' (paratext), which includes both the '*péritexte*' (peritext) and the '*épitexte*' (epitext). Part 1.3 first explains the importance of the paratext and then identifies the main peritextual criteria used in this thesis, ranging from prefaces to titles.

1.3. The Paratext, the Peritext, and the Epitext

Muldoon has written short autobiographical pieces such as 'A Tight Wee Place in Armagh' and 'Notes for *Chez Moy*: *A Critical Autobiography*'. However, the latter is only available at Emory University, Atlanta, and there is not, to date, a full-length autobiography (or a biography of Muldoon) that would help the work of a researcher on autobiography (and, inevitably, on autofiction). It is, therefore, difficult for a reader of Muldoon's works to access autobiographical pieces that would verify his other writings. With such scarce autobiographical material, the

researcher has to turn to Muldoon's interviews, prefaces, and critical works, in order to track down fragments of autobiographical material: these elements are part of what Genette calls 'paratext'.

In his study of autobiography and autofiction, Gasparini draws heavily on Genette's *Seuils* and his definition of the paratext, which includes the peritext and the epitext. The peritext corresponds to

> textual or iconographic elements that, in a book, surround the text itself such as: titles, sub-titles, names of the author and of the publisher, *prière d'insérer* [publisher's blurb for press release], the list of books by the same author, preface(s), the *apparatus criticus*, illustrations, dedications, epigraphs, titles of chapters, notes, *etc.* On the other hand, [Genette] puts in the epitext all the information that is available on a book: literary criticism, academic studies, interviews, other books by the same author, notoriety, *etc.* The paratext is therefore made up of the peritext and of the epitext. (Gasparini, *Est-il je?* 61)[79]

Given the richness of the paratext, Part 1.3 exclusively deals with three *peritextual* criteria: prefaces, dedications, and titles. These textual elements surrounding the text are the most useful for this research, because they help the reader assess the nature of some of Muldoon's poems and collections.[80] Academic studies, interviews, and autobiographical essays (belonging to the *epitext*) are referred to in the subsequent chapters.

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[79] The original reads: 'Il y regroupe d'abord, sous l'appellation de "péritexte", tous les éléments textuels ou iconographiques qui, dans un livre, entourent le texte proprement dit, à savoir: le titre, le sous-titre, les noms de l'auteur et de l'éditeur, le prière d'insérer, la liste des ouvrages du même auteur, la ou les préfaces, l'apparat critique, les illustrations, la dédicace, les épigraphes, les titres des chapitres, les notes, *etc.* Il range d'autre part dans l' "épitexte" toutes les informations disponibles sur un livre: critiques et commentaires, études, interviews, autres ouvrages de l'auteur, notoriété, *etc.* Le paratexte est donc constitué du péritexte et de l'épitexte'.

[80] The reason why I have only chosen these three elements is due to the fact that other peritextual elements do not feature in Muldoon's poetry (apparatus criticus, titles of chapters, and notes) or do not provide any information in order to identify the autobiographical or autofictional nature of the poems and/or collections (sub-titles in *Madoc: A Mystery*, illustrations in *When the Pie Was Opened*, etc). Other peritextual elements, which are not analysed in detail, are nonetheless occasionally referred to later in the thesis to illustrate and strengthen some analyses. For instance, Muldoon's epigraphs are mentioned in the section dedicated to prefaces and editorial blurbs are referred to in the analysis of dedications and titles (Chapter One). In Chapter Five, the list of books written by Muldoon is used to support my analysis of his *mises en abyme*.

Prefaces

Prefaces do not loom large in Muldoon's poetry since they are limited to a small amount of works such as *When the Pie Was Opened* (a joint work with Italian artist Lanfranco Quadrio), *Plan B* (a collaboration with Norman McBeath), and *The Faber Book of Beasts*. Although these prefaces are scarce, there is one particular preface that does shed light on the autobiographical dimension of some of Muldoon's poems. In his preface to *When the Pie Was Opened* (2008), the poet mentions the name of a neighbour, who is a recurrent character throughout his *œuvre*:

> The idea of journeywork was one that my father knew only too well. He had spent much of his youth as a hired laborer, and even now, in the 1960s, would sometimes work as a daysman, often carrying his own scythe. [...] I well remember an occasion when my father had been hired by Jimmy McParland to mow a gap into a hayfield in a remote part of the townland. He was meant to clear a way in for the tractor-drawn mowing machine. I tagged along. When we arrived we found we couldn't get into the field because of a little gypsy encampment blocking the gap. I still have a sense of the tension between the gypsy family and ourselves as they were forced to up the stakes of their tent and move further along the hedge. (9)

Muldoon has kept McParland's real name for his neighbour character who appears in 'Yarrow', for instance. This example clearly illustrates how crucial the peritext—in this case, the only confirmation of McParland's existence and connection to Muldoon—is in helping the reader identify characters based on real referents in some of the poems.

While Muldoon's collections rarely feature prefaces or introductions, some of them present the reader with an epigraph placed just before the opening poem. In *The Prince of the Quotidian*, this peritextual element sheds light on the autobiographical nature of the volume as a whole:

> *I moved in consequence my family to Princeton, where I hired a small house for the winter, which I furnished frugally but decently. I fitted up my study and began to think my lot was cast to be an American farmer.*
>
> —Theobald Wolfe Tone to Thomas Russell, 1795. (9)

A mere hundred and ninety-seven years separate this volume from the letter written by Muldoon's fellow countryman, Wolfe Tone. This epigraph is ironic in so far as the image of the 'American farmer' would not be what best describes our more 'urban' poet (in particular, given the numerous urban journeys that characterise the volume), nor would it describe Tone's eventual fate; however, this 'January Journal' also takes place in the winter (January 1992) and mostly in and around Princeton, New Jersey, where Muldoon settled with his family in the late eighties. This extract of Tone's letter, used as the epigraph to *The Prince of the Quotidian*, may also hint at the location where the poems might have been written: Muldoon may have written a number of these thirty-one poetic notes in his own 'study' in his house in Princeton. This house, located along the Delaware and Raritan Canal, is also the setting of a number of events narrated in *The Prince of the Quotidian*.

These prefaces are important since they shed light on the personal dimension of the volume *in general*. When the collection does not feature any preface, the researcher may turn to dedications (either placed at the beginning of the volume or after the title of a poem), because they also provide information on the autobiographical nature of Muldoon's poetic works, particularly on the identity of some of the characters.

Dedications

> The dedication can become a key if the dedicatee is identifiable to a character in the story.
> (Gasparini, *Est-il je?* 75)[81]

Gasparini argues that dedications explicitly substitute referents for the actors of the novel, and, I would suggest, for the characters in a poem. In fact, when it comes to Muldoon's abundant prose and verse writing, dedications often shed light on some collections and poems.[82] While some of Muldoon's books—especially his literary criticism, translation work, and libretti—are dedicated to fellow academics and poets,[83] all his poetry collections are dedicated to members of his family or to his close friends, some of whom feature as the main characters of some of the poems.[84] Although the next chapters engage in a close analysis of

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[81] In French: 'La dédicace peut devenir une clef si le dédicataire est identifiable à un personnage du récit'.

[82] There is only one dedication that misleads (at first) the reader. In *Quoof* (1983), the dedication indicates that 'The Mirror' was written '*in memory of my father*' (12). In fact, this dedication is in contradiction both with the year of Patrick Muldoon's death (1985) and with the note at the end of the poem telling us that this poem is actually a translation '*from the Irish of Michael Davitt*' (13). This dedication is simply a translation of the dedication Davitt wrote below the title of 'An Scáthán': '*i gcuimhne m'athar*' (50). I refer to this interesting case in Part 4.4 on Muldoon's biographical forgeries.

[83] His translation *The Birds* and his literary prose criticism *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures* were both dedicated to Northern Irish poet Tom Paulin; *When the Pie Was Opened* was written in memory of Robert Fagles (1933-2008), an American academic, poet and translator of ancient Greek and Latin classics; and *To Ireland, I* was dedicated to A. Walton Litz, an American critic and literary historian who was Professor of English literature at Princeton University where Muldoon is currently professor and director of the creative writing programme. *Bandanna* was dedicated to a little girl, Olivia Kuenne, who was killed in an accident aged six, and to Britt Arvid Hagen, brother of the composer Daron Hagen, who died of pneumonia the same year. *General Admission* is unsurprisingly dedicated to Muldoon's friends and former members of the 'three-car-garage rock' band, *Rackett* (2004-2010).

[84] With the exception of *Quoof*, dedicated to fellow Northern Irish poet Ciaran Carson, and *Why Brownlee left*, dedicated to Michael Allen, a British lecturer and poetry critic at Queen's University who was associated with the Belfast Group of the mid-1960s. *Quoof* was described by Neil Corcoran in the *Times Literary Supplement* as a 'wily, mischievous, nonchalant negotiation between the affections and attachments of Muldoon's own childhood, family and place' ('The Shy Trickster' 1180). While in the eponymous poem 'Quoof' the speaker explains that this term is, in fact, the family word for a 'hot water bottle' (*Q* 17), the choice of this enigmatic title that has its ramifications in the Latin term '*quo*' most likely illustrates the disorientation and distress experienced at the time of the writing of these poems: the collection is one of the most violent ones in Muldoon's *œuvre*, having been written after the 1981 hunger strikes and, more generally, in a context of extreme political violence in the North of Ireland. The 'conventional and cutting-

the poems, this section provides a brief overview of these dedications, which are central in order to support an autobiographical reading of some of these collections.

What is important in the following list of dedications (arranged in chronological order) is that they signal the most important events in Muldoon's personal life that lie at the core of these volumes. These key elements range from the influence of his teachers and fellow poets (*New Weather*), to his failed love relationships (*Mules* and *The Wishbone*), to the death of his parents and sister (*Meeting the British, The Annals of Chile*, and *Horse Latitudes*), and, finally, to his life as a father and husband (*Poems 1968-1998, Moy Sand and Gravel*, and *Maggot*, among others). Dedications often provide information on the nature of the volumes, by signalling key personal elements, which, in turn, enable the reader to situate poems and collections on a specific timeline.

Muldoon's early collection, *New Weather* (1973), was dedicated to his 'Fathers and Mothers'. This dedication could be a reference to his teachers at Saint Patrick's College in Co. Armagh: his Irish teacher Sean O'Baoill,[85] John McCarter, Jerry Hicks, and Gerard Quinn, who introduced him to Frost and who is elegised in 'Gold' as the figure who 'loomed like Merlin / over the class / of 1962' (*MB* 6). A passage from 'Notes for *Chez Moy*' emphasises the importance of these teachers in Muldoon's intellectual and personal development:

> After attending the primary school in Collegelands, I went to St. Patrick's College, Armagh for the seven years between 1962 and 1969. This was the school run by the Vincentian order, in which I came under the influence of a number of remarkable teachers, including Sean O'Boyle, who taught me Irish, and two teachers of English, John McCarter and Jerry Hicks, who had a profound influence on my intellectual development. It was John McCarter who first

edge, beautiful and bleak' *Hay* (back cover) did not feature any dedication at the beginning of the volume. However, the poem 'The Hug' is dedicated to Joseph Brodsky.

[85] Sean O'Baoill had a great influence on Muldoon as he encouraged him to write and translate poetry. See Muldoon's preface to *When the Pie Was Opened* (Paris: Sylph Editions, 2008), 9-10.

> encouraged me to write poetry, accepting a poem in lieu of the weekly essay, and steering me towards *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*, while it was Jerry Hicks who, in April 1968, introduced me to Michael Longley and Seamus Heaney after a poetry reading in Armagh Museum. According to Seamus Heaney, Hicks presented me to him as a poet who would one day surpass him, adding in a whisper, '*Rara avis*'. (n. pag.)

This early collection is also dedicated to the poets involved in the literary circles of Dublin and Belfast (Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, among others), who were all part of Philip Hobsbaum's Belfast Group (Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 13-14). While *New Weather*'s dedication is addressed to his 'literary parents', other dedications are devoted to relatives or close friends and are most useful in order to identify, in particular, the female characters that pervade his collections.

Mules (1977) was dedicated to his first wife Anne-Marie Conway, whom he met at Queen's University. They married in May 1974 and broke up in 1977. As a result, this dedication sheds light on some poems about the strains of their relationship such as 'Epona' ('I have no heart, she cries. I am driving her madder, / Out of her depth, almost, in the tall grass / Of Parsons' triangular meadow', 17), 'Paris' (in which the couple 'aren't quite all they seem', 40), 'Cider' ('I have lain by your side for long enough', 45), and 'Bang' ('For that moment we had been the others / These things happen to—', 50). Although these poems could be about the strains of *any* relationship, the dedication gives them a more personal dimension. This dedication is, therefore, crucial for my analysis of failed romance poems published in *Mules* (Part 2.3), because it enables me to situate these poems in a very specific autobiographical context. The tensions between Muldoon and Conway, analysed in Chapter Two, later led to the break-up of their marriage, which is charted in *Why Brownlee Left*: 'a volume preoccupied with the lack of fit, with things falling apart, with lack of resolution' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 61). In fact, Wills further argues that it 'is hard not to relate such concerns to

elements of Muldoon's biography, in particular the break-up of his marriage to Anne-Marie Conway in 1977'.

The importance of the dedication is also visible in *The Wishbone* (1984), which was published by The Gallery Press in a limited number of copies and was dedicated to artist Mary Farl Powers, with whom Muldoon had a relationship after his first marriage broke up. The dedication in *The Wishbone* shows that some of the failed romance poems collected in this volume are also related to Muldoon's own personal experience: the volume charts 'the failure and ending of their relationship' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 111). The first poem is a loose translation of the first stanzas of Alfred de Vigny's 'La Mort du Loup' and is then followed by two 'animal poems' ('Bears' and 'Pandas'), in which the unnamed 'you' is clearly identifiable as Powers, thanks to the collection's dedication.[86] Wills further argues that '[t]he death of wild animals, the destruction of their habitat, the consumption of animal flesh—all represent stages in the demise of the relationship between Muldoon and Powers, which is described in terms of sexual betrayal, emptiness and lifelessness' (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 112). In fact, although Muldoon decided to end his translation of 'La Mort du Loup' right before the hunters kill the wolf family, the poems that follow—in particular, 'The Main-Mast', in which two huskies lie dead at the foot of the couple's bed—act as a sequel to 'Wolves', since they tell the end of the story: the death of the animals is a metaphor for the end of the relationship. Furthermore, since poems such as 'The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife' (referred to in Part 2.3) were reproduced in

[86] Muldoon's long-time interest in poems dealing with animals led him to publish *The Faber Book of Beasts* in 1997: 'This ongoing question of "What am I?" is, indeed, central, not only to animal poetry, but to all forms of poetry. For if, as Wallace Stevens argues in his essay "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" the function of the poet "is to help people to live their lives", it might also be argued that nowhere is that responsibility thrown into sharper relief than in our accounts of the parallel lives of "our little kinsmen". For there, almost uniquely, do we see ourselves not only for who and what we are, but glimpse the possibility of what we might become' (xvii). This quote is certainly *à propos* since this 'ongoing question' is at the core of this research.

Meeting the British, the dedication of the 1984 volume is also useful in order to understand the personal dimension of some of the poems re-published in the 1987 collection. The dedications in *Mules* and *The Wishbone* are important because they shed light on the personal dimension of some of the failed romance poems collected in these volumes, by helping the reader identify some of the female figures.

Meeting the British, published in 1987, was dedicated to his father's memory: 'In Memory of Patrick Muldoon 1910-1985'. In this volume, Muldoon wrote several elegies for his father ('The Coney', 'The Wishbone', and 'The Fox'), but also for his grandfather ('My Grandfather's Wake' and 'Brock'). This collection is, therefore, not only a tribute to his own father, but to fatherhood, in general. Once again, the dedication (which includes Patrick Muldoon's birth and death dates) is important because it tells us that Muldoon's father was still alive when the poet wrote the volumes that preceded *Meeting the British*. As a result, the father elegies in the preceding volumes (from *New Weather* to *Quoof*), which are analysed in Chapter Four (Part 4.4), cannot be elegies for Patrick Muldoon. Furthermore, as later discussed in my analysis of father-and-son poems (Part 2.2), the death of Patrick Muldoon marks a clear change between the father poems published before 1987 and those published after this date, in relation to the speaker's ability (or inability) to inscribe his own name in the poem. Without this dedication, it would be difficult to point to the significance of the 1987 volume and of the father's death, regarding the son's emancipation from the father. It is also interesting to point out that, although Muldoon's mother died in 1974 (eleven years before her husband), the first volume to be dedicated to a deceased parent is addressed to Muldoon's father. Even if the reader does not know about the problematic relationship Muldoon had with his mother, the fact

that the poet waited twenty years after his mother's death to dedicate *The Annals of Chile* to her (and to write the poignant elegy 'Yarrow') invites us to explore the mother-and-son relationship in Chapter Two (Part 2.2).

The harrowing volume *The Annals of Chile* is the first collection to break the pattern Muldoon had established so far. While the previous collections are composed of shorter poems and end on a long concluding poem,[87] the 1994 volume is constituted of only twelve poems, two of which are long elegies. 'Incantata' (dedicated to Mary Farl Powers, who died of cancer in 1992) and 'Yarrow' (the long concluding poem written in memory of his mother) are both monumental poems that give the volume its commemorative tone. Although no dedication to his mother appears below the title of 'Yarrow' (unlike 'Incantata', which is specifically dedicated to Powers),[88] 'Yarrow' constitutes the second part of the volume: the volume's dedication is directed towards 'Yarrow', in particular. The editorial note at the back of the book indicates that this collection 'is Paul Muldoon's seventh collection of poems and contains, amongst other things, celebrations of the birth of his daughter, a plangent and frankly personal lament for the artist Mary Farl Powers, and a long fantasy invoking the world of boys' adventure stories, over which the poet's mother presides as a benign influence'. This editorial blurb (belonging to the *epitext*) therefore provides further information on the nature of the collection. In fact, to most critics, it is Muldoon's 'most candidly autobiographical volume' (Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 209). The dedication to the 1994 volume illustrates how central the mother figure is and, by extension, the extent to which female characters pervade *The Annals of Chile*. In fact, this volume is a 'more open, lyric [collection] than Muldoon has produced

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[87] For instance: 'Armageddon, Armageddon' in *Mules*, the bewildering tale 'The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants' in *Quoof*, or the maddening and obscure 'Madoc: A Mystery' in *Madoc*.
[88] 'Incantata' was also reproduced on its own in a beautiful book published by the Graphic Studio, Dublin, in 1994.

for some time, and it is tempting to connect this with the powerful feminine presence in the books' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 158). My discussions of Muldoon's elegies for Mary Farl Powers and for his mother illustrate the fact that this 'powerful feminine presence' in the volume—and, in particular, in the elegies—is also characterised by a blurring of identities, especially *female* identities in 'Yarrow' (Part 2.4).

Pulitzer Prize-winning *Moy Sand and Gravel* (2002) was dedicated to both Dorothy and Asher, with the penultimate poem, 'Cradle Song for Asher', being especially about his son.[89] However, unlike the other collections discussed above, the persons to whom the volume is dedicated do not feature in most of the poems. In fact, this volume is mostly about the author's own childhood since Muldoon takes the reader through his childhood memories in County Armagh. The collection's dedication goes hand in hand with the theme of childhood. Furthermore, the children's invisible presence pervades the whole collection. This is the case in the poem that gave its title to the collection, and in which the speaker pays a visit to his childhood cinema, the Olympic Cinema, in the Moy: it is unclear whether the poet is remembering himself as a child going there or if he took his children to the cinema long after.[90] Moreover, *Moy Sand and Gravel* is as much about 'private grief' and his long-lost childhood in the Moy as it is about his new home in New Jersey, as exemplified in 'At the Sign of the Black Horse, September 1999', set 'the morning after Hurricane Floyd' (73). This back and forth movement between the Moy and New Jersey is explored in my analysis of the poet's two-dimensional world in his fantastic autofictions (Part 4.3).

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[89] Unsurprisingly, one of the children's books, *The Last Thesaurus* (1995), was dedicated to his first-born child, Dorothy Aoife.

[90] Similarly, memories of that 'Boxing Day morning' when Muldoon rode his 'new Raleigh cycle' (*MSG* 17), or of an argument with his own father in 'The Misfits', could also echo his current life as a father. As for 'A Collegelands Catechism', it could be read as a self-parody featuring the poet as an inquisitive schoolboy, or as a poem parodying the poet's own curious children ('Which is known as the "Orchard County"? / Which as the "Garden State"?', 15).

Moreover, the fact that the title of the 2002 volume highlights the importance of particular place names (such as the Moy) invites the reader to explore the significance of these *loci* in Muldoon's poetry. These place names are discussed in Chapter Three in relation to the poet's *memori loci* (Part 3.3).

Horse Latitudes (2006) was dedicated to the memory of his sister, Maureen Muldoon (1953-2005), who died of cancer. The dedication sheds light on the identity of the 'dear Sis' (80), since Maureen's name does not appear in the elegy 'Turkey Buzzards'. The elegiac tone also pervades the whole volume, which is as much about personal matters as political and historical concerns:

> The poems have to do with a series of battles (all beginning with the letter 'B' as if to suggest a 'missing' Baghdad) in which horses or mules played a major role. Intercut with those battle-scenes are accounts of a 'battle' with cancer by a former lover, here named Carlotta, and a commentary on the agenda of what may only be described as the Bush 'regime'. (Fenton 6)

The elegiac tone also characterises the concluding long poem 'Sillyhow Stride', which was dedicated to Muldoon's close friend, American singer and songwriter Warren Zevon. The dichotomy between private and public issues underlined by James Fenton is well summed up in the editorial blurb accompanying the collection: '*Horse Latitudes* engages the public sphere on equal terms with the most private and fugitive materials—"the fifty years I've spent trying to put it together"—all within the same vigilant optic, in a language of inspired happenstance which, as ever, combines radical uncertainties of perspective with a lyric lucidity' (inside cover). Once again, this editorial emphasis on the personal dimension of the volume goes hand in hand with the collection's dedication.

One of Muldoon's most recent collections, *Maggot* (2010), was—perhaps surprisingly given its theme of 'sex, decay and death' (Garner C26)—dedicated to his daughter Dorothy. However, in the preface to *When the Pie Was Opened*

(2008), in which some of the poems from *Maggot* were first collected, Muldoon explains that '"The Windshield" [published in both collections] is a poem about a man caught between two women—his teenage daughter and the mother who used to wait at night to collect him from that same school where Sean O'Baoill taught him Irish' (10). Furthermore, like poems in *Moy Sand and Gravel*, 'The Wishbone' features 'images and themes relevant to [Muldoon's] childhood in the Northern Irish countryside' (Lynn n. pag.). In fact, while the poetic virtuosity and 'acrobatic wit' (Garner C26) of Muldoon was acclaimed when *Maggot* came out, commentators did not fail to notice how autobiographical this collection is: 'behind the easy laughter of a rhyme are life and death issues. Poems about cancer, being a parent, his mother, lovers' (Muir n. pag.). By bringing together all the major themes of the previous collections—death, love, parenthood, and family—*Maggot* may be read as a tribute to all the individuals to whom these previous volumes were dedicated. In addition, like the preceding volumes (*The Annals of Chile*, *Moy Sand and Gravel*, and *Horse Latitudes*), *Maggot* is more openly autobiographical than earlier collections, demonstrating an evolution towards a more autobiographical poetry in Muldoon's career since the mid-1990s.

To conclude, the presence of dedications strengthens the autobiographical dimension of some of Muldoon's most personal collections since they act as a stamp of authenticity that supports an autobiographical reading of these poems. Moreover, with the exception of *The Annals of Chile* (dedicated to his mother twenty years after her death), these dedications chronologically mirror the most important events in Muldoon's life. By shedding light on these personal issues lying at the core of these volumes, dedications help the reader situate poems on a timeline and identify some of the characters featuring in these collections. Although *Poems 1968-1998*—ironically described as the 'banana-yellow bumper'

by Sansom (25)—is a wonderful book that gathers in one volume most of Muldoon's collections, the fact that the dedications at the beginning of each volume are not reproduced changes dramatically the reading experience of a reader who might not have previously possessed all the separate collections in his or her possession. However, the reader of the 'Collected Poems' may turn to another epitextual device in the absence of dedications in order to assess the autobiographical or autofictional nature of some poems: namely, the title.

Titles

Genette distinguishes between two types of titles: the thematic title and the rhematic title. The former designates the contents of the book, while the latter announces its form (qtd. in Gasparini, *Est-il je?* 63). For the purpose of this study, this section exclusively deals with the thematic title giving information on where and/or when the poem took place, and on the characters featuring in the poems. Some of these titles therefore provide information on the spatio-temporal context of the poems and on the real referents of some of the characters.[91]

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[91] While the title of Muldoon's 1978 collection *Names and Addresses* seems to promise the reader personal information, the poems only brush with autobiography and mislead the reader: in 'Cuba 1962', Muldoon's younger sister, Maureen, has been replaced by an 'elder sister' called 'May' (3); and in 'Immrama', the speaker's father (while bearing some resemblance with Muldoon's real father) is drinking rum in a 'verandah' with a man believed to be a Nazi (6). These poems are analysed in Chapter Four. Furthermore, although names are indeed given, they do not provide the reader with any clue as to the autobiographical nature of the poems since they often belong to a sphere that is too personal and remain unintelligible to the reader: for example, the 'Quinns', 'O'Briens', and 'McAuleys' in 'The Flight' (renamed 'Come into my Parlour' in *Poems 1968-1998*). Places (or 'addresses'), however, are most interesting, particularly the Moy Cinema in 'The Weepies', where Muldoon went 'most Saturday afternoons'; and 'Wigan' and 'Crewe Junction' in 'Immrama', a poem in which the speaker follows the trail of his 'father's spirit' (6). Only one collection provides explicit autobiographical information in its title: *Moy Sand and Gravel*. As explained previously, the author's childhood village, the Moy, pervades the whole collection. The title of this collection may originate from the unpublished poem 'Lost Ground', kept in the Muldoon Archive at Emory, which is about the death of an uncle: 'While I mourned him for himself at first / What I missed truly was the field / I might have fallen into had he made his will, / My acre of sand and gravel'. The word 'him' in the first line was added later on to the typescript by hand. See *PMP*, '"Lost Ground", single corrected typescript', Box 13, Folder 8. The words 'sand and gravel' also feature in the unpublished poem 'The Perimeter Fence', also collected in 'Miscellaneous Poems, *c.* 1978-1983' (*PMP*, Box 13, Folder 21).

Some titles indicate where the scene takes place, such as 'Dancers at the Moy', 'Clonfeacle', 'At Master McGrath's Grave', 'Paris', 'A Journey to Cracow', 'A Hare at Aldergrove', and the seven-sonnet sequence 'Armageddon, Armageddon' that concludes the volume *Mules*. This title not only refers to the cataclysmic war that will mark the end of the world, but is also based on a pun on Muldoon's home county (Armagh), which is central to a number of personal poems analysed in this thesis. For instance, place names in Armagh and the speaker's journeys across County Armagh are important in the treatment of memory in Muldoon's autobiographical poems (Part 3.3). Other titles give useful information on the date or the time of year that surrounds these events:[92] 'Good Friday, 1971. Driving Westward', 'October 1950', 'Palm Sunday', 'Holy Thursday', 'A Christmas in the Fifties', 'Lines for the Quartercentenary of the Voyage of the Halve Maen' (referring to the trip undertaken by Henry Hudson in 1609, giving an approximate date for the writing of the poem), and 'Profumo'. Some of these titles are important, particularly 'Profumo', analysed in mother-and-son poems (Part 2.2), because they provide information on the speaker's age: although no precise date is given in the title or in the poem, the Profumo political scandal took place in 1963, indicating that the speaker was eleven or twelve at the time.[93] Some rare titles offer both an indication of time and place as in 'Three Deer, Mount Rose, August 1995', 'At the Sign of the Black Horse, September 1999', 'Starlings, Broad Street, Trenton, 2003', and 'Bob Dylan at Princeton, November 2000', which is based on an actual concert that took place on 17 November 2000 at the 'Dillon Gym' in Princeton, mentioned in the first line of the poem.

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[92] This is important because, apart from *Kerry Slides* dated to '1986-1995' and two poems collected in *Knowing My Place* (the early 'Belfast' written at Myrtlefield in 1971 and 'Leaving the Island' written at Lough Derg in 1969), Muldoon hardly ever dates his poems. In 'Leaving the Island', the poet explicitely mentions where he was at the time of writing: 'Only that these poems, / / Composed on that island' (15).

[93] This is confirmed by the 'Thirteenth Birthday card' addressed to a school friend (*MB* 8).

In other poems, members of the poet's family, lovers, relatives, and neighbours appear in the title, such as a former lover in 'Elizabeth', the pig killer in 'Ned Skinner', or the poet's parents in 'Ma' and in 'My Father and I and Billy Two Rivers', telling us the story of the Muldoon figure and his father watching '[their] favoured wrestler, the Mohawk Indian' on TV in the 'local barber shop' (*Q* 16). The case of Ned Skinner is particularly important because an interview of Muldoon (belonging to the *epitext*) enables the author to relate this character to an autobiographical referent: 'I have a memory of a pig killer coming to the house we'd lived in before—"Ned Skinner" is based somewhat on that experience. That day certainly we ate our own pigs, or parts of them. There were always various animals lurking around—turkeys, chickens, dogs, cats, hamsters, tortoises' (qtd. in Wilson, James n. pag.). The combination of peritextual and epitextual elements provides key information on the nature of the poems in which Ned Skinner features.[94]

All of these details included in the titles are important because they either provide a context for the poems or help identify the characters in the poems. In fact, since Muldoon rarely dates his poems, the spatial and temporal elements present in some titles *anchor* the poem in a spatio-temporal framework. The reference to relatives and friends in other poems, like dedications, substitute referents for some of the characters who feature in the poems.

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[94] However, it is important to note that the poems that are most autobiographical (particularly elegies) do not include in their title any information as to their personal nature. We could mention, for instance, 'The Stoic', 'The Coney', 'Incantata', 'Yarrow', and 'Turkey Buzzards', among others. Another aspect of the title that one may consider is the presence of the first-person singular. The 'I' does not loom large in Muldoon's titles; yet, as argued by Gasparini, '[t]he inscription of the grammatical "I" on the cover is even more intriguing, maybe because it tends to suppress the distinction between title and text' (*Est-il je?* 67). While Gasparini refers to the title of novels, his comments may also be used in poetry. Unfortunately, few of the poems that include the 'I' are truly autobiographical (apart perhaps from 'My Father and I and Billy Two Rivers'). Interestingly, it is one of Muldoon's critical volumes, *To Ireland, I*, that most prominently features the 'I' in its title. The poet ostensibly places himself at the front of this A to Z list of Irish writers. Yet, the book does not reveal anything autobiographical, it tells us however much about the way the poet reads poetry and the way the reader might try reading his.

These peritextual criteria—prefaces, dedications, and titles—enable the reader to assess the nature of some of Muldoon's works (poems and collections), because these elements surrounding the poems often confirm the *personal* dimension of Muldoon's 'frequent, apparently autobiographical poems' (Brearton, 'For Father Read Mother' 48). Furthermore, as seen in the analysis of editorial blurbs and dedications, these peritextual elements indicate that Muldoon's collections have been more openly autobiographical since the publication of *The Annals of Chile*: 'autobiography has become a more prominent or explicit connective tissue in the "American" Muldoon' (Longley, Edna, *Poetry and Posterity* 255). The peritext is, therefore, as important as the theories highlighted in Part 1.2 for the analysis of the autobiographical elements in Muldoon's poetry in the next chapter.

Chapter Two examines the main evolutions across the poet's *œuvre* in relation to his autobiographical writing and argues that there is a constant tension between autobiography and poetry or, as Hancock puts it, between 'two masters': 'the intrinsically serendipitous processes of poetry' and 'the less tractable claims of the emotive material of life' ('Dining Out with Paul Muldoon' 99). This chapter argues that what might be seen by some critics as a lack of feeling on the part of the poet may, in fact, disguise a real emotional core: the poet's 'adroitness and ingenuity in the use of language are not deployed at the cost of feeling' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 16).

CHAPTER TWO: Poetry and Autobiography

The Problematic Divisions of The Self

In Armagh or Tyrone
I fell between two stones.

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

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
in 1951
I fell between two stones
that raised me as their own.

('The Outlier' *HL* 47)

If realized, poetry does help us make sense of the key moments in our lives. People realize that when a major moment occurs, a birth, a death, a marriage, they realize that poetry might have something to say to that moment. They know that poetry might be a way of making sense of what is happening. They just have no idea of what to reach for.

(Muldoon, qtd. in Dent n. pag.)

One of the most striking aspects of Paul Muldoon's work is his ability to write autobiography as poetic form. He represents elements of his own autobiography—childhood, family life, the farm, marriage, Northern Ireland—not simply as thematic preoccupations but as stylistic principles, pressures on the style, form and genre of his poetry. This transformation of personal narrative into poetic form may be one reason why the autobiographical drive behind Muldoon's work has not been fully recognised, for this is as far as possible from confessional verse.

(Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 61)

2.1. Introduction

As highlighted by Wills in her insightful monograph on Muldoon, 'the autobiographical drive behind Muldoon's work has not been fully recognised'.[95] This second chapter therefore examines how this autobiographical drive affects the representation of the self. For this purpose, this close analysis is divided into three parts—family poems, failed romance poems, and elegies—into which elements of the critical framework established in Chapter One are woven (in particular, the section 'Autobiography and Poetry' in Part 1.2).

This chapter explores the development of the first-person voice in these three different forms of verse. Part 2.2 places the emphasis on poems in which the speaker is trying to pin down his own *identity*: the poems discussed are about father-and-son and mother-and-son relationships. Part 2.3 focuses on *fragmentation* and charts the development of the first-person voice in failed romance poems. Finally, Part 2.4 deals with the *instability* of identities and of the lyric 'I' in the elegiac form, focusing on 'Incantata' and 'Yarrow'. All three parts illustrate the extent to which the 'I' is fragmented in Muldoon's autobiographical poems.

Since Laura Marcus argues that '[t]he pronouns of identity ("I", "you", "he/she") frequently appear in autobiographical texts as strategies for articulating or engaging the tension between unity and division' (194), this chapter does not simply examine Muldoon's use of the first-person singular, but it also examines the poet's *multiple-subject positionings*.[96] The use and positioning of various

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[95] I am referring here to one of the epigraphs to this chapter.

[96] Discussing Barthes's *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, Linda Anderson argues that '[t]he text's most salient break with tradition is achieved through discarding the first-person singular and substituting instead *multiple-subject positionings*: "he", "R. B.", "you" and "I" exchange places almost arbitrarily in an attempt to reinforce the effect of distance between the writer and the written text' (66, my emphasis). Chapter Two shows that Muldoon also resorts to multiple-

personal pronouns in these poems contribute to the instability of the lyric 'I'. Another observation that arises in all three parts is that autobiographical poetry creates a distance between the lyric 'I' and the empirical 'I'. This chapter therefore illustrates the main argument advanced in *L'irressemblance: Poésie et autobiographie*, namely that autobiographical poetry exemplifies the tensions between speaker and author.[97]

This chapter is divided into these three parts—family, failed relationships, elegies—because they are bound together by the common theme of loss or absence. While the experience of loss is most obvious in elegies that mourn the death of a family member or friend, the notion of loss or absence is also central to poems based on distant memories of the poet's parents or depicting the absence of a former lover through a break-up. What is at stake in all of these poems about loss is the instability of the autobiographical self—the 'doubling' of the first-person voice or the multiple 'identity slippages' (Batten, 'He Could Barely Tell One from the Other' 199)—that comes to the fore through the conscious (and unconscious) use of poetic language. Before turning to a close-reading analysis of these poems, this introduction offers a brief account of the relationship between the experience of loss (or absence) and the instability of the autobiographical self in order to anticipate my local readings of Muldoon's personal poems, particularly the elegies 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata' (Part 2.4).

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subject positionings: 'I', 'he', 'we', and 'P' (in 'Thrush'), for instance. Similarly, Sermet uses the phrase '*énallage de personne*' to refer to this device that consists in using personal pronouns such as 'you' or 's/he' instead of 'I' (91–92).

[97] The reason why this chapter foregrounds the analysis of pronouns and addresses is due to the fact that a detailed analysis of Muldoon's multiple-subject positionings is crucial in order to understand the complexities of the lyric 'I'. Although this thesis favours an analysis of pronouns, there are a few sections that emphasise the ambiguous use of tense as a 'pluralising' grammatical technique that blurs the autobiographical nature of the poems. See, for instance, the analysis of alternative presents and the overlaying of past and present in the extended reading of 'Yarrow' (Chapter Three).

In *The English Elegy*, Peter Sacks begins his preface with a reference to Wordsworth's insistence on the importance of the experience of loss in poetry: 'Perhaps the most striking aspect of Wordsworth's account of a poet was his insistence on the poet's "disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present". Wordsworth knew that the poetic imagination operates more powerfully within the spaces of absence or dislocation' (xi).[98] Sacks proposes to 'reexamine the connections between language and the pathos of human consciousness' (xii) and argues that the elegiac mode 'gives us the chance to view man in tension with, rather than inertly constituted by, the language that so conditions him' (xiii).[99] He further argues that 'this relationship between the language of elegy and the experience of loss' is 'an event or action: rather than finding absence or loss to be somehow already "there" in the language, [he is] exploring how an elegist's language emerges from, and reacts upon, an originating sense of loss' (1). It is in the experience of loss that language comes to the fore and *imposes* itself on the elegist. In *The New Black*, Darian Leader writes that words, 'rather than being chosen by the writer, *choose them*': 'They have the quality of forcing themselves on the mourner, as if words were the one barrier separating them from an abyss and so arrive without warning, bypassing the cognitive mechanisms we might suppose govern our usual uses of language' (93).[100] Muldoon himself acknowledges that during the writing process the poetic

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[98] Sacks is here referring to Wordsworth's *Poetical Works*, 737.

[99] Sacks reproaches 'several current critical approaches' for tending to 'slight the dialectical relationship between language and the grieving mind' (xii). He adds: 'Most studies of the elegy tend to describe rather than interpret the genre's conventions. In this introductory chapter, I attempt such an interpretation, asking how the traditional forms and figures of elegy relate to the experience of loss and the search for consolation' (1).

[100] Leader gives the example of Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*, in which the author 'chronicles her reactions to the death of her husband': 'Beyond the elegance of the composition and the grace of her style, the book documents a process not just of inner feelings but of the creation of words. It is not just the story of her husband's death but of her search for words to circumscribe it. The book opens with four italicized lines: "*Life changes fast. / Life changes in the instant. / You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends. / The question of self-pity*". Although each of these lines refers to something concrete and is expanded in the book itself, they

language is partly unconscious, in so far as, '[o]n a good day', poems are 'writing themselves': 'I know it sounds a bit corny, but it goes back to that thing we were talking about with the unconscious' (qtd. in Whitwham n. pag.). Furthermore, it is this inner tension between elegist and language that accounts for the *instability* of the self.

In fact, towards the end of his introductory chapter, Sacks stresses the 'division between or within mourning voices' and explains that 'even in elegies that call themselves "monodies", such as [Milton's] "Lycidas", the voice of the elegist seems to work through several moments of extreme divisiveness or multiplicity' (34-35). As argued in my opening chapter, Nerval's poems expressing loss or bereavement are emblematic of this 'extreme divisiveness' (*je suis l'autre*). In *Black Sun*, Julia Kristeva provides an illuminating study of the melancholic[101] 'I' in 'El Desdichado' and stresses the 'dramatic doubling' (168) and 'fragmented identity' (171) of the Nervalian persona: 'there is a place for the "I" only in play, in theater, behind the masks of possible identities, which are as extravagant, prestigious, mythical, epic, historical, and esoteric as they are incredible' (145).[102] Kristeva also analyses the speaker's identification with real or mythological figures in order to account for the *scattering* of the first-person voice: 'if the "persons" that have been named belong to the same world of love

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return again and again at different moments in the text, as if the words were somehow both units of meaning and simply markers for a point of real, unsymbolizable absence. The reader understands that they are not only words with meaning but *words as such*, material elements, things that don't express any sense, rather like nursery rhymes repeated again and again. The fact that they imposed themselves on Didion, rather than being carefully chosen, reinforces this material, brute function of human language. And we can find this creationist emergence of words at many other moments of loss and tragedy' (91-92). Leader also gives the example of American journalist Vincent Sheean's reaction to the death of Mahatma Gandhi: '[words] would impose themselves on Sheean with utter clarity although he had made no effort to summon them up [...]. This strange efflorescence of words is perhaps an attempt to name what is most real, the hole that has opened up in that person's life' (92). This floral metaphor ('efflorescence of words') brings to mind the image of the yarrow plant in Muldoon's elegy for his mother, discussed later in this chapter.

[101] For more information on the meaning of the terms 'melancholia' and 'mourning', see Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2008).

[102] Kristeva also focuses on the second-person voice in 'El Desdichado' (152).

and loss, they suggest—through the poet's identification with them—a dispersal of the "I", loving as well as poetic, among a constellation of elusive identities' (157). The critic concludes that because of these multiple masks, we are required 'to view *doubling* as the central image of Nerval's imagination' (166). The French poet is far from being the only writer whose poetic persona is unstable, even multiple, in the experience of loss. In *Poetry of Mourning*, Jahan Ramazani offers a very insightful analysis of the *duality* and *multiplicity* of the elegist's self in several contemporary elegiac works. He refers, in particular, to the split persona of Sylvia Plath, whose 'I' is both 'mourner and mourned, consumer and consumed' in her self-elegies (283). Other examples include the 'self-division characteristic of melancholic mourning' in Anne Sexton's elegies for her mother (303),[103] the 'splitting of identity' in Langston Hughes's poem 'Misery' (Ramazani 150),[104] Hughes's 'various blues personae' in his first collection *The Weary Blues* (148), the Heaneyesque speaker's 'multiplicity of positions' in 'Punishment' (342),[105] and John Berryman's 'self-partition' in his elegies for his father in *The Dream Songs*:

> [In Song 143] [t]he poet can best express his grief by recasting himself as *other*, in particular as racial other [...]. Dividing himself into an older singing 'I' and the 'little' suffering 'you', Berryman tries to ensure his distance from the traumatized child. But pronominal instability erodes this self-partition, as the mourner shifts from 'you' to 'we', from 'you' to 'us', then finally to 'My', 'me', 'my', 'I', 'I', 'I', 'I', and 'I'. (244)

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[103] The critic is here quoting Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976), 247.

[104] In this poem, the female speaker 'shifts from "ma", "me", and "I" to "A good woman", a "Black gal like me", and "her"' (150).

[105] 'As in "Bog Queen", Heaney identifies with the dead victim [...]. But this statement of identification turns, at a second glance, into a statement of victimization: like her executioners, the poet holds the woman's halter and leads her to death, imaginatively recapitulating her initial sacrifice. Nor is he only victim or executioner; he is also a spectator. [...] Finally, the poet also plays the part of adulterer' (342).

This interchangeability and fragmented nature of personal pronouns is central to this chapter, particularly the use of the 'I' or the 'he' in mother-and-son poems, the relationship between the 'I' and the 'you' in failed romance poems and 'Incantata', the doubling of the lyric 'I' in 'Yarrow', and the distance established between the lyric 'I' and the empirical 'I' in all three parts.[106]

The mourner 'experiences a disorder of memory (or time) that disorients the very boundaries of the self (or space)', as argued by Guinn Batten in relation to 'Muldoon's poetry of mourning' ('He Could Barely Tell One from the Other' 187). While Chapter Three focuses on the notion of memory, this chapter illustrates this brief theoretical framework on the poetry of loss, by exploring this *disorientation* of 'the very boundaries of the self' in Muldoon's most autobiographical poems.

2.2. Family Poems

In his definition of the term 'autobiography', Lejeune explains that the narrative focuses on 'the development of [the author's] personality' (*Le Pacte* 14). For this reason, Part 2.2 focuses on poems that depict the young speaker's efforts to come to terms with his identity. This part is divided into two sections: father-and-son poems and mother-and-son poems. They both emphasise the tensions between poetry and autobiography and illustrate the instability of the lyric 'I': father-and-son poems highlight the speaker's difficulty in naming himself in the poem (the speaker is not nominally identified with the poet, as in Lejeune's autobiographical

[106] The distance between the lyric 'I' and the empirical 'I' is further explored throughout this thesis.

pact), while mother-and-son poems show that the use of personal pronouns creates a distance between the lyric 'I' and the empirical 'I'.

Embracing One's Name in Father-and-Son Poems

In his numerous volumes on autobiography, Lejeune clearly states that the nominal identity between author, speaker, and protagonist is at the core of autobiographical writing (Genette's *protocole nominal*). He argues that it is through the proper name that a person's speech exists even before s/he refers to him- or herself in the first-person voice (*Le Pacte* 22).[107] This first section first underlines the poet's difficulties in inscribing his name in *poetry*, before turning to a close analysis of some father-and-son poems, in which the young speaker struggles to overcome his father's nominal heritage. This difficulty in writing under one's name characterises Muldoon's first writing period, which extends from his earliest poems to 1987, date of the publication of *Meeting the British* and of Patrick Muldoon's death.

[107] The original reads: 'C'est dans le *nom propre*, que personne et discours s'articulent avant même de s'articuler dans la première personne'.

*

> The back row of the class of '61.
> Internal exiles at thirteen or fourteen.
>
> Most couldn't read, though Mungo Park
> Could write his name. He'd made his mark
>
> [...]
>
> To chart his progress, bench by embellished bench,
> Till he petered out next to Lefty Lynch
> ('The Geography Lesson' *WBL* 10)

Lejeune has consistently stressed the importance of the author's name, whether it appears on the cover of the book and/or within the text. In his study of the act of articulating one's self via a proper noun, the critic distinguishes between autobiographical texts, in which the name of the narrator-character is the same as that of the author on the cover of the book; and fictional texts, particularly autobiographical novels, in which the name of the narrator-character is different from that of the author and is, as a result, fictional. In fact, Lejeune argues that in an *autobiographical* text, the author has to *embrace his or her name*, and therefore, s/he cannot use a fictional name: '[although t]he forms that can take the autobiographical pact are very diverse [...] they all show the intention to honour one's *signature*. The reader may cavil about resemblance, but never about identity. We know how much we hold on to our name' (*Le Pacte* 26).[108] Lejeune argues that the presence of the author's proper name (family name or first name) in his or her work is a clear sign of the alignment between author and speaker. Moreover, when the critic broadly uses the term 'autobiography', he includes all forms of personal writing (diary, self-portrait, essay, *etc.*), but he does not deal with the particular case of autobiographical *poetry*. If we think of William

[108] The original reads: 'Les formes du pacte autobiographique sont très diverses: mais, toutes, elles manifestent l'intention d'honorer sa *signature*. Le lecteur pourra chicaner sur la ressemblance, mais jamais sur l'identité. On sait trop combien chacun tient à son nom'.

Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, there is no such naming of the author within the text, and yet, this epic poem is considered by many the leading autobiographical poem written in English. Before turning to father-and-son poems, the next analysis explores the intricacies of inscribing one's name in some of Muldoon's classroom poems.[109]

Lejeune uses the term 'signature' to refer to the proper noun. While the signature refers to the name of the author as it appears on the cover of the book and within the text, this term also has more abstract implications, as 'honouring one's signature' equals asserting one's identity. Although Muldoon's first and family names appear on the cover of his books, what his poems highlight is the ability (or inability) to *write* one's name, and, therefore, to assert one's identity. In the following classroom poems, the ability to write one's name in poetry is always associated with physical pain. This pattern is not restricted to early collections and is characteristic of most of Muldoon's classroom poems from *Why Brownlee Left* ('Anseo') to *Hay* ('The Point'). While in 'Anseo' (meaning 'here' or 'present'), the rebellious Joseph Mary Plunkett Ward is described as having engraved his initials on the stick with which the master beats him (*WBL* 20); in 'The Point', one of the schoolmates 'rammed his pencil' in the speaker's thigh:

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[109] Lejeune later refines this statement and argues that 'all questions of fidelity (the problem of "resemblance") depend ultimately on the question of *authenticity* (the problem of identity), that expresses itself by the proper noun' (*Le Pacte* 26). He therefore establishes a difference of degree between 'resemblance' and 'identity' drawing a comparison between identity, authenticity, and proper noun. While 'identity' equals authenticity, 'resemblance' simply refers to a mere likeness. In French, one would use the phrase '*un air de resemblance*' to refer to a similarity between two persons. Lejeune argues that in fictional works, in which the identity of the author is not asserted through the name, the reader looks for resemblances; in contrast, in autobiographical works, in which the author's identity is asserted, the reader looks for differences. Although there may be differences between author, narrator, and protagonist, the reader cannot question the narrator-character's identity if it is asserted in the text through the 'identity of the name (author-narrator-character)': 'The autobiographical pact is the affirmation in the text of this identity referring back ultimately to the *name* of the author on the cover' (26). Originally: 'C'est dire que toutes les questions de *fidélité* (problème de la "ressemblance") dépendent en dernier ressort de la question de *l'authenticité* (problème de l'identité), qui elle-même s'exprime autour du nom propre'.

What everything in me wants to articulate
is this little bit of a scar that dates
from the time O'Clery, my school-room foe,

rammed his pencil into my exposed *thigh*
(not, as the chronicles have it, my calf)
with such force that the point was broken off. (*H* 10)

Although this other fellow pupil is able to master the 'writing tool' (like Ward), the unnamed speaker is left struggling to 'articulate' this memory. In fact, although the emphasis is placed on inscribing one's signature in 'Anseo' and 'The Point', the 'I' remains characteristically anonymous in most of Muldoon's personal poems about the young speaker's identity, particularly in his father-and-son poems.[110]

Overcoming the Father's Heritage

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The speaker's inability to honour his signature in the text may be explained by his difficulty in distancing himself from both the father's name and the language of the constrictive family circle. This section examines how the father's heritage and name prevail over the son's name up until Patrick Muldoon's death in 1987.

In 'Table ronde', Maulpoix uses the metaphor of a garden to explain how the writer should *cultivate* his name in order to learn how to write under his name. According to him, this necessarily entails separating oneself from a constraining symbolic heritage (the maternal body) and erasing the genetic heritage.[111] Maulpoix uses a metaphor in order to explain that the author has to

[110] Gasparini argues that this anonymous speaker may be a fictional strategy enabling the writer to blur the frontier between autobiographical and fictional elements in the text. However, it may also be used when the author employs an 'auto-referential' strategy: the anonymous speaker is not necessarily a *fictional* speaker (*Est-il je?* 40-42). The original reads: 'L'anonymat du protagoniste peut évidemment relever d'une stratégie fictionnelle. [...] Mais ne peut-on pas soutenir, à l'opposé, que l'anonymat du narrateur s'inscrit dans une stratégie autoréférentielle?'.

[111] Maulpoix mentions Claude Royet-Journoud's collection *Le Renversement* (1972), in which the French poet mentions what he calls the 'parental crossing' (*'traversée parentale'*). Unfortunately, the critic does not offer a detailed and concrete explanation of his theory. Furthermore, readers

clean the language and suggests that it is like 'clearing the family garden of its stones' (*épierrage du jardin familial*) ('Table ronde' 29): '[t]o establish oneself at a distance, nurture the surface, cultivate the page like a soil, this is the only way to force one's way through the "body of the mother"—it is about learning how to "write under one's name"'.[112] Although Maulpoix insists on the importance of severing the links with the body of the mother; in Muldoon's poetry, it is the poet's relationship with his *father* that plays a major role in asserting his name. In fact, it is primarily the father's heritage that stands as a barrier to the son's

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might disagree with his position, according to which the 'biological' or 'genetic' can easily be distinguished from the 'symbolic': Maulpoix uses these terms without explaining what differentiates the erasure of the genetic from that of the symbolic. This position would, in fact, be questionable in the case of a Kristevan reading of what she calls 'the semiotic *chora*' in her early work *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974). She explains that the *chora* is characterised by 'drives' (28) and is 'analogous' to the 'vocal and kinetic rhythm' (26). It is 'generated in order to attain to [the] signifying position' (*i.e.* the 'position that represents something for someone' and the 'position that represents someone for another position', 26). According to Kristeva, all signification is composed of the 'semiotic' *and* of the 'symbolic'. This is particularly true in the case of the maternal body: 'The mother's body is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*' (27). Consequently, the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic' are combined, they are *intertwined*. One does not precede the other. Lacanians would also disagree with such an analysis, assuming that we can distinguish the 'genetic' from the 'symbolic' so easily. They would argue that the subject (including the autobiographical subject) does not exist before receiving a symbolic designation—a first and a family name—on or just after birth. Muldoon takes this issue of the name very seriously and often refers to the Latin phrase '*nomen est omen*' in his critical work. See, for instance, his reading of Elizabeth Bowen's short stories 'The Demon Lover' and 'The Tommy Crans' in *To Ireland, I* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 18-25; and his reading of Fernando Pessoa's *Autopsychography* in *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006), 222-244. Similarly, in his poetry, Muldoon makes the name so performative, so 'real', that it seems to determine the individual's life. This is the case with the gravedigger named 'Coulter' in 'Come into My Parlour' and with the poet's first name in 'Incantata': 'you detected in me a tendency to put / on too much artificiality, both as man and poet, / which is why you called me "Polyester" or "Polyurethane"' (*AC* 17). This passage is discussed in Part 5.2. In his interview with John Redmond, Muldoon also explains: 'Well, it sounds a little retrogressive for me to start talking about fate. But geneticists will tell you that there are certain things about our lives and deaths that we can't do anything about. On the one hand we're terrifyingly complicated things, but on the other hand, we're very simple creatures, very basic organisms, and so much about us is pre-programmed and determined. It's something which has always been an element in my poems: you know the notion that Brownlee's end is somehow in his name, *nomen est omen* if you like. Of course if you said *nomen est omen* to people nowadays they'd look at you. [...] On the one hand there's the wonderful chanciness and randomness of things, and on the other hand there's a terrifying predictability' (4).

[112] Maulpoix's garden metaphor is interesting for this research because of Muldoon's habitual use of place as signature (as in the early pamphlet *Knowing My Place*). See, for instance, the analysis of the family farm as a symbolic element of autobiography in 'Yarrow' (Chapter Three). The original passage by Maulpoix reads: 'S'établir à distance, entretenir la surface, travailler le page comme un sol, telle est ici la seule façon de forcer et de traverser "le corps de la mère". Il s'agit d'apprendre à "écrire sous son nom". Mais écrire sous son nom, c'est précisément s'efforcer de se libérer de tout un héritage symbolique qui contraint et qui parasite. C'est violemment s'en prendre à l'enveloppement du corps de la mère tel qu'il retient aussi bien dans une nasse de signes convenus ou imposés [...] le poète littéraliste procède à une espèce d'effacement génétique. Écrire sous son nom c'est écrire dans le neutre, se dépendre du symbolique'.

emancipation and his ability to write under his own name.[113] The author-speaker needs to overcome his father's name in order to assert his own. The speaker's difficulty in overcoming the fatherly 'anxiety of influence' is obvious in most of the father-and-son poems: although Muldoon's father has always been portrayed in a better light than his mother, the father figure is responsible for hindering the son's ability to write under his own name.[114]

There is an evolution in the father-and-son relationship from the early sonnet 'Quoof' (*Q* 1983) to 'The Coney' and 'The Fox', which were both published in the next collection, *Meeting the British* (1987), dedicated to his father's memory.[115] This evolution is most likely due to the fact that, while 'Quoof' was published before the father's death, 'The Coney' and 'The Fox' were published a year *after* his death. In 'Quoof', it is not so much the name of the father that the speaker needs to overcome at this point, but the family language and in particular the family word for a 'hot water bottle': 'quoof'. This family word represents the father's symbolic presence (or, to use Maulpoix's terms, the 'symbolic heritage') that the speaker cannot easily shake off. This poem illustrates how the speaker is entrapped in the constrictive family circle and the 'father's personal history':

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[113] The following analysis of father poems focuses on the speaker's emancipation from his real father (*i.e.* Patrick Muldoon). It does not deal with the speaker's emancipation from the 'English Law of the Father' (*i.e.* the 'coloniser'), nor from the 'Irish Law of the Father' (*i.e.* the 'nationalist'). For a detailed analysis of the multilayered significations of the 'law of the father' in Muldoon's poetry, see Guinn Batten, '"He Could Barely Tell One from the Other": The Borderline Disorders of Paul Muldoon's Poetry', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 95:1 (Winter 1996), 174. Although Muldoon's mother does not play a role in the speaker's difficulty in naming himself in the text, she is often associated with the symbolic, with language (particularly in *The Annals of Chile*), more than Muldoon's father is. Batten elaborates on the importance of Muldoon's mother in her son's linguistic development in 'He Could barely Tell One from the Other': 'it was from his mother the schoolmistress that the poet acquired his fondness for books as an escape from the farm chores he shared with his father' (175); 'whatever her linguistic shortcomings, her status as the local schoolmistress makes the poet's mother his first authority on words—and the first to put those words to authoritarian uses' (177).

[114] This nod in the direction of Harold Bloom also points to the *literary* anxiety of influence. Muldoon is also willing to differentiate himself from writers with whom he has often been compared. On the notion of influence and on the relationship between father figures and Northern Irish writers (including Muldoon), see Edna Longley, '"When Did You Last See Your Father?" Perceptions of the Past in Northern Irish Writing 1965-1985', *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1994), 150-172.

[115] 'The Wishbone', published in *The Wishbone* and in *Meeting the British*, is also about father-and-son relationships.

> [t]he private word *quoof* is a mark of personal authenticity derived from familial tradition. More particularly the lineage goes from father to son, so that the father's personal history infuses the son's identity—gives him his particularity. In this sense, the word is, as Muldoon has said, a shibboleth, a test for inclusion or exclusion from the tribe. Here, however, it is the family which is the exclusive group. The word can be used to enlarge the family circle, or to set boundaries around it. (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 104)[116]

The first stanza of 'Quoof' reads:

> How often have I carried our family word
> for the hot water bottle
> to a strange bed,
> as my father would juggle a red-hot half-brick
> in an old sock
> to his childhood settle.
> I have taken it into so many lovely heads
> or laid it between us like a sword. (*Q* 17)

The quatrains are not separated by a stanzaic break, which emphasises the correspondences and differences that are established within the quatrains *and* between the quatrains. The first and final lines of the opening quatrain echo each other as the 'red-hot half-brick / in an old sock' refers back to the 'family word / for the hot water bottle'. However, 'his childhood settle' has now been replaced by 'a strange bed'. The change from the possessive adjective 'his' to the indefinite article 'a' can be read as indicating the distance taken by the speaker from the private familial sphere and his possible exclusion from it. Even so, despite becoming an outsider to the family circle, the speaker remains caught up in the paternal lineage: while the father demonstrated skills in 'juggling' a red-hot half-

[116] Wills is perhaps referring to Muldoon's article in the 1983 *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, in which the poet explains the origins of the word 'quoof': 'The title-poem was sparked off by what I'd always taken to be a word passed on by my parents, a shibboleth of the kind that occurs in the private language of any family. [...] I wondered a long time about the etymology of this word "quoof". Did it come from Gaelic? From Elizabethan English, like so many of my father's words? According to him, he first heard it from us, his children' ('Paul Muldoon Writes' 118:1).

brick, the verb 'carry' suggests that the son dutifully continues the family tradition, outside the family circle.

Furthermore, this notion of duty and inheritance is echoed in the next quatrain through the hot water bottle's association with the sword: 'I have taken it into so many lovely heads / or laid it between us like a sword'. There is a parallel between the two lovers in the second stanza and the Celtic story of Tristan and Isolde.[117] This legendary story from the early Middle Ages is transposed to the twentieth century and 'Cornwall's verdant strand' (Wager 47) gives way to a 'hotel room in New York City' (*Q* 17). In the original story by Gottfried von Strassburg, Tristan and Isolde are lying next to each other and Tristan places his sword between them.[118] When one of King Mark's huntsmen sees the two lovers separated by the sword, King Mark takes it as a sign of Isolde's fidelity and Tristan's loyalty. In the poem, the speaker may show that he is similarly willing to use the hot water bottle as a symbol of chastity, and a sign of loyalty towards his father.[119] However, unlike the legendary story, the two lovers in the poem remain unnamed: the family word also prevents the speaker from 'entering the language' just like the beast at the end of the poem. The speaker's hand is compared with this unnamed 'shy beast', who 'has yet to enter the language'. Consequently, the speaker has not been *named* yet:

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[117] In 'Yarrow', the mother addresses Morholt, the Irish knight who was betrothed to Isolde and slain by Tristan.

[118] This passage is not reproduced in Richard Wagner's 1859 lyric drama.

[119] There is indeed a strong analogy between the two unidentified lovers in the poem and these Celtic figures. The Breton nobleman and the Irish Princess are uprooted since in Act I they are sailing to Cornwall (Wagner 47). In Muldoon's poem, the speaker (if associated with Muldoon himself) is Irish and the girl is clearly foreign since she could hardly speak English (*Q* 17): they are both similarly 'displaced' in the United States. In addition, just as the word 'quoof' acts as a sesame (a word used as a charm) to obtain admission to the family circle, the sword enables Tristan and Isolde to return to court without being punished for adultery. However, without excluding either reading, there are several levels of significations in this passage, and it should also be noted that instead of representing the son's duty towards his father, the image of the sword may also be read as a phallic symbol of the son's empowerment. According to this other reading, the son is no longer just the heir to his father's heritage: he has severed the links with the previous generation by confidently making the family object *his* (the verb 'carry', unlike 'juggle', shows more adroitness). Nonetheless, despite this empowerment, the speaker remains anonymous. These two readings illustrate the multilayered meanings characterising Muldoon's poetry.

> An hotel room in New York City
> with a girl who spoke hardly any English,
> my hand on her breast
> like the smouldering one-off spoor of the yeti
> or some other shy beast
> that has yet to enter the language. (*Q* 17)

The final lines seem to refer to a pre-Logos world, a world in which the speaker has not yet imprinted his own name.

Wills argues that the son 'must take on the necessary task of mowing the ground before planting' (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 120), an image that echoes Maulpoix's analogy with the garden; however, he is not able to ascertain his name because he has not been able to *clear the family garden*. In fact, in 'The Coney', the son has 'never learned to mow' and is unable to use the father's tools in order to do the task he has been set to do: 'The scythe would dull / so much more quickly in my hands / than his' (*MB* 3).[120] Interestingly, discussing family background in an interview with fellow writer Yusef Komunyakaa, Muldoon makes an astute analogy between the art of poetry and the skill of using tools:

> MULDOON: The root of the word 'poet' is 'maker'—you've made wonderful analogies to your father's work as a carpenter, a man using tools—but that analogy breaks down for me. It's as if each time one has to make the tools for the task.
>
> KOMUNYAKAA: Yes. Redefine the tool and test it against possibility, with slightly different adjustments and emotional calibration. (qtd. in Sherman 76)

Although within the scope of this poem the speaker has not managed to 'redefine his own tools', there is at the end of the poem a progressive movement towards

[120] The 'scythe' is, in fact, an emblematic tool of the father figure since in Muldoon's personal documents, among the few pictures of Patrick Muldoon, there is one that perfectly illustrates 'The Coney': Muldoon's father is standing with his scythe in his hands in the middle of what seems to be the family farm (*PMP*, 'Father', Box 44, Folder 28).

individualisation and distantiation from the father figure, which was absent in 'Quoof':

> 'Come in'; this flayed
> coney would parade
> and pirouette like honey on a spoon:
> 'Come on in, Paddy Muldoon'.
> And although I have never learned to swim
> I would willingly have followed him. (*MB* 4)

Unlike 'Quoof', in which the speaker remains trapped in the family tradition, despite his relocation to America; in 'The Coney', he refuses (however unwillingly) to be associated with his father's heritage (cultivating the land) and, more importantly, with his father's first name ('Paddy').[121] The son's emancipation is made even more obvious in the short elegy 'The Fox', which comes later in *Meeting the British*, marking a further evolution in the distantiation between father and son.

In both 'The Coney' and 'The Fox', the father figure is absent from the poem. However, there is an important difference between these elegies: while 'The Coney' narrates an event that happened during the father's final illness, the story in 'The Fox' took place *after* the father's death. In the last lines of the elegy, the ghostly figure of the father's voice is brought back to life in a very emotional instance of *prosopopoeia* (an image defying death) and reassures the son about the noise made by the geese in a neighbour's farm:

> You seem engrossed,
> as if I'd come on you
> painfully writing your name
> with a carpenter's pencil
>
> on the lid
> of a mushroom-box.

[121] 'Paddy' is Patrick's nickname.

You're saying, *Go back to bed.*
It's only yon dog-fox. (*MB* 24)[122]

The father is imagined as if 'writing his name on a box of mushrooms (that he'd picked)' (Holdridge, *The Poetry of Paul Muldoon* 89). In fact, the adverb 'painfully' could hint at his father's difficulties with (both reading and) writing.[123] Even if it is the father, and not the speaker, who is writing (or carving) his own name, this elegy marks an evolution regarding the speaker's emancipation from the father figure because this is the first poem narrating an event that took place after the father's *burial*. This is particularly important because the parents' burial 'lies behind every act of acquiring words': 'it is hardly surprising that these parents will haunt especially the language of dreams, slips of the tongue, and poetry' (Batten, 'He Could Barely Tell One from the Other' 173). In 'The Fox', although the father's image and voice still 'haunt' the speaker, the son finally manages to individualise himself, by acquiring these words that will enable him to anchor his own name in some of the poems published after *Meeting the British*.[124]

Lejeune argues that, although '[t]he first name given and accepted is the father's name', it is 'above all the *first* name that individuates you' (*Le Pacte* 34, my emphasis).[125] The critic makes a distinction between the *family* name that binds an individual to the father and the individual's *first* name that individuates

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[122] This image of the father coming from the realm of the dead to reassure his son is curiously similar to the one in 'Nettle Soup': 'My father and his father / Were born in what is now a byre. / [...] They always wave me back to bed / When something is wrong. / / For only they can have the inside story. / I watch them from behind the hedge. / Each with a foot in the grave, / Another on the nettled edge' (*PMP*, '"Nettle Soup", single typescript', Box 10, Folder 2).

[123] Muldoon explains that his father 'received no secondary education. He could read and write only with difficulty, needing help to manage official documents and forms' ('Notes for *Chez Moy*' n. pag.). This pain associated with *carving* one's name draws a striking parallel between the father in 'The Fox' and the classroom figures analysed previously.

[124] Although Muldoon's first and family names do not appear in 'The Outlier', this later poem, published in *Horse Latitudes*, confirms this distantiation taken by the poet from the family circle. While the Muldoon figure seems to have been born in a confining environment—stuck, as it were, 'between two stones' (mother and father)—this constrictive family circle is offset by the fact that an 'outlier' is a 'portion or mass of a geological formation lying *in situ* at a distance from the main body to which it originally belonged' ('Outlier').

[125] In French: 'Le nom premier reçu et assumé qui est le nom du père, et surtout le prénom qui vous en distingue, sont sans doute des données capitales de l'histoire du *moi*'.

him or her.[126] Interestingly, the first poem in which Muldoon's first name appears is 'Capercaillies', published in the collection that came out after *Meeting the British*, *Madoc: A Mystery*: 'Paul? Was it you put the *pol* in polygamy / or was it somebody else?' (6).

This analysis of Muldoon's difficulty in naming himself has shown that, while the *protocole nominal* is central to Lejeune's autobiographical pact, this nominal identity is not often present in autobiographical poetry, particularly in Muldoon's personal poems. Furthermore, this struggle is associated with the difficulty in overcoming the father's nominal heritage in collections published before Patrick Muldoon's death. In fact, the publication of *Meeting the British* and Muldoon's departure for America the same year mark a turning point in his writing career in so far as the speaker is now able to individualise himself from his father and embrace his own name.

In light of this analysis of Muldoon's father-and-son poems, there is another interesting argument to be made about the relationship between naming and labour and the shift from agricultural to 'post-production' forms of labour. In fact, the son's progressive emancipation from the father figure is mirrored by a shift from the father's agricultural labour (in early poems) to the son's authorial work (in later poems). Early poems depicting the father and son relationship are characterised by the description of the father's farm work and by the son's inability to inscribe his signature in the poem. In other words, the father's emblematic agricultural tools (*e.g.* the scythe) seem to prevent the son from naming himself in the poem through his own authorial tools (*e.g.* the pen). In contrast, in later poems written after the father's death, the son's signature in the poem highlights both his ability to assert himself in the poem and his power to

[126] Lejeune does not comment on situations where father and son share the same first name.

overcome the father's influence. The father's tools have given way to the son's own tools. This authorial signature also signals the son's position as the writer of the poem.[127]

Nonetheless, most of Muldoon's personal poems rest on the unstable use of the 'I': the speaker mostly articulates himself in the first-person singular, yet this does not guarantee the wholeness of the self. The Muldoonian 'I' is particularly split or '*dédoublé*' (to use the terms of Chapter One) in collections written after *Meeting the British*, from 'The Key' (*Madoc: A Mystery*, 1990), to 'Twice' (*The Annals of Chile*, 1994) and 'Between Takes' (*Hay*, 1998).[128] For instance, the 'I' no longer refers to a stable referent but to a split self, as when the intoxicated speaker in 'Cider' is left 'in two minds' at the end of the poem (*M* 45).[129] The doubling of the lyric 'I' is discussed in my analysis of 'Yarrow' (Part 2.4).

This split nature of the 'I' is particularly visible in other poems describing the 'development of [the author's] personality': mother-and-son poems. The following analysis explores poems about the relationship between the young Muldoon and his mother in collections published after *Meeting the British*, and in which the use of various personal pronouns creates a distance between mother and son, and between author and speaker.

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[127] The author's ability to name himself in the poem is often characterised by his intrusion in the text *in propria persona* and by the encoding of his name in the text (see authorial intrusions in Chapter Five, Part 5.2).

[128] Nicholas Jenkins effectively points to the unstable nature of the 'I' in his review of *Hay*: '*Hay* is an amazing formal and thematic representation of the interchanges between self and other that go into making an identity, and of the ways in which the "I" in a lyric poem is a mysteriously provisional quantity, always starting to collapse just as it seems to have solidified' (9). The critic also comments that there is in this volume a 'plethora of lookalikes, stand-ins, doubles, seconds, and, even Siamese twins that multiply as the book proceeds' (10). This plethora of doubles is at the core of my analysis of Muldoon's *personnages d'auteur* in the final chapter (Part 5.2).

[129] This duality is also at the core of 'Between Takes' ('I was standing in for myself, my own stunt double, / in a scene where I was meant to do a double', *H* 28) and 'Twice', which is '[a] poem about doubled, traded, fluctuating identities', depicting 'copies without originals, dual and multiple chains of shifting selves whose narratives fail to reach clear ends' (Burt, 'Thirteen or Fourteen' 21). There is an interesting parallel between the pluralisation of the self in modern poetry (Rabaté, 'Poésie et autobiographie' 44, 46) and Muldoon's 'multiple chains of shifting selves' in 'Twice'.

'I himself': 'He' Instead of 'I' in Mother-and-Son Poems[130]

The use of personal pronouns in mother-and-son poems is central to understanding the instability of the lyric 'I': Muldoon's multiple-subject positionings ('I', 'he', and 'she') highlight the difficult relationship between Muldoon and his mother, on the one hand, and the distance Muldoon creates between the lyric 'I' (his younger poetic self) and the empirical 'I' (himself, the poet), on the other. This analysis of mother-and-son poems argues that, by establishing a distance between speaker and author, the use of the 's/he' instead of the 'I' accentuates the instability of the lyric 'I', which is characteristic of Muldoon's personal poems.[131]

This analysis of the distance that is created between the author and his former self focuses on four poems: 'Brazil', 'Profumo', 'Cheesecake', and 'The Mist-Net'. In these mother poems, Muldoon hovers between several multiple-subject positionings, referring to himself in the first-person singular (as in 'Brazil' and 'Profumo') and in the third-person singular (as in 'Cheesecake' and 'The Mist-Net'). Hubier argues, for instance, that the use of the third-person singular (when the reader expected the first-person singular) is a means of 'establishing a distance between the subject and the object of the narration, between the speaker and the character that s/he has been' (47).[132] This is particularly the case in poems dealing with the complexity of Muldoon's relationship with his mother. In fact, while the speaker seems to refer to Muldoon in all four poems, the author

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[130] I borrow the first half of this title from a mistake overlooked by the poet in his typescript for 'Notes for *Chez Moy*': 'Though my student days coincided with a period of extreme political unrest in Northern Ireland, I himself never took any direct part in political activity' (n. pag.).

[131] The use of the 'you' is explored in the second and third sections of this chapter, respectively on failed romance poems and elegies.

[132] Originally: 'l'utilisation de la troisième personne dans un récit où nos habitudes de lecture nous font attendre la première est un moyen d'instaurer une distance entre le sujet et l'objet de la narration, entre le narrateur et le personnage que ce dernier a été'.

alternates between distance and proximity with his persona in order to modulate the autobiographical nature of these poems.

Unlike father-and-son poems, in which there is a clear progression towards individualisation; in mother-and-son poems, there is a much more problematic relation between mother and son. In the poems dealing with Patrick Muldoon, the son progressively distances himself from the father figure. In the poems discussed here, the difficult relationship with the mother is particularly visible through the entanglement in the use of pronouns. This is the case *within* the 1987 collection *Meeting the British* ('Profumo' and 'The Mist-Net') and *across* Muldoon's work: from *Mules* ('Cheesecake') to *The Annals of Chile* ('Brazil'). However, just as it did with the father poems, *Meeting the British* seems to hold a central place. 'Profumo' and 'the Mist-Net' both contrast each other and interact with one another, establishing this volume as the corner-stone of family poems.

Epitextual documents on the strained relationship Muldoon had with his mother may inform our reading of these poems. In an interview, Muldoon comments on his mother's personality: 'she was a hard task master and she was a tough woman, there was a certain amount of beating [...] as I think there was in many houses in that era [...]. I think she was affectionate behind it all [...]. I sometimes wonder if in the poems I haven't demonised her a little bit' (qtd. in O'Callaghan n. pag.). In fact, in all four poems, the mother appears as a coercive figure embroiled in tensions with her son. The first line of 'Profumo' ('My mother had slapped a month-long news embargo', *MB* 8) is echoed by that of the later poem 'Brazil' ('When my mother snapped open the flimsy parasol', *AC* 6). Not only is the possessive pronoun before the word 'mother' in the first-person singular, but the near homonyms 'slap' and 'snap' echo each other and hint at her strict attitude. On the other hand, in 'Cheesecake' and 'The Mist-Net', she is

respectively referred to as 'The mother' (*M* 20) and 'his mother' (*MB* 10), with the determinant 'the' and the third-person possessive 'his' creating more distance between author and speaker. However, although 'Brazil'/'Profumo' and 'Cheesecake'/'The Mist-Net' could create pairs that echo each other, there are resonances across all four poems.

'Profumo' and 'The Mist-Net' were both published in *Meeting the British*, in which they stand only one poem apart, highlighting the contrast between them. In 'Profumo', the mother is referred to as 'My mother' and features at the very beginning of the poem; in contrast, in 'The Mist-Net', 'his mother' is delayed until the last couplet. However, although the different use of possessive pronouns marks a clear contrast between these two almost adjacent poems, they both end on a direct address from the mother to her son: 'Profumo' ends on one of the mother's typically harsh criticisms and 'The Mist-Net' ends on her dying words. The use of the 'he' in 'The Mist-Net' may therefore indicate that the distance taken by the author alleviates this painful memory of his mother's final words: the use of the third-person singular creates a greater distance between the speaker and his mother's death. It is as if it would have been too difficult to articulate this memory through the first-person voice.[133]

If one compares 'Cheesecake' to 'Profumo', the contrast lies mainly in the two first words: 'The mother' ('Cheesecake', *M* 20) and 'My mother' ('Profumo', *MB* 8). Their positioning at the beginning of these poems makes this disparity all the more striking: the impersonal and distant 'the' has become the more intimate

[133] 'The Mist-Net' might be read as a rewriting of Thomas Hardy's 'The Voice', which starts with the line: 'Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me' (Hardy 58). In fact, although 'The Mist-Net' is written in the third-person voice while 'The Voice' is written in the first-person voice, both poems are about the loss of a woman—a mother or a lover—and end with this incorporeal woman calling from afar. In addition, the present tense in 'The Voice' and in the final italicised line of 'The Mist-Net' is performative so that the deceased and elusive female figure seems to be part of the immediate present of the speaker. As argued by Matthew Campbell, in Muldoon's elegies as in 'the elegies of Thomas Hardy, ghosts continue to haunt subsequent poems' ('Muldoon's Remains' 178). In fact, the mother's voice in 'The Mist-Net' comes back to haunt the poet in later poems such as 'Yarrow'.

'my'. Just as in the pair 'Profumo'/'The Mist-Net', the use of the third-person singular 'he' and the definite article 'the' in 'Cheesecake' suggests that the author tries to distance himself from the speaker. In this poem, there is no nominal indication that enables the reader to identify the third-person singular who, we might assume, refers to the young Muldoon: 'The name she had given her son / Was never this name in such ugly type' (*M* 20). The determiner 'this' (as opposed to 'that') is used whenever we refer to a person or a thing that has already been mentioned or when we point to something or someone that is near us: this latter use anchors the narrative in the sphere of the present. It is as if we were in the company of the mother. However, despite the use of the determiner 'this', the reader is never given a hint as to the actual name of the son, as if the author were unwilling to disclose any personal information. The poet establishes a greater distance between speaker, author, and character. Even the photographs that are contained in the 'plain brown envelope' cannot give any information on the identity of the speaker:

> When she opened the envelope
> There was a sheaf
> Of photographs in cellophane.
> Should he not somehow
> Have been the one confused,
> Did she not even now hold the proof? (*M* 20)

It remains a mystery whether these photographs portray the 'he' or another individual, although we might assume that these embarrassing photographs are probably about the 'he' and his lover.[134] While 'confused' could refer to the fact of being disconcerted or put to shame, the verb 'to confuse' also means 'to mix up in

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[134] An earlier version of this poem indicates that the 'he' has betrayed his mother's love by perhaps secretly loving another woman: 'She could not help being shocked, here was proof / Of how he had gone beyond her love. / He must have kept the plain brown envelope hidden / In the bottom drawer like a secret wife' (*PMP*, '"Cheesecake", multiple typescript drafts with some holograph corrections', Box 9, Folder 7).

the mind, to fail to distinguish, erroneously regard as identical, mistake one for another' ('Confuse'). The emphasis in this poem is, therefore, on the instability of identities (the speaker's unwillingness to identify the 'he' and the reader's inability to identify the speaker). Is the speaker the 'he' or another person altogether?

This confusion regarding identities is not surprising. In fact, 'Cheesecake' is the first poem Muldoon wrote about his mother after her death in 1974. These details seem to suggest the possibility that this distance reflects the necessarily complicated emotional context of that moment. Similarly, in the small elegy 'Ma'—published in *Mules* (only one poem away from 'Cheesecake'), and in which the photograph motif is also present—the Muldoonian persona similarly creates a distance with the past: he does not address his mother directly but refers to her in the third-person singular ('Old photographs would have her bookish' and 'She read aloud'), while the father figure is referred to as '*my* father' (23, my emphasis). This discrepancy highlights once again the different type of relationships Muldoon had with his mother and father. While there is intimacy between speaker and father, a distance is established between speaker and mother: this may be explained by the strained mother-and-son relationship and by the fact that 'Ma' was written soon after her death.

If we now turn to 'The Mist-Net' and 'Brazil', it is clear that these two poems parallel and contrast each other. Although they both feature a coercive mother, the mother asserts her authority in strikingly different ways. In 'Brazil', published in *The Annals of Chile*, the exoticised mother shouts a 'triumphant "*Champi*ŇON"' (6), contrasting strongly with the dying mother in 'The Mist-Net' who murmurs '*You mustn't. You mustn't*' (*MB* 10). While the speaker's use of the possessive 'my' in 'Brazil' creates proximity between speaker and mother, the

fictionalisation of Brigid Regan into an exotic South American mother creates distance between them. In the more delicate poem, 'The Mist-Net', the third-person singular creating this distance is balanced out by the final heart-breaking lines. As a result, the use of the third-person singular does not make 'The Mist-Net' less personal than 'Brazil'. In fact, although Gasparini argues that the 'I' draws the text towards autobiography and the 's/he' draws the text towards fiction (*Est-il je?* 154), it is quite the opposite in the case of these two mother-and-son poems: there seems to be much more emotional involvement in 'The Mist-Net' than in 'Brazil'. Although the speaker uses the first-person singular in 'Brazil', both the mother and the family home have been partly fictionalised. By contrast, in 'The Mist-Net', the tone is much more down to earth and personal, as if the use of the third-person singular paradoxically indicated a sense of propriety rather than distance. It is as if the reader were eavesdropping on the final exchange between mother and son ('*You mustn't. You mustn't*').

According to Gasparini, the more rapid the succession of pronouns ('I', 'he', or 'she'), the more the speaker-hero seems to intermingle the narrating subject and the observed object, becoming at once 'actor and spectator of the same movie', with 'a change of identity, a mutation of the character' (*Est-il je?* 154).[135] The speaker is, therefore, in two different positions in relation to the event narrated, particularly in 'The Mist-Net': the first lines indicate that the speaker is in the position of the spectator, whereas the final line would indicate that he is very much the actor and the recipient of the mother's dying words, as she directly addresses her son with the use of the second-person singular ('*You mustn't. You*

[135] The originals read: 'Plus la succession du "je" et du "il" est rapide, plus le héros-narrateur semble confondre ses deux fonctions. Dédoublant sa conscience en sujet racontant et objet observé, il se projette simultanément dans le présent et dans le passé, à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de lui-même, acteur et spectateur du même film. Telle est la double position, rétrospective et spéculaire'; 'La rupture énonciative est un procédé particulièrement efficace pour indiquer que l'écoulement du temps a provoqué un véritable changement d'identité, une mutation du personnage'.

mustn't'). This analysis has shown that the use of multiple-subject positionings emphasises the uneasy mother-and-son relationship and, on a larger level, indicates that Muldoon creates both intimacy and distance between author, speaker, and protagonist. In fact, Muldoon constantly oscillates between distance and proximity, depending on the emotional context in which the poems are set. Furthermore, while the figure of the father is often described in similar terms (kind, reassuring, and industrious), the portrait Muldoon draws of his mother is much more versatile: she may be described as a harsh mother in one poem ('Profumo') and as an exotic sexualised mother elsewhere in his verse ('Brazil').[136] The reader will have to wait for 'Yarrow' to see Muldoon try to come to terms with his mother's death.[137]

2.3. Failed Romance Poems

> From *New Weather* all the way up to *Hay* Muldoon has written poems that look back critically at his own failed romances—from divorces to difficult dates.
> (Burt, 'Thirteen or Fourteen' 10)

Part 2.3 pursues the examination of the instability of the lyric subject explored in family poems. This analysis of Muldoon's failed romance poems is divided into two sections that illustrate the fragmentation of the 'I', on the one hand, and the disruption of the poetic narrative (mirroring this fragmentation), on the other.

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[136] Although readers could argue that in 'Brazil' the female figure is simply a more generalised maternal image, I argue that this image is a fictionalised portrait of Muldoon's mother partly because of the spatial displacement from Armagh to South America (see Part 4.2).
[137] Part 2.4 focuses on the relationship between mother and son in 'Yarrow', focusing on the use of pronouns and the blurring of identities.

The first section focuses on Muldoon's multiple-subject positionings. Just as pronouns mirror the nature of the relationship between mother and son (Part 2.2), Muldoon's use of various personal pronouns in failed romance poems illustrates the *tensions* between the 'I' and his lover. These tensions are visible in the lack of exchange between the 'I' and the 'you', which is a common feature of all the poems analysed in Part 2.3. More importantly, this *énallage de personne* (Sermet 91-92) highlights the instability of the 'I': in failed romance poems, the lyric 'I' is both *provisional* (identities are unstable) and *pluralised*. This analysis therefore illustrates some of the theories discussed in Chapter One, according to which poetry 'disfigures' and 'pluralises' the representation of the autobiographical subject (Maulpoix, 'Table ronde' 25; Rabaté, 'Poésie et autobiographie' 44, 46).

The second section of Part 2.3 demonstrates that this fragmentation (the couple's break-up and the speaker's instability) is mirrored by the disruption of the poetic pattern. This analysis of the poetic pattern in failed romance poems confirms the fact that autobiographical poetry is often written in broken lines (Maulpoix, 'Table ronde' 25-26).

Multiple-Subject Positioning: The 'You' and the 'We'

> We may never put enough emphasis on the addressee. Everything is there. [...] My intention is my addressee. Nobody else.
> (Hocquard 225, qtd. in Sermet 81)[138]

In *Figures du sujet lyrique* (1996), Sermet uses the French poet's above-quoted comment as a springboard for her piece on the lyric address and argues that

[138] Originally: 'On n'insistera jamais assez sur le destinataire. Tout est là. [...] Mon intention est mon destinataire. Personne d'autre'.

'understanding *to whom* one speaks will perhaps enable us to understand better *who* speaks' (80).[139] This second part focuses on the use of two other pronouns, the 'you' and the 'we', in failed romance poems collected in *Mules* and *Meeting the British*. This analysis of the interaction between the 'I' and the 'you', on the one hand, and between the 'I' and the 'we', on the other, is important because it reveals more information on the lyric 'I', by highlighting the elusive and fragmented nature of the lyric subject. In fact, examining Muldoon's multiple-subject positionings and the speaker-addressee interaction (or lack of interaction) gives more information on the problematic divisions of the 'I', since it is *characteristically* in failed romance poems that the lyric subject is at his most vulnerable and that identities are most contingent and unstable.

The 'I' and the 'You': Fragmentation and Provisionality

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This section analyses both the tensions between the 'I' and the 'you' and the fragmentation of the 'I', which lies at the core of failed romance poems published in *Mules* and *Meeting the British*. This fragmentation is further increased in the 1987 volume, in which identities are provisional because of the interchangeability of pronouns ('I' and 'you').

As seen in Chapter One, *Mules* was dedicated to Muldoon's first wife, Anne-Marie Conway, whom he met at Queen's University and married in 1974. This dedication sheds light on the autobiographical nature of some poems that depict the strains of their relationship (particularly 'Paris'), which later led to the break-up of their marriage in 1977. The fragmentation of the 'I' and the instability of identities in 'Paris' are therefore linked to these deeply personal tensions, but also to the wider context surrounding the publication of the volume: '[*Mules*] was

[139] In French: 'comprendre d'abord à *qui* l'on parle permettra peut-être de mieux saisir *qui* parle'.

published in 1977, and—among other events—responds to [...] the intensifying conflict in Northern Ireland' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 42).

The following analysis illustrates the fact that '[t]he pronouns of identity [here, the 'I' and the 'you'] frequently appear in autobiographical texts as strategies for articulating or engaging the tension between unity and division' (Marcus 194). In fact, although the 'you' in 'Paris' is voluble and even addresses the 'I' (unlike the mute lovers in *New Weather*),[140] the lover's two utterances do not interrupt the flow of verses, illustrating the lack of communication and the tensions between speaker and addressee. The poem builds up on these tensions between the 'I' and the 'you', mirroring the strains of the couple's relationship:

> A last shrimp curls and winces on your plate
> Like an embryo. 'Is that a little overdone?'
> And these country faces at the window
> That were once our own. [...] (*M* 40)

Even the first utterance—which is, actually, a question—remains unanswered. Far from being interrupted, the speaker resumes his description of the restaurant scene with a mere coordinating 'and'. This tension is also visible in the last stanza, because a parallel is drawn between the couple 'trying to piece it together' (like the couple in 'The Avenue', *WBL* 29) and the politicians in Northern Ireland, who are dealing with more public issues: just as the talks of peace are an unending battle, the lovers are also engaged in their own battle involving all the people they

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[140] Although this analysis does not focus on *New Weather* (1973), failed romance poems collected in this early volume form a recurrent pattern, one in which communication is almost impossible between the 'I' and the 'you': the 'you' remains mute and is entirely constructed by the 'I'. In fact, in 'Elizabeth' and 'The Kissing Seat', the 'I' is not so much talking *to* the 'you'—who is unable (or has nothing) to communicate—but *about* the 'you'. The use and the positioning of the first- and second-persons singular illustrate the 'seizure and annexion of the figure of the other [the 'you']', argued by Sermet in her analysis of autobiographical poetry (93). Furthermore, in 'Elizabeth', the fact that the lover is held hostage by her father could also suggest that this poem is about a kind of exchange, such as in a siege or stand-off, in which women are often involved ('assaults', 'trapped', 'captive', 'hostaged', *NW* 32-33). The speaker has staged a siege, albeit one in which the female character's only agency becomes entry into *his* world (as opposed to the father's).

have been, who are now 'strategically deployed'. The author equates the break-up of the amorous partnership with the war-like situation.[141] This tension is further accentuated by the interjection 'Chicken Marengo!' referring to the battle of Marengo, which breaks the narrative momentum of the third stanza and mirrors the couple's lack of harmony.[142]

By drawing a parallel between the domestic and public spheres, the author may also be distancing himself from the speaker. The fragmentation of the couple ('I' and 'you') is therefore coupled with a fragmentation of the 'I' (the lyric 'I' and the empirical 'I'). In fact, the last stanza contrasts clearly with the preceding lines:

> The world's less simple for being travelled,
> Though. In each fresh, neutral place
> Where our differences might have been settled
> There were men sitting down to talk of peace
> Who began with the shape of the table. (*M* 40)

Even though the repetition of 'table' echoes back to the first line of the poem, there is no circular pattern. Instead, there is a progression from the beginning to the end of the poem: while the first three stanzas were unrhymed, the final one stands apart since it follows a regular pattern (*ababc*). The voice is no longer that

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[141] The equation between battle and romance is also at the core of 'The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife': 'I might as well be another guest / at the wedding-feast / of Strongbow and Aoife MacMurrough / as watch you, Mary, / / try to get to grips / with a spider-crab's / crossbow and cuirass' (*MB* 11). The painting by Irish painter Daniel Maclise (1806-1870) infiltrates the scene as the spider-crab is transformed into an armoured animal endowed with both a weapon and a defensive attribute.

[142] Legend has it that Napoleon's chef cooked the Italian dish 'chicken Marengo' after the battle of Marengo on 14 June 1800. This narrow victory 'resulted in the French occupation of Lombardy up to the Mincio River and secured Napoleon's military and civilian authority in Paris' ('Battle of Marengo'). What is interesting is that the interjection 'Chicken Marengo!' is, for the speaker, 'a far cry from the Moy' (*M* 40). This particular example illustrates how autobiography in verse scatters the origins of the 'I' (Maulpoix, 'Table ronde' 25-26), since the speaker associates the Piedmont with Northern Ireland. In a way, however, Marengo and the Moy might not be that much further apart since Muldoon explains that the Moy 'is an area very rich in history and folklore, just as every square mile of Ireland is coming down with history and is burdened by it. The Moy itself was built by a man called James Caulfeild, who was at one stage Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Earl of Charlemont, which is a little sister hamlet to the Moy. This story may be totally apocryphal, but Caulfeild is supposed to have designed it on the principle of an Italian town, Marengo' (qtd. in Haffenden 130). This sense of disorientation and mixing up of origins is also at the core of *Meeting the British*. In his review of the 1987 volume, the late Mick Imlah argued that the whole book revolves around 'abandoned origins' (946).

of the speaker, but the author's voice piercing through the page, since the tone in these last lines is very different from that of the rest of the poem: these words sound as if they were detached from the reality of the restaurant scene and had been written by a more composed, dispassionate speaker. It is as if the author had written this final stanza in retrospect, detaching himself from the bustling persona of the first three stanzas. As a result, 'Paris' exemplifies the fragmentation of the lyric 'I' because there is a gap between the lyric 'I' and the empirical 'I'.

'Sushi', published in *Meeting the British* and written a decade after 'Paris', offers a sort of *déjà-vu* to the earlier restaurant poem, since there is a similar tension between the 'I' and the 'you'. Furthermore, not only is the equation between speaker and author also questioned, but this fragmentation of the 'I' is further increased in the 1987 volume because of the *interchangeability* of pronouns and, consequently, of identities. As in the previous poem, the lover is empowered with speech and even interrupts the speaker's monologue on several occasions. However, the stand-offish and self-absorbed speaker is unwilling to engage in a verbal exchange with his lover. Indeed, even if the lover interrupts the flow of verse three times at regular intervals (1st, 17th-18th, and 33rd lines), her utterances become less and less audible.[143] Although two voices coexist—that of the lover and that of the speaker—there is, paradoxically, a lack of communication, since the interruptions of the dining partner become less substantial and do not even produce a rupture in the poem. The lover's verbal intrusions become less and less significant as they are drowned in this long single

[143] The poem starts with a line uttered by the lover: 'Why do we waste so much time in arguing?' (*MB* 34). Her question, however, is disregarded by the speaker and remains unanswered. A further sixteen lines down, the lover is interrupted, since the three full stops indicate that the speaker is not even listening to the rest of what she has to say: 'It's as if you've some kind of death-wish. / You won't even talk...' (34). Finally, her voice is made less and less audible when a further fifteen lines later the lover capitulates and her utterance 'is reduced to a mere parenthesis' (Hancock, 'Dining Out with Paul Muldoon' 92): '("I might just as well be eating alone".)' (*MB* 35).

stanza, in which the lines seem to flow into one another following an *aabb* pattern, whose harmony conceals the deeper issues faced by the couple.

Moreover, unlike 'Paris', in which the 'you' is clearly addressed to the lover and the 'I' refers to the speaker; in 'Sushi', the first- and second-persons singular are interchangeable and identities are, as a result, provisional. This provisionality illustrates the fact that, while autobiography tends to centre the subject, poetry scatters and disfigures the lyric 'I': the autobiographical poem does not offer an 'identity card', but an 'alterity card' (Maulpoix, 'Table ronde' 24-25). In other words, the 'I' is an ever-changing 'other' to him- or herself because the speaker's identity keeps shifting between the 'I' and the 'you'. In fact, while in the initial interruption the lover uses the first-person plural to refer to the couple, in the later utterances she stresses the break between the lovers by replacing the 'we' with first- and second-persons singular, which are interchangeable: in the second interruption ('It's as if you've some kind of death-wish. / You won't even talk...'), the 'you' actually refers to the 'I' of the speaker; by contrast, in the last utterance ('I might just as well be eating alone'), the 'I' is, in fact, the 'you' of the addressee. There is, therefore, a greater instability in 'Sushi' than in 'Paris' in spite of the smooth flow of verse, as the use of the first- and second-persons singular sows a confusion between speaker and would-be addressee. The speaker becomes both the *subject* and the *object* of the address. This interchangeable use of pronouns highlights the dispersion (or 'scattering', to use Maulpoix's term) of the speaker's voice in the text, and indicates that the poet blurs any simple identification of the speaker.

What is more, by leaving the autobiographical aspects of his relationship in the background and favouring a more lyric writing based on chains of phonetic and analogical associations, the poet stresses the lyric nature of his poem over the

autobiographical content, which increases the distance created between the lyric 'I' and the empirical 'I'. Referring to the lines 'a woman in a leotard / with a real leopard', Hancock argues that

> [b]y using an image created out of linguistic coincidence, rather than anything recognizable from actual experience, Muldoon draws our attention to the processes of aesthetic composition, to how these processes seduce the poet away from the real (the emotionally challenging situation with his dining partner) and towards the surreal (the temptingly exotic imagined woman on the sidewalk). ('Dining Out with Paul Muldoon' 92)

In fact, the multiple stretched run-on lines and the brevity of the lines may indicate that the speaker is caught in the whirlpool of fantasy and is severed from the real world: the speaker prefers escaping to the world of the imagination to confronting the deeper issues that, however hard he tries to avoid them, are an invisible presence throughout the poem. It seems that the speaker in 'Sushi', by entering the world of fantasy and creative imagination, disregards the reality of his relationship's apparent failure and, by doing so, leaves autobiographical aspects in the background: the speaker immerses himself in linguistic associations and wordplay that sever him from his reality (namely, the couple's imminent break-up).

Muldoon's poetic language, particularly his insistence on 'the processes of aesthetic composition', strongly resembles the main motif of the poem, the art of making sushi:

> We were sitting at the sushi-bar
> drinking *Kirin* beer
> and watching the Master chef
> fastidiously shave
> salmon, tuna and yellowtail
> while a slightly more volatile
> apprentice
> fanned the rice,
> [...]

I saw, when the steam
cleared, how this apprentice
had scrimshandered a rose's
exquisite petals,
not from some precious metal
or wood or stone
[...]
but the tail-end of a carrot (*MB* 34-35)

This 'work of art' (the act of creating sushi) is itself an 'aestheticization' of the simple serving of raw (unmediated) fish and vegetables, and is, consequently, a 'parallel realm' to verbal symbolization. Both the act of creating sushi and the symbolic use of language lead from a 'raw' reality to 'something else, then something else again' *ad infinitum*, creating an ever-growing distance from a base reality. At the same time, since these parallel realms can never actually meet, they are emblematic of the relationship of any symbol to the 'thing' it brings into being by 'representing' it. Although Maulpoix argues that when poetry and autobiography come together, they do not produce a poem but rather, like flint stones, create sparks, therefore drawing verse towards prose ('Table ronde' 49-50);[144] by contrast, in 'Sushi', the discarding of autobiographical details enables the writer to centre the poem on 'the processes of aesthetic composition' and to create a greater distance between the empirical 'I' and the lyric 'I' than in 'Paris'.

In both 'Paris' and 'Sushi', the 'I' seems much more unstable than in the poems collected in *New Weather:* there is not only an estrangement between the 'I' and the 'you', but there is also a critical distance between speaker and author,

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[144] The original reads: 'la question étant alors de savoir si poésie et autobiographie s'accouplant engendrent des poèmes. Je ne le pense pas spécialement, mais je pense plutôt qu'il y a là comme deux silex. Les images qui ressortent de ce qu'on a entendu des échanges depuis tout à l'heure, c'est que poésie et autobiographie sont plutôt comme deux mots à projeter l'un contre l'autre, à frapper l'un contre l'autre comme on frappe des silex pour produire des étincelles, voilà. Alors il y a des autobiographies en poème, il y a aussi tout un véhiculage de la poésie vers la prose de par l'autobiographie si l'on veut'. In other words, Maulpoix does not necessarily differentiate between 'autobiographical poems' and 'autobiographies in verse', as they often correspond to a similar enterprise, but rather, he makes a distinction between them and the movement from verse to prose that is created when there is an autobiographical intention on the part of the author. This means that when autobiography surrounds poetry it tends to draw verse towards prose (Maulpoix, 'Re: Poésie et autobiographie', Message to the author, n. pag.).

particularly in the 1987 volume. Furthermore, in 'Sushi', identities are highly provisional since the 'I' and the 'you' become interchangeable. This provisionality observed in the analysis of the 'I' and the 'you' is further accentuated by the use of the first-person plural (since it necessarily includes the 'I'). The following analysis focuses on the movement from the 'we' to the 'they' and its impact on the *pluralisation* of the 'I' in failed romance poems collected in *Mules*.

The 'I' and the 'We': From the Individualisation to the Pluralisation of the 'I'

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In his article on Muldoon's restaurant poems, Hancock argues that '[s]omewhat paradoxically, Muldoon's use of the first-person plural in these poems actually indicates a sense of fundamental connectedness between the divided "couple": as if, though he recognises the demise of the relationship, the poet continues to speak from within it, reluctant or unable to individuate himself' (89). While Hancock has a point in so far as the 'we' is still present in these poems describing couples on the verge of breaking up, there are considerable differences in the use of the 'we' from *Mules* to *Hay*. In *Mules*, the poems about Muldoon's relationship with Conway emphasise the break-up of the mutual 'we' (Cider', 'Paris', and 'Bang'); in contrast, in poems about his second marriage to American writer Jean Hanff Korelitz, there is a fundamental harmony in the 'we' between the 'I' and the 'you' ('The Mudroom' and 'Long Finish').[145]

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[145] The break-up of the 'we' in *Mules* is also a leitmotiv in failed romance poems published in *New Weather*. In 'The Kissing Seat', this estrangement between the 'I' and the 'you' is exemplified by the positioning of the 'we' in the last two stanzas: the stanzaic break between the two instances of 'we' materialises the distance between the 'I' and the 'you' (*NW* 34). The last line of the poem even concludes with the binary opposition 'you and harm', when the reader might have expected 'you and I'. The end of the poem creates a sinister effect because of the association of the 'I' and the term 'harm', and because 'harm' rhymes with the ominous opening line of the poem: 'The organized *crime*'. Although the kissing seat is in an 'S' shape (this 'conversation seat' is colloquially—and, ironically here—called a 'love seat'), the echo between 'harm' and 'crime' creates a circular and menacing pattern, in which the 'you' is 'caught and fixed' (or *seized*) by the 'I'.

In *Mules*, the three poems analysed chart the progressive fragmentation of the 'we' and its evolution towards the more impersonal 'they'. This pattern also applies to the first-person voice, since the 'I' is necessarily included in the 'we': the lyric 'I' evolves from an individualisation (from the mutual 'we') to a pluralisation (through its association with the 'he'). This discussion of the 'I' and the 'we' in failed romance poems collected in *Mules* illustrates the 'pluralisation of the images of the self', characteristic of autobiographical poetry (Rabaté, 'Poésie et autobiographie' 44, 46).

In the sonnet 'Cider', the first of this series of poems, although the 'we' is overly present in the first quatrain (it is repeated four times), it suddenly gives way to the 'I' in the following stanzas (in which there is only a single occurrence of the 'we'). This highlights the growing distance between the 'I' and the 'we', and the progressive individualisation of the first-person voice. In 'Bang', this distantiation between the 'I' and the 'we' is brought to another level as the 'I' no longer features alongside the 'we'. In fact, the first couple of lines indicate that the break-up of the 'we' also means the total disappearance of the 'I' and the 'you': 'For that moment we had been the others / These things happen to—' (*M* 50). The elliptical syntax materialises this fragmentation and the disintegration of the relationship. In 'Paris', the 'I' goes even further than distancing itself from the now fragmented 'we': it becomes an *outsider* to the relationship. The 'I' is no more entangled in the first-person plural (as in the first few lines), it becomes pluralised through the use of the third-person plural:

> A table for two will scarcely seat
> The pair of us! All the people *we* have been
> Are here as guests, strategically deployed
> As to who will go best with whom.
> A convent girl, a crashing bore, the couple
>
> Who aren't quite all *they* seem. [...] (*M* 40, my emphasis)

In these first few lines, the relaxed conversational tone sits lightly with the theme of the poem. The imminent break-up of the couple is both clearly marked by the single occurrence of the 'we' and by the stanzaic break after 'couple' at the end of the first quatrain. In fact, the emphasis on the binary repetition 'two' and 'pair' in the first two lines is misleading since this poem is not about a united couple but about '[a]ll the people [they] have been'. This initial apparent unity is, therefore, not sustained. Just as Maulpoix argues that the 'I' in an autobiographical poem becomes the *megaphone of a plurality* ('Table ronde' 26), I would argue that the 'we' of the second line (necessarily including the 'I') also becomes pluralised: 'All the people we have been / Are here as guests' (*M* 40). Even if the first-person plural occurs at the outset of the poem, it is almost immediately swept away by the more impersonal 'they' in the first line of the second stanza. Consequently, the 'we' inevitably fades into a more universal 'they':

> [...] the couple
>
> Who aren't quite all *they* seem.
> A last shrimp curls and winces on your plate
> Like an embryo. 'Is that a little overdone?'
> And these country faces at the window
> That were once our own. *They* study the menu,
>
> Smile faintly, and are gone. (40, my emphasis)

The third-person plural in 'Who aren't quite all they seem' echoes the one at the opposite end in 'They study the menu'. The movement from the initial intimate 'we' to the more impersonal and unspecified 'they' creates a greater distance between the two dining partners, and between the couple they are now and the couple they used to be. This is further accentuated by the positioning of the two third-person plurals at the opposite ends of the stanza. As a result, there are two

parallel movements in 'Paris'. Firstly, the 'we' becomes the 'megaphone of a plurality' because of the transition from the 'we' to the 'they'. Secondly, the 'I' being subsumed in the 'we', there is a movement towards the pluralisation of the 'I', since the 'I' could be equated with a 'he' (included in the 'they'). Just like the addressee in 'Kissing and Telling', the lyric subject 'might just as well be *anyone*' (*Q* 33, my emphasis).

In *Hay*, however, the 'I' is much more stable as it both speaks from within the relationship—the mutual 'we'—and yet manages to individualise itself. Although there is no dedication to this collection, the poems are about Muldoon's second marriage to Korelitz.[146] In the three poems discussed, there is a balance between the occurrences of the first-person singular and plural, on the one hand, and between the first- and second-persons singular, on the other. Unlike 'Cider', in which the two ex-lovers don't know the 'lengths to which [their] roads might go' (*M* 45); in 'The Mudroom',[147] the united 'we' follows the same path: 'We followed the narrow track, my love, we followed the narrow / track through a valley in the Jura' (*H* 3).[148] This harmony is also present in 'Long Finish', marking the couple's ten-year anniversary ('ten years of marriage and parenthood', 78), which similarly features two occurrences of the 'we' in the opening line: 'Ten years since we were married, since we stood / under a chuppah of pine boughs' (78). In the (unfortunately) overlooked poem 'A Journey to Cracow', the

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[146] In fact, the lack of dedication is balanced by the wealth of references to Korelitz's Jewish background. It is important to note that although the following analyses highlight the themes of love, marriage, and harmony in 'The Mudroom', 'Long Finish', and 'A Journey to Cracow' in order to contrast these later poems with the poems published in *Mules*; it would be reductive to simply focus on these aspects. For instance, themes such as violence and farm labour could be analysed in 'Long Finish' (stanzas five and six). Furthermore, farm labour and production are, more generally, the main themes shared by a number of poems collected in *Hay*, particularly the visual poems 'The Plot' and 'A Half-Door Near Cluny'.

[147] The title of the opening poem in *Hay* was formerly spelt 'The Mud Room' in *Hay*. I use the later spelling of *Poems 1968-1998*, 'The Mudroom'.

[148] This motif of the 'narrow track' is further repeated with slight variations throughout the poem: 'we followed the narrow track, my love' (6); 'follow the narrow path' (7); 'the narrow track to the highest good'.

coordination 'and' between the first- and second-persons singular marks the unity between the two lovers in the fourth and fifth stanzas:

> Into the Vistula swollen with rain
> *you and I* might have plunged and found a way
> [...]
>
> *you and I* might have plunged and found a way
> to set a cigarette on the barn door
> [...] (91, my emphasis)

This harmony is also visible in the use of the first-person plural:

> As *we* high-tailed it across the meadows
> toward what might have been common ground
> *we* were dragged down by our own shadows
> through a dance-floor near Wanda's mound
>
> [...]
>
> whatever that might be. For an instant, even
> *we* were dragged down by our own shadows,
> my love, in some polka or mazurka or Cracovienne
> as *we* high-tailed it across the meadows. (91-92, my emphasis)

The couple is designated four times by the first-person plural, twice in the first stanza and twice in the final one. This mirror effect frames the poem and illustrates the couple's unity. This visual and sonorous harmony is further reinforced by the repetition of the first and third line of the first quatrain in the final one, by the alternate rhyming, and by the repetition of each second rhyme of each quatrain as the first rhyme of the next quatrain (*abab bcbc*). While these interconnected structures could highlight the couple's entanglement and the *désindividualisation* of the first-person singular who seems to fade away in the 'we' (Sermet 87),[149] this circular pattern suggests 'a sense of fundamental

[149] Discussing Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* (1918), Sermet argues that the collection 'offers an opposite progression from the "I" to the "we", aiming towards de-individualisation'. Originally:

connectedness' between the two lovers. There is, therefore, a clear contrast between the early poems in *Mules* and those in *Hay*. While those in *Mules* depict the estrangement between the first- and second-persons singular (and, as a result, the inevitable break-up of the 'we'), those in *Hay* celebrate the new couple's harmony.

Most of the theoreticians on autobiography and poetry argue that the unity of the speaker is disrupted as soon as there is an autobiographical intention. This analysis of personal pronouns makes it clear that the wholeness of the 'I' is particularly disrupted in poems about the failure of a love relationship: the lyric 'I' is scattered among diverse modes of figurability since the 'you' (in 'Sushi') and the implied 'he' (in 'Paris') designate the 'I', thus enticing the reader in a protean polyphony. Furthermore, the fragmentation of the first-person voice is particularly visible in the distance created between the lyric 'I' and the empirical 'I'. Interestingly, this fragmentation of the first-person singular is also visible in the poetic *form*. Before turning to a discussion of Muldoon's elegies, the following section focuses on the sonnet form and argues that there is a relationship between the disruption of the sonnet and the instability of the 'I', discussed previously.

The Disruption of a Traditional Poetic Form: The Sonnet

As explained in Chapter One, a poetic autobiography is often incomplete and written in broken lines (Maulpoix, 'Table ronde' 25-26). While Chapter Three illustrates this characteristic in relation to the treatment of temporality in Muldoon's autobiographical poems in general, this analysis focuses on the disruption of the poetic pattern in failed romance poems. This section offers a

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'[l]e recueil *Calligrammes* offre un cheminement inverse du "je" au "nous", dans le sens d'une désindividualisation'.

close-up analysis of a single form, the sonnet, by contrasting Muldoon's use of the sonnet form with the traditional pattern and rhyming scheme of the Petrarchan sonnet. This study of the poet's '"destructed" sonnets' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 216) shows that Muldoon subverts the traditional sonnet form by describing the end of a love affair instead of celebrating love (as in more traditional sonnets), and by disrupting both the aim of the traditional sonnet (which is resolving a problem stated in the octet) and its rhyming pattern. This formal disruption mirrors both the break-up of the relationship and the fragmentation of the 'I', discussed previously.

Muldoon often explains that he does not have a particular poetic pattern in mind when he writes a poem and that it is the poem *itself* that determines its own shape, as the writing progresses. It is ironic that most of Muldoon's failed romance poems evolved into sonnets, since this poetic form is believed to have 'originated in the thirteenth century among the Sicilian school of court poets, who were influenced by the *love poetry* of Provencal troubadours' ('Sonnet', my emphasis). Unlike famous Italian sonneteers, such as Dante, who used the sonnet 'as a medium of quasi-religious devotion to a beloved lady, a *donna*' (Hirsch and Boland 52); in these failed romance poems, Muldoon does not address a beloved 'donna', but rather recounts the failure of past relationships. Just like the sonnet 'The Ox'—described as an 'anti-love sonnet, a piece of anti-Petrarchism, a frustrated idyll or ideal' (Burt, 'The Contemporary Sonnet' 260)—the sonnets analysed in this section are also 'pieces of anti-Petrarchism'.[150] By discussing poems that span a period from the 1970s to the late 1980s ('Cider' in *Mules*, 'Holy Thursday' in *Why Brownlee Left*, and 'Gone' in *Meeting the British*), this analysis

[150] All the poems discussed in this section are based on the stanzaic pattern of the Petrarchan sonnet (and not of the English sonnet, which is composed of three quatrains and ends on a rhyming couplet): 'Cider' and 'Gone' are composed of two independent quatrains followed by two independent tercets, and 'Holy Thursday' is composed of two independent quatrains and a sestet.

illustrates how the disruption of this traditional poetic pattern mirrors the growing instability of the 'I' in failed romance poems, particularly in *Meeting the British*.

According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*'s definition, the Petrarchan sonnet is a poetic form that builds up tension in the quatrains and finally resolves it in the final lines: 'the first eight lines, the octave, state a problem, ask a question, or express an emotional tension'; while the 'last six lines, the sestet, resolve the problem, answer the question, or relieve the tension' ('Sonnet'). However, in Muldoon's sonnets, this poetic pattern is disrupted and mirrors the end of the relationship. In 'Cider', the couple seems to have reached a dead end since, while the octet sets the problem ('Though we lie by their sides we may never know / The lengths to which our roads might go', *M* 45), the sestet does not bring any solution: in the last lines of the poem, the speaker wishes to leave, only this departure does not bring relief to the two lovers as this is an escape to an otherworld in Irish mythology, Tír na nÓg ('the Land of Youth', 45). This formal disruption also characterises 'Holy Thursday'. The octet is about a couple sitting at a table realising that their relationship is over: 'We know, you and I, that it's over, / That something or other has come between / Us, whatever we are, or were' (*WBL* 31). The octet does not so much state a problem: this situation is beyond remedy. After the *volta* (meaning 'turn') that marks the 'rhetorical division and shift between the opening eight lines and the concluding six' (Hirsch and Boland 49), the accent shifts to the figure of the waiter. Although the following sestet somehow relieves the tension as the emphasis is entirely placed on a third party, the ghostlike waiter is only setting the table for the next service and the poem ends on an unresolved tension between the two dining partners:

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. (*WBL* 31)

Finally, in 'Gone', a poem depicting the auction of 'ten Venetian goblets' (*MB* 31) belonging to two recently divorcees, the break-up of the poetic pattern is made even more obvious. The final lines of the sonnet do not resolve the couple's issues because the sestet does not bring relief to the problem, which is stated at the end of the poem: 'what should we make of that couple / we never quite became' (31). In fact, the speaker does not mention the problem in the octet since the *entire* sonnet—which is composed of a single supernumerary line—is, actually, *the* question. This stretched run-on line that extends from the beginning to the end of the sonnet exemplifies this tension on which the sonnet ends. This disruption of the traditional Petrarchan sonnet, particularly visible in the 1987 volume, illustrates the couple's break-up. This formal instability is further strengthened by the lack of a distinct *rhyming* scheme.

Edward Hirsch and Eavan Boland argue that a Petrarchan sonnet 'invites an asymmetrical two-part division of the argument' (52). The octet of a Petrarchan sonnet follows the strict pattern *abbaabba*, while the rhyming scheme of the sestet varies: the most common patterns being *cdecde*, *cdccdc*, and *cdedce*. In all three poems, these rhyming schemes are to a greater or lesser degree disrupted. 'Holy Thursday' is the most regular sonnet when it comes to the rhyming pattern. The octet follows the regular pattern *abababab*: 'late/plate', the eye rhyme 'up/soup', the mosaic and slant rhyme 'but one/between', and the near rhyme 'over/were'. However, the rhyming pattern of the sestet is irregular and disturbing: 'bread' rhymes with 'borrowed' (consonance), but does 'wine' rhyme with 'one' or with 'napkin'? We could either put together the pair 'wine/one',

forming a masculine rhyme, or 'wine/napkin', which would correspond to a near rhyme. And what should we make of the final rhyming word 'absence'? The fact that this is the only end word that does not pair with another end word in the poem probably hints at the *absence* of a strict rhyming pattern. In 'Cider', only the first quatrain follows a regular monosyllabic and unaccentuated end rhyme pattern *aabb*: the two masculine rhymes 'know/go' and 'end/bend'. However, after the first four lines, the rhyming pattern is slightly shady. The second quatrain could follow the pattern *cddc*: the near rhyme 'quays/lights' and the oblique rhyme 'enough/moths'. However, in the sestet, no clear pattern presents itself to the reader. We could argue that 'estuary' and 'Hy' form a rhyming pair, since 'Hy Brasil' comes from the Irish '*Uí Breasil*': '*Uí*' is pronounced like the free vowel /i:/ and so is 'Hy', since the 'h' is not phonological or morphological (*i.e.* it is a redundant, silent 'h').[151] However, this is not an exact rhyme given that the final vowel of 'estuary' refers to a different phoneme: the checked vowel /ɪ/. Finally, in 'Gone', apart from a few rhyming pairs, such as the double slant rhyme 'cannery/Henry' in the octet and the consonance in the near rhyme 'forget/forked', there is no distinct rhyming pattern across this sonnet. In all three

[151] According to Mícheál Hoyne, '[s]cribes had a tendency to prefix a "*h*" to small words beginning in a vowel, so we encounter "*hi*" for "*i*", "*hua*" for "*ua*". Because *uí* is a genitive plural masculine with a vocalic ending, we would normally expect the initial consonant of the noun qualifying it (*Breasal*) to be lenited (especially in the later language). In English, because of the difficulty of indicating a lenited initial and perhaps because of its obscure radical form (or just possibly because of the influence of Manuscript/Old Irish orthography which had a difficult system for indicating aspirants, and in which "*bh-*" would be written "*b-*"), the lenition is not mentioned. Fluent Irish-speakers would, for instance, refer to *Ui Fhiachrach* as *Hy-Fiachrach* or *Ui Mhaine* as *Hy-Maine*. So *Hy-Brasil should* be pronounced "*ee vrasil*". However, some might argue that they have heard it say "high/hee brazil" in English. Depending on the pronunciation, therefore, the rhyme "estuary"/"Hy" may not stand. This name is also a legitimate place name: there are a few historically-attested places of the name listed in Hogan's *Onomasticon Goedelicum*. This place name means "descendants of Breasal" (cf. *Ui Mhaine* means "descendants of Maine" or the "territory of descendants of Maine" in South Roscommon/East Galway; and the most famous *Ui Fhailghe* ("Offaly") means "descendants of Failghe" or the "territory of the descendants of Failghe")' (n. pag.). We could see in the rhyming pair 'estuary'/'Hy Brasil' a thematic relationship between the river flowing through the estuary into the open sea and the descendants as offspring to a previous generation: river/sea and offspring/parents. Interestingly, a poem by Gerald Griffin entitled 'Hy Brasail—The Isle of the Blest' features in the volume edited by William Butler Yeats, *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales*, whose 2003 edition is introduced by a foreword written by Muldoon.

poems, not only is the 'two-part division of the argument' subverted, but so is the traditional rhyming pattern.

This analysis of the poetic pattern has shown that, unlike the harmony that pervades poems about Muldoon's marriage to Korelitz (*Hay*), the disruption of the sonnet form in failed romance poems published from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s mirrors the tensions between the 'I' and the 'you', discussed previously. This analysis has also shown that the most anti-Petrarchan sonnet is 'Gone', published in *Meeting the British*. Interestingly, in the analysis of the 'I' and the 'you', 'Sushi' (also published in *Meeting the British*) presented a more fragmented 'I' than the one in 'Paris' (published in *Mules*). The 1987 volume is, therefore, a corner-stone in both family poems (as seen in Part 2.2) *and* failed romance poems, regarding the evolution and nature of the 'I'. More generally, Part 2.3 has evidenced that failed romance poems exemplify the fragmentation of autobiographical poetry, which is both visible in the instability of the 'I' (the first-person singular is split, provisional, and/or pluralised) and in the disruption of the poetic pattern (the sonnet). The following part argues that the instability of the first-person voice examined in family and failed romance poems also lies at the core of some of Muldoon's most accomplished poems: the elegies 'Incantata' and 'Yarrow'.

2.4. Elegies

As argued in the introduction to this chapter, the common themes of the autobiographical poems discussed in Chapter Two are loss and absence. In Part 2.2, the notion of absence was present in father-and-son poems in relation to the

speaker's ability to inscribe his own name in the poem after the father's *death*. This theme was then illustrated by the relationship between the speaker and the deceased (or *absent*) mother. In Part 2.3, the notion of loss was visible in the break-up of a marriage (or relationship) and in the lack of harmony and exchange between the speaker and his lover. Part 2.4 explores other poems in which the notions of loss and absence are even more visible, Muldoon's elegies.

Part 2.4 pursues the analysis of the instability of identities and the fragmentation of the 'I', explored in family poems (Part 2.2) and in failed romance poems (Part 2.3), by focusing on the poet's experience of mourning in 'Incantata' and 'Yarrow'. In *Black Sun*, Kristeva explains that elegies are characterised by a fragmentation of identities—a 'constellation of *elusive identities*'—and a '*dispersal* of the "I"' (157, my emphasis). The analyses of 'Incantata' and 'Yarrow' are based on a similar structure that first examines these multiple 'identity slippages' (Batten, 'He Could Barely Tell One from the Other' 199) and then explores the instability of the first-person voice.[152] The analysis of 'Incantata' first examines the instability of the speaker's and addressee's identities before turning to the impact of the experience of mourning on the *disappearance* of the 'I' and the 'you'. The examination of 'Yarrow' similarly starts with a discussion of the instability of identities, particularly that of the mother, and then turns to an analysis of the *doubling* of the 'I'.

[152] As rhyme and form have been already analysed in detail by Ian Twiddy and by Kendall in *Paul Muldoon* (1996), Part 2.4 focuses on the impact of the autobiographical drive on the self in the elegies 'Incantata' and 'Yarrow'. Unfortunately, I do not have the space to discuss other elegies such as 'Turkey Buzzards' (dedicated to Muldoon's sister Maureen) and 'Sillyhow Stride' (written in memory of Warren Zevon).

Mary Farl Powers and 'Incantata'

> Written over five days, 'Incantata' seems the closest Muldoon has ever come to fulfilling Wordsworth's concept of poetry as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.
>
> (Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 209)

> 'Incantata', for the artist Mary Farl Powers, disarmed many critics who had previously seen him as emotionally inhibited and self-absorbed.
>
> (Wheatley, 'An Irish Poet in America' 147)

'Incantata' was written in 'a five day frenzy of rage and remorse' (Muldoon, 'Paul Muldoon Writes' 162:2) and 'is perhaps the climax of Muldoon's concerns with how poetry can help us live our lives, with what it can do in the face of violence and loss' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 181). This analysis of 'Incantata' first emphasises how the difficulty in coming to terms with loss is visible in the disruption of identities and in the subsequent disappearance of Mary's body. It then argues that this fragmentation is also made obvious in the distribution of the first- and second-persons singular: while the first half of the poem establishes an intimacy between the 'I' and the 'you', there is an abrupt change in the second half of the elegy because the speaker's first-person voice fades away as the addressee disappears.

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That night you slept in the crook
of my left arm
I woke
at 3 or 4 a.m.

to find it numb,
a knotted, phantom limb.
I called you by another's name:
Emily. (*W* 13)

In the sonnet 'Emily', collected in *The Wishbone* (dedicated to Mary Farl Powers), the identity of Mary Farl Powers is already disrupted: 'I called you by another's name: / Emily'. This confusion somehow ends abruptly after the second quatrain, as the break with the following sestet corresponds to the moment when Mary wakes up. While the speaker calls Mary by the name of a previous lover in 'Emily', in 'Incantata', some passages associate her with fictional characters, offering distance from the reality of this painful situation. This section argues that the instability of identities in 'Incantata', particularly that of the elegised person, progressively leads to the disappearance of the 'you', illustrating the fact that a poetic autobiography strives towards a deconstruction of the subject (Maulpoix, 'Table ronde' 27).

In the very first stages of the elegy, the identities of both the elegist and the elegised person are unstable because the 'I' and the 'you' are reminiscent of fictional characters and, in particular, of Joycean characters from *Dubliners*.[153] This is interesting because Kristeva explains that the fragmentation of identities

[153] In the opening pages of *To Ireland, I*, Muldoon's affection for James Joyce's last short story in *Dubliners* is particularly visible: 'I'm likely to be a little promiscuous myself, referring, when appropriate, to matters other than the one supposedly in hand, though with a tendency to keep coming back to James Joyce's "The Dead"' (5). For this reason, Muldoon's critical prose in *To Ireland, I* offers an insight into his poetry because some of his own poems bear strong links with Joyce's short story. Furthermore, Muldoon also draws parallels between 'The Dead' and MacNeice's poetry, *Imram Curaig Maíle Dúin*, as well as the *féth fiáda*, which will be of great importance in Chapter Four, in particular. See Paul Muldoon, *To Ireland, I* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 57-60; 92-93.

in elegies is often visible in the speaker's identification with real or fictional figures (*Black Sun* 157). In the passage quoted below, the speaker brings to mind Gabriel Conroy, while the addressee (Mary) is strikingly similar to Conroy's wife, Gretta:[154]

> our first night, you just had to let slip that your secret amour
> for a friend of mine was such
> that you'd ended up lying with him in a ditch
> under a bit of whin, or gorse, or furze,
> somewhere on the border of Leitrim, perhaps, or Roscommon:
> 'gamine', I wanted to say, 'kimono';
> even then it was clear I'd never be at the centre of your universe. (*AC* 14)

In 'The Dead', Michael Furey (Gretta's former lover) is standing under a tree at the end of Gretta's garden, just as Mary and her 'secret amour' are lying 'under a bit of whin'. Furthermore, 'gamine' (meaning 'kid' in French) brings to mind Gretta's 'girlish beauty' (Joyce, *Dubliners* 254) and 'furze' may be a veiled reference to 'Furey', since the pair 'furze'/'Furey' is a near-anagram.[155] Finally, the last sentence of this stanza may refer to Gabriel Conroy: 'it hardly pained him now to think how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life' (Joyce, *Dubliners* 254). The spectral presence of Joyce's short story therefore hovers over 'Incantata', which charts the decline of Powers's health and her progressive disappearance.

In the first lines of the following passage, Mary is represented in the final stages of her illness:

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[154] See Alexandra Tauvry, *Petrol or Gasoline? From Commitment to Entanglement in Paul Muldoon's* Meeting the British, The Annals of Chile *and* Hay (unpublished MA thesis, 2008), 30-31. In another instance, Mary is transformed into a Roman Gladiator: 'you were the one who, in the end, / got yourself up as a *retiarius* and, armed with net and trident, / marched from Mount Street to the Merrion Square arena' (*AC* 15). This is a recurrent analogy since, in 'The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife', Mary is trying 'to get to grips / with a spider-crab's / crossbow and cuirass' (*MB* 11).

[155] Muldoon also refers to some 'burning furze' in 'Yarrow' (*AC* 127). This shrub, characterised by its yellow flowers, also echoes the 'small bit of furze' in Durcan's 'The Kilfenora Teaboy', which is partly about the Kilfenora Teaboy's daily country life, wife, and daughters, and in which the refrain reads: '*Oh but it's the small bit of furze between two towns / Is what makes the Kilfenora teaboy really run*' (47).

I thought of you again tonight, thin as a rake, as you bent
over the copper plate of 'Emblements',
its tidal wave of army-worms into which you all but disappeared:
I wanted to catch something of its spirit
and yours, to body out your disembodied *vox*
clamantis in deserto, to let this all-too-cumbersome device
of a potato-mouth in a potato-face
speak out, unencumbered, from its long, low, mould-filled box. (*AC* 17)

Just like the other female figure Elizabeth in *New Weather*, Mary is getting thinner and thinner to the point of losing her corporeal identity: within the space of the run-on line (after the colon), Mary's body has vanished. The 'isolated shower' of birds (*NW* 32) has been replaced with the 'tidal wave of army-worms' (*AC* 17). This gruesome image is reminiscent of the poem 'Une Charogne' ('A Carcass' or 'Carrion'), written by nineteenth-century French poet Charles Baudelaire, which describes an army of maggots crawling over the rotting body of a woman.[156] However, while Mary's body has vanished in the above stanza, her disembodied face still reappears in the lines that follow and continues haunting the 'I': 'when I saw in that swallow's nest a face in a mud-pack / from that muddy road I was filled again with a profound sorrow' (*AC* 18). The supernumerary run-on line exemplifies the extent of the speaker's 'profound' despair that cannot be alleviated.[157]

Even though Muldoon sometimes resorts to the trope of *prosopopoeia* to give a voice to the dead ('The Fox', for example), Mary's 'disembodied *vox*' is not

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[156] The fifth and sixth quatrains of 'Carrion' read: 'Flies on that putrid belly buzzed and teemed, / While from it issued a black horde / Of larvae that like viscous liquid seemed / As round these living shreds they poured. / / A billowing tide, this concourse ebbed and welled, / Or in a shimmering nimbus soared; / One thought the corpse, by vague afflatus swelled, / In harbouring life, its own restored' (Baudelaire 31). In *Maggot*, the macabre imagery of decay and death of 'The Humors of Hakone' bears strong similarities with these passages from 'Carrion' and 'Incantata': 'Too late to determine how long the girl I'd also glimpsed at the hot spring / had been beleaguered by pupae. / By day four the skin would have peeled from her thigh like a fine-mesh stocking' (65). Furthermore, the polysemous title of the 2010 collection can refer to the larva found in decaying organic matter.

[157] The second time the image of Mary's face is mentioned, it is described in a more laconic way ('I saw your death-mask / in that swallow's nest', 18), perhaps because it is the first and only occurrence of the word 'death' in the elegy.

heard and the speaker's questions remain unanswered ('(remember how Krapp looks up "viduity"?)', 14). Only the voices of Beckettian characters feel this void (Watt's '*Krak! Krek! Krik!*', 25; and Lucky's '*quaquaqua*', 20), but their utterances are devoid of any meaning. Even Mary's nicknames—'Polyester' and 'Polyurethane' (17), echoing the word 'Polygamy' in 'Capercaillies' (*MM* 6)—are words that Muldoon 'put in her mouth'.[158] Therefore, while the addressee's face is momentarily brought back from the dead, this is an artifice—a 'utopia of co-presence', as Sermet would have it (94)—as both her body and her voice have altogether disappeared:

> I wanted the mouth in this potato-cut
> to be heard far beyond the leaden, rain-glazed roofs of Quito,
> to be heard all the way from the southern hemisphere
> to Clontarf or Clondalkin, to wherever your sweet-severe
> spirit might still find a toe-hold
> in this world: it struck me then how you would be aghast
> at the thought of my thinking you were some kind of ghost
> who might still roam the earth in search of an earthly delight.
>
> You'd be aghast at the idea of your spirit hanging over this vale
> of tears like a jump-suited jump-jet whose vapour-trail
> unravels a sky: for there's nothing, you'd say, nothing over
> and above the sky itself, nothing but cloud-cover
> reflected in a thousand lakes; it seems that Minne-
> sota itself means 'sky-tinted water', that the sky is a great slab
> of granite or iron ore that might at any moment slip
> back into the worked-out sky-quarry, into the worked-out sky-mines. (*AC* 19-20)

In the final lines of this passage, the speaker is conversing with his friend's spirit roaming the earth and, until this point, the 'I' remains in control of the language.[159] However, although the speaker seems to have a strong command of language, this apparent mastery is short lived. The impending doom of the lover's death affects both the 'living and the dead' as not only is the body of Mary

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[158] See John Redmond, 'Interview with Paul Muldoon', *Thumbscrew* 4 (Spring 1996), 2. I refer to this interview in Chapter Five for my analysis of Muldoon's auto-commentaries.

[159] The dictionary-driven speaker even gives an accurate etymology of 'Minnesota' ('sky-tinted water'). Similarly, in the passage reminiscent of Joyce's 'The Dead', he characteristically gives the reader a plethora of synonyms referring to the same plant ('whin, or gorse, or furze').

progressively fading out of view, but the speaker too is gradually disappearing, marking a clear breakdown in the elegiac sequence.

The Disappearance of the 'I' and the 'You'[160]

*

> The fact that you were determined to cut yourself off in your prime
> because it was *pre*-determined has my eyes abrim:
> I crouch with Belacqua
> and Lucky and Pozzo in the Acacacac-
> ademy of Anthropopopometry, trying to make sense of the '*quaquaqua*'
> of that potato-mouth; that mouth as prim
> and proper as it's full self-opprobium,
> with its '*quaquaqua*', with its 'Quoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiq'. (*AC* 20)

While the first stanzas narrated memories that the two former lovers shared, the above-quoted twenty-third stanza marks a clear division between the first and second halves of the poem and constitutes the dramatic core of the poem. This breakdown in the sequence is exemplified by the Beckettian '*quaquaqua*' and the Joycean 'Quoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiq' announcing the speaker's distress at his former lover's bout with cancer.[161] This nonsensical passage illustrates the fact that, in the experience of loss, words force themselves on the mourner (Leader 93), and that the elegist is in 'tension with' the language (Sacks xiii): this stanza highlights the limits of language since *quoi* in French means 'what?', suggesting that the speaker struggles to fully articulate his grief in this particular passage.

Furthermore, while the 'I' and the 'you' are united one last time in this mid-sequence stanza, the two pronouns do not feature alongside each other in the

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[160] While my analysis of the romance poems dealt with the use of the first-person plural, one of the distinctive features of 'Incantata' is that the 'we' does not loom large in the long sequence of forty-five eight-line stanzas, and is replaced by the overwhelming presence of the first- and second-persons singular.

[161] Batten argues that 'an Irish poetry of loss like Muldoon's suggests a mourning that is so familial and personal as to be virtually inexpressible' ('He Could Barely Tell One from the Other' 181). These nonsensical chains of words also echo back to the enigmatic title of the 1983 volume *Quoof*, in which the Latin word '*quo*' is embedded. 'Quo'—which reads as a sort of linguistic variation of '*quoi*'—may be used as an adverb of place meaning 'somewhere' in its indefinite form, and 'to which place?', 'to what place?', or 'where?' in its interrogative form ('Quo').

same stanza in the second half of the poem: both pronouns almost fade away as if the disappearance of the addressee simultaneously led to the withdrawing of the speaker's voice who is no longer able to express his sorrow adequately. In fact, there are in total thirty-four instances of the 'I' and fifty-six occurrences of the 'you' in the poem. However, while there are thirty-one occurrences of the 'I' and forty-six occurrences of the 'you' in the first twenty-two stanzas, there is a sharp decline after stanza twenty-three. In the long digression starting '[t]hat's all that's left' (*AC* 21), following stanza twenty-three, the realisation of the doomed future of his friend is marked by the only two occurrences of the 'I': the speaker's voice fades away as the lover's body surrenders to cancer and subsequently vanishes.[162]

However, in the very last line of this monumental elegy, the 'I' and the 'you' are finally reunited: the writer's hands are stained in ink, just like those of his artist friend, suggesting an identification of the elegist with the elegised person. This is interesting because Ramazani explains that, in some elegies (such as Plath's), the 'I' is both 'mourner and mourned, consumer and consumed' (283):

> [...] this *Incantata*
> might have you look up from your plate of copper or zinc
> on which you've etched the row upon row
> of army-worms, than that you might reach, arrah,
> and take in your ink-stained hands my own hands stained with ink. (*AC* 28)

In the final lines, this 'Incantata' progressively becomes a poetic *incantation* that seems to cast a spell on the speaker and the addressee because there is, in fact, a transcendental union building a bridge between the world of the living and that of the dead: in the final line, the poem's magical powers enable the addressee to reach out for the speaker by joining their hands stained with the ink of writing

[162] The 'you' reappears a few times, particularly in stanza forty-three, but only in 'what can only have been a state of delirium' (27).

and etching.[163] This powerful feeling of intimacy also emphasises the somehow curative and comforting power of art and writing, in which the speaker may finally find solace.

Twiddy explains that 'Muldoon's circular forms are consistently used for the function of elegy' (182) and that 'Muldoon's circles attack the idea of elegy's ability to overcome loss' (198). Although the analysis of 'Yarrow' in the next section confirms Twiddy's point, this is not entirely true of 'Incantata': while there are a number of passages that illustrate the speaker's struggle to come to terms with the loss of his friend and former lover, the final lines bring a sense of closure. Furthermore, despite the instability of identities and the progressive disappearance of both first- and second-persons singular in the second half of the elegy, mourner and mourned are reunited at the end. This analysis has therefore illustrated the impact of the elegiac dimension on the 'I' and the curative powers of poetry in the experience of bereavement. In the penultimate stanza, the speaker even manages to voice the name of his deceased friend for the first and only time in the sequence with the hope to 'anoint and anneal' (*AC* 28). The action consisting in rubbing over the body with some ointment bears a strong connection with the word 'yarrow'.

[163] Wills argues that 'the constant recurrence of the same verbal patterns and grammatical structures gives the poem a magical, "incantatory" aspect' (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 181).

Brigid Regan and 'Yarrow'

> Muldoon has said that the poem was sparked off by the visit to his childhood home in March 1992, when he saw that, due to the changes which had been done to the house, all, bar the pampas grass in the garden in which he had lain to read as a child, had been swept away.
>
> (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 173)

> 'Yarrow' is as emotionally charged as anything Muldoon has ever written; it is a frantic and at times painful elegy for the poet's mother which can barely bring itself to register the loss.
>
> (Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 226)

'Yarrow' is the common name of the herb *Achillea Millefolium* and can be used medicinally: in mythology, it refers to the plant that Achilles and his soldiers used to treat their wounds and staunch blood during the Trojan War.[164] However, in the opening lines of the poem, the plant stands for what will soon entirely overwhelm the family farm: 'Little by little it dawned on us that the row / of kale would shortly be overwhelmed by these pink / and cream blooms' (*AC* 39). 'Yarrow' is, therefore, both an elegy for Muldoon's mother and for the family farm in County Armagh.

'Yarrow' is a challenging epic poem that is made of a hundred and fifty-one short poems or 'twelve intercut, exploded sestinas' (Muldoon, qtd. in Bolton 49). This monumental elegy constitutes part two of *The Annals of Chile* and highlights the commemorative design of the collection, since it is deeply connected to the rest of the volume: 'Yarrow' is 'a series of concentric circles, matching the smaller circles from part one of *The Annals of Chile*' (Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 228). As it is very difficult to engage in an exhaustive reading of this poem's achievement in such a short space, I concentrate on the poem's autobiographical dimension in

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[164] The *Oxford English Dictionary* mentions the 'soldier's yarrow' otherwise called *Stratiotes aloides* ('Yarrow').

the following analyses and pursue my broader analysis of 'Yarrow' in the next chapters: since this elegy constantly oscillates between memories and boys' adventure stories that Muldoon play-acted on the family farm, Chapter Three focuses on the remembering process in 'Yarrow' and Chapter Four discusses its autofictional dimension.

Since Muldoon weaves autobiographical elements into this fantastical journey, the difficulty for the reader—as is the case with so much of Muldoon's work—lies in finding the autobiographical threads that hold this disorienting and kaleidoscopic elegy together. In fact, every time the speaker veers towards the imaginative world of his childhood fantasies, the reader almost immediately loses track of the autobiographical portrait that is drawn of the 'I'. In order to differentiate the real from the imagined, I support my 'quest' for autobiographical elements by analysing what lies *within* the text as much as *outside* the text: this analysis examines autobiographical resonances across poems, and focuses on interviews and articles written by Muldoon (the epitext).[165] This analysis of 'Yarrow' therefore draws on elements of the theoretical framework established in Chapter One (particularly Part 1.3). The networks of association between 'Yarrow' and other poems, on the one hand, and internal echoes within the elegy, on the other, enable the reader to uncover the autobiographical elements of this poem among the imaginative wanderings of the speaker's mind. Despite the bewildering fictionalisation of his family home, parents, and childhood memories (discussed in Chapter Four), thematic repetitions hold this chain of scenes together and sustain the autobiographical structure that lies behind this monumental elegy. The example of 'Yarrow' illustrates the fact that Muldoon's poems are not free-

[165] The fact that the reader turns into a sleuth is explored later in Chapter Five.

standing structures, since this elegy hinges on recurrent themes through both internal echoes and cross-connections between this elegy and other poems.[166]

This analysis is divided into two sections based on the same pattern used for my discussion of 'Incantata'. The first section emphasises the commemorative dimension of this elegy by arguing that the figure of the dead mother pervades this semi-autobiographical poetic masterpiece. However, this analysis shows that 'Yarrow' is emblematic of the instability of identities and focuses on the blurring of the mother's portrait.[167] The second section focuses on the fragmentation of the 'I' and argues that, while the 'I' progressively fades away in 'Incantata', the first-person voice is *split* throughout 'Yarrow'.

The Figure of the Mother

*

This section offers a *reconstruction* of the mother's portrait thanks to echoes between this elegy, mother-and-son poems, and epitextual documents. In fact, just like autobiographical poetry strives towards a deconstruction of the lyric 'I' (Maulpoix, 'Table ronde' 27), the autobiographical drive also contributes to the fragmentation of the portrait of the elegised person. Furthermore, not only are elements of the mother's portrait scattered throughout 'Yarrow', but her identity is often blurred with that of another female character: although Muldoon's mother is often clearly identified ('ma', 'mother', 'That silver-haired mother o'mine', 'Brigid'), the portrait of Brigid Regan often intersects with that of the sexually liberated and 'sado-masochist muse' (Bolton 66), mysteriously named

[166] Muldoon often refers to Frost's following lines: 'The way to read a poem in prose or verse is in the light of all the other poems ever written. We may begin anywhere. We *duff* into our first. We read that imperfectly (thoroughness with it would be fatal), but the better to read the second. We read the second the better to read the third, the third the better to read the fourth, the fourth the better to read the fifth, the fifth the better to read the first again, or the second if it so happens' (*EP* 60-61).

[167] This section is a brief look at the blurring of the mother's identity. Since the mother's and speaker's portraits are partly fictionalised, Chapter Four pursues the analysis of the mother's multiple identities and examines the multiple facets of the young speaker.

'S—'. These two female characters are, therefore, often indistinguishable, making it difficult to identify the female character the speaker is referring to (unlike Mary, who is easily identifiable in 'Incantata'). Such a blurring is addressed by Collot, who, in discussing Nerval's female figures, argues that each female hero is the 'double' of another. He further argues that, while these female figures may be based on autobiographical elements, this blurring of identities corresponds to a 'structure of the imagination and a literary construction' (qtd. in Braud 124).[168] Following on from this logic, the association of the mother figure with 'S—' transforms the image of Brigid Regan into this 'structure of the imagination'. As a result, the reader has to uncover elements from other poems and epitextual documents in order to reconstruct the mother's elusive portrait in 'Yarrow'.

There are a number of passages in which the mother is either associated with another real figure or with a fictional character so that it is difficult to know if she belongs to the real or to the young speaker's fanciful imagination. For instance, the 'she' may refer to the enigmatic 'S—', to the mother figure, or to Plath (another female character in the elegy) in the lines: 'she was fixing the rubber ring / / on a Mason jar' (*AC* 58). Another interesting passage reads:

> This is some goddess of battle, Macha or Badhbh,
> whose '*Ná bac*
> *leis, a Phóil*' translates as 'Take heed, sirrah:
>
> you must refrain
> from peeking down my dress, though it's cut so low
> you may see my aureoles'. (153)

While the speaker seems to identify this female figure with an Irish goddess, these lines could equally be voiced by one of the two main female figures (the mother or

[168] The original reads: 'Le processus de projection et d'identification qui fait de chaque héroïne nervalienne le double d'une autre, tend à soustraire la figure féminine à toute identité fixe, la vouant à différer constamment d'elle-même à force de ressembler aux autres. La récurrence des mêmes situations correspond sans doute à certaines données biographiques mais surtout à une structure de l'imaginaire et à une construction littéraire'.

'S—'). The last line most likely refers to the frivolous 'S—', but the line from William Shakespeare's *King Lear* ('Take heed, sirrah') would most likely refer to the mother, who is associated with Lear in a previous passage ('but to the girdle do the gods inherit', 103). As a result, it is unclear whether the Irish line '*Ná bac leis, a Phóil*' is spoken by 'S—' or by the mother.[169] While Wheatley has a point in so far as the Irish language is often associated with 'S—', we should also bear in mind that, elsewhere in the poem, the mother also speaks Irish and uses similar words.[170] The fact that both 'S—' and the mother speak Irish in 'Yarrow' (and use similar phrases) makes it difficult to differentiate them.[171] Without precise autobiographical points of reference, these passages seem 'constructed', as Collot argues. However, while the elegy constantly oscillates between reality and imagination and blurs the thin line separating the two female figures, passages in 'Yarrow' revisit other poems about Muldoon's childhood memories that help identify the third-person singular as the real-life mother, Brigid Regan, in these passages.

There is however a clear difference between the mother's portrait in some mother-and-son poems (Part 2.2) and the mother's description in this elegy. While the mother figure in previous poems was sometimes exoticised (such as in

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[169] 'Ná bac leis, a Phóil' does not translate as 'Take heed, sirrah' but as 'Take no heed of it, Paul' or 'Don't mind it, Paul', as suggested by Wheatley ('The Aistriúchán Cloak' 134). For a translation of the Irish words in 'Yarrow', see David Wheatley, 'The Aistriúchán Cloak: Paul Muldoon and the Irish Language', *New Hibernia Review* 5:4 (Winter 2001), 123-134.

[170] See the lines: 'her "*Ná bac leis an craoibhín aoibhinn*" / and "Stay clear of those louts and layabouts" / were quite lost on me; I promptly stepped on the gas. / / "O come ye back", I heard her sing, "O come ye back / to Erin"' (*AC* 111-112). The sentence '*mar do thinteán féin*' (meaning 'there is no earth like your own', 146), which is attributed to 'S—', could also be voiced by the mother who praises historical and political Irish figures elsewhere in the poem.

[171] Similarly, in 'Brazil' the Spanish language is not an indicator of the actual identity of the person who speaks since it is unlikely that Muldoon's mother would have spoken Spanish. Elsewhere in 'Yarrow', Yeats speaks Spanish to Plath. In 'Yarrow' and 'Brazil', identities are highly unstable because Muldoon plays with languages to blur the characters' identities. In other poems, Muldoon even adds an Irish prefix to a Spanish name. For instance, Salvador Dalí becomes 'O'Daly' in '7, Middagh Street' (*MB* 59), in which 'identities are disrupted largely for fun', since we 'are only precariously ourselves' (Imlah 946). Muldoon playfully transforms a Spanish name into an Irish one by adding the prefix 'O'—used in Irish when the surname is derived from the grandfather or other ancestor—and changing the characteristic Spanish letter 'í' into an 'y'.

'Brazil'), that in 'Yarrow' very much resembles the mother Muldoon described in interviews. In the fourth poem of the elegy, the unnamed 'she' seems to refer to the mother, not only because the speaker mentions farm tools and machinery that ground this poem in the familial rural setting ('cattle-truck', 'plough'), but also because the image of the female character 'pin[ning] the clothes on the clothes-line' (42) is reminiscent of the image of the mother in the opening lines of the family poem 'Gathering Mushrooms':

> 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. (*Q* 7)[172]

Moreover, the images of the mother rinsing her son's hair in 'Yarrow'—'the weekly hair-wash' (*AC* 73); 'as she last rinsed my hair' (78)—also echo 'Brazil' (published in the same collection), which describes one afternoon when the speaker was 'hunched over the font / / as [his mother] rinsed [his] hair' (6). However, the mother in 'Yarrow' is no longer the exotic South American mother figure in a 'towel-turban' crying out in Franco-Spanish '*Champi*ŇON' (6), but a more severe Irish mother who tells her son '*seachain droch-chómhluadar*' (*AC* 78),[173] 'Stay well away from those louts and layabouts at the loanin'-end',[174] and

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[172] Both parents are clearly identifiable in the next passage from 'Yarrow': the mother is 'thumb[ing] through a seed-catalogue / she's borrowed from Tohill's of the Moy' and the father is mentioned with his attribute 'the shaft of a rake' (*AC* 43). Later on, the 'rusted blade of the loy' (70) seems to echo back to 'The Coney', in which verses indicate that the 'scythe would dull / so much more quickly' in the son's hands and that 'the blade / grew less and less a blade' (*MB* 3). Similarly, the 'bit of land' in 'Yarrow' (*AC* 95) also nods in the direction of 'The Coney' and 'the unenviable / bit of ground' (*MB* 3). Bolton argues that '[t]he father figure in ['Yarrow'] is not so much the poet's real, autobiographical father as a stereotype of masculinity. Volatile, punchy, and territorial, Muldoon's father becomes a symbol of the male impulse toward violence' (60-61). However, while Bolton argues that the mother figure in 'Yarrow' 'is primarily a symbol of mother Ireland' (63), I concentrate on the resemblances between the mother figure in 'Yarrow' and the real-life mother, Brigid Regan. Moreover, although Chapter Three argues that 'Yarrow' is as much an elegy for Muldoon's mother as for the family farm in County Armagh, the figure of the mother in 'Yarrow' is not a national allegory.

[173] Irish for 'avoid bad company'.

again, 'Stay clear of those louts and layabouts' (*AC* 111).[175] This warning is confirmed by what Muldoon stated in an interview on RTÉ radio on 18 November 2011:

> I think, frankly we were discouraged to make any friends in the vicinity. I think we were discouraged from hanging out at the crossroads [...] had there not been that tradition in the area of violent action and I think she was concerned we might have been caught up in it [...] one would easily have been. (qtd. in O'Callaghan n. pag.)

Furthermore, Muldoon said that, because she was the school mistress, he and his siblings were somehow put apart from the other children in the village:

> But even before we left we, the children, were somehow removed from the place. That, I think, had partly to do with my mother being the schoolmistress, and, as you know, there's still something of the priest/doctor/teacher triumvirate in rural communities. I don't suppose any one has lost their status to the extent of that fourth member of the triumvirate—if that doesn't sound too Irish—the postmistress. I used the word 'status'. I think it's fair to say that my mother was quite taken by the idea of status, and had high hopes for all her children. ('A Tight Wee Place', 19, 23)

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Muldoon often remarked that he was particularly drawn towards the mother figure in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, as his own mother was rather 'aspirational' herself (qtd. in O'Callaghan):

> There was a television in the house as a matter of status, but comics were frowned on. We subscribed to improving publications like 'Look and Learn' and 'Finding Out' and collected 'Classics Illustrated'. Oddly enough, there were very few books in the house. About the only thing I remember was a copy of *The Poems* of Rupert Brooke which had been given to my mother as a prize at St Mary's College of Education in Belfast. It might have been because she was the only member of her family who'd had an education that she put such store by it. Anyhow, we all

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[174] 'Loaning' means 'a lane, a by-road' ('Loan', def. 1) or '[a]n open uncultivated piece of ground near a farmhouse or village, on which the cows are milked' (def. 2).

[175] This is not to say that the farm and its surroundings are described matter-of-factly, because the family home is also transformed and exoticised. Such is the case when the mushroom shed of 'Gathering Mushrooms' is replaced in 'Yarrow' by a Spanish American estate: 'this rinky-dink / bit of land / / on which a mushroom-mogul has since built a hacienda' (95). The fictionalisation of the family farm is explored in Chapter Four.

> trooped out to elocution classes and piano lessons. We even had a piano installed. ('A Tight Wee Place' 23)

Brigid Regan's attitude regarding books and elocution classes is hinted at several times in the poem:

> [...] she continues to reel
>
> off in her own loopy version of R.P.
> 'parsnips', 'swedes', and, I guess, 'vegetable marrow';
> hers is a sensibility so rare
> [...]
> 'It should be *Fidei Defensor*, by the way, *not Defensor Fidei*'. (*AC* 95)[176]

Muldoon also highlights the fact that his mother made him and his siblings read books that they did not particularly like:

> That was the year my ma gave me a copy of Eleanor Knott's
> *Irish Classical Poetry* and I first got my tongue
> around *An Craoibhín Aoibhinn* (Douglas Hyde):
>
> I was much less interested in a yellowed copy of *An Claidheamh Soluis* than *Tschiffley's* [*sic*] *Ride* or *The Red Rover* or *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. (82)

The mother's attitude towards books in 'Yarrow' also echoes back to the early short elegy 'Ma', in which the 'bookish' mother is reading aloud 'no doubt from Rupert Brooke' (*M* 23).

The mother figure is also clearly identifiable in the poem through her piety from the opening poem right until the end, which contributes to recreating the mother's portrait. However, there is an interesting evolution regarding the length of her religious utterances:

> and my ma were to make one of her increasingly rare

[176] Ironically, on the inside cover of *Mules*, Muldoon himself is said to have a 'wholly distinctive sensibility' (*Irish Times*).

appeals to some higher power, some *Deo*
this or that (*AC* 39)

she would nevertheless have been understood by God
to whom she appealed at every twist and turn. (67)

'For your body is a temple', my ma had said to Morholt,
'the temple of the Holy Ghost' (68)

'For Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands' (90)

she made a sign of the Cross

over the tray (91)

God help us (165)

Begad (186)

While her first religious utterance spreads over two stanzas, her appeals to God grow fainter and fainter, and are finally encapsulated into the single word 'Begad', which, interestingly, recalls her own name 'Brigid'. As her health is dramatically worsening, her appeals to religion 'at every twist and turn' seem to progressively lose their healing powers.

In this elegy, Muldoon criticises his mother's piety (and religion on a broader level).[177] Nonetheless, the last word 'Begad' is now coming from the realm

[177] One cannot help but hear the poet's sarcastic voice in these statements about religion. In fact, Muldoon sometimes transforms his characters into puppets, putting his own words into their mouth (as in 'Capercaillies'): this is particularly the case in the humorous address to Morholt (68) and the caustic references to politics ('the legacy of Connolly and, God help us, Pearse / is the latest pell-mell in Pall Mall', 165). These often derisive utterances also reveal Muldoon's deeper aversion towards 'organized religion': '[w]hatever the mottoes are, when they become organized, codified, there's a very fine line between organized religion and organized crime' (qtd. in Kendall and McDonald 8). Similarly, in 2009, Muldoon argued: 'I fear that I myself am not a fan of organized religion, and one doesn't have to look much further than the Catholic Church, in which I was brought up, to see the hypocrisy of so much of what I was being told as a kid by these guys who were operating outrageously double standards. Of course there are those who say that they are just men, and that doesn't make them the Catholic Church. I don't know about that' (qtd. in Eltringham and Toda n. pag.).

of the dead and the tone seems much more emotional than sarcastic. In fact, as the mother's health is steeply declining, she receives the last sacraments: 'This, Brigid, is a cross / you must bear with fortitude' (*AC* 173). The priest's words are then followed by the description of the 'aghast' young speaker listening to his mother's dying '*râle*' in poem 134, at which point the pattern (characterised by its humorous and sarcastic tone) breaks down:

> The bridge. The barn. Again and again I stand aghast
> as I contemplate what never
> again will be mine:
>
> 'Look on her. Look, her lips.
> Listen to her *râle*
> where ovarian cancer takes her in its strangle-hold'. (175)

These two stanzas are the corner-stone of the elegy, not only because the tone is no longer ironic or caustic, but also because the first-person voice becomes much more unstable. There is, therefore, a tension between this foundational core and the instability of the 'I' that directly follows it. This cathartic pivotal poem releases the full elegiac potential of 'Yarrow' and causes greater fragmentation in the rest of the elegy.

The 'I' as Split

*

Unlike 'Incantata', in which stanza twenty-three marks the disappearance of the lyric 'I'; in 'Yarrow', not only is the 'I' still present, but it is '*dédoublé*'. In fact, the whole elegy is narrated through two different perspectives: the 'I' at times refers to the eleven- or twelve-year-old Muldoon and at other times to the middle-aged Muldoon (contemporary with the time of writing), whom we had encountered at the beginning of the elegy, looking up the term '*Achillea millefolium*' and plucking a sprig of yarrow from a 'funerary vase' (45). As a result, there is a

constant to-and-fro movement between the 1963 'I' (the young speaker who is being remembered) and the 1992 'I' (the speaker who is remembering his 1963 self). 'Yarrow' perfectly illustrates Sacks's comment on the voice of the poet in elegies: 'the voice of the elegist seems to work through several moments of extreme divisiveness' (34-35). In 'Yarrow', there are *two* coexisting narrative voices.

Furthermore, the above-quoted poignant poem marks a clear rupture between the two first-person voices. While the 1963 'I' and the 1992 'I' coexisted in the first 133 poems, the 1963 'I' is gradually substituted by the 1992 'I' after this pivotal poem. The contemporary 'I' no longer looks back towards his mother with the same irreverent or critical attitude, but is profoundly overwhelmed and grief-stricken. In this poem powerfully evoking the mother's dying '*râle*', there is a clear distinction between the two stanzas. While in the first one the 'I' refers to Muldoon in March 1992, contemplating with sadness what has become of the farm; the colon, placed before the stanzaic break, signals a flash-back to the scene when the young Muldoon was tending to his mother on her death bed. After this pivotal poem (poem 134),[178] the voice of the 1992 'I' becomes more present in the text and the older Muldoon even corrects the lines of his younger self: '"American", did I write? British' (177).[179] Later, in poem 140, the 'I' clearly refers to the middle-aged Muldoon, who 'heard the cry go up, "*Vene sancti Spiritu*"' (181), during the feast of the Pentecost on his return to America following his trip in March 1992. As a result, there is, in these final poems, a greater distance between the 1992 'I' and the 1963 'I'. Although Muldoon does not use the third-

[178] The 151 short poems in 'Yarrow' are not numbered but they are numbered in this analysis for reading clarity.

[179] This line is perhaps an instance of *authorial intrusion*: although the 1992 'I' is one of the two speakers in the elegy (with the 1963 'I'), this lyric 'I' may sometimes be read as the 'I' of *the poet* (the empirical 'I') in passages where this first-person voice intrudes in the text to correct the 1963 'I' or to comment on the text. Authorial intrusions in 'Yarrow' and in other poems are examined in detail in the final chapter.

person singular to create this distance (as in 'The Mist-Net' and 'Cheesecake'), he uses the first-person singular in a way that highlights how the 1992 'I' progressively takes stock of his mother's death and distances himself from the eleven- or twelve-year-old boy he was: 'there's no more relief, no more respite / than when I scurried, click, down McParland's lane / with my arms crossed, click, under my armpits' (188). Furthermore, while most of the elegy was built on a interwoven pattern of fact and fiction and on telescoping episodes drawn from former poems, in the last few pages, the narrative wavers since the 1992 speaker is ridden with doubt—'he cut through... what? / A cushion? A pillow?' (176)—and can no longer 'read between the lines' (189).

This progression from the point of view of the young Muldoon to that of the middle-aged Muldoon is made all the more obvious by the different use of verb tenses in the opening and final poems:

> Little by little it dawned on us that the row
> of kale would shortly be overwhelmed by these pink
> and cream blooms, that all of us
>
> would be overwhelmed (39)

> I can no more read between the lines
> of the quail's 'Wet-my-lips' or his 'Quick, quick'
> [...]
>
> there's something about the quail's 'Wet-my-foot'
> and the sink full of hart's-tongue, borage and common kedlock
>
> that I've either forgotten or disavowed;
> it has to do with a trireme, laden with ravensara,
> that was lost with all hands between Ireland and Montevideo. (189)

While the past tense in the first poem refers to a snapshot of the author's memory in which the event is seen from the young Muldoon's point of view, the present tense in the concluding poem anchors the final lines in a here and now that is

contemporary with the time of writing (1992): the quail's 'Quick, quick' (a faint version of the '*quaquaqua*' and 'Quoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiq' of 'Incantata') exemplifies how grief-stricken this now middle-aged speaker is. The elegy concludes with the image of the trireme lost at sea, echoing the ominous image of the trireme in 'My Grandfather's Wake', in which the 'little barge / in tow' is, in fact, 'a freshly-dug grave' (*MB* 5).

2.5. Conclusion

Unlike 'The Outlier', a poem in which the portrait of the speaker is progressively built stanza after stanza, the portrait that is drawn of the Muldoonian speaker often unravels itself as soon as it is woven, just like Penelope's shroud, to use Rabaté's metaphor (*Figures* 8).[180] Muldoon's personal poems are often characterised by unstable identities, a fragmented first-person voice, and a distance between the lyric 'I' and the empirical 'I'. Although Linda Anderson argues that '[autobiography] offers an unmediated [...] yet stabilizing wholeness for the self' and 'offers the possibility of alleviating the dangers and anxieties of fragmentation' (3), this could not be more different in Muldoon's personal verse. In the autobiographical poems examined in this chapter, the 'I' is either split (*dédoublé*) or pluralised, emphasising its deeply fragmented nature. Just as Kennedy-Andrews observes that 'the fracturing of identity lies at the heart of contemporary Irish fiction' (qtd. in Brearton and Hughes xiii), I would argue that this is also the case of Muldoon's personal poems, because poetry scatters the

[180] Rabaté's comment applies to autobiographical poetry in general. Originally: 'éléments d'un portrait qui se défait dès qu'on l'assemble, le sujet lyrique ressemble à la toile de Pénélope, cousue de fil blanc...'. 'The Outlier' is quoted as an epigraph to this second chapter.

representation of the autobiographical 'I' (Maulpoix, 'Table ronde' 25). The distance between the lyric 'I' and the empirical 'I', in particular, was a recurrent feature in the personal poems discussed in this chapter, showing that autobiographical poetry is emblematic of the tensions between speaker and poet.

Part 2.2 was divided into two sections in order to examine the instability of the 'I' in father-and-son and mother-and-son poems. In poems preceding the father's death, this instability is visible in the speaker's difficulty in overcoming the father's nominal heritage. The analysis of father-and-son poems argued that some characteristics of Lejeune's autobiographical pact, such as the *protocole nominal*, do not always apply to autobiographical poetry. In poems depicting the relationship between mother and son, the use of various personal pronouns exemplifies the distance between the 'I' and the 'you', and the gap between the lyric 'I' and the empirical 'I'. Muldoon's multiple-subject positionings in failed romance poems (Part 2.3) also highlighted this instability: the use and positioning of the first- and second-persons singular both mirror the couple's break-up and the distance between speaker and author. Part 2.4 argued that elegies are characterised by the instability and elusiveness of identities, combined with a dispersal ('Incantata') or 'doubling' ('Yarrow') of the 'I'. 'Incantata' progressively charts the disappearance of the first-person voice as Mary's presence disappears. In contrast, in 'Yarrow', the first-person voice pervades the elegy but it is increasingly split: the gap between the 1963 'I' and the 1992 'I' becomes more important as the elegy progresses, particularly after the powerful description of the mother's death. Furthermore, in 'Yarrow', while we are given glimpses of Muldoon's childhood and, in particular, of the winter of 1963, the highly fictionalised nature of the elegy disassembles the portrait that is drawn of the mother (and of the speaker) as soon as the narrative veers towards the

imaginative. The young speaker's multiple facets in 'Yarrow' are discussed in Chapter Four.

Muldoon is more personally exposed in 'Incantata' and 'Yarrow' than in other poems. However, these two poems confirm that Muldoon's elegies are far from being conventional elegiac poems, because they illustrate the limits of autobiographical poetry. While these elegies articulate grief more fully than earlier elegies such as 'Ma', 'Yarrow' fails to resolve some of the elegist's powerful feelings towards his mother's death and the tensions that characterised the mother-and-son relationship. Unlike the final lines of 'Incantata' that unite the elegist and the elegised person, the last verses of 'Yarrow' do not bring the same sense of closure and relief, as the 'I' wishes to be 'delivered / from the rail's monotonous "alack, alack"" and the 'bittern's bibulous "*Orinochone O*"' (*AC* 188). The speaker 'can no more read between the lines / of the quail's "Wet-my-lips" or his "Quick, quick"' (189). The birds' laments keep haunting him, 'buzzing in his ear', as Blaise Pascal would have it (21). Although the elegy ends on the far-off and exotic city of 'Montevideo', this final line does not represent an escape for the speaker: the last stanza indicates that a trireme—'laden with ravensara' (*AC* 189)—foundered off its shores, echoing the first lines of the elegy and imprisoning the speaker in the elegy's circular pattern.[181] The full articulation of grief in poems such as 'Yarrow' involves—perhaps, necessarily—a lack of resolution.

In his analysis of contemporary elegies, Ramazani emphasises this fragmentation and the difficulty in finding comfort in poetry: 'We should turn to [contemporary elegy] expecting not so much solace as *fractured speech*, not so much answers as memorable puzzlings' (ix, my emphasis). This chapter has in fact shown that, in the experience of loss and absence, the narrative is either

[181] In fact, this exotic plant (ravensara) echoes back to the yarrow plant at the beginning of the poem and the trireme may be seen as a symbol of the vanished family farm similarly 'laden with' yarrow.

written in broken lines or lacks the harmony of more conventional traditional patterns. This was particularly visible in the disruption of the sonnet form (Part 2.3) and in the breakdown of the elegiac sequence after the twenty-third stanza in 'Incantata' and after poem 134 in 'Yarrow' (Part 2.4). However, the analysis of 'Yarrow' has also shown that, despite the fragmentation of verse in Muldoon's autobiographical poems, internal echoes and cross-references between poems shed light on the personal dimension of the poems and help the reader reconstruct the characters' fragmented portraits. In fact, Muldoon's poems are not free-standing structures: there are numerous internal echoes and recurrent images *within* as well as *across* collections.

Furthermore, in each poem, Muldoon uses the particularities of verse (run-on lines, rhymes, stanzaic breaks, formal pattern, *etc.*) in order to convey feelings and emotions: the linguistic virtuosity deployed in these poems and the complexity of their rhyming patterns often reveal larger personal crises. This was particularly visible in failed romance poems (such as 'Sushi') and in the complexity of the elegiac structures ('Yarrow' and 'Incantata'). As a result, the autobiographical drive behind these poems does not draw verse towards prose (as argued by Maulpoix), but rather releases the full potential of the verse form.

Twiddy argues that the intricate system of rhymes in both 'Yarrow' and 'Incantata' makes these deeply personal poems some of the most sophisticated lyric poems Muldoon has written to date. The complex architecture of these elegies may also be seen as an attempt to prevent memories from being swept away. In fact, commenting on 'The Coney', Wills argues that

> [t]his process of preservation is analogous to the 'eternalising' role of poetry. It was a feature of the traditional sonnet in particular, but also of elegy, that the beloved attain an unchanging presence in literature, in contrast to life's processes of corruption and decay. The poem acts as a protection against both age and death. (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 122)

We could argue the same for 'Incantata': not only does the elegy bring a sense of closure, but it is also a poetic monument that guards the elegised person from the passing of time and oblivion—'a monument to the human heart / that shines like a golden dome among roofs rain-glazed and leaden' (*AC* 19). Although 'Yarrow' also anchors some of Muldoon's memories of his deceased mother, the following chapter argues that this elegy is beset by mnemonic vacillations, which pervade most of Muldoon's autobiographical poems.

We might attribute these constant oscillations to the failure to remember, the failure to 'reconstruct' the past. This is the case in 'Yarrow', in which the Muldoonian persona 'rake[s] / over these misrememberings' (183), unlike the speaker in Heaney's 'Squarings' who is 'riding or quelling / / The very currents memory is composed of' (*Opened Ground* 385). The next chapter argues that Muldoon's work can at times best be described as this 'supremely Joycean object, a nautilus / of memory jammed next to memory' (*AC* 152) and that memory mediated through verse accounts for the instability of the self that has been discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: Poetic (Mis)Rememberings

Non ita mirum, si a me longe est quidquid ego non sum: quid autem propinquius me ipso mihi? Et ecce memoriae meae vis non conprehenditur a me, cum ipsum me non dicam praeter illam.

(Augustine)[182]

[T]he positing of Augustine's *Confessions* as the first 'true' autobiography has become firmly linked with the view that autobiography is both introspective and centrally concerned with the problematics of time and memory.

(Marcus 2)

[182] This passage is an extract from Saint Augustine's *Confessions* (book X, chapter XVI), which is part of a larger discussion on memory (chapters VIII to XXV): 'It is not remarkable if things that I am not are far from my knowledge: but what could be closer to me than myself? Yet the power of memory in me I do not understand, though without memory I could not even name myself' (202).

[A] cheerful and communicative temper disposing us to notice the similarities and contrasts of things, that we may be able to illustrate the one by the other; a quiet conscience; a condition free from anxieties; sound health, and above all (as far as relates to passive remembrance) a healthy digestion; *these* are the best, these are the only ARTS OF MEMORY.

(Coleridge 88)

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the instability of identities and traced the evolution and fracturing of the 'I' across collections *and* within specific poems ('Incantata' and 'Yarrow'). It argued that the combination of poetry and autobiography is characterised by the fragmentation of the poetic self. This is particularly visible in Muldoon's use of pronouns, especially in his failed romance poems and elegies. The final analysis in Chapter Two suggested that this fragmentation of the 'I' may be partly due to mnemonic vacillations and to the slippages of memory. The subject of memory presents itself as meriting scrutiny in one separate chapter.

While the previous chapter focused on the limits of autobiographical poetry and analysed the fragmentation of the lyric voice, this new chapter traces the origins of this instability by discussing the process of anamnesis. My intention is to turn to the analysis of memory in order to find the *causes* for the instability of the autobiographical poetic 'I', as discussed in Chapter Two. The present chapter is divided into two parts, each dedicated to one of the notions that are central to the analysis of memory: time and space. Part 3.2 focuses on the combination of autobiographical poetry and time: when the speaker tries to remember the past, the narrative does not follow the linearity of the time sequence; instead, it favours an *associative logic* rather than a linear one. This first part identifies the *disruption* of time and chronology (caused by the poetic form and lines of linguistic and/or sensory association) as an important cause for the fragmentation of the lyric 'I'. Part 3.3 shows that space plays an equally important role as time in the process of remembrance. After briefly explaining the

theory called 'The Art of Memory' and applying it to Muldoon's personal poems, Part 3.2 underlines the limits of the association of specific places with memories (*memori loci*) and their impact on the uprooting of the 'I'. The notion of *associativeness* (linguistic, sensory, and spatial) is, therefore, the unifying theme of this chapter.[183]

3.2. The Specificities of Autobiographical Poetry in Relation to Time

> [T]he autobiographical genre itself [...] is based on a certain conception of the individual and, strangely enough, of memory. Incidentally, these two notions remain intimately linked since we are and remain, in fact, what we remember.
> (Ferrieux, 'L'autobiographie et la vérité' 113)

This introduction briefly explains the importance of memory and time in relation to the construction and the stability of the autobiographical 'I', before turning to the limits of anamnesis in Muldoon's personal poems.

The relationship between memory, time, and identity has been clearly highlighted by researchers in cognitive psychology and by philosophers such as French critic Paul Ricœur in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000), a corner-stone in studies on memory. The first part of this work is dedicated to memory and to mnemonic phenomena. He explains that shaping one's identity is inevitably linked to memory:

> In this way, the phenomenology of memory begins deliberately with an analysis turned toward the object of memory, the memory (*souvenir*) that one has before the mind: it then passes through the stage of the search for a given memory, the

[183] While I refer in this chapter to several personal poems across Muldoon's *œuvre*, 'Yarrow' holds a central place since it is emblematic of the way the poetic genre engages with the spatiotemporal dimensions of memory.

> stage of anamnesis, of recollection; we then finally move from memory as it is given and exercised to reflexive memory, to *memory of oneself*. (xvi, my emphasis)

We therefore progress from the *object* or *event* that is remembered to the memory of *oneself*: 'the use in French and in other languages of the reflexive pronoun "*soi*" (self)' is not accidental, '[i]n remembering something (*se souvenant de quelque chose*), one remembers oneself (*on se souvient de soi*)' (96).[184]

Ricœur not only argues that memory and time are intimately related to the shaping of one's identity, but he also states that the difficulty in constructing one's identity is directly linked to the obstacles raised by the treatment of temporality: 'As the primary cause of the fragility of identity we must cite its difficult relation to time; this is a primary difficulty that, precisely, justifies the recourse to *memory as the temporal component of identity*' (81, my emphasis). In fact, the notion of temporality is crucial in order to understand the construction and fragility of the subject's identity in autobiographical writing. Robert Ferrieux adds to the idea of the construction of the self another important dimension: namely, the self's *continuity* in time. If 'we are and remain what we remember', this means that our sense of identity is entirely dependent on our memories ('we are/we remember'), and that this identity is *stable* to the extent that it has a *continuity* in time ('we remain').[185] Although Ferrieux comments on the autobiographical genre in general, this theory ('we are and remain what we remember') falls short when we deal with autobiographical *poetry*.

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[184] Another similar passage reads: 'The phenomenology of memory suggested here is structured around two questions: *Of what* are these memories? *Whose* memory is it? These two questions are asked in the spirit of Husserlian phenomenology. [...] This "object oriented" approach poses a specific problem on the plane of memory. Is not memory fundamentally reflexive, as the pronominal form which predominates in French would lead us to believe: to remember (*se souvenir de*) something is at the same time to remember oneself (*se souvenir de soi*)?' (3).

[185] See the epigraph to Part 3.2.

It is true that the identity of the autobiographical lyric 'I' is dependent on his or her memories. However, some critics argue that the poetic 'I' is inevitably fragmented because the subject does not have a continuous existence in time.[186] Recent theories of autobiography and poetry have shown that autobiography in verse breaks away from the notion of continuity that underlies some canonical autobiographical prose texts. In Chapter One, I briefly touched upon some of these theories, on which the textual analyses of this third chapter are based. Rabaté argues that

> what the poem therefore produces is a sort of kaleidoscope of the self in which all elements hold together at the same time. We realise how far we have driven away from the progressive temporalisation of autobiography. But the term kaleidoscope immediately implies the splitting up and crumbling of poetry. ('Poésie et autobiographie' 44)[187]

The *lack of temporal continuity* in autobiographical poetry leads to the creation of a *kaleidoscopic* self: in other words, the disruption of the chronological sequence in autobiographical poetry—materialised by ellipses, associative digressions, *etc.*—inevitably leads to the *fragmentation* of the 'I'. These theoreticians argue that what differentiates autobiographical poetry from autobiographical prose is their radically different relation to *time*. Consequently, while the subject in prose autobiographies may appear stable and have a continuous existence in time through the process of anamnesis, the

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[186] In the field of autobiographical poetry, some critics have a tendency to analyse the works of poets whose poetic 'I' is fragmented (Nerval, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, among others): consequently, the broad critical consensus is that the first-person voice is fragmented and that this fragmentation is directly related to temporal discontinuities. Benoit argues, for instance, that autobiographical poetry is characterised by its temporal and syntactic discontinuity (32). In Part 3.2, I use these theories to explain why the fragmentation of the Muldoonian 'I' may, in fact, be explained by mnemonic discontinuities in time.

[187] The original reads: 'Ce que produit alors le poème est une sorte de kaléidoscope de soi où tout se tient en même temps. On voit combien nous nous sommes éloignés de la temporalisation progressive de l'autobiographie. Mais qui dit kaléidoscope, dit aussitôt morcellement ou émiettement'.

autobiographical 'I' in verse is characterised by its unstable and fragmented nature.[188]

There are various reasons inherent to the poetic genre that account for these temporal fragmentations. Firstly, I focus on the poetic *form* as one of the main causes of this temporal discontinuity.

Poetic and Mnemonic Fragments

Hubier argues that, on a psychological level, we perceive our experience as a *continuum* by following the 'adage according to which *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*' ('after this, therefore, because of this'). However, he sustains that, while this sense of *continuum* supposes causal links, the narrative may be discontinuous in specific literary genres. He makes a distinction between 'uninterrupted texts' and 'fragmented texts': 'On the one hand, autobiography and its fictional avatars, memoirs, some self-portraits; on the other, notebooks, diaries, interviews, chronicles, but also letters and lyric or narrative poetry' (30).[189] Although critics, such as Hubier, tend to differentiate texts in those terms—'uninterrupted' and 'fragmented'—it is important to note that this distinction does not necessarily apply to all texts and that we should allow more flexibility in establishing such categories.[190] This is certainly the case of autobiographical poetry which does not

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[188] In his essay on memory, Sigmund Freud argues that this chronological discontinuity is particularly noticeable when it comes to old memories (such as flash-backs): they seem isolated and detached from any temporal sequence (qtd. in Gasparini, *Est-il je?* 72). This is particularly the case in Muldoon's autobiographical poems depicting his childhood memories of the family farm in County Armagh, which are analysed in Part 3.2.

[189] Originally: 'On opposera ainsi les textes ininterrompus et les textes fragmentaires. D'un côté, l'autobiographie et ses avatars romanesques, les mémoires, certains autoportraits; de l'autre, les carnets, les journaux intimes, les entretiens, les chroniques, mais aussi l'épistolaire et les poésies lyriques ou narratives'. In relation to the second category, Jean-Yves Tadié argues that this fragmented conception of time is mainly endowed with a *poetic* function (qtd. in Hubier 31).

[190] For example, autobiographical prose may be fragmented. This is the case with Michel Leiris's first autobiographical prose work *L'Âge d'homme* (1939), in which the writer's self-portrait is fragmented and discontinuous.

fall neatly into one single category since, according to this classification, autobiographical poetry would belong to both categories (autobiography being 'uninterrupted' and poetry 'fragmented'). There is, therefore, a tension between autobiography, on the one hand, and the fragmented nature of poetry, on the other, in relation to the treatment of temporality. The previous chapter discussed the importance of the poetic form (in particular, the subversion of the sonnet in failed romance poems) as one of the factors accounting for the instability of the 'I'. The next analysis further explores the cause of the self's instability by focusing on the impact of the poetic form on the treatment of time: the poetic pattern prevents the 'I' from having a continuous existence in time and this lack of temporal linearity accounts for the instability of the 'I', as discussed in Chapter Two.

In autobiographical poetry, the treatment of temporality differs from chronological continuity partly because of the layout of the poem on the page and the arrangement of the poetic lines. The isolation of the poem on the page inevitably creates a rupture that is characteristic of the poetic genre. When we open one of Muldoon's collections, our first visual impression is that the book itself is a cluster of fragments or *vignettes*: each poem is separated from the previous and the following ones by a page break, a blank, a title, and/or dashes or asterisks.[191] In some instances, a sense of temporal continuity is achieved despite the layout of the poems.

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[191] Furthermore, long poems are even further fragmented since they have been printed in such a way that there is a page break after each section or 'vignette'. By 'vignette' I mean a textual fragment that is isolated from prior and succeeding text by the blank space surrounding it (the way an illustration or picture would be) and by a page break. This is the case with 'Yarrow' and 'Madoc: A Mystery' (in the latter, each section is also titled): in both poems, instead of printing the stanzas from top to bottom to use all the space on the page, the stanzas have been grouped together to form semi-independent vignettes within the longer piece. As a result, each vignette has been separated from both preceding and subsequent vignettes by a page break. A vignette does not always necessarily correspond to a single stanza and more often corresponds to a series of consecutive stanzas (generally two or three) that are thematically related (their combination offers the reader a 'snapshot'). I often use the term 'vignette' in my analyses of 'Yarrow'. Muldoon

This is true of Muldoon's so-called 'January Journal': *The Prince of the Quotidian*. This poetic diary results from a New Year's resolution that entailed writing one poem a day in January 1992. Each poem corresponds to an entry in a journal or to 'a fragment of a daily personal note'.[192] This collection is made of thirty-one poems that have been ordered *chronologically*, providing an apparent narrative: the chronological order in which the poems are arranged creates a linear narrative, creating a sense of continuity in time, which is characteristic of some autobiographical prose texts. *The Prince of the Quotidian* is not a rambling episodic journal since it accurately follows the sequence of events that punctuated that first month of 1992. Despite the fact that none of these poems were dated, the succession of poems follows the succession of days and reintroduces a sense of temporality characteristic of journals or diaries.[193] Poems six and seven (presumably written on 6 and 7 January) recount what happened the previous days—Twelfth Night (5 January) and the Epiphany (6 January)—giving the reader an essential temporal referent, a *hic et nunc*. Moreover, in the surreal poem marking both the end of the collection and the end of January, a talking horse urges the narrator to settle his differences with his mother and to 'begin on the Feast of Saint Brigid' (*PQ* 41), which, incidentally, falls on 1 February. This chronological arrangement is unique to *The Prince*: this journal is, in fact, very different from earlier and later works because it is the only volume that achieves

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acknowledges that this formal arrangement on the page necessarily changes the reading experience: 'I remember someone saying about "Madoc" that Muldoon has written a very long poem and then somebody else saying, yes, but there's an awful lot of white space in it. What we're talking about is a typographical convention. The poem would change if it were printed in a different way—in numbered sections, for example. I guess "Yarrow" would change too. The shape it makes on the page does make an impact, sure it does' (qtd. in Redmond, 'Interview with Paul Muldoon' 16).

[192] This sentence is used by Michel Braud in his study of poetic journals ('Les poèmes des jours' 77).

[193] According to Ferrieux, there is an important difference between these two terms: a diary is an introspective autobiographical piece in which the narrator focuses on his personality, whereas a journal deals with external events ('L'autobiographie, genre littéraire' 31).

temporal continuity despite the fragmented nature of the poetic genre.[194] Nonetheless, despite the chronological arrangement of this collection, each poem starts on a different page (just like an entry in a diary) and each stanza is necessarily separated from the previous and following ones by a blank, which fragments any *narrative momentum*.

Furthermore, with the exception of *The Prince*, the order of the poems in Muldoon's collections often prevents the establishment of a chronological timeline. If we consider the short collection *The Wishbone*, some of the poems are autobiographical and deal with Muldoon's relationship with Mary Farl Powers, to whom the collection is dedicated. However, these autobiographical poems recounting memories shared by the two former lovers ('Emily' and 'The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife', for instance) are 'intersected' by poems that are about entirely different topics and are not explicitly autobiographical ('Anthrax'). As a result, while the memories recounted in these personal poems could create a chronological narrative, the fact that they are not contiguous emphasises the jagged linearity that underlies the collection. What is more, even if these personal poems had followed one another, they are not dated and could have been arranged in a different order than the chronological one. For instance, while 'The Wishbone' describes Muldoon spending Christmas without his mother ('Maureen in England, Joseph in Guelph, / my mother in her grave', *W* 18), the next poem is about an unidentified mother's dying words ('The Mist-Net'). If this is the poet's own mother (as argued in my previous chapter), 'The Mist-Net' should have preceded 'The Wishbone' in order to follow the chronological time sequence. We

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[194] If *The Prince* is the exception to the rule (according to which autobiographical poetry disrupts any narrative momentum), this is perhaps because Muldoon deliberately chose to write a poem a day in January 1992, thereby favouring temporal continuity and recreating the chronology of that month. In contrast to *The Prince,* collections published before and after this journal are characterised by temporal discontinuities caused by forms of association discussed in this chapter. *The Prince* is therefore an 'oddity' in Muldoon's poetic development since this unique experiment in the diary form does not signal any formal evolution in his career.

are given snapshots of memories that are not arranged in accordance with chronology. This lack of linearity prevents the 'I' from having a continuous existence in time within the collection: the 'I' in 'The Wishbone' is necessarily older than the 'I' in 'The Mist-Net'.

While it is difficult to keep a sense of linearity across an entire volume, it is easier to recreate a chronological order within a single poem. In fact, in some rather short poems, a sense of chronology is achieved. This is the case with 'Ned Skinner' based on the poet's early memories in County Armagh.[195] In this poem, almost every stanza recounts a detail of this memory and the succession of stanzas follows the chronological order in which these details occurred.[196] In the first stanza, the speaker remembers when the pig killer came to his aunt and uncle's farm on 'a summer afternoon':

> He would step over the mountain
> Of a summer afternoon
> To dress a litter of pigs
> On my uncle's farm. (*M* 21)

The second stanza then recounts chronologically how Sarah would reassure her nephew and then ends on Ned Skinner's routine after killing the pigs:

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[195] As explained in my discussion of the paratext (Chapter One), Muldoon said that the poem 'Ned Skinner' was based on the memory of a pig killer coming to the family house. In 'A Tight Wee Place in Armagh', we learn that Ned Skinner's real name is James Blemmings: 'We kept pigs, too. My brother used to ride piggy-back on the runt of the litter. Inevitably the day came for the pigs to go. We were kept indoors for the afternoon. I'm not sure how the pigkiller did it. His name was James Blemmings. He must have cut their throats' (19). Although the name of the pig killer has been changed to the more visual name 'Ned Skinner' as part of a possible strategy to blur the autobiographical nature of the poem, this epitextual document confirms that Ned Skinner is based on a real referent. The pigkiller also features in 'The Turn' (*MSG*) and in the unpublished poem 'Mouth to Hand': 'I can remember only that father could see the pigkiller / Coming a mile away, I was sent indoors to be spared / The gallons and gallons of blood that must accompany a dying pig' (*PMP*, '"Mouth to Hand", single corrected typescript', Box 9, Folder 77).

[196] This sense of continuity is heightened by the fact that the subject of the clause in the opening verse is the actual title of the poem: '[Ned Skinner] was a "barbaric yawp", / If you took Aunt Sarah at her word' (*M* 21).

Aunt Sarah would keep me in,
Taking me on her lap
Till it was over.
Ned Skinner wiped his knife
And rinsed his hands
In the barrel at the door-step.

In the fourth stanza, we are then told of his return to the farm later that day (or on another day):

Ned Skinner came back
While my uncle was in the field.
'Sarah', he was calling, 'Sarah.
You weren't so shy in our young day.
You remember yon time in Archer's loft?'
His face blazed at the scullery window.
'Remember? When the hay was won'.[197]

While Skinner's words reproduced in direct discourse evoke an anterior memory, the recollection of the main anecdote (that which constitutes the whole poem) continues chronologically in the final stanza:

Aunt Sarah had the door on the snib.
'That's no kind of talk
To be coming over. Now go you home'.
Silence. Then a wheeze.
We heard the whiskey-jug
Tinkle, his boots diminish in the yard.
Aunt Sarah put on a fresh apron. (22)

As a result, a *narrative* is achieved in this short poem: not only are we given a full-blown memory (from the arrival of Skinner to his departure), but the

[197] The other neighbour's name, Archer, may also be a fictional name since Muldoon had originally named him 'Parsons' when the poem was first published in *Spirit of Dawn* and in the early drafts for 'Ned Skinner' (*PMP*, '"Ned Skinner", two corrected typescripts, one with holograph *Mules* table of contents on back', Box 10, Folder 1). Archer also features in 'Armaggedon, Armaggedon': 'I knew these fields. How long were they fallow? / Those had been Archer's sixty yellow acres, / These Hunter's forty green and grey. / Had Hunter and Archer got it into their heads / That they would take the stars in their strides?' (*M* 57). Interestingly, Muldoon kept the name 'Parsons' in 'Epona' and 'Mules', both collected in *Mules*. As a result, it is unclear whether these names are based on two real referents named Archer and Parsons, or if one of these two names is the real name of a single real referent, or if these characters are entirely fictional.

sequence of events is arranged in a chronological order. Despite the apparent fragmentation of the verse form (created by the blank between each stanza), each 'fragment' or 'snapshot' of this memory is included in a narrative, which is more often associated with autobiographical prose. This is however one of the few instances of a continuous and full-blown recollection in Muldoon's verse.[198]

Unlike some short autobiographical poems, it is particularly difficult to achieve a sense of linearity in longer poems, as these are sometimes of the same length as individual collections.[199] In these longer poems, both the formal fragmentation—created by the blank space between each stanza and the occasional use of an asterisk—and the epic length of the poem make it more difficult for the poet to keep a narrative momentum. In fact, while a short flashback in shorter poems does not disrupt the overall chronological narrative, in longer autobiographical poems, the consequences of occasional flashbacks (or temporal shifts) are brought to a whole new level and the scale of the temporal fragmentation is increased: instead of reading a chronological succession of snapshots from the past, every section reads as an independent mnemonic vignette that is not anchored in a chronological narrative. Although both short and long poems are formally fragmented, in 'Ned Skinner', the arrangement of stanzas is similar to reading a comic strip, in which events are chronologically ordered;[200] in Muldoon's long poems, the disorderly mingling of mnemonic

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[198] Furthermore, the use of direct speech in 'Ned Skinner' (and in other personal poems) may lead the reader to question the veracity of the words the speaker remembers. In fact, Pluvinet argues that direct speech should not logically feature in an 'authentic autobiographical text' because an 'exact retrospective reproduction' of things said in the past 'exceeds the capacities of human memory' (105). The original reads: 'la citation de paroles en discours direct devrait être absente en toute rigueur d'un texte autobiographique authentique car une reproduction rétrospective exacte des propos tenus dans un dialogue excède les capacités de la mémoire humaine'.

[199] 'Yarrow', for instance, runs over a hundred and fifty pages.

[200] I use this visual analogy because the stanzas in Muldoon's poems are interrelated and surrounded by a blank space, evoking the panels of a comic strip that are surrounded by a rectangular border and often form a linear and chronological sequence.

vignettes reads as 'a mosaic of jagged fragments'.[201] This lack of narrative structure and these multiple temporal disruptions are the causes of the instability of the 'I' characteristic of Muldoon's elegies.

In 'Ned Skinner', the 'I' is stable and homogeneous from the opening to the final lines, thanks to the poem's narrative impulse; in 'Yarrow', by contrast, the split nature of the 'I' results from the spatiotemporal dislocations of the poem: some vignettes date back to 1963 when Muldoon was an eleven- or twelve-year-old boy in Armagh, and others refer to the year 1992 (contemporary with the time of writing) when he visited the family farm long after his parents' deaths. In some instances, the same vignette includes events that took place in 1963 *and* in 1992. The reader is constantly navigating between 1963 and 1992, and the succession of vignettes reads as a spatiotemporal pell-mell: it is almost impossible to keep track of the progression of each past and contemporary event. In order to reconstruct these memories, which would enable us to grasp the 1992 and 1963 speakers' identities separately and restore the chronological order, we have to isolate these mnemonic fragments to recreate a sense of linearity.

This is particularly the case when it comes to the episode when the young Muldoon was asked to buy seeds at the local grocer's. If we set out to reconstruct this central memory in 'Yarrow', we soon come to realise that this memory-event is *literally scattered* (just like seeds) throughout the elegy: on page 43, the mother is thumbing through a seed-catalogue; on page 70, she is now ticking off a list of seeds; finally, on page 103, she gives the carbon-slip to her son. This memory from 1963 is consequently disseminated across the poem and is highly fragmented. Some of the memories read as puzzles, which the reader must

[201] This is a quote taken from H. G. Well's review of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which is particularly relevant when reading Muldoon's elegies ('Incantata' and 'Yarrow').

reassemble in order to reconstruct the chronology and form a full image of the younger speaker.

The reason why these three vignettes do not follow each other in linear fashion (particularly in longer poetic pieces) is often due to the author's use of *lines of association* induced by the speaker's mental wanderings or stream of consciousness. The formal fragmentation previously discussed is coupled with, and amplified by, the associative process: on page 43, the word 'seed' (in 'seed-catalogue') triggers the image of the yarrow plant, which prevents the development of the speaker's recollection of his mother; on page 70, it is this time the name of the local grocer ('Tohill') that drives the narrative away from this specific memory ('Tohill, from *tuathal*, / meaning "withershins"'). 'Yarrow' follows an associative logic rather than a linear and chronological one, which accentuates the formal/temporal discontinuities and contributes to the fragmentation of the subject and his memories. Although this associative logic is a present tense continuity of the remembered thoughts and events, this continuity differs from historical linearity (the continuity of the historical events that are being remembered). In other words, this present tense continuity is a *rearranged continuity* of the original historical sequence.[202]

Linguistic Lines of Association

Frances A. Yates argues that Aristotle was the first-person to give a 'formulation of the laws of association through similarity, dissimilarity, contiguity' (48) in his work *De memoria et reminiscentia*. The concept of association is rather simple:

[202] Although the following sections are dedicated to linguistic and sensory lines of association, the deterministic nature of rhyme and repetition in forging associations is also an important characteristic of Muldoon's poetry. See, for instance, the analysis of 'Gathering Mushrooms' and of the visual rhyme 'line'/'linen' later in this section. See also Ian Twiddy, 'Grief Brought to Numbers: Paul Muldoon's Circular Elegies', *English* 55:212 (Summer 2006), 181-199.

one idea triggers another. We could then similarly argue that one *memory* triggers a subsequent memory. Memories set off their own resonances and contribute to fragmenting the chronological time sequence and the first-person voice.

Mnemonic lines of association may be present in any literary genre, but they are all the more obvious in poetry: line breaks, stanzaic breaks, envois, internal rhymes, rhyming patterns, caesuras, enjambments, *etc.*, all feature among the diverse formal aspects of poetry that favour lines of association over the chronological order and participate in the fragmentation of memories. The process of association does not develop full-blown memories; rather, it offers 'vignettes of memory', 'broken memories', 'splinters' or 'fragments of memories', to use Lecarme's terms. Instead of charting a memory throughout a poem and favouring the linearity of the time sequence, memories are 'atomised' and the reader has to find among diverse poems and collections these mnemonic splinters in order to recreate the unity of the memory (as with the seeds episode). Critics agree on a strong pattern according to which some poets use linguistic lines of association during the remembering process that subvert the linearity of the time sequence, accentuating the fragmentation of the 'I' and the scattering of the origins of the 'I'. I use this pattern as a tool to understand the process of recollection in Muldoon's poems and the fragmentation of the 'I'.

Disrupting the Unity of the 'I' in 'Something Else' and 'Gathering Mushrooms'

*

'Something Else' is, without a doubt, one of Muldoon's most relevant poems when it comes to analysing lines of association since its entire structure is based on the process of the association of ideas. In fact, lines of association put an end to the process of recollection before the memory has even had time to develop: the

speaker remembers how his lover's lobster 'was lifted out of the tank', which then immediately reminds him of Nerval's pet lobster. This may be read as a *déjà-vu* or, as French philosopher Henri Bergson puts it in *Matter and Memory*, the feeling of 'having seen a thing before': the present perception 'dives into the depths of memory in search of the remembrance of the previous perception which resembles it' so much so that we obtain 'a blending' of perception and memory (106).[203] In this poem, we are not so much dealing with a present perception and a memory but with two memories that blend into one another (one that is personal, the other that is more-or-less commonly known by readers):

> When your lobster was lifted out of the tank
> to be weighed
> I thought of woad,
> of madders, of fugitive, indigo inks,
>
> of how Nerval
> was given to promenade
> a lobster on a gossamer thread,
> how, when a decent interval
>
> had passed
> (*son front rouge encor du baiser de la reine*)
> and his hopes for Adrienne
>
> proved false,
> he hanged himself from a lamp-post
> with a length of chain, which made me think
>
> of something else, then something else again. (*MB* 33)

The poet uses obsessively the preposition 'of' after the intransitive verb 'think' as a means to link the stanzas together (stanza one with stanza two and stanza four with the final envoi), and as a way to materialise the associative logic pervading

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[203] This type of association is exemplified by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*: 'Seeing a mackerel, it may happen, that I immediately think of gooseberries, because I at the same time ate mackerel with gooseberries as the sauce. The first syllable of the latter word, being that which had coexisted with the image of the bird so called, I may then think of a goose. In the next moment the image of a swan may arise before me, though I had never seen the two birds together. In the two former instances, I am conscious that their co-existence in *time* was the circumstance, that enabled me to recollect them; and equally conscious am I that the latter was recalled to me by the joint operation of likeness and contrast' (86).

the poem. There are, in fact, several lines of association that progressively drive the speaker away from the original memory: the blue-black colour of his lover's lobster changing to a pink-red colour makes him think 'of woad, / of madders' (first quatrain)[204] and of Nerval's own pet lobster (second quatrain); the lobster's radical change of colour then reminds the speaker of a line in Nerval's 'El Desdichado' (*Les Chimères*) describing the image of the erotic *red* trace of lipstick left on the forehead of the speaker (first tercet); and, finally, the 'thread' of the second quatrain reminds the speaker of the 'chain' Nerval used to hang himself (second tercet).[205] These language-based *lines* of association are, therefore, *materialised* by the terms 'gossamer', 'thread', and 'chain'.[206] Ironically, the consequence of the associative logic is that the *personal* memory of the lived event (image of the lover's lobster) gives way to a *historical* event that the speaker could not have personally experienced (image of Nerval's lobster). Furthermore, another consequence of the process of association is that the chronological sequence is fundamentally disrupted: a 'decent interval' has passed in the octave since the narrative has been *transposed* within the space of the first stanzaic break from the speaker's own personal memory (which is necessarily posterior to the poet's birth in 1951 and anterior to the publication of the volume in 1987) to Nerval's nineteenth-century eccentric habits and tragic death in 1855.

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[204] The term woad refers to a type of seaweed but also to a blue dye, while madder is a plant that is cultivated for its reddish-purple dye.

[205] The term 'thread' inevitably calls to mind the mythological figure Ariadne for three reasons. First, according to legend, Ariadne used a thread to help Athenian hero Theseus escape King Menos's labyrinth. Similarly, in Muldoon's poem, Ariadne is the speaker's muse since she is the one helping him navigate between personal memories and his imagination. Moreover, at the end of the poem, she sets him free: the extra line that is outside the sonnet-based structure could represent the poet's escape from the restrictive poetic form or *labyrinth*. Secondly, the cryptocurrent of Ariadne may be seen in the name 'Adrienne' since the pair Ariadne/Adrienne is a near anagram. Finally, the hanging of Nerval also brings to mind this legendary female figure since, according to another version of the legend, Ariadne was abandoned by Theseus and hanged herself.

[206] Within this series of synonyms, there is even a progression from the incorporeal 'gossamer'—this substance is so light that it has no substance—to the heavy and unyielding 'chain'. The poet therefore follows an associative logic through lines of association (both linguistic and physical) that become stronger as the narrative progresses.

The memory that the speaker shared with his lover is aborted after the line break that directly follows 'weighed'. This is not surprising since the verb 'to weigh' is used when estimating the weight or value of something or in order to balance something with or against *something else*. The autobiographical memory is nipped in the bud because of the process of association that is set in motion in the third line and that introduces the *pendant* to this memory: the image of Nerval's pet lobster. Although it seems, on first reading, that the personal memory *blends into* this anecdote of Nerval, we could equally argue that the process of association leads to a *substitution*. The actual memory is not just balanced against this image, it is has been substituted by the subsequent image: the lover's lobster has been replaced by Nerval's pet, and the couple formed by the speaker and his partner has been substituted by that of Nerval and Adrienne.[207] This poem illustrates how the 'I' becomes unstable to the point of being replaced by an 'other' since the Irish poet has been substituted by the figure of the French poet. While in 'Something Else', the 'I' has been replaced by the figure of an 'other', in 'Gathering Mushrooms', *three* 'I' coexist on the page. Once again, it is the associative logic that undermines the unity of the first-person voice.

In 'Gathering Mushrooms', the 'I' does not refer to the speaker at one single moment in time but at three different ages:

> The rain comes flapping through the yard
> like a tablecloth 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.

[207] Adrienne is a fictional representation of a certain type of woman (saintly, child-like) who features in *Sylvie* (1853), which is itself part of the longer volume, *Filles du feu* (1854). Interestingly, in this novella (*Sylvie*), Nerval also plays with temporal ambiguity since the speaker re-lives past events that remind him of his current situation. He therefore oscillates between past and present just like the speaker in 'Something Else' navigates between two different temporal strata.

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. (*Q* 7)

There are not two but *three* different time periods: the present time of the narration/writing, the time when the first memory took place (stanza one), and that of the second memory (stanza two). While the first mnemonic vignette (stanza one) is recounted in the present tense, which differs from the present of narration, the second mnemonic vignette is recounted in the past tense. This shift in tenses creates a first level of temporal disruption, which takes place within the stanzaic break since the narrative shifts from one particular moment in the past to an anterior one ('All brought back to me that September evening / *fifteen years on*'). Combined with this temporal rupture, there is also a *spatial* shift from the family farm (stanza one) to another countryside setting ('Barnett's fair demesne' in stanza two). This poem clearly illustrates how poetry creates fragmented narratives since we travel both in time and in space via the associative logic: while the motif of the mushroom underlies this psychedelic poem—the 'psilocybin' substance is an organic compound found in mushrooms—there are, in fact, several lines of association between the first and second stanzas: the back yard of

the parents' farm is later echoed in the 'fair demesnes', the 'hand-embroidered' tablecloth that the mother left 'on the line' then resonates in the 'collection of linen' (forming the visual rhyme 'line'/'linen'), and, within the second stanza, the words 'fair' and 'dewy grass' echo the 'fair maid' and 'dewy grass' of the traditional Irish ballad 'Gathering Mushrooms', whose lyrics are consequently brought to the speaker's mind in the final couplet.[208] The poem therefore comes full circle since the closing lines hark back to the title of the poem.[209] The associative logic transports the 'I' who narrates the story from one memory to another, from one self to a former self who is fifteen years younger. As a result, the 'I' has no continuity in time from the opening to the closing line of the poem.

In 'Something Else', the recollection of a personal memory is *replaced* with the description of a nineteenth-century tragic incident; in 'Gathering Mushrooms', the various memories are *embedded* in each other, emphasising the connections between them. In both cases, the chronological order is disrupted and the past memory that supplants the other event is anchored in the past (it is recounted in a past tense). However, in other instances, the past (brought up by similar lines of association) not only disrupts the chronological sequence, but it is, in fact, *reactualised* in the present. In other words, the past event irrupts in the writing and is narrated as if it were relived in the present time of writing. This is the case of 'Yarrow', in which the resonance between events takes precedence over the chronological order in a more extreme way than in 'Something Else' and 'Gathering Mushrooms'.

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[208] The verse reads: 'I've seen you on the *dewy grass*'. My emphasis.
[209] This circling pattern is also encapsulated in the final letter of the poem: 'o'.

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> [T]he most striking aspect of Wordsworth's account of a poet was his insistence on the poet's 'disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things *as if they were present*'.
>
> (Sacks xi, my emphasis)

In 'Yarrow', this time-travelling is brought to another level: not only are there several temporal spheres (as in 'Gathering Mushrooms', for instance), but the narrative constantly *oscillates* between the past (1963) and the present time of writing (1992). This ambiguous and unstable use of tense produces a 'doubling' of the narrative in 'Yarrow'.[210] In fact, since this oscillation between past and present is constant, some memories from 1963 are narrated in the present tense as if they were called out from the past and relived in the present time of 1992. Emmanuel Laugier contends that when poetry and autobiography are combined, the 'I' does not look back towards the past—towards what 'was'—but *reactualises* what 'was' (40). These 1963 memories read as if they were *reactualised* in the present time of 1992. In the following extracts, for instance, this distinction between past and present is almost unnoticeable since the 1963 memories of the parents are recounted in the present tense: 'she pins the clothes on the clothes-line' (*AC* 42); 'For the moment, though, she thumbs through a seed-catalogue' (43); 'while, quiet, almost craven, / / he studies the grain in the shaft of a rake' (43). These events read as if they had taken place in the present time of writing (*i.e.* 1992). As a result, the narrative alternates between two presents—that of the old days or the recent past, and that of today—making it difficult for the reader to differentiate between the 1963 'I' and the 1992 'I'.

[210] Muldoon's use of modals (such as 'would') also creates an ambiguous and pluralised narrative.

The previous analyses argued that the treatment of temporality in Muldoon's autobiographical poetry is not linear because of the formal specificities of the poetic genre, on the one hand, and because of the speaker's associative logic, on the other. The process of remembrance fails to develop full-blown memories and, more importantly, prevents any unified and continuous image of the poetic 'I', particularly in 'Yarrow'. In this elegy, the fragmentation of the 'I' is also due to another type of association: sensory recollection. In fact, sensory associations also disrupt the linearity of the narrative and the unity of the 'I'. The next section first briefly summarises this particular type of recollection and then emphasises its impact on the disruption of the chronological order and on the uprooting of the 'I' in 'Yarrow'.

Sensory Misrememberings: The Uprooting of the 'I'

> Associations are built up between the present and the past through sensation, memory can bring to the surface past sensations that are relived with the same strength as the first time.
>
> (Gaspari 308)[211]

Following the analysis of *linguistic* associations in the previous section, the next discussion focuses on how the process of recollection is also set in motion through (or disrupted by) the *senses*.[212] Since the most famous example of sensory association is to be found in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (or *In Search of Lost Time*), I refer to a few passages taken from the *madeleine* episode in order to illustrate the theory of sensory associations on which my analysis of Muldoon's *madeleines* is based.

In *The Cambridge Introduction to Marcel Proust*, Adam Watt explains that

> Most famously, near the start of the novel the Narrator's childhood, long thought to be a forgotten, and therefore inaccessible, chapter of his past, is recaptured for him as an adult when he tastes a *madeleine*, a small, sweet cake, dipped in lime-blossom tea. This sense experience, far more powerful that any willed act of the mind, revitalizes involuntarily the experience of tasting the same concoction as a

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[211] Originally: 'Des associations se nouent entre le présent et le passé par l'intermédiaire de la sensation, la mémoire peut faire remonter à la surface des sensations passées qui sont revécues avec la même force que la première fois'. The critic is here commenting on Irish writer George Moore's semi-autobiographical trilogy *Hail and Farewell* (*Ave*, *Salve*, and *Vale*, published, respectively, in 1911, 1912, and 1914).

[212] Cognitive psychologist researcher Pascale Piolino explains that autobiographical memory is, in fact, intimately related to the senses: 'Autobiographical memory enables us to "see" images, but also to take a walk among our memories while "keeping in mind" odours, sounds... everything that creates an atmosphere' (n. pag.). This image is reminiscent of the Baudelairean *flâneur* figure, strolling among his or her memories and taking stock of all their sensory features. This is the case in some of the poems from *The Prince of the Quotidian*: the poem about Muldoon's newly born nephew invites the speaker to immerse the baby boy in a world of senses in the heart of New Orleans: ""Let him", I heard, "let him be one ignited by the quaint / / in this new quotidian: a mound / of coffee beans in the 'Café du Monde'; / the New Orleans School of Cookery's / okra- / / monious gumbo [...] the whiff from Pat O'Brien's / thousand and one rums"' (*PQ* 26-27).

> child; this memory opens the floodgates and a crucial period of his existence is vividly restored to him. (2)[213]

While the Proustian narrator believes that his childhood is forlorn and beyond his reach, he stumbles upon the *object* that brings back memories of his past. In fact, just before the *madeleine* episode starts, the speaker in *Swann's Way* explains that memories can irrupt if we are lucky enough to come upon a particular object or being, be it an animal, a plant, or an inanimate object:

> It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture [our past]: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling. And it depends on chance whether or not we come upon this object before we ourselves must die. (Proust 51)

In these few lines, Proust explains that we cannot deliberately evoke the past, but that an object may bring back memories that were not voluntarily called by us. These 'transient and passive memories' (Tukey 398) provide the narrator with a direct and involuntary access to his or her reservoir of memories.[214]

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[213] The passage referred to is in the first volume of *Remembrance of Things Past* (*Swann's Way*) and reads: 'Many years had elapsed during which nothing of Combray, except what lay in the theatre and the drama of my going to bed there, had any existence for me, when one day in winter, on my return home, my mother, seeing that I was cold, offered me some tea, a thing I did not ordinarily take. [...] She sent for one of those squat, plump little cakes called "petites madeleines", which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted valve of a scallop shell. And soon, mechanically, dispirited after a dreary day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shiver ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. [...] Undoubtedly what is thus palpitating in the depths of my being must be the image, the visual memory which, being linked to that taste, is trying to follow it into my conscious mind. [...] And suddenly the memory revealed itself. The taste was that of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because on those mornings I did not go out before mass), when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of tea or tisane' (Proust 51-54).

[214] Proust's involuntary memories have often been compared to the theories put forward by one of his contemporaries, French philosopher Bergson, whose substantial body of work was revived by Gilles Deleuze's *Le bergsonisme* (1966). Bergson develops his theory of memory in his second influential book *Matière et mémoire* (1896), 'a text of great richness', according to Ricœur (*Memory* 25). In this work, Bergson argues that memory is time that has been materialised as an object or an image. In this sense, memory has been *objectified* (as opposed to memory understood in a psychological sense). When referring to the different forms of recollection in *Matter and Memory* and in his essay 'Intellectual Effort' (in *Mind-Energy*), Bergson opposes this

Furthermore, in both 'Yarrow' and Proust's novel, it is not just the object itself that matters; it is the *sensory* effect that is associated with it that brings back recollections, 'the sensation which that material object will give us'. In fact, these memories—referred to as 'involuntary memories'—may irrupt, as it were, thanks to a smell, a particular taste, or a melody, thus constituting another form of association. According to Proust smell and taste are among the most powerful senses when it comes to sensory recollection:

> But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection. (54)

In *Swann's Way*, the narrator remembers his childhood through the *taste* of a cake; in 'Yarrow', 'amid the ruins' of the farm, it is the *smell* of the yarrow plant that may bring back this 'vast structure of recollection'.

'spontaneous recollection' to 'laborious recollection'. It is important to note, however, that some critics argue that Bergson's and Proust's theories are different. On the notions of time, memory, and the real in Bergson and Proust, see Joyce N. Megay, 'La question de l'influence de Bergson sur Proust', *Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 27:2 (Jun. 1973), 53-58. In addition to similarities in their work, Bergson and Proust were also related through Bergson's marriage to one of Proust's cousins, Louise Neuburger, in 1891.

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> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future
> And time future contained in time past.
> What might have been and what has been
> Point to one end, which is always present.
> Footfalls echo in the memory
> Down the passage which we did not take
> Towards the door we never opened
> Into the rose-garden.
>
> ('Burnt Norton' Eliot 171)

While the speaker in Heaney's 'Squarings' sequence says '[t]he places I go back to have not failed / But will not last' (*Seeing Things* 101), in 'Yarrow', this looming doom has already happened: the family farm has already been 'swept away' and the 'I' is waist-deep—not in 'cow-parsley', as in 'Squarings'—but in pampas-grass. Referring to the family garden and the farm, Muldoon explains that:

> The image of the 'pampas', or as it appears in another poem, 'That hacienda's frump / of pampas-grass' ('The Earthquake') is particularly evocative for me. There was, in our garden, a great 'frump' of pampas-grass that has, for me, come to stand for something along the lines of Eliot's 'rose-garden' from the opening section of 'Burnt Norton'. (qtd. in Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 72)

Muldoon's own 'rose-garden' is, in fact, described in 'The Earthquake', which is about a man who progressively remembers what happened the previous night:

> One delicately-tufted lynx's ear,
> the fibre-optics
>
> of her hair;
> slowly last night comes back to him.
>
> *
>
> That hacienda's frump
> of pampas-grass,
>
> a pair of cryptic
> eagles guarding its front door. (*MB* 22)

In this poem, the 'frump / of pampas-grass' is at the core of the recollection process. This memory-image forms a vignette since it is encapsulated in two couplets separated from the previous and the following stanzas by a blank and an asterisk. This association of senses and memories is brought to another level in Muldoon's elegy for his mother, in which the poet is finally ready to go down this 'passage' and open the 'door' (to borrow Eliot's words) leading to his childhood memories.

While Chapter Two discussed the *symbolic* 'clearing of the stones of the family garden' in father-and-son poems; at the beginning of 'Yarrow', this process has *literally* happened. What seemed to anchor the poem in a spatial frame—the family farm in the Moy—has vanished and has been replaced by an invasive type of plant. The yarrow plant—which is paradoxically responsible for the disappearance of the family landscape and yet the last element that anchors the poem in the past—plays an important part in the process of recollecting the image of the now gone family farm. I first explain why the yarrow plant may be compared to a *madeleine*, and then illustrate the disruption of temporality through sensory recollection.

The very first poem of this elegy encapsulates the speaker's main fear, the disappearance of the farm:

> Little by little it dawned on us that the row
> of kale would shortly be overwhelmed by these pink
> and cream blooms, that all of us
>
> would be overwhelmed, that even if my da
> were to lose an arm
> or a leg to the fly-wheel
>
> of a combine and be laid out on a tarp
> in a pool of blood and oil
> and my ma were to make one of her increasingly rare
>
> appeals to some higher power, some *Deo*

this or that, all would be swept away by the stream
that fanned across the land. (*AC* 39)

The 'indeterminate' demonstrative pronoun 'these' (first tercet) introduces in the text a referent that at first is not known to the reader but that creates immediacy with the past and a certain sense of urgency.[215] In fact, the speaker uses the deictic 'these' as if he were pointing to the reader the title of the poem *and* the yarrow plant. This opening vignette introduces the speaker's main fear (the disappearance of the farm) and the element that is both the cause of this fear and the only element that may restore memories to the speaker (the yarrow plant).[216]

Since in the second and third stanzas both parents are mentioned, the speaker insists on the intimate link between the plant (stanza one) and his lineage or origins (stanzas two and three). The analysis of the following three vignettes, alternating between descriptions of the yarrow plant and memories of the past, shows that the plant is, in fact, directly associated with the process of recollection:

Vignette 1[217]

For the moment, though, she thumbs through a seed-catalogue
She's borrowed from Tohill's of the Moy
while, quiet, almost craven,

---

[215] The determinant 'this' is used in a similar way in some of Rimbaud's poems in *Illuminations*. The opening line of 'Childhood I' reads: 'This idol, black eyes and yellow mane, without family or court, nobler than the fable, Mexican and Flemish' (23); and 'Childhood V' opens with the line: 'Let someone finally rent me this tomb, whited with quicklime, with lines of cement in relief—very far below the earth' (29). Both poems feature an indeterminate deictic and a descriptive passage about this unknown referent, which is in many ways similar to the first stanza of 'Yarrow'. Collot argues that when the reader is faced with these deictics, s/he is confronted with a 'semantic void' (195). While Collot argues that in Rimbaud's poems no prior context may help the reader identify the referent, in this elegy, the deictic 'these' points to the title of the elegy, *i.e.* the referent.

[216] The 'pink / and cream blooms' of the yarrow plant are associated with the image of 'the stream that fanned across the land' so that the invading plant is compared to a stream or river. Since a river symbolically represents the irreversible passing of time, the yarrow plant metaphorically stands for the passing of time and oblivion.

[217] Once again, I choose to use the word 'vignette' for reading clarity. The entire elegy is composed of 151 short poems, each printed on a separate page. I therefore refer to each of these 151 poems as a 'vignette'. Each vignette is numbered for reading clarity only. These titles ('Vignette 1', 'Vignette 2', *etc.*) do not refer to actual titles or numbers in the original poem. 'Vignette 1', for instance, is not the first vignette in 'Yarrow', it is the first vignette I analyse.

he studies the grain in the shaft of a rake:
there are two palm-prints in blue stone
on the bib of his overalls

where he's absentmindedly put his hands
to his heart; in a den in St John's, Newfoundland, I browse
on a sprig of *Achillea millefolium*, as it's classed. (*AC* 43)

Vignette 2

Achillea millefolium: with its bedraggled, feathery leaf
and pink (less red
than mauve) or off-white flower, its tight little knot

of a head,
it's like something keeping a secret
from itself, something on the tip of its own tongue. (44)

Vignette 3

Would that I might take comfort in the vestigial scent
of a yarrow-sprig, a yarrow-spurt
I've plucked from the somewhat unorthodox

funerary vase
that fills one grate:
from the other there's a chortle of methane-gas

(is it methane
that's so redolent of the apple-butt?)
through a snow-capped sierra of non-combustible coal. (45)

Vignette 2 is at the centre of this poetic triptych for two reasons.[218] First of all, the fact that the two 'lateral' vignettes are made of three tercets (compared to the central poem which is only made of two) creates an enveloping pattern in which vignette 2 holds a central place. Secondly, within this central vignette, the speaker points to the core of the triptych: the stanzaic break creates a rupture in the phrase 'its tight little knot / / of a head' (44) and brings to the foreground the

[218] I call this set of three vignettes a triptych because they are consecutive, they are semantically tied together and, just like an altar piece, the lateral pieces are 'hinged so as to fold over [the] central one' ('Triptych').

term 'knot' embodying this image of the core or centre. The yarrow 'knot of a head' holds a central place in this triptych and in the collection as a whole since it constitutes the bridge between past and present. This 'knot', this link between past and present, is encapsulated in the author's use of punctuation.

In fact, in vignette 1, this link is made explicit by the use of the semicolon in the third tercet after 'to his heart'. Since the semicolon is used when there is a connection between two clauses, it indicates that they are clearly connected and yet remain independent from one another. However, it does not feel quite right to have a semicolon since the link between past (the parents in Northern Ireland in 1963) and present (the speaker in a den in St John Newfoundland in 1992) is not obvious. However, the fact that Muldoon uses this type of punctuation draws our attention towards the link that unites these two clauses, these two presents. In doing so, he sends a signal to the reader: the 'sprig of *Achillea millefolium*' is what links the past and the present. The two images—that of 1963 and that of 1992—coexist, they are at once connected and independent. The link between past and present is further emphasised by the poetic form: vignette 1 hinges on a mirror pattern because the first line 'she thumbs through a seed-catalogue' is echoed by the final lines 'I browse / on a spring of *Achillea millefolium*, as it's classed'.[219] The past image of the mother and her 'seed-catalogue' coexists with that of the contemporary image of the 1992 speaker and his botanical reference book. The memory of the seed-catalogue is, therefore, brought to the speaker's mind by its association with plants or seeds in general and, in particular, with the yarrow plant. The present perception (the speaker's browsing through a botanical book) evokes a past memory (his mother browsing through her seed-catalogue) so much

[219] The Latin name *Achillea millefolium* is similar to a motto or a magical password enabling the speaker to open 'the door into the rose garden': 'it's like something keeping a secret / from itself, something on the tip of its own tongue'. Interestingly, the term 'sesame' is used when the 'cruel Emir' and 'the High King, Connor MacNessa' cry out 'Open, Sesame' to open the barn-door on the family farm (186).

so that the past is reactualised in the present of 1992 (it is narrated in the present tense).

The third element of the triptych (vignette 3) is particularly important because it is the first time that the distinctive *smell* of the yarrow plant is mentioned. The adjective 'vestigial' echoes the sacred nature of this plant: like a relic, it is the last thing that remains on the family farm. Interestingly, while vestigial means '[o]f the nature of a vestige; remaining or surviving in a degenerate, atrophied, or imperfect condition or form' ('Vestigial'), the yarrow plant is thriving in this environment. Consequently, it is important to point out that it is the *scent* that is 'degenerate', 'imperfect'.[220] Just like any spontaneous recollection, it 'is as capricious in reproducing as it is faithful in preserving' (Bergson 102). While Proust's *madeleine* restores memories of 'the old grey house',[221] memories that follow these descriptions of the yarrow plant do not constitute full-blown memories of the family farm, only mnemonic splinters, so that the chronological order of the rest of the narrative is increasingly disrupted.

The Uprooting of the 'I' Through Sensory Associations

*

Gasparini argues that 'if the destination is a place endowed with memories, the traveller runs the greater risk to be taken in and jostled by the slide of memory' (*Est-il je?* 201).[222] By embarking on a mental and physical trip to the place of his origins, Muldoon is in the grip of the slippages of memory. In 'Yarrow', the process of sensory recollection spirals out of control and accounts

[220] The term vestigial could also just refer to the lingering smell of a plucked sprig (in an arranged bunch) and, therefore, to the dying plant severed from its roots.

[221] 'And as soon as I had recognised the taste of the piece of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-blossom which my aunt used to give me [...] immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like a stage set to attach itself to the little pavilion opening on to the garden which had been built out behind it for my parents' (Proust 54). Interestingly, the image of the garden is central to Eliot, Proust, and Muldoon in their effort to remember the past.

[222] 'Si la destination est un lieu investi de souvenirs, le voyageur court un risque accru d'être embarqué et bousculé dans le toboggan de la mémoire'.

not only for the disruption of chronology, but also for the scattering of the origins of the 'I'.

Among the other various senses present in 'Yarrow', we encounter 'the scent of new-mown hay' (*AC* 62), the 'scent of jacaranda—jasmine' (69), the 'scent of Vaseline' (148), and, finally, the 'thuriferous / scent' (168).[223] However, unlike Proust, the speaker is not always confident about the exact origin of some of the smells. As a result, the process of reminiscence is thwarted:

> The scent of new-mown hay (it may be the scent of tonka)
> pervades the 1848 edition of Clough's
> *The Bothie of Tofer-na-Fuosich*: I know that ash-girt
>
> well where a red
> bullock with a stunning white head
> will again put its shoulder to the water like hardy Canute. (62)

The speaker's hesitation is clearly emphasised in the parenthetical clause and in the use of the modal 'may'. Although the scent of this almond-shaped seed (tonka) is reminiscent of vanilla or new-mown hay ('Tonka'), the reference to the exotic seed of the tropical tonka tree somehow clashes with the more domestic scent of hay.[224] Therefore, this unidentified sense hinders the process of sensory reminiscence. In fact, after the colon placed before the stanzaic break, the process of (indirect) reminiscence is stopped in its tracks since the speaker's past is not recollected in the next lines and is, instead, replaced with a reference to the eleventh-century king of Denmark and of England, 'hardy Canute' (Hardicanute). The use of the colon would normally indicate a correlation between the two clauses: between the familiar scent of hay (first tercet) and the remembered

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[223] The term 'thuriferous' refers to something that produces frankincense, an aromatic gum resin. Taste is also sporadically present in the elegy such as in 'the *arrière-goût* of patchouli oil and urine' (148).

[224] This type of seed (tonka) may be found in the northern regions of South America or in West Africa, a region also referred to in 'Blissom' (*H*) and 'Unapproved Road' (*MSG*) through the figure of the Tuareg.

person (second tercet). The domestic scent of hay should have logically brought up an image of one of the parents; instead, these unreliable sensory associations have replaced the expected image of the biological father with that of a historical figure.[225]

In the later stages of 'Yarrow', this mnemonic instability is increased and similarly blurs the origins of the 'I':

> It might have been hogweed, or horehound, perhaps even arum,
> that would inundate this rinky-dink
> bit of land
>
> on which a mushroom-mogul has since built a hacienda (95)

The use of the coordinating 'or' and of the combined adverbs 'perhaps' and 'even' in the first line mark an evolution from the mere 'may' of the previous passage (hay/tonka). While in the earlier passage the father was temporarily replaced by a historical figure, this time, the father has been transformed into a mushroom magnate.[226] Furthermore, the young Muldoon imagines that there is a large South American estate on the tiny 'bit of land', whose smallness is emphasised by the shortness of the poetic line. Within the space of the stanzaic break, the narrative seems to have taken a fictional turn: the now gone family farm has been

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[225] The failure of sensory associations similarly blurs the *origins* of the 'I' in 'Milkweed and Monarch', in which the 'taste of dill, or tarragon' fills the speaker's mouth. The sensation he experiences at his parents' grave immediately brings to the surface an involuntary remembrance, that of an unidentified woman who may be related to the erotic and drug-addicted 'S—' in 'Yarrow'. The scent she is associated with ('little pickled gherkin', *AC* 10) is less delicate than dill or tarragon, and could reflect the worsening of her drug addiction or, perhaps, some sort of disease of the sexual organs (this scent may read as a slightly odd euphemism for her sexual scent). From then on, the narrator is troubled by this involuntary reminiscence and his inability to distinguish between his mother and father—the figures of origins—who have been overshadowed by the enigmatic female figure. Unlike the passage in 'Yarrow', which is eventually followed by an image of the father later in the poem; at the end of 'Milkweed and Monarch', neither the mother nor the father is identifiable. The impossibility of distinguishing between dill and tarragon in the opening stanza signals the failure to differentiate the mother from the father.

[226] This 'mushroom-mogul' could, in fact, refer to several figures: the person who bought the farm, a fictional character, or Muldoon's father. It is likely that this 'mushroom-mogul' is the father's fictional double because in 'Immrama' the father's fictive double is a well-off man leaving in South America (perhaps on a hacienda) and because Patrick Muldoon *was* a mushroom grower.

imaginatively recreated and transformed into a hacienda, and the dead father has been resurrected as a mushroom magnate.[227] In this passage, the 'rinky-dink / bit of land' has finally been submerged by the plant and the speaker has lost the *spatial* terrain of his childhood (the family farm).[228]

This vignette prompts me to turn to the other central notion within the process of recollection: space. Following the analysis of the remembering process in relation to time in Part 3.2, Part 3.3 focuses on the importance of space in Muldoon's autobiographical poems that are based on memories. This part argues that, although some *memori loci* shed light on the construction of the speaker's persona, one particular 'place of memory' contributes to the fragmentation of the 'I': namely, the family farm.

3.3. Spatial Memories: Mapping Out the Childhood Landscape

> [T]he 'things' remembered are intrinsically associated with places. And it is not by chance that we say of what has occurred that it took place.
>
> (Ricœur, *Memory* 41)

Reflecting on a remark by American writer Carson McCullers in his essay 'The Sense of Place' on the relationship between place and poetry, Heaney argues that 'to know who you are, you have to have a place to come from' (*Preoccupations* 135). In fact, memory, identity, time, *and* space are intimately related. Heaney

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[227] The fictional dimension of 'Yarrow' is further explored in my next chapter.

[228] Muldoon's formal techniques (lines of association, rhyme patterns, etc.) create simultaneous narratives of possibility (or alternative pasts) since the family farm has been reconstructed in the narrator's imagination as a hacienda owned by a mushroom magnate. This means, in turn, that if the past is 'plural' or multiple, then the future is not to be understood as a single entity either, but as a sheaf of alternative futures. This is particularly the case when the poet uses 'would' in *Why Brownlee Left* or 'yet to' in *Quoof*.

further explains that, despite their different use of place, both Kavanagh and Montague have in common 'a feeling for their place that steadies them and gives them a point of view' (144). Part 3.3 therefore hinges on another type of association: places and memories. In Muldoon's poetry, specific *memori loci* are linked to the speaker's sense of identity and of personal origins. This part focuses on the notion of space and its relation to memory by first giving a brief overview of the theory called 'The Art of Memory', according to which specific places are used to enable the process of recollection. My analyses then apply this theory to Muldoon's poems and argue that spatial structuration and toponymy are intimately related to memories and to the speaker's sense of identity. Finally, Part 3.3 highlights the limits of the association of space and memories, which account for the fragmentation of the 'I' in 'Yarrow'.

Anchoring the Past: The Art of Memory

> [W]hen we return to a place after a considerable absence, we not merely recognise the place itself, but remember things that we did there, and recall the persons whom we met and even the unuttered thoughts which passed through our minds when we were there before.
> (Quintilian, qtd. in Yates 37)[229]

Yates famously pioneered the theory of *memori loci* in the 1960s in her fundamental book *The Art of Memory*.[230] According to this mnemonic art, places

[229] Ricœur draws a parallel between Greco-Roman theories and contemporary theories. He argues that 'our contemporary discussion concerning the places of memory—real places inscribed in geography—can be considered the most recent heir to this art of artificial memory coming from the Greeks and the Latins, for whom the places were the sites of a mental script' (*Memory* 63).

[230] Early on in her book, Yates explains that '[t]here is no modern book in English on the history of the art of memory and very few books or articles on it in any language' (13). Another researcher who has dedicated an important part of his work to *memori loci* is French critic Pierre Nora, who coined the term '*lieux de mémoire*' (places of memory). He developed his theory in essays that were published in several volumes entitled *Les lieux de mémoire* (from 1984 to 1992).

and memories are tightly tied together since memories are spatially-mapped. Yates explains that this art, which was formerly a part of the art of rhetoric, 'seeks to memorize through a technique of impressing "places" and "images" on memory' (11) and originates with a tragic event involving Simonides of Ceos.[231] This incident was recounted by 'Cicero in his *De oratore* when he discusses memory as one of the five parts of rhetoric' (18). Yates opens her first chapter with the story of the Greek poet, who lived in the sixth and fifth centuries BC:

> At a banquet given by a nobleman of Thessaly named Scopas, the poet Simonides of Ceos chanted a lyric poem in honour of his host but including a passage in praise of Castor and Pollux. [...] A little later, a message was brought in to Simonides that two young men were waiting outside who wished to see him. [...] During his absence the roof of the banqueting hall fell in, crushing Scopas and all guests to death beneath the ruins; the corpses were so mangled that the relatives who came to take them away for burial were unable to identify them. But Simonides remembered the places at which they had been sitting at the table and was therefore able to indicate to the relatives which were their dead. [...] And this experience suggested to the poet the principles of the art of memory of which he is said to have been the inventor. (17)[232]

Yates argues that, although Simonides was credited with this method of memorisation, the book that is central to the art of memory was written by an anonymous teacher. According to her, everything written on memory stems from *Ad Herennium*, a text-book for students written by an unknown teacher of rhetoric in Rome—who was thought to be Cicero by the medieval tradition (Ricœur, *Memory* 61)—and compiled *c.* 86-82 BC. A section of this book is dedicated to memory.[233] This teacher distinguishes between natural memory and *artificial* memory, which is the type of memory that concerns us here:

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[231] Interestingly, Scottish photographer Norman McBeath, who has worked with Muldoon on *Plan B* (2009), recently published *Simonides* (2011) with Scottish poet Robert Crawford who translated some of Simonides's poems. Each original poem and its translation are accompanied by one of McBeath's duotone black and white photographs.

[232] The two young men were the Greco-Roman deities called the Dioscuri.

[233] See *Ad Herennium* (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1954), ch. 16-24.

> The artificial memory is established from places and images [...], the stock definition to be forever repeated down the ages. A *locus* is a place easily grasped by the memory, such as a house, an intercolumnar space, a corner, an arch, or the like. Images are forms, marks or simulacra [*formae*, *notae*, *simulacra*] of what we wish to remember. (qtd. in Yates 22)

Yates, emulating the memory section of *Ad Herennium*, further explains that 'the same set of *loci* can be used again and again for remembering different material': 'the *loci* are like the wax tablets which remain when what is written on them has been effaced and are ready to be written on again' (23). Several *memori loci* in Muldoon's poetry are also used as 'wax tablets' to help the speaker anchor mnemonic fragments of his past.

Memori Loci in Muldoon's Personal Poems

> INTERVIEWER: Are your childhood memories still vivid?
>
> MULDOON: Absolutely. I do feel very much that I can be in that moment, almost at will. It takes almost nothing to get me back there, certainly to the house I was brought up in, after the age of four, near a village called the Moy. The room I had there was a bedroom-cum-workroom looking on to a little backyard with a house, that my father had built, used mostly for pigs.
>
> (qtd. in Wilson, James n. pag.)

Muldoon's poetry 'keeps returning to a historical and biographical ground which, in one sense, is astonishingly almost obsessively specific' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 16). In fact, in Muldoon's personal poems, several places are transformed into *memori loci* since they are used again and again as reservoirs of memories. *Memori loci* are associated with Muldoon's personal memories in two different ways: specific 'places of memory' and meticulous descriptions of journeys across County Armagh.

*

> My parents were living in Dungannon, County Tyrone, when I was born on June 20th, 1951 in a hospital in Portadown, County Armagh. The family moved soon afterwards to Eglish, County Tyrone, where two other children, Maureen and Joseph, were born in 1953 and 1954 respectively. In 1954, we all moved to Collegelands, County Armagh, where my mother had taken a post in the local primary school, and where the family would continue to be based for the next thirty years. ('Notes for *Chez Moy*' n. pag.)

Just as Kavanagh's place names are used 'as posts to fence out a personal landscape' (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 141), these specific places—Eglish, Collegelands, Moy—hold a central place in Muldoon's poetry since they are connected to the process of recollection. The association of places and memories enables the reader to reconstruct the poet's self-portrait as a child because these *memori loci* often feature in childhood poems.

Muldoon's family moved to Eglish when he was only a few months old:

> My earliest memories are of a place called Eglish, where my father ran a tiny little shop, a subterranean place with a bench. I remember running towards the shop and expecting the door to be solid, but going through it and then falling into the shop. In 'The Right Arm' I write about the various items for sale there, including a dreadful confection called clove rock kept in a glass jar. (Muldoon, qtd. in Wilson, James n. pag.)

'The Right Arm', published in his 1983 volume *Quoof*, centres on the association of the place name and the poet's 'earliest memories'. In this short autobiographical poem, Muldoon abides by the tradition of the *dinnseanchas* ('lore of places') and offers 'an understanding of the notion of place', as Donegal poet and playwright Cathal Ó Searcaigh would put it (qtd. in Battersby 10):

> Ever playful with words and with places, the poet, Paul Muldoon, fetches back to the village of Eglish (*Eaglais*, 'a church') in South Co. Tyrone. The name of the place is a matter of mystification to him. He cannot explain it other than in terms of wonderment as to how Eglish managed to insinuate itself between the Latin *ecclesia* and the French *église*. It is like a child plunging an arm into a sweet-jar 'for the last bit of clove-rock', and finding it wedged there for good. Rock and glass

> are the dual motifs of this church-named place, conferring upon it age-old affirmation. As Muldoon phrases it: 'The Eglish sky was its own stained-glass vault / and my right arm was sleeved in glass / that has yet to shatter'. (O'Connor 75)

Given that this collection is mostly concerned with contemporaneous politics and physical violence, this poem seems to steady the poet and give him a sense of identity:

> I was three-ish
> when I plunged my arm into the sweet-jar
> for the last bit of clove-rock.
>
> We kept a shop in Eglish
> that sold bread, milk, butter, cheese,
> bacon and eggs,
> Andrews Liver Salts,
> and, until now, clove-rock.
>
> I would give my right arm to have known then
> how Eglish was itself wedged between
> *ecclesia* and *église*.
>
> The Eglish sky was its own stained-glass vault
> and my right arm was sleeved in glass
> that has yet to shatter. (*Q* 11)

The poet's nostalgic memory of 'clove-rock' from his early childhood (stanza one) is immediately followed by the place name and the recollection of the products sold in the shop (stanza two). In fact, just as the 'last bit of clove-rock' in the sweet-jar is 'wedged' there for good, the nostalgic memories associated with the young Muldoon have now found a poetic frame in which to be remembered. We are therefore given an autobiographical snapshot of Muldoon as a toddler that is intimately connected with a specific place. Eglish constitutes what Ó Searcaigh calls 'the gate of the past into the present' (qtd. in Battersby 10).

When Muldoon was three years old, his family then moved to Collegelands, which is similarly related to early childhood memories. This place name is particularly recurrent in Muldoon's first writing period, which extends from one

of his earliest collections (*New Weather*, 1973) to his last collection written before leaving Ireland (*Meeting the British*, 1987).[234] This *memori locus* not only strengthens the speaker's *identity* (through his childhood memories), but it also anchors his *lineage* (through personal memories of his parents and grandparents). Muldoon has often emphasised the importance of Collegelands in interviews and autobiographical pieces and has provided some interesting background information on the origins of its name:

> The 'college' of Collegelands was Trinity College, Dublin, and many of our neighbours had been tenants of Trinity College for several generations, up until the founding of the Irish Free State. This, then, was a little enclave of Roman Catholics living within the predominantly Protestant Parish of Loughgall, the village where the Orange Order had been founded in 1795. ('Notes for *Chez Moy*' n. pag.)

In 'Anseo', for instance, the speaker remembers when the 'Master was calling the roll' in the 'primary school in Collegelands' (*WBL* 20). We are given a mnemonic snapshot of the speaker's portrait as a young boy since this place name is introduced at the very beginning of the poem and constitutes the poetic and physical grounds on which the poem then builds on. Collegelands is also often associated with memories of the speaker's parents, strengthening the speaker's filiation and consequently building his sense of identity. In the short elegy 'Ma', the speaker remembers his mother in the month of 'May or June' in the vicinity of 'Collegelands' (*M* 23). Similarly, in the short elegy for his father 'The Fox', the personal memory is (more or less) dated and is given a precise location: the speaker remembers events that took place 'a month ago' in the graveyard of

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[234] In fact, Brian Cliff explains that 'the poems that would become *Meeting the British*' were written in the mid-1980s when Muldoon 'came to the decision to leave Northern Ireland' (613-614). On the different stages for the composition of '7, Middagh Street', see Brian Cliff, 'Paul Muldoon's Community on the Cusp: Auden and MacNeice in the Manuscripts for "7, Middagh Street"', *Contemporary Literature* 44:4 (Winter 2003), 613-614. Wills similarly argues that '*Meeting the British* was published in the autumn of 1987 (and much of it was therefore written before his emigration to the States)' (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 118).

Collegelands 'three fields away' from the speaker's location. In both poems, each memory of the parent is associated with Collegelands, just as Proust remembered specific relatives associated with Combray. It is as if the memories of the parents were called from the past by their association with the place name. The importance of anchoring or *grounding* these memories is particularly emphasised in the father's elegiac poem:

> You lay
> three fields away
>
> in Collegelands
> graveyard, in ground
> so wet you weren't so much
> buried there as drowned.
>
> That was a month ago (*MB* 24)

The groundedness of the spatial vignette is emphasised both by the vocabulary used ('ground'/'buried') and by the repetition of the consonants 'b', 'd' and 'g' since these alliterations reinforce the importance of the terms 'ground' and 'buried', giving the poem an *earthier* dimension. Furthermore, this four-line mnemonic vignette is framed by both spatial ('three fields away') and temporal ('a month ago') elements, which anchor the memory in a specific spatiotemporal dimension. In 'The Fox', it is the *graveyard* that is pointed out so that Collegelands is both a reservoir of personal memories and the realm of the dead. In fact, this is also true of another poem, 'Come into My Parlour', in which the graveyard kept by a local man named Coulter is mentioned:[235]

> And I saw over his tilting shoulder
> The grave of my mother,
> My father's grave, and his father's;
> The slightly different level

[235] As in the case of 'Ned Skinner', the visual name 'Coulter' may be fictional.

Of the next field, and the next;
Each small, one-sided collision
Where a neighbour had met his future.
Here an O'Hara, there a Quinn,
The wreckage of bath-tubs and bedsteads,
Of couches and mangles,
That was scattered for miles around. (*WBL* 36)

'Come into My Parlour' reads as a vertical cut in the soil (as if it were made by the *coulter* of a plough) revealing the genealogical layers of Muldoon's ancestry and suggesting that vertical time coexists on the same spatial plane.[236] The image of the graveyard enables the speaker to strengthen his family's genealogy by going further back to the figure of the paternal grandfather: the description of his ancestors who are 'stacked / As high as dinner-plates' (35) visually recreates the vertical image of the family tree. Once again, the poet emphasises the importance of Collegelands as both a place related to past memories and personal lineage.

The final place name discussed in this analysis of *memori loci* is the Moy, near Collegelands. The polysemy of the term 'Moy' and its topographical importance in Muldoon's work have made this place one of the poet's most important *memori loci*. There is in fact a strong connection between the 'I' and 'The Moy': in 'At the Sign of the Black Horse, September 1999', the speaker refers to himself as 'I, the so-called Goy from the Moy' (*MSG* 78). In this example, Muldoon is possibly playing with the French word *moi* (myself) and subsequently highlighting the link between his *moi* (his self) and the place name.[237] The Moy

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[236] This analogy between the layout of the poem on the page and the image of the graveyard is also used by Muldoon himself in his discussion of Elizabeth Bishop's prose poem '12 O'Clock News' in *The End of the Poem*. He explains that the fourth paragraph in '12 O'Clock News' 'describes a "*typed sheet*" as a "field" which is "dark-speckled" and "obviously man-made"'. He further argues that the poem 'asks us to think of the *typed sheet* as being akin to an "airstrip" or "cemetery"' (85). This relationship between 'topography and *typo*graphy' in '12 O'Clock News' also lies at the core of 'Come into My Parlour'.

[237] My interpretation is supported by another personal poem 'The Soap-Pig', in which the poet plays on the French phrase *Chez moi* ('at my place') and the name of his home village: 'from Marlborough Park (and Anne-Marie) / to the Malone Avenue flat / (*Chez Moy*, it was later dubbed) / to the rented house in Dub (as in *Dub- / / lin*) Lane' (*MB* 27). This interpretation of the term 'Moy' in these two poems is however in no way related to the Irish roots of the term 'Moy' since it derives from the Irish *An Mhaigh*, meaning, 'the plain'. In his *Atlas of Irish Place-Names*,

looms large in Muldoon's poetic career: it is mentioned at least once in almost every poetry collection and is often related to a personal memory.[238] Just as Proust's Combray is associated with memories from Proust's past that shed light on the author's life, memories attached to the Moy bring back Muldoon's past: these mnemonic snapshots are similar to puzzle pieces since putting them together enables the reader to reconstruct an image of Muldoon's memory of himself as a child. In fact, from Muldoon's earliest collection right up until his most recent works, the Moy is often associated with early memories from his childhood just like Eglish and Collegelands: the traditional 'Moy fair' in 'Dancers at the Moy' (*NW*), the memory of a childhood sweetheart in 'Boon' (*M*),[239] his trip to the eponymous 'Duffy's Circus' in 'the big field near the Moy' with his dad (*M* 51),[240] the local shop 'Tohill's of the Moy' in 'Yarrow' (*AC* 43, 137), and Muldoon's fondness for the American films he watched in 'the Olympic Cinema, Moy' in 'The Key' (*MM* 3).[241] As a result, the Moy is often mentioned alongside an early memory that contributes to creating the speaker's self-portrait.

Patrick J. O'Connor writes an interesting passage about Muldoon's multiple references to this 'plain': 'I once heard the poets Paul Muldoon and Gabriel Fitzmaurice read together in joint session. The contrast in style and content was profound, but the bond of commonality may have lain in their derivative places in plains countries. Because they both hail from the *maigha*. In Muldoon's case, the Moy (*An Mhaigh*, "the plain"), on the Tyrone-Armagh borderland, is the village of his youth, while in Fitzmaurice's it is the village of Moyvane (*An Mhaigh Mheáin*, "the middle plain") in north Co. Kerry which commands his primary and enduring allegiance. Both are celebrants of their *maigha*. With Muldoon it is the melding of Italianate square and "circling plain" with the "flat Blackwater" and the immemorial horse fair that becomes transfigured—through classical allusion—into "Dancers of the Moy". With Fitzmaurice on the other hand it is the disarming everydayness of life in Moyvane that animates "the middle plain", "the space between / reality and fable"' (101). O'Connor is here referring to Fitzmaurice's collections *The space between* and *A Wrenboy's Carnival: Poems 1980-2000*.

[238] However, the term 'Moy' is not mentioned in *Hay*, *Horse Latitudes*, and *Maggot*. In *Quoof*, the 'son of the King of the Moy' (52) is mentioned but it is not an autobiographical memory. In *The Prince of the Quotidian*', the Moy is referred to in relation to the Troubles and to the death of Kevin and John McKearney on 3 January 1992: 'Weehawken. Kearny. The Oranges. I'm filled with dismay / by news of two murders in The Moy' (19).

[239] 'We climbed the hills to the highest hill-farm / Without a word of snow or bittern / And viewed the extravagant wilderness / Of the brawling townlands round the Moy' (32). Although the girl's name 'Mercy' is likely to be allegorical, the poem could still be read as an autobiographical piece.

[240] 'Once Duffy's Circus had shaken out its tent / In the big field near the Moy / God may as well have left Ireland / And gone up a tree. My father had said so' (51).

[241] In this poem, the speaker says that he 'sat through three or four showings of *The Hoodlum Priest*'. Since the film dates back to 1961, it is likely that this memory dates back to the year of the

Travelling Across County Armagh

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With the exception of Eglish, the *memori loci* analysed previously are all situated in County Armagh, which is itself a 'place of memory'. Muldoon has said in several interviews that his family spent some time in north Armagh, 'an important mushroom-growing area' where 'there are also many orchards' (qtd. in Haffenden 130), which forms the backdrop of a number of poems across his *œuvre*.[242] However, while Eglish, Collegelands, and the Moy are often associated with early personal memories featuring in Muldoon's early collections, the place name Armagh is not necessarily associated with *personal* memories that enable the reader to progressively build a portrait of the speaker, with the exception of 'Yarrow'.[243] Since Muldoon has often highlighted the importance of County Armagh in his poetry, the next analysis argues that the *journeys* he recreates in

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film's release. The speaker is, therefore, a nine- or ten-year-old boy. The cinema is also referred to in *Moy Sand and Gravel*, in which the Moy features predominantly. In 'The Misfits', the Olympic cinema is not directly mentioned but the reader assumes that the 'I' saw the 1961 film *The Misfits* in the local cinema: 'I'd let the Monk give you a lift / / into the Moy to see Montgomery bloody Clift' (10). In these poems, it is important to note that these vivid memories date back to when the young Muldoon was nine or ten, a time when one's personality is shaped and constructed. The Moy (and, in particular, the church) is also central to 'The Moy Clock', published in *The Irish Press* on 23 October 1971: 'Sunday in the Moy / The shopkeepers at their prayers / In this church with three / / Faces on its tower' (*PMP*, '"The Moy Clock", two typescript drafts', Box 9, Folder 78).

[242] In another interview, Muldoon similarly explained that he grew up in an 'apple orchard-dominated landscape in County Armagh' (Brown, Jeffrey n. pag.).

[243] Although 'Armagh' is not mentioned in *New Weather*, the collections leading to *The Annals of Chile* chart the growing importance of the poet's native Armagh. However, while this place name is more and more present in his poetry, it is not always associated with autobiographical memories. It is mentioned once in *Mules* in 'Armageddon, Armageddon', which is itself a pun on the name Armagh, and twice in *Why Brownlee Left*: it features in the semi-autobiographical poem 'Cuba', which presents a fictional older sister May, and once in the sonnet 'Lull', which is about farmland habits in County Armagh. This growing recurrence of the term continues in *Quoof*, in which Armagh is mentioned three times. In this collection, all occurrences are related to the Troubles: the IRA stronghold and hotbed of sectarian violence 'South Armagh' features in 'Mink' (a poem about the undercover agent Robert Nairac); the Armagh/Tyrone border and the 'A Wing of Armagh Jail' (59) both feature in 'The More a Man Has The More a Man Wants' concluding the collection. However, in the pivotal collection *Meeting the British* and in the following collection *Madoc: A Mystery*, the name 'Armagh' does not feature at all, as if marking the poet's spatial relocation to America. Muldoon's visit to his family home in 1992 signals a return to his native roots, which is made obvious by the numerous occurrences of this place name in *The Annals of Chile*. Armagh is later referred to in the opening line of 'A Collegelands Catechism' in *Moy Sand and Gravel*: 'Which is known as the "Orchard / County"?' (15).

Armagh drive the poet closer to the elegiac core of 'Yarrow', one of his most powerful memories.

Armagh is intimately associated with the process of remembrance in Muldoon's 1994 collection, *The Annals of Chile*, in which the term 'Armagh' is mentioned eight times in total with all occurrences featuring in the elegy for his mother, 'Yarrow': this poem is as much an elegy for the mother county as for the poet's mother. The recurrence of this place name may be explained by the fact that 'Yarrow' was written after Muldoon's visit to the family farm in 1992: the poet travelled from America to Armagh and then back to America, where he set out to write 'Yarrow'.[244] Consequently, journeying between America and Armagh is a recurrent motif in 'Yarrow'. While the constant spatiotemporal shift—between Ireland and America, on the one hand, and between 1963 and 1992, on the other—creates a highly fragmented narrative, it is clear that, as the speaker closes in on the elegiac core, we are physically getting closer to the county town, Armagh. Journeying to Armagh is, in other words, also a mental journey back in time, back towards one of the speaker's most personal and heart-breaking memories, the death of his mother.

The speaker imagines himself hovering over County Armagh, flapping his way back and forth between familiar towns, until he reaches his final destination:

> Again and again I flap through Aughnacloy and Caledon (*AC* 159)

> Again and again I'm about to touch down by the pebble-dashed wall
> (by way of Keady and Aughnacloy)
> when it hits me that the house has changed hands (166)

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[244] For Muldoon these back and forth journeys between America and Ireland are like hopping on a bus as he once put it: 'I am a citizen of both countries, insofar as one can be in two places at once, which I think one can. [...] it's not so strange that I came here [America], it's very familiar. And looking back home is not strange either, because it's not too far to look, even to go. I'm going to Ireland on Thursday and returning next Monday. It's like getting on a bus' (qtd. in Sherman 79).

> Through Caledon and Aughnacloy the little dogs and all
> are hard on my heels (174)[245]

From Aughnacloy to Keady by way of Caledon the speaker follows the border with the Republic and, since all three locations are located only miles away from Armagh town and the Moy, he is closing in on the elegiac core of 'Yarrow', which is the next poem in the elegy:

> The bridge. The barn. Again and again I stand aghast
> as I contemplate what never
> again will be mine:
>
> 'Look on her. Look, her lips.
> Listen to her *râle*
> where ovarian cancer takes her in its strangle-hold'. (175)

The speaker is *summoned* to remember this event through his senses: '*Look* on her. *Look*, her lips'; '*Listen* to her *râle*'. Senses take the speaker in the 'strangle-hold of memory' just as 'cancer takes [the mother] in its strangle-hold'. The speaker views the memory-image of her death with the same distress ('aghast') with which it was first felt: 'the more [we] strive to recall a past pain, the nearer [we] come to feeling it in reality [...] the progress of a memory precisely consists [...] in its becoming materialized' (Bergson *Memory* 174). The death of his mother is not just remembered, it is narrated as if it were a felt presence. It is difficult to make a distinction here between the memory and the actual perception, between the moment of death in 1963 and the moment when the 1992 speaker is remembering this particular passage that belongs to the past.

However, this powerful autobiographical vignette—which is, actually, one of the rare unmediated autobiographical passages of the elegy—brings an end to the process of recollection: once the speaker has reached his destination (the

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[245] In a previous vignette the little green heron also called 'fly-up-the-creek' (80) is this time flapping 'above Carrickmore and Pomeroy', both located north of Aughnacloy.

family farm in Armagh and the heart of the elegy), the elegiac core or centre 'cannot hold' (as Yeats would have it), and the rest of the elegy unravels, charting the dissolution of the family home. In fact, as said previously, this elegy mourns both the death of the poet's mother and the disappearance of the family farm in Armagh, so much so that the memory of his mother's death and the dissolution of the farm become inseparable phenomena. The family farm is the final locus examined in this part: while it is used again and again like 'wax tablets' to remember several memories (farmland work, the mother's reprimands, or the father's numerous altercations with the neighbour),[246] this place *no longer exists*. Consequently, the associative logic (places and memories) is made impossible and this failure accounts for the highly fragmented nature of the 'I' in this elegy.

'The bridge. The barn': The Disappearance of the Family Farm

When Muldoon returned for the first time since his 1987 departure for America to County Armagh in March 1992, the family farm had undergone a radical change. The farm was no longer in the same state it had been in when the family originally moved to Collegelands in 1955: 'We had bought an acre of land from the McParlands of Collegelands, and were going to build a bungalow on it. I first saw the place when it was still a field, before the foundations were built' ('A Tight Wee Place in Armagh' 19). When we read passages of 'Yarrow', we soon realise that the childhood landscape has returned to its virgin state: a bare 'field'.[247] While in

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[246] 'Jimmy McParland would turn / [his cattle] out of the byre' (*AC* 49); 'I hear McParland's cattle low / as they plumb their murky bath' (55); 'one of McParland's poley cows / that had run amuck on our spread' (63); 'I scurried, click, down McParland's lane' (188). The neighbour McParland also appears in the final poem in *Quoof* ('The More a Man Has The More a Man Wants') and in the later poem 'Sandro Botticelli: The Adoration of the Magi', in the part entitled 'Gold' (*Mt* 15).

[247] In 'Notes for *Chez Moy*', Muldoon explains that the family house was sold around the time of his father's death, which is confirmed by the correspondence with his sister Maureen (*PMP*, Box 4, Folder 16).

Simonides's tale the banqueting hall is in ruins—and, therefore, something is left of the building—in 'Yarrow', nothing remains. Although Muldoon uses elements associated with the farm (the bridge and the barn) in order to 'fence out' his vanished personal landscape—the place that is 'burned into the retina' (Muldoon, qtd. in Potts B6)—the author cannot anchor his memories in a grounded setting.

This is particularly well illustrated by the succession of vignettes that refer to the same local setting: 'The bridge. The barn'. In each vignette, the event described is more or less related to an actual event experienced by the speaker (a memory). However, although the combination of these memories forms a composite image of the family farm that permeates and seems to anchor the whole elegy, the speaker is progressively driven away from these memories, as the image of the farm disintegrates.

Vignette 4[248]

> Again and again I find myself keeping watch from the bridge
> across the Callan: a snatch of hazel-wood
> gives on to the open
>
> range in which, once Jimmy McParland would turn
> them out of the byre,
> his cattle would cross-fade to Elmer Kelton's
>
> stampeding herd
> from *The Day the Cowboys Quit*, or *The Oklamydia Kid*,
> or, hold on, something by Jack Schaefer. (*AC* 49)

While in vignette 4 the speaker associates the familiar landscape with the memory of the neighbour (second stanza), this memory is then replaced with a cinematographic image after the stanzaic break between stanzas two and three. Similarly, in vignette 5, while the neighbour is still associated with the setting in

[248] Once again, I use numbered vignettes for reading clarity.

the first stanza; in the second stanza, the speaker already loses track of the familiar image of the farm to focus on the setting up of a booby trap that may either be a historically accurate or an imagined event:

Vignette 5

> The bridge. The barn. The all-too-familiar terrain.
> I hear McParland's cattle low
> as they plumb their murky bath
>
> for a respite from their cattle-sorrow:
> they're not to notice, taped to the trough, an aerial
> and a battery-pack. (55)

There is a further evolution between vignette 5 and 6 because, in the next image, the neighbour is no longer present and has been replaced by the enigmatic female figure 'S—':

Vignette 6

> The bridge. The barn. The all-too-familiar seal-flipper terrine
> with the hint of seaweed
> (carrageen? samphire?)
>
> that lent it the texture of gelatin.
> Again and again S— turns up 'The Unforgettable Fire'
> and shrugs off her halter of buckram or barege
>
> and holds herself open;
> my ma hands me the carbon-slip; 'But to the girdle do the gods',
> she repeats, 'but to the girdle do the gods inherit'. (103)

One could argue that not only is the narrative no longer anchored as strongly in the past as in vignette 4, but vignette 6 even creates the appearance of fiction because it is unclear whether this woman is a fictional character or not: although the event described may be historically accurate, the fact that it is followed in the

third stanza by a composite image of Muldoon's mother and King Lear undermines the autobiographical dimension of vignette 6.[249] Furthermore, although the mother is powerfully remembered in vignette 7—

Vignette 7

> The bridge. The barn. Again and again I stand aghast
> as I contemplate what never
> again will be mine:
>
> 'Look on her. Look, her lips.
> Listen to her *râle*
> where ovarian cancer takes her in its strangle-hold'. (175)

—she is later displaced into the image of the mythological Deirdre:

Vignette 8

> Again and again I look out over the bridge where Deirdre
> dashed her head against the 'Begad,
> I'll teach him not to mitch
>
> when the spuds need spraying'; again and again the cruel Emir
> stops with the High King, Connor MacNessa,
> at the barn-door; again and again they cry out, 'Open, Sesame'. (186)

Finally, in vignette 9, the stanzaic form mirrors the disintegration of the farm and of memories:

Vignette 9

> The bridge, the barn: the tongue of a boot once lus-
> trous with mink-
> oil (187)

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[249] Alternatively, one could argue that this image of the mother illustrates the double-time of the memory since the 1992 'I' is watching King Lear in Spanish while remembering her.

This final vignette is splitting at the seams and the image of the bridge and the barn is no longer associated with a memory of the speaker's past.[250]

Muldoon once argued that repetition is part of the 'art of making verse': 'Words are all about returning and returning and *re*-turning. Things coming round again. All narratives, as Coleridge suggested, [are] like a snake eating its own tail' ('Paul Muldoon on *Maggot*' n. pag.). Similarly, in 'Yarrow', the speaker keeps harking back to memories of the past attached to the leitmotivs of the bridge and the barn, but fails to remember full-blown memories. In fact, this series of vignettes illustrates the way our mind transforms *independent* memories into a *generic* memory. Not only are memories interrupted (those of the neighbour are nipped in the bud and give way to cinematographic scenes), but this series of images creates a *single* memory: the reader is given a generic memory of the farm because of the motif of 'the bridge and the barn' (reinforced by the obsessional anaphora 'again and again'). In other words, instead of offering a multitude of *independent* and *diverse* memories that took place in this specific location, this series of vignettes leaves the reader with one image in mind: the bridge and the barn on the family farm. Since none of the memories are fully developed, what remains of this succession of vignettes is simply an image of this location, a *locus* without memories (and not a *memori locus*).[251]

Piolino explains that this generic memory results from the transfer from *episodic* to *semantic* memory in the context of autobiographical memory. According to her, autobiographical memory is made of *episodic aspects* ('the fact

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[250] The narrative is broken down in this last mention of the farm since not only are the words 'lustrous' and 'mink-oil' split by the run-on line, but the lines are getting shorter and shorter, mirroring the fact that all has indeed been 'swept away'. In his *Cambridge Introduction to Modern Irish Poetry*, Justin Quinn explains that Muldoon took his repetitive line from Emily Dickinson's two-line poem 'All things swept sole away / This—is immensity—' (184).

[251] This process pervades the whole elegy and is not limited to the previous six vignettes.

of travelling back in time and remembering, as if it had happened the day before, a very unique event of your life') and *semantic aspects* ('decontextualised' information) (n. pag.). Semantic aspects refer to similar individual experiences that have become decontextualised over time and have conglomerated so as to give way to a more general experience (such as when individual memories of holidays spent in the countryside are replaced by the more generic memory of 'countryside holidays'). Piolino explains that when we create a generic memory we retain the elements these individual memories had in common (in our case here, the bridge and the barn). In other words, the transition operates from the memory of 'a specific event that occurred once' to the memory that captures 'multiple similar occurrences' (Rubin, Schrauf, and Greenberg 890). In this series of vignettes, this 'specific event' could be the memory of McParland's cattle or the mother's dying *râle*, while the image of 'the bridge and the barn' is what 'captures' these various past events that all have in common the fact that they took place on the family farm. As a result, the specific memories (the neighbour's cattle and the mother's death) are not fully developed and are lost in the process of creating a generic memory: the composite image of the bridge and the barn is all that the speaker has left because this generic memory prevents the development of specific memories. While such repetitions in 'Yarrow' enable the speaker to recreate a spatial frame, these recurrent images of the bridge and the barn also illustrate that the speaker is held captive by this rerun of similar images.

Re-reading Heaney's comment about place and identity ('to know who you are, you have to have a place to come from'), one could therefore argue that the association of place and identity is made more complex in 'Yarrow': it is not that the farm never existed, but that it *no longer* exists. Although the speaker recreates a generic memory of this vanished place, the memories attached to this place are

almost swept away in this transition from independent memories to a single memory. Consequently, there is a tension between the speaker's effort to retain a *mental* image of the farm and the fact that this place has *physically* vanished. Although Muldoon has 'a place to come from', it is now a *locus of the mind.* Unlike the art of memory, the speaker's various childhood memories cannot be anchored in this *locus* because the family farm, like these memories, has no physical existence. Since *memori loci* are crucial in the process of remembering the past, which, in turn, contributes to shaping one's *identity* (Ricœur, *Memory* xvi), then the complex case of the family farm accounts for the unstable and fragmented nature of the 'I', as discussed in Chapter Two.

Furthermore, the evolution from vignette 4 to vignette 9 shows that not only is the memory of the bridge and the barn more and more decontextualised, but it progressively becomes fictionalised. 'Yarrow' does not simply invite the reader on an autobiographical trip down memory lane; it also opens a gate to the poet's imagination and allows for the fictionalisation of the speaker and his family circle, which is at the core of my next chapter.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has analysed in detail the reasons why memory was a topic worth investigating in a study of autobiography and autofiction, particularly in relation to the poetic genre. The analysis of several forms of association showed that the process of anamnesis is severely put to the test in Muldoon's personal poems. There are significant limits to the act of recollection when memory is mediated through poetry since the treatment of temporality in autobiographical poetry

differs from autobiographical prose in so far as it does not follow the linearity of the time sequence (Part 3.2). Unlike autobiographical prose, which is generally held to present a clear sense of temporal continuity, autobiographical poetry gives precedence to the resonance between events and associative digressions over the chronological sequence. In fact, the process of recollection is thwarted by the formal fragmentation of poetry and the linguistic or sensory lines of association that inevitably lead to temporal discontinuities. This lack of chronological order is one of the factors that accounts for the instability and uprooting of the 'I'. Furthermore, although the recurrence of *memori loci* in Muldoon's autobiographical poetry seems to anchor the speaker's memories and to help the reader reconstruct the speaker's portrait, that recurrence is also responsible for the fragmentation of the 'I' in poems such as 'Yarrow', where the repetition of the motif of the bridge and the barn creates a *generic memory* (Part 3.3). Unlike the still existing villages (*e.g.* Eglish), the family farm has disappeared. As a result, it does not constitute a *memori locus* but a *locus* of the mind.

According to most critics, memory is necessarily flawed and we are led to use fiction to compensate for mnemonic failures: 'every life narrative, as honest as it purports to be, is flawed simply because our memory is also by definition flawed. We forget, we misunderstand or only partially understand, we lie, we use our imagination to escape our limited empirical experience' (Schmitt, 'Making the Case for Self-Narration' 129). Lejeune contends that memory is 'an imaginary construction, if only by the choices it makes, without mentioning everything it invents. Some people decide to *observe* this construction [...]. Others decide to *continue* it' (*Signes de vie* 40).[252] This is, in fact, true of some writers such as

[252] The original reads: 'elle est une construction imaginaire, ne serait-ce que par les choix qu'elle effectue, sans parler de tout ce qu'elle invente. Cette construction, certains décident de l'*observer* (d'en fixer les traits avec précision, de réfléchir à son histoire, de la confronter à d'autres sources...). D'autres décident de la *continuer*'.

Rousseau, who filled in the gaps left by the process of recollection with elements of his imagination:

> I wrote them from memory; my memory often failed me or only provided me with imperfect recollections, and I filled in the gaps with details which I dreamed up to complete those recollections [...] I embellished them with ornaments which my fond regrets provided me with. I talked about the things I had forgotten as I thought they must have been, or as they perhaps really had been, but never contradicting what I remembered them to have been. I sometimes invested the truth with exotic charms, but I never replaced it with lies to cover up my vices or to lay claim to virtue. (*Reveries* 44-45)

It is as if the writer were 'mending' or 'patching up' his memories: the author 'tightens the weft, patches up the holes, borrows, if needed, a piece of fabric here or there, embroiders on top of it, and finally soaks it in a dye-bath' (Gasparini, *Est-il je?* 191).[253]

While this 'patching up' may be true for writers like Rousseau, Muldoon's use of fiction is not a way to compensate for mnemonic failures but a characteristically elusive means to mythologise his origins and poetic self. The following chapter discusses the extent to which Muldoon wilfully fictionalises his personal landscape, family origins, and his own poetic persona. Far from being a means to compensate for the gaps left by the process of remembrance, Muldoon's fanciful imagination blurs the thin line between fact and fiction to the extent of fictionalising his own persona.

[253] Originally: 'Le travail de l'auteur faisant appel à sa mémoire s'apparente à du ravaudage: il resserre la trame, raccommode les trous, emprunte, si besoin est, une pièce de tissu ici ou là, brode par-dessus, et enfin trempe le tout dans un bain de teinture...'.

CHAPTER FOUR: Poetry and Autofiction(s)

Reinventing The Self

I have disgracefully broken the illusion? No. My characters still exist, and in a reality no less, or no more, real than the one I have just broken. Fiction is woven into all, as a Greek observed some two and a half thousand years ago. I find this new reality (or unreality) more valid; and I would have you share my own sense that I do not fully control these creatures of my mind, any more than you control—however hard you try, however much of a latter-day Mrs Poulteney you may be—your children, colleagues, friends, or even yourself.

But this is preposterous? A character is either 'real' or 'imaginary'? If you think that, *hypocrite lecteur*, I can only smile. You do not even think of your own past as quite real; you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, censor it, tinker with it... fictionalize it, in a word, and put it away on a shelf—your book, your romanced autobiography. We are all in flight from the real reality. That is a basic definition of *Homo sapiens*.

(Fowles 99)

I think one of the great things about being a writer is the extent to which it allows us to invent ourselves. It's like being in a witness-protection program.

(Muldoon, qtd. in Wilson, James n. pag.)

4.1. Introduction

> In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.
> (Fanon 229)

> I have invented my own life, I invent, I have invented my own history, my own family, my own place, my own country. They're all inventions.
> (Muldoon, qtd. in Noble n. pag.)

In Chapter One, I explained that the aim of my Ph.D. thesis is to position Muldoon's poetry within the frameworks of autobiography and autofiction. I have explored the autobiographical dimension of Muldoon's poetry in the previous two chapters: Chapter Two analysed the interactions and tensions between poetry and autobiography across the poet's work; Chapter Three explored the limits of autobiographical poetry by concentrating on memory. This new chapter turns to Muldoon's autofictional practice, which constitutes the second component to my thesis.[254]

Chapter Four breaks away from Muldoon's autobiographical writing by exploring the ways in which the poet *intentionally* resorts to fiction in a number of personal poems. Unlike some autofictional writers (such as Doubrovsky in *Le Livre brisé*, 1989) who use fiction to compensate for mnemonic failures, Muldoon mythologises his past (and present), blurring the thin line separating reality from fiction.[255] Since the poet willingly uses fiction, these poems therefore belong to a

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[254] It is important to insist on the word 'autofictional' and not 'fictional' since, in the former, there is always a link (however tenuous) with reality.

[255] Muldoon often puts greater emphasis on fiction than referentiality so that his autofictional practice corresponds to Colonna's definition, which favours the fictional dimension over the referential one, as apposed to Doubrovsky's, whose definition insists on the referential nature of autofictional texts. Colonna argues that there are multiple degrees of fictionalisation with texts ranging from biographical autofictions (facts are real but the narrative occasionally slips into fiction) to fantastic autofictions or *autofabulations* (facts are imaginary). See Chapter One. In

particular type of autofiction, either called 'voluntary autofiction' (Gasparini) or 'true autofiction' (Genette). Although I refer to some of Colonna's autofictional theories, my intention is not to confine Muldoon's autofictional practice to theoretical strangleholds or to put a restrictive label on the poems discussed. The aim of this chapter is to examine how Muldoon explores multiple degrees of fictionalisation in order to reinvent his 'self' and origins.

This chapter is divided into three main parts, each focusing on a specific type of fictionalisation: the *appearance* of fiction (Part 4.2), fiction understood in terms of the *surreal* (Part 4.3), and fiction understood in terms of what is *fake* (Part 4.4).[256] As a result, this chapter is structured in such a way as to illustrate a progression from the appearance of fiction (Par 4.2) to the illusion of reality (Part 4.4).[257] Part 4.2 focuses on the intensity of childhood imagination as remembered from the present. In other words, the adult Muldoon *re-creates* the young Muldoon's real fantasies in such a way that the overlaying of these fantasies on childhood memories creates the appearance of fiction. To give a concrete example, although one might think that Muldoon is fictionalising his younger self when the latter is portrayed as an Indian, the poet is, in fact, faithfully reproducing (as far as memory allows it) the young Muldoon's imaginative games of cowboys and Indians. Part 4.3 argues that these childhood fantasies re-created by the adult Muldoon later gave way to the *creation* of a surreal world (featuring

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biographical autofictions, the author distils fictional facts and occasionally drifts away from the referential basis of his or her text: 'the autofictional author [is] allowed some flights of imagination' (Schmitt, 'Making the Case for Self-Narration' 126). In this type of text, the author resorts to fiction in order to patch up the holes left by the failure to remember the past. While any autobiographical writer is subject to the deficiencies of memory, Chapter Four focuses on instances where Muldoon is wilfully using fiction. It does not deal with biographical autofictions nor with what Gasparini calls 'unconscious fictionalisation', corresponding to instances when the author forgets autobiographical details or modifies by mistake past events ('De quoi l'autofiction est-elle le nom?' n. pag.).

[256] According to Jean-Louis Jeannelle, the term 'fiction' can also be used to refer to the act of lying, to what is *fake* ('il s'agit du faux' 30).

[257] In other words, in the poems discussed in Part 4.2, Muldoon narrates real events in such a way that they have the appearance of fiction. In contrast, in the poems analysed in Part 4.4, Muldoon weaves biographical inaccuracies into poems that have the appearance of autobiography.

the *adult* Muldoon), which is contiguous to the world we live in: these poems correspond to one of Colonna's autofictional categories—'fantastic autofictions'—in which the real is mixed with the surreal. Part 4.4 examines Muldoon's biographical forgeries: although the poems narrate seemingly real events, they are partly inaccurate and create the illusion of reality.[258]

4.2. Childhood Re-Created Through the Prism of Boyhood Fantasies

When we read Muldoon's poems about his childhood memories, we may have the impression that the poet has fictionalised his past to a great extent: the speaker fantasises that he and his family live in a foreign land or that he is going to school with explorers and engaging in battles with literary heroes. However, although Muldoon does at times incorporate entirely fictional elements into his childhood memories, most of the time, it is the superimposition of various narrative layers (fantasies on memories) that creates the illusion of fiction. Like any other child, the young Muldoon had such a powerful imagination that his daily activities on the farm (or at school) where often tinted with imaginary adventures. As a result, when the adult Muldoon set out to write poems depicting his childhood, he *staged* his childhood memories according to his boyhood fantasies. In fact, as argued by Jacques Lacan, 'every autobiography is a fiction of oneself, *a later reconstruction*' (qtd. in Schmitt, 'Making the Case for Self-Narration' 127, my emphasis). There is, therefore, a distance between the adult Muldoon (who is

[258] Although the term 'auto' in 'autofiction' refers to the 'self', it is equally important to examine the fictionalisation of the author's *family* and *personal landscape* since they are essential components to personal writing and constitute the author's 'biographical context': Sermet argues that when the 'I' is 'removed from his or her biographical context', the '"I" breaks away from him- or herself' (93). Throughout Chapter Four, I illustrate how Muldoon fictionalises his family, personal landscape, and, consequently, his own poetic self.

writing) and the young Muldoon (who is being remembered): not only does the author *reconstruct* his childhood memories in retrospect, but, by doing so, he also *reinvents* his former self through the prism of his imagination.

Since most of Muldoon's early fantasies were inspired by the American continent, historical events, and adventure stories, Part 4.2 is divided into three types of superimposition: spatial layers (the overlaying of the American landscape), temporal layers (the overlaying of historical events), and textual layers (the overlaying of adventure or mythological stories).

Spatial Layers: The Americanisation of the Personal Landscape

> INTERVIEWER: Even the farm poems don't seem to be set in a recognizable Ireland.
>
> MULDOON: If anything, in fact, they are set in America. 'The Field Hospital', for example, 'The Lost Tribe'—all about dust and crops and the oil slick, the creek. Even in one of the first poems I wrote, when I was about eleven or twelve, about Charlemont Fort, an Elizabethan fortress near where I was brought up, I compared the ancient fort to the modern world and the smell of gasoline. I remember the teacher said, What's *gasoline*? I probably didn't say anything. But I suppose now I would say that *gasoline* was as much part of my language as *petrol*.
>
> (qtd. in Wilson, James n. pag.)

This anecdote about Muldoon's Americanisation of the Charlemont Fort in County Armagh is emblematic of the influence America has had on the poet since he was a child. For instance, the American films he watched in the Moy cinema are often referred to and have clearly fuelled his imagination to the point of blurring the boundaries between Ireland and North America.[259] In 'Ontario', the opening poem of *Meeting the British*—Muldoon's last collection written before his

[259] 'I was reared on American TV and films. There was a huge sense of occasion about going to the cinema in Moy in the late 1950s and early 60s' (Muldoon, qtd. in Wroe 11). See, for instance, 'Moy Sand and Gravel' and 'The Misfits'.

departure for America—the speaker wonders 'where the Plough stopped being the Plough and became the Big Dipper' (1).[260] Furthermore, there are many childhood poems that emphasise the interest the young Muldoon had for the American landscape. This analysis argues that there is a superimposition of Muldoon's adopted continent (America) on his native county (Armagh), creating the appearance of fiction. This overlapping of America and Armagh has evolved from a spatial ambiguity in *New Weather* to a spatial displacement in *The Annals of Chile*.

Spatial Ambiguity in New Weather

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> There's a nearby village called the Moy which figures quite strongly in my poems, though I've fictionalized it to a great extent.
> (Muldoon, qtd. in Haffenden 130)

From one of his earliest collections, *New Weather* (1973), there has been a strong sense that Muldoon has been 'sailing' westward towards America.[261] The leitmotiv of the river pervading this volume embodies this spatial ambiguity and the blending of Ireland and America. In 'Identities', the speaker reaches the sea (probably the Atlantic Ocean on the western shore of Ireland) and meets an enigmatic woman. Although he does not escape with her, he ends up wandering (and wondering) about rivers' identities: 'I have been wandering since, back up the streams / That had once flowed simply one into the other, / One taking the other's name' (13). Throughout *New Weather*, Muldoon plays with rivers and

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[260] The Plough is the term used in Britain and in Ireland to refer to the Great Bear constellation, whereas in North America it is referred to as the Big Dipper.

[261] In 'Lives of the Saints', the speaker mentions an Irish Saint who epitomises this journey westward: 'I think especially of Brendan setting sail / / One day the sea was blueblack' (*NW* 28). Just like Brendan the Navigator—the legendary hero of the eighth- or ninth-century Atlantic sea journey *Navigatio Brendani*—the young Muldoon's imagination often brought him to the shores of America.

their names in order to blur the representation of the personal landscape. This spatial ambiguity is, in fact, central to 'Dancers at the Moy' and 'The Waking Father'.[262] In these poems, the narrative develops from presumably real events (a countryside fair, a fishing trip), but their fictional dimension lies in their geographical ambiguity.

O'Connor argues that, in 'Dancers at the Moy', Muldoon celebrates and transfigures the Moy (101):

> This Italian square
> And circling plain
> Black once with mares
> And their stallions,
> The flat Blackwater
> Turning its stones
>
> Over hour after hour
> As their hooves shone
> And lifted together
> Under the black rain,
> One or other Greek war
> Now coloured the town
>
> Blacker than ever before (*NW* 11)

The classical references ('Greek war'), the Italian architecture,[263] the almost surreal image of the 'black and gold river' (11, 12), and the intriguing insistence on the river's name (mentioned three times in total) point to this transfiguration of the personal landscape. This is not a straightforward representation of the Moy and its surroundings since the name of the river may refer to several rivers.[264] In fact, while a river called Blackwater runs through Northern Ireland near the Moy, there are several rivers bearing the same name in Ireland and in North America.

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[262] Although the following poems are not related to the Americanisation of the personal landscape, they illustrate the importance of rivers throughout the collection and their lethal implications: a dead girl is floating 'as if underwater' in 'Cuckoo Corn' (37), a young couple commits suicide at the top of a waterfall in 'The Upriver Accident', and a river goes on fire in 'The Lost Tribe'.

[263] See footnote n°142 on p.113.

[264] The fact that 'Identities' follows directly after 'Dancers at the Moy' invites us to draw a parallel between the blurring of identities in the former and the plurisignification of the Blackwater River in the latter.

This poem therefore creates a spatial ambiguity since the river could refer to one of the Blackwater Rivers in North America. This spatial ambiguity also characterises 'The Waking Father', in which it is coupled with a surreal metamorphosis.

The opening lines read: 'My father and I are catching spricklies / Out of the Oona river' (10). The image of father and son catching spricklies anchors this poem in a Northern Irish setting since the Oona river (tributary of the afore-mentioned Blackwater) is famous for fishing and runs near the family farm: in 'A Tight Wee Place in Armagh', Muldoon explains that the 'river Oona ran at the bottom of [their] garden' and that he remembers his 'father spotting the pig killer coming across the Oona bridge about a quarter of a mile down the valley' (19). However, in the second stanza, the speaker realises that '[t]he spricklies might have been piranhas / The river a red carpet / Rolling out from where he had just stood' (*NW* 10). The exotic transformation of the fish and the surreal metamorphosis of the river indicate that this personal landscape may not be what it seems, offering various interpretations. As in 'Dancers at the Moy', the Oona river has been judiciously chosen since it may also refer to the Oona River in British Columbia, Canada. The poet blurs any simple identification of the place since the metamorphosis in the second stanza invites us to read a *displacement* from Northern Ireland to the Great White North. Alternatively, we could argue that since piranhas are native to *South* America, their presence in a Canadian river would be exotic and unlikely: instead of offering a displacement from Northern Ireland to North America, the poem more likely presents a blurring of Northern Ireland and South America.

The leitmotiv of the river is associated with spatial imprecision ('Dancers at the Moy') and a possible spatial dislocation ('The Waking Father'): the poems'

spatial ambiguity—or, as Muldoon would have it, their 'indeterminacy of location' (*EP* 155)—is intensified in *The Annals of Chile*.

Spatial Displacement in The Annals of Chile

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The hypothetical westward displacement that is suggested in the dreamscape of 'The Waking Father' becomes an achieved reality in *The Annals of Chile*. The second collection Muldoon published while living in the United States is, in fact, characterised by the Americanisation of his 'rivery and apple-dappled Armagh' (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 148): 'throughout *The Annals of Chile* [Muldoon's] home in the Moy is associated with South America' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 168).[265] This analysis focuses on 'Brazil' (the second poem of the collection), which acts as a harbinger of the Americanisation of the personal landscape in the rest of the collection.[266]

The fact that 'Brazil' starts with a reference to one of the parental figures ('When my mother') and that it is based on a seemingly real memory (the mother washing the young Muldoon's hair) anchors the poem in a referential dimension.[267] However, its autobiographical nature is immediately and characteristically undermined in the second line: 'When my mother snapped open her flimsy parasol / it was Brazil: if not Brazil, / / then Uruguay' (*AC* 6).[268] The

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[265] The fact that the poet had settled in America when he wrote this volume can be seen in the more obvious Americanisation of the childhood landscape in this later collection. While in 'Dancers at the Moy' and 'The Waking Father' the events seem to be set in Ireland, in *The Annals of Chile*, they clearly take place in South America. Furthermore, the 1994 volume opens with a translation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book VI, lines 313-81), which prefigures the metamorphosis of Muldoon's personal landscape in the rest of the collection.

[266] Another instance of the South Americanisation of the farm in *The Annals of Chile* features in 'Yarrow': 'It might have been hogweed, or horehound, perhaps even arum, / that would inundate this rinky-dink / bit of land / / on which a mushroom-mogul has since built a / hacienda' (95). The father has been transformed into a business magnate and the family house into a South American estate.

[267] The image of the mother rinsing her son's hair under the 'faucet' also invites us to see a sort of American baptism celebrating the speaker's new life in America.

[268] This description of the mother emphasises the fact that she has also been transformed into a South American figure. While the poem opens with a direct reference to the speaker's mother ('my

second line subverts the referentiality of the setting and signals a geographical displacement: the setting is far away from Muldoon's house in County Armagh and has been relocated somewhere in South America. Furthermore, there is at once specificity and non-specificity since there is a shift from Brazil to Uruguay and then to 'Ecuador' ('it must be somewhere on or near the equator').

Readers could argue that, unlike 'The Waking Father' and 'Dancers at the Moy', the personal landscape no longer features in 'Brazil' and that Armagh has been entirely replaced with South America. However, as argued by Wills, the Moy and South America are 'associated': South America has not been substituted for Armagh, the Irish and South American landscapes overlap. In fact, there is a subtle spatial marker implicitly evoking the Armagh landscape beneath the South American setting. The South American countries mentioned in 'Brazil' form a triangle (Fig. 3) that is evocative of the triangular pattern often referred to directly (or indirectly) in other personal poems, such as 'Yarrow' (Fig. 4):

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mother') and her severe attitude towards him ('snap'), her attributes are very different from those described in autobiographical poems: the 'tablecloth' she 'hand-embroidered' in 'Gathering Mushrooms' (*Q* 7), has been replaced with a more exotic fabric (the 'towel-turban') and foreign accessories (the 'flimsy parasol' and 'terrapin comb'). This poem therefore offers a fictionalised portrait of the mother figure, an exoticised *copy* of Brigid Regan: the word 'flimsy' can also refer, when used as a noun ('a flimsy'), to a thin paper used for *carbon copies*. Brearton wrote a very interesting article on Muldoon's blurring of his parents' identities in 'For Father Read Mother: Muldoon's Antecedents'. She quotes the first stanza of 'Errata' ('For "mother" read "other"', *H* 88) and argues that the poem invites to 'dwell, through rhyme, in more than one place at the same time (or in the same place twice)' (46). Her research focuses on Muldoon's 'exploration of biological antecedents' and 'literary antecedents' (47).



Fig. 3. Map of South America: Ecuador, Brazil, and Uruguay

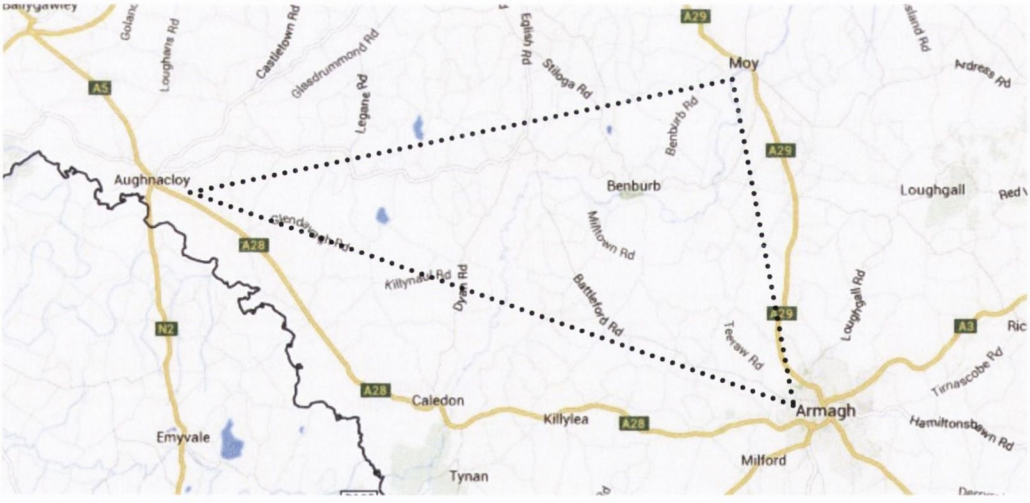

Fig. 4. Map of Armagh: Aughnacloy, The Moy, and Armagh

In 'Yarrow', Muldoon does not refer time and again to one or two loci, but to *three* places, which necessarily form another triangular pattern. The recurrence of these three Irish towns invites us to observe more closely the journeys undertaken by the 'I' throughout the elegy and compare spatial patterns across the poet's works.

In fact, the triangular pattern formed by villages in 'Yarrow' mirrors the triangular space re-created in 'Brazil' and the triangular motif in 'Epona':

> I have no heart, she cries. I am driving her madder,
> Out of her depth, almost, in the tall grass
> Of Parsons' triangular meadow. (*M* 17)

At first sight, 'Parsons' triangular meadow' may not seem like a significant detail but, if we look further into this poem, we discover that in the early drafts Muldoon simply wrote 'At the centre of the meadow', which was later changed to 'Parson's triangular meadow'.[269] This recurrent geometric pattern invites us to see a transposition of the Armagh landscape on the South American soil in 'Brazil'.[270]

In all the poems considered, Muldoon remembers the fantasies of his younger self, ranging from spatial ambiguities (*New Weather*) to spatial displacements (*The Annals of Chile*). The re-creations of these former fantasies are not limited to the overlaying of the American landscape: historical American figures (*e.g.* James 'Lefty' Lynch) or conquistadors associated with the discovery of the American continent (*e.g.* Hernan Cortes) are also overlaid on childhood memories.

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[269] *PMP*, '*Mules*, photocopy of corrected typescript with cardboard folder', Box 12, Folder 4.

[270] This spatial transposition is also accompanied by a linguistic *translation* that similarly intertwines America and Northern Ireland: 'I stood there in my string vest / / and shorts while she repeated, '*Champi...? / Champi...? Champi...?*' Then, / / that bracelet of shampoo / about the bone, her triumphant '*ChampiÑON*' (*AC* 6). In this macaronic verse, the diacritic mark on the letter 'n' reinforces the South American spatial and linguistic dimension of the poem. However, there is once again a tenuous link with Northern Ireland: the French-Spanish word for 'mushroom' is a possible reference to Patrick Muldoon's job as a mushroom grower, and the '*ÑON*' is a strong hint towards the often used 'no' in Loyalist sectarian slogans inscribed in the Northern Irish landscape ('Ulster Says No' and 'No Surrender'). 'No Surrenders' is, for instance, mentioned in 'Armageddon, Armageddon' (*M* 55) and 'Not an Inch' features in 'A Hare at Aldergrove' (*Plan B* 59).

Temporal Layers: Historical Events and Historical Figures

Historical battles and discoveries, in particular, had a profound impact on the young Muldoon's imagination, so much so that he imagined himself and his friends living in another era in the company of these warriors and explorers. Across Muldoon's *œuvre*, historical figures irrupt from the past to compose a heterogeneous and often unexpected mosaic of characters. Even if these historical figures actually existed, it is their *anachronistic* presence in the poems that creates the illusion of fiction. This is particularly true of poems in which Muldoon's childhood friends and classmates feature: the memories of the games the young Muldoon played with his friends are overlaid with the presence of historical figures. I have chosen 'The Centaurs' (*M*) and 'The Geography Lesson' (*WBL*) to illustrate the overlaying of historical figures on childhood memories because there is a gradation regarding the extent to which these characters intrude in the child's imagination: either the speaker and his friends are fictionalised by *association* (they are simply in the company of these historical figures) or they are fictionalised by *substitution* (they embody one of them).[271]

> I can think of William of Orange,
> Prince of gasworks-wall and gable-end.
> A plodding, snow-white charger
> On the green, grassy slopes of the Boyne,
> The milk-cart swimming against the current
>
> Of our own backstreet. Hernan Cortes
> Is mustering his cavalcade on the pavement,
> Lifting his shield like the lid of a garbage-can.
> His eyes are fixed on a river of Aztec silver,
> He whinnies and paws the earth
>
> For our amazement. And Saul of Tarsus,

[271] Although this analysis focuses on poems depicting boyhood fantasies, there are other poems featuring historical figures such as 'Lunch with Pancho Villa' (*M*), narrating a fictional encounter between the speaker and the Mexican revolutionary and guerrilla fighter. This poem is examined in my final chapter in relation to Muldoon's authorial intrusions (Part 5.2).

The stone he picked up once has grown into a hoof.
He slings the saddle-bags over his haunches,
Lengthening his reins, loosening his girth,
To thunder down the long road to Damascus. (*M* 14)

In 'The Centaurs', the familiar landscape—'our own backstreet'—is overlaid with the image of 'a river of Aztec silver' associated with one of the historical characters intruding in the child's imagination: Hernan Cortes. Furthermore, the poem charts a journey back in time—from the seventeenth century to the early ages of Christianity[272]—which is accompanied by a gradation in the intensity of the child's imagination. In fact, in the first stanza, the 'I' is only *imagining* ('I can think of') William of Orange in his familiar environment (the 'milk-cart' and the local 'gasworks'). Then, in the second stanza, the present continuous ('Cortes / Is mustering') *actualises* the past in the real: Cortes is gathering his troops in the child's backstreet and lifting 'his shield like the lid of a garbage-can'. Finally, in the final stanza, not only does the historical event intrude in the child's imagination, but a *surreal* stratum is added to the overlaying of historical events on boyhood games: the stone that Saint Paul picks up grows into a hoof (perhaps that of a centaur).[273] 'The Centaurs' therefore offers a tripartite model of autofictionality charting an evolution from the possible intrusion of a historical figure (stanza one), to the achieved re-actualisation of a past event (stanza two), and, finally, to the intrusion of a surreal metamorphosis (stanza three). This gradation from the opening to the final line progressively intensifies the illusion of fiction.

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[272] These historical figures were well-known for their battles or missionary work: William III (1650-1702) was most famous for his victory over King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, Hernan Cortes (1485-1547) was a Spanish conquistador who brought down the Aztec Empire, and Saul of Tarsus, also known as Saint Paul the Apostle (4 BC?- *c.* AD 62-64), was a Christian missionary converted on the road to Damascus.

[273] Interestingly, the 'tarsus' comes from the Greek *ταρσός* referring to a part of the anatomy—'the flat of the foot between the toes and the heel' ('Tarsus')—which is surely hinted at in the reference to the hoof Saul of Tarsus picks up in the poem.

This process of fictionalisation is brought to another level in *Why Brownlee Left*. 'The Geography Lesson' is a school poem based in 1961 when Muldoon was aged nine or ten. Unlike 'The Centaurs', in which historical figures are taking part in the children's' games, there is this time an ambiguity. Either these figures are once again rubbing shoulders with the young Muldoon and his classmates or the child imagines that his school friends have been *replaced with* these historical figures:[274]

> You should have seen them, small and wild
> Against a map of the known world,
>
> The back row of the class of '61.
> Internal exiles at thirteen or fourteen.
>
> Most couldn't read, though Mungo Park
> Could write his name. He'd made his mark
>
> As surely as some old explorer
> Would christen a mountain, or a river.
>
> To chart his progress, bench by embellished bench,
> Till he petered out next to Lefty Lynch
>
> Who kept ladybirds in a match-box,
> Some with two, others with seven spots. (10)

The young Muldoon is here imagining that his classmates are Mungo Park (a Scottish explorer of the Niger) and James 'Lefty' Lynch (a thug who dealt with Al Capone and who was at the head of the Chicago Teamsters Union). This poem reads as if the historical figures studied in the teacher's 'geography lesson' had become real in the child's imagination. While the speaker is not overtly

[274] In fact, in 'The Centaurs', the historical figures do not seem to have replaced the speaker's friends because the line 'For our amazement' suggests a separation between, on the one side, the speaker and his friends (the spectators) and, on the other, the historical characters (the actors).

fictionalised, the replacement of his fellow classmates with historical figures increases the appearance of fiction.[275]

By re-creating his childhood fantasies peopled with historical adventurers, explorers, and heroes, the author stages his younger self in different epochs that create the illusion of fiction. As in 'The Centaurs' and 'The Geography Lesson', there is a similar overlaying of historical events on childhood memories in 'Yarrow': memories of daily life and games on the farm are superimposed with historical adventures the young Muldoon embarks on. The reader is therefore led on a roller coaster ride blending vignettes of Muldoon's childhood and his imaginary adventures in the company of figures ranging from Tutankhamen, Cicero, Charlemagne and his Paladins, to Spanish colonisers and missionaries from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. However, this elegy is even more complex than the two poems discussed previously. In 'Yarrow', the young Muldoon not only rubs shoulders with historical characters, but he also associates himself with characters taken from adventure stories and films:

> The young Muldoon had 'a very powerful imaginative life', inventing 'scenarios' with other children; in the backyard they would build 'pirate ships, fortresses, trucks, lorries'; even, after seeing *The Four Feathers*, a camel. Some of these imaginary games, a blend of history and *Boy's Own* fiction, are evoked in his long poem, 'Yarrow'. (Potts B6)[276]

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[275] Although one might argue that the Irish nationalist Joseph Mary Plunkett similarly 'walks in' the classroom in 'Anseo', the classmate's name is Joseph Mary Plunkett *Ward*. This character is more likely based on a child who was given a hypernationalist name by his parents rather than on the actual historical figure.

[276] In a humorous passage, the young Muldoon is 'hunkering' with Wyatt Earp (American frontiersman, gambler, and saloonkeeper) and Wild Bill Hickok (American frontiersman and lawman involved in the antislavery movement). The 'I' therefore attends the meeting of these two frontiersmen, which (in reality) took place in 1871 in Kansas City. Interestingly, later in the poem, the border separating the realms of history and literature is transgressed since the three men are on the unlikely 'ramparts of Troy' (*AC* 71) with Hickok talking to Priam about the etymology of 'saboteur'. Muldoon's deep-seated interest in American frontiersmen is well known and is evidenced by some of the postcards he received such as the one depicting Wyatt Earp sent by American poet Tess Gallagher in 1979 (*PMP*, 'Gallagher, Tess, 1977-1982', Box 2, Folder 19).

My next analysis concentrates on the influence of boyhood readings on the young Muldoon's imagination. As in the previous analyses, the overlaying of adventure stories and literary heroes on childhood memories creates the illusion of fiction.

Textual Layers: Childhood Adventure Stories

> 'Yarrow' was written over a period of about eighteen months to two years. It began as something slightly different. I had a few images, and a few ideas for it. I did want to write something about the winter of 1962-63, very bitterly cold winter, the winter Sylvia Plath died in London. The poem is set in contemporary Newfoundland but goes back and forth to that period of my childhood and has to do with all sorts of adventure stories—the imaginative life, I suppose, of a child of ten, or eleven. [...] It's the background of a poet's mind, or whatever [...] a child's mind, but written with somewhat loopy style.
>
> (Muldoon, qtd. in Ingersoll and Rubin n. pag.)

In 'Yarrow', the young speaker either imagines himself and his entourage in the company of literary figures (fictionalisation by association) or imagines that he and his family have become one of these fictional characters (fictionalisation by substitution). Since most of these stories are coming-of-age stories, it could be argued that the overlaying of adventure stories on childhood events not only creates the appearance of fiction, but it also charts the young Muldoon's progressive coming of age.[277] In 'Yarrow', the poet recreates the 'imaginative life' of his 1963 self 'with somewhat loopy style'. Because of the complex overlaying of adventure stories in 'Yarrow', this analysis is divided into three parts. Each part

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[277] Adventure stories are also superimposed on the present of 1992: 'I would grit my teeth and brace / myself against the plunge into Owl Creek. / / I grit my teeth. I brace myself. It's 1:43 / by the clock / on the V.C.R.: with one bound / / Peyton Farquhar and I will break free and swim across / to Librium / with a leisurely crawl and flutter-kick' (*AC* 52-53). The poet aligns an event that took place in his imagination with a similar lived event contemporary with the time of writing: while there are two identical images of the speaker gritting his teeth and bracing himself, one refers to the young Muldoon fantasising that he is Peyton Farquhar's companion and one refers to the adult Muldoon who has slept through a film (possibly William Wellman's 1943 *The Ox-Bow Incident* mentioned in the next stanza). The stanzaic breaks after 'Owl Creek' and 'one bound' mark, respectively, the transition from the fantasy to the lived event and then the shift from the lived event back to the fantasy.

focuses on the impact of adventure stories on one element characteristic of personal writing: the self, the family, and the personal landscape.[278]

The Speaker in 'Yarrow' and 'The Glad Eye'

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'Yarrow' and 'The Glad Eye' are both set on the family farm and feature the young Muldoon in the company of literary or mythological figures. Some passages simply associate the young Muldoon with these fictional characters, others suggest a transformation of the child into one of them.[279]

In 'Yarrow', the young Muldoon sometimes imagines that he is a companion to various literary figures from adventure stories such as Ambrose Bierce's *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* (1891) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1881): the young Muldoon is often in the company of Peyton Farquhar (66)[280] or of Jim Hawkins 'plundering the Spanish Main / from the Grenadines to Grand Cayman' (*AC* 58).[281] The association of the young Muldoon with these literary heroes throughout the elegy creates the appearance of fiction. This illusion is further increased when the 'I' is not merely in their company, but embodies one of them. This is the case when the young Muldoon fancies himself as the young Arthur 'tug[ging] at the rusted blade of Excalibur' (66).

This transformation of the child into a legendary/mythological hero is also explored in the early poem 'The Glad Eye'. The latter illustrates the poet's interest

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[278] Apart from my analysis of the self focusing on 'Yarrow' and 'The Glad Eye', the other two sections (family and landscape) centre exclusively on the elegy.

[279] Muldoon's self-dramatization analysed in this section might have been influenced by MacNeice's multiple 'guises and disguises': 'In a letter to Anthony Blunt, written on 29 March 1927, and quoted by Jon Stallworthy in a note, MacNeice gives a hilarious pedigree for himself that runs on one side from Concobhar MacNessa through St Brandan and Stephen Dedalus to Don Quixote and, on the other, Hamlet through the Playboy of the Western World through Bishop Heber to Queen Victoria' (Muldoon, *TII* 91).

[280] Farquhar is a character from Bierce's story set during the American Civil War.

[281] The speaker and Hawkins are later joined by Morgan, an ex-pirate from Captain Flint's former crew, and are finally re-united when they crouch 'in the apple-butt on the *Marie Celeste*' (60). The ship could either refer to the real ship or to the one used in fiction by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

in the multiplicity of identities that characterises the volume *New Weather*. The formal layout of the poem, which is composed of ten couplets, illustrates the overlaying of literary and mythological figures on the young Muldoon's portrait:

> Bored by Ascham and Zeno
> In private conversation on the longbow,
>
> I went out onto the lawn.
> Taking the crooked bow of a yellow cane,
>
> I shot an arrow over
> The house and wounded my brother.
>
> He cried those huge dark tears
> Till they had blackened half his hair. (6)

It is likely that this poem was based on a real event since Muldoon has often mentioned his fondness for archery. Furthermore, family photographs illustrate strikingly similar childhood anecdotes: in Muldoon's personal papers at Emory, there is a family picture of the eight-year-old Muldoon playing with a bow and arrow, and another one depicting Paul and his brother Joseph playing cowboys and Indians in the family garden with a tepee in the background.[282] These photographs and various epitextual documents therefore support an autobiographical reading of this poem: the setting could be that of the farm in County Armagh (the 'lawn' and the 'house') and the brother most likely refers to Muldoon's actual brother, Joseph.[283] However, the young speaker soon

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[282] *PMP*, 'Various shots of Muldoon as a boy and young man', Box 44, Folder 1; and 'Various shots of Muldoon with siblings', Box 44, Folder 17. These pictures are corroborated by several lectures and interviews: 'I've always wanted to be an Indian. When I was a child I had a tent, a bow, and arrow. I still have a bow and arrow. It's pathetic really' (Muldoon, qtd. in Wilson, James n. pag.). In his F. W. Bateson lecture, Muldoon said: 'I'm looking at an autographed glossy photograph and accompanying letter from Richard Greene, the star of the ITV series *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. I've written to Richard Greene asking him if I could possibly have one of his bows when he's done with it. Unfortunately, he has none to spare, but he does enclose this photograph with his warmest wishes' ('Getting Round' 113).

[283] Muldoon's younger brother also features in the autobiographical poem 'The Wishbone' and in the unpublished poem 'The Brothers'. In the latter, Muldoon reminisces about their childhood in Armagh describing it as 'one long summer evening spent in that back-yard at the back of beyond', which is probably where the events in 'The Glad Eye' take place. *PMP*, 'Miscellaneous Poems, *c.* 1978-1983', '"The Brothers", single corrected typescript', Box 12, Folder 28.

transforms his reading about archery in the first couplet into a fictional scenario in the rest of the poem: in the third couplet, the young Muldoon has turned into one of the characters of British humanist and scholar Roger Ascham's *Toxophilus, The Schole of Shooting* (1545),[284] Toxophilus, defender of archery: 'I shot an arrow over / The house and wounded my brother'. The diegetic young speaker intrudes in the *metadiegetic* universe (the books he is reading), which is a form of metalepsis.[285]

In the second half of this poem, identities are even more unstable because the young Muldoon no longer imagines himself as Toxophilus but as a mythological figure:

> Yet that obstinate one
> Eye inveigled me to a standing stone.
>
> Evil eyes have always burned
> Corn black and people have never churned
>
> Again after their blink.
> That eye was deeper than the Lake of the Young (*NW* 6)

The image of the 'I' 'inveigled' to 'a standing stone' calls forth the image of the legendary hero of the Ulster Cycle, Cú Chulainn, who died after tying himself to a standing stone in order to die on his feet.[286] According to the mythological story, Cú Chulainn's enemies waited for a raven to land on the hero's shoulders to make sure that he was dead. This is important because Joseph has also been

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[284] This book was the first book on archery published in English. The two characters of this dialogue are Philologus ('a lover of study') and Toxophilus ('a lover of the bow').

[285] This is an example of metalepsis at the story level: a diegetic character (the young Muldoon) intrudes in a metadiegetic world (Ascham's book). In other words, the boundary between the primary story (the young Muldoon reading Ascham's book) and the secondary story (the framed story narrated in this book) has been transgressed. The metalepsis of the author at the discourse level is explored in Chapter Five. For more information on the distinction between the metalepsis at the story level and the one at the discourse level, see Dorrit Cohn, 'Metalepsis and Mise en Abyme', *Narrative* 20:1 (January 2012), 105-114.

[286] This superimposition of a mythological tale on a childhood memory is mirrored in the change of setting: while the personal landscape is briefly sketched in the first few lines, the poem ends on a reference to 'the Lake of the Young' (6).

transformed in the young Muldoon's imagination and has been metamorphosed into this ominous bird of prey: 'He cried those huge dark tears / Till they had blackened half his hair' (6). Although the 'inky' tears evoke the other character in Ascham's book—the study lover, Philologus, whose attributes would be the quill and *ink*—they also suggest that the speaker's brother has been changed into a raven since his hair has turned black.[287] While this poem started as an autobiographical poem telling the story of a bored young Muldoon who decides to play in the family garden and annoy his younger brother, within the space of a few couplets, the Muldoon figure and his brother have been transformed into mythological beings. The overlaying of literary (or mythological) figures is often accompanied in these boyhood scenarios by a similar fictionalisation of the family circle and, in particular, of the parents.

The Parents in 'Yarrow'

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In most of the passages depicting the speaker's parents in 'Yarrow', there is a clear overlaying of memories and fantasies: memories, on the one hand, because the poet refers to the real referents easily identifiable thanks to their moral values (mother) or work tools (father); and fantasies, on the other, because each parental portrait is overlaid with that of a fictional figure. This superimposition of the real parent with that of a fictional figure creates, once again, the appearance of fiction. Furthermore, as in the previous section, there is a gradation in this fictionalisation because the parents are either in the company of these literary characters or are transformed into one of these figures.

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[287] The transformation of the brother into a bird is strengthened by the presence of black birds in the poem that directly follows 'The Glad Eye': 'The nests of birds, these obvious concentrations of black' ('Hedges in Winter' 7).

The mother is often identified in personal poems thanks to her moral and religious values, as discussed in Chapter Two. In 'Yarrow', she is portrayed in similar ways even when she is in the unrealistic company of literary or mythical figures. This is the case when she converses on religion and morality with Morholt: "'For your body is a temple", my ma had said to Morholt, "the temple of the Holy Ghost"' (*AC* 68). The mother's real pious nature is here overlaid with the image of the warrior from the Arthurian legend.[288] The fact that the young speaker imagines that his mother and one of his favourite heroes inhabit the same world creates the illusion of fiction. This is further accentuated when the mother is *performing* the role of a fictional character: '"But to the girdle do the gods," / she repeats, "but to the girdle do the gods inherit"' (103). Her religious inclination is once again overlaid with a literary figure, King Lear. Although the mother is only repeating the lines, just as an actor on stage would, one might think, for an instant, that she has been transformed into Shakespeare's character.

There is a similar ambiguity regarding the father who is often staged as a cowboy, fighter, or sailor:

> In a conventional sestina, that plaster of Paris skull
> would almost certainly reveal the dent
> where my da took a turf-spade to poleaxe
>
> one of McParland's poley cows
> that had run amuck on our spread,
> bringing it to its knees by dint of a wallop so great
>
> it must have ruptured a major vein,
> such was the spout
> of, like, blood that hit him full in the face. (63)

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[288] In another vignette, she is in the presence of a character from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*: '"May your word be as good as or better than your bond", / my ma was saying to Queequeg / as she made a sign of the Cross / / over the tray: / when would we Irish find our *lán glaice* / of nutmeg to sweeten our barium?' (91). Before the stanzaic break, the mother is in the company of Queequeg—a cannibal and harpooner on the Pequod—and, after the break, she is back in the domestic and familiar setting of the family home.

Patrick Muldoon's portrait—recognisable by his attribute the 'turf-spade'—is overlaid with that of cowboy heroes. The visual exaggeration at the end of the vignette also conveys a cinematographic dimension to this passage, which participates in the illusion of fiction. This illusion is further increased when the father *embodies* one of the fictional characters:

> [...] 'How come you Fenians are so averse
>
> to buying plants in Comber, that's loyal to the king,
> instead of smuggling them in from Rush?
> Buy stalwart plants from a stalwart Prod, albeit a dissenter'.
>
> All I remember is how my da drew himself up like Popeye
> as he gave a tight-lipped 'C'mon'
> and by sheer might and main
>
> stuffed Utepandragun into a spinach-jar:
> 'I'll have you know, you clouricane,
> that I force
>
> my own kale every Spring';
> all I remember was the sudden rush
> of blood from his nose, a rush of blood and snatters. (76-77)

The narrative seems to be based on a (real?) dispute between the two neighbours. Nonetheless, the sectarian tensions between the Protestant neighbour and Muldoon's father are overlaid with a fictional fight opposing King Utepandragun and Popeye.[289] Once again, the visual dimension of the final line contributes to the cinematographic dimension of this passage. The victorious father is transformed into the pugnacious cartoon character who 'by sheer might and main / / stuffed Utepandragun into a spinach-jar' (77).[290]

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[289] Utepandragun is a character from Wolfram Von Eschenbach's epic poem *Parzival*. This poem runs through 'Yarrow' since 'Bearosche' is a battle site and 'Ingliart "With the Short Ears"' (*AC* 88) is one of the horses in the medieval German romance.

[290] It is not surprising that the father is associated with these powerful figures since his son was fond of sailors and Arthurian knights such as those featuring in '*Tschiffley's* [*sic*] *Ride* or *The Red / Rover* or *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*' (82). James F. Cooper's *The Red Rover* (1827) is about sailors and pirates who also feature in the elegy. Aimé Felix Tschiffely travelled from Buenos Aires to New York on horseback in 1925, hence perhaps the central image of the young Muldoon's rocking horse replacing Tschiffely's horses 'Mancho and Gato' (88). Finally,

In 'Yarrow', the fictionalised portraits of the parental figures may be due to two different reasons: the father's association with (or transformation into) a fighter/warrior could simply be read as he author's illustration *a posteriori* of his admiration for his father as a young boy,[291] while the fictionalisation of the mother figure could be explained by the fact that the poet is trying to come to terms with her death: the mother's journey from life to death is in a way mirrored by the movement from the real to the fictional.

The Family Farm in 'Yarrow'

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The parents' association with literary characters is also accompanied by a similar overlaying of the personal landscape with the backdrop of adventure stories from which these characters are taken: throughout the elegy, the family farm is metamorphosed into the set of an adventure story, a tale, or a western film. Like the Americanisation of the farm in the rest of the volume ('Brazil', for instance), the familiar landscape in 'Yarrow' remains anchored in the real. In most passages, an element on (or near) the farm—such as the barn and the bridge—is mentioned so that, while the family farm is associated with a fictional setting, it remains anchored in the real:

> For all would be swept away: the barn where the Pharaohs
> had buried Tutankhamen;
> where Aladdin found the magic lamp and ring;
>
> where Ali Baba
> watched the slave, Morgiana,
> pour boiling oil on the thieves in their jars; (*AC* 41)

Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee* (1889) tells the story of a Yankee who travels back in time to King Arthur's court.

[291] Muldoon later wondered if he didn't caricature his parents 'in ways that are ever so slightly cartoonish' and might have been referring to poems such as this passage associating his father with the Popeye figure: 'I'm a little fearful that I've made my father kind of overly glowing' (qtd. in Wilson, James n. pag.).

The barn is a distinctive element on the farm, yet it undergoes three successive metamorphoses triggered by the young Muldoon's imagination: it is first transformed into a pyramid, then into Aladdin's cave (*The Thousand and One Nights*), and, finally, into Ali Baba's cave (*Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*). Just as the legendary hero Aladdin rubs a lamp to produce genies, the young speaker rides his rocking horse and transforms the barn into a secret treasure-house:[292] 'again and again the cruel Emir / stops with the High King, Connor MacNessa, / at the barn-door; again and again they cry out, 'Open, Sesame' (186).[293]

In other instances, the family farm is associated with the setting of a cowboy story. This transformation not only involves the farm itself, but extends to farm animals:

> Again and again I find myself keeping watch from the bridge
> across the Callan: a snatch of hazel-wood
> gives on to the open
>
> range in which, once Jimmy McParland would turn
> them out of the byre,
> his cattle would cross-fade to Elmer Kelton's
>
> stampeding herd
> from *The Day the Cowboys Quit*, or *The Oklamydia Kid*,
> or, hold on, something by Jack Schaefer. (49)

This almost cinematographic overlaying ('cross-fade') takes place in the space created by the second stanzaic break. From the viewpoint of the local bridge, the

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[292] It is important to mention that, throughout 'Yarrow', the shift from vignettes centred on the daily routine on the farm to vignettes revolving around the young Muldoon's fantasies is, in fact, associated with the image of the rocking horse. The rocking horse enables the child to escape to the world of his imagination and is particularly well suited to this purpose since it evokes the poet's childhood (it is a toy) and his early fantasies (it stands for a knight's horse). The importance of the rocking horse as a sort of spatiotemporal vehicle—'my rocking-horse's halter fast-forwards through my hands' (70)—is particularly visible in this passage: 'That was the year my da would find the larvae, or pupae, / of cabbage-whites on the acumen / of a leaf: my rocking-horse with the horse-hair mane / / stopped in its tracks, giving me such a jar / I fell off, just as Utepandragun / himself was trotting by' (76). The speaker enters the world of literary fiction after falling from the horse within the space created by the line break following 'jar'.

[293] In this other vignette, the farm's transformation is accompanied by the intrusion of Irish legendary heroes ('Deirdre of the Sorrows' and the Irish King MacNessa from the Ulster Cycle) who are in the company of the poet's mother ('Begad, / I'll teach him not to mitch / / when the spuds need spraying').

young Muldoon imagines that his neighbour's cattle has been replaced with the cows from Kelton's Western book *The Day the Cowboys Quit* (1883)[294] or with those from the 1939 Western film *The Oklahoma Kid* ('*Oklamydia*') starring Humphrey Bogart. Finally, another recurrent transformation of the farm is when it is overlaid with fictional battle sites. In these vignettes, the poet reproduces his childhood fantasies by recounting how elements on the farm played an important role in his war-like scenarios:

> I can hear the gallant six hundred ride into the valley
> and the Assyrian come down on the fold:
>
> beyond the cattle-crush, beyond the piggery,
> I fall headfirst with Peyton
> Farquhar through doeskin and denim and dimity and damask. (66)

In this vignette, the speaker is at war against the Assyrians and is fighting alongside Peyton Farquhar, while elements on the farm are transformed into obstacles or military defences (the 'cattle-crush' and the 'piggery').[295] Finally, at the end of the elegy, the adventure comes to an end with the image of a trireme reminiscent of the 'great vessel of three masts' in *Treasure Island* (235):

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[294] This books tells the story of Texan cowboys who went on strike against big ranches. The young speaker imagines that Jimmy McParland is one of the owners of the big ranches in Kelton's fictional story. The local Callan River, mentionned in the first stanza, may also have been transformed in the child's imagination into the Canadian River of *The Day the Cowboys Quit*.

[295] The farm is also at times transformed into *historical* battle grounds: '"*Non*," I heard from the depths of the barn, "*Je ne regrette rien*": / Edith Piaf, I thought, but lo / and behold, if it wasn't Sir Reginald Front-de-Boeuf / / and Ben Gunn, fresh from the battle of Zara; / Ben had armed himself with a hurley / and both *Wisden's Cricketer's* and *Old Moore's* almanacs' (93). In this vignette, personal, historical, and fictional events are mingled. The family farm and the barn are transformed into a remake of the Siege of Zara, set in 1202 during the Fourth Crusade, involving Ben Gunn from Stevenson's adventure novel *Treasure Island* and Sir Reginald Front-de-Boeuf from Sir Walter Scott's historical romance *Ivanhoe* (1819). Almost a hundred pages later, the transformation of the real farm into a fictional battlefield continues: 'even now I hear his shuffle-saunter / / through the yard, his slapping the bib / of his overalls; even now he stops by the cattle-crush / from which the peers and paladins would set out on their forays' (185). While in these passages the narrative is anchored in the real with the father's characteristic 'overalls' (also referred to on p.43 of the elegy), the farm and the elements present in the childhood landscape (the barn, the bridge, and the cattle-crush) become elements of a war-like landscape storming with fictional characters and eighth- or ninth-century paladins from Charlemagne's Court.

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

that I've either forgotten or disavowed;
it has to do with a trireme, laden with ravensara,
that was lost with all hands between Ireland and Montevideo. (*AC* 189)

The depiction of this ancient vessel lost at sea 'between Ireland and Montevideo' evokes that of the wrecked ship lying off the shores of North Inlet in Stevenson's adventure story.[296]

In 'Yarrow', the farm is seen both through the eyes of the 1992 speaker and through the various fantasies of the 1963 speaker. Just like the speaker in the poem 'Twice' (also published in *The Annals of Chile*), we may therefore wonder if the farm represents 'Two places at once [...] or one place twice?' (12). In fact, this particular place is both anchored in the real and in the young speaker's imagination so that we experience a sort of *trompe l'œil* or 'double image', as in some of Salvador Dalí's paintings.[297] The narrative is interspaced with vignettes depicting journeys through County Armagh in a relatively straightforward manner by the 1992 speaker, but the depiction of the family farm is mostly seen through the eyes of the 1963 speaker: this other 'vision' is mediated through the imagination of the young Muldoon. 'Yarrow' is a perfect example of what Genette calls *double focalisation* (double focalisation or vision) or *polymodalité*

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[296] The description of the ship in *Treasure Island* reads: 'Scarcely had we passed the heads before the land closed around us. The shores of North Inlet were as thickly wooded as those of the southern anchorage; but the space was longer and narrower, and more like, what in truth it was, the estuary of a river. Right before us, at the southern end we saw the wreck of a ship in the last stages of dilapidation. It had been a great vessel of three masts, but had lain so long exposed to the injuries of the weather, that it was hung about with great webs of dripping seaweed, and on the deck of it shore bushes had taken root, and now flourished thick with flowers' (235).

[297] The Spanish artist painted a number of 'double images', which are optical illusions. For instance, in *Accommodations of Desire* (1929), the lion's head also looks like female genitalia: 'the head of a lion appears in many positive and negative images. In French terms, the painting's iconography symbolizes impotence in the face of paternal power, but the lion's head could also be read as suggesting a woman's sex and Dalí's fear of intercourse' (Jeffett 348). In 'Yarrow', all the vignettes blending the real landscape (family farm) and the various fictional settings of adventure stories could be called poetic double images.

(polymodality) because there is a concurrence between the objective adult narrator and the subjective younger protagonist.

In contrast, in poems published in the collections that directly followed after *The Annals of Chile—Hay* (1998) and *Moy Sand and Gravel* (2002)—the real landscape is not overlaid by historical or literary settings.[298] Instead, it exists *alongside* an 'otherworld', a world belonging to the surreal. The poet presents 'two places at once', one of which is entirely constructed by the poet and transcends the laws of the real. There is, therefore, one set of poems in which several landscapes are *overlaid* (Part 4.2), and another set of poems in which the real landscape exists alongside a surreal otherworld (Part 4.3). These poems offer a greater degree of fictionalisation and are emblematic of *fantastic autofictions* since the border separating the real from the surreal is transgressed.

[298] As explained later in this chapter, Muldoon already experimented with the creation of an otherworld in an earlier collection: *Why Brownlee Left*.

4.3. Muldoon's Fantastic Autofictions: The Creation of Otherworlds

> Among contemporary Irish writers Paul Muldoon evokes most deliberately the themes and experiences of stories of the otherworld. Although the first two volumes, *New Weather* (1973) and *Mules* (1977), contain only the snippet of an *immram*, these volumes, like the subsequent three volumes, can be read in light of the basic themes of otherworld narratives.
>
> (Johnston, Dillon, 'Next to Nothing' 129)[299]

The existence of an imaginary world is a recurrent motif in fantastic autofictions. These texts, which belong to different literary sub-genres (the fantastic, the magical, and the oneiric, among others), present readers with a strong feeling of unreality that arises from the presence of otherworldly elements.[300] Colonna argues that the invention of this surreal dimension is a resurgence of antique shamanism: in these fantastic autofictional texts, the speaker-character is able to enter a world governed by unfamiliar laws (Rathé 43-44).[301] The poet reinvents

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[299] Dillon Johnston wrote a very important analysis of the presence of the otherworld in Irish literature from Yeats and Joyce to contemporary writers in his essay entitled 'Next to Nothing: Uses of the Otherworld in Modern Irish Literature'. The critic dedicates part of his study to Muldoon's poetry focusing on poems such 'Immrama', 'Immram', 'Bran', and 'The Coney'. I refer to this key study in my discussion of Muldoon's fantastic autofictions and pursue this analysis of the otherworldly in collections published after this article was written (particularly *Hay* and *Moy Sand and Gravel*). I also analyse in greater detail Muldoon's voyage tales ('Immrama' and 'Immram'). Another study that deals with Muldoon's creation of a virtual world existing alongside the real was written by Carle Bonafous-Murat in 'Guides, plans, cartes: les frontières du virtuel dans la poésie nord-irlandaise contemporaine'. The critic focuses on three Northern Irish poets (Longley, Carson, and Muldoon) and argues that Muldoon's analyses of other writers in *To Ireland, I* are comments applicable to his own work. Bonafous-Murat insists on the 'supremacy of the principle of contiguity over the principle of substitution', reminding us that Muldoon describes this virtual world as 'coterminal' to our real world (134). His article focuses on two poems: 'Cauliflowers', in relation to the poet's feeling of guiltiness towards his fellow countrymen in Northern Ireland; and 'Madoc: A Mystery', in relation to its networks, toponyms, and the *dinnseanchas* tradition. My intention is to extend Johnston's and Bonafous-Murat's studies to other poems in order to illustrate how the real world coexists alongside this virtual world across Muldoon's *œuvre*.

[300] As explained by Dillon Johnston, the 'fantastic pervades that portion of a "realistic" narrative when the reader and the protagonist encounter some experience that defies the laws of normal reality' ('Next to Nothing' 127). For a detailed explanation of Tzvetan Todorov's terms such as 'fantastic', 'uncanny', 'supernatural', and 'marvelous', see Dillon Johnston, 'Next to Nothing: Uses of the Otherworld in Modern Irish Literature', *New Irish Writing: Essays in Memory of Raymond J. Porter*, ed. James D. Brophy and Eamon Grennan (Boston: Twayne, 1989), 121-140.

[301] Colonna mentions, for instance, Dante Alighieri's descent into the circles of Hell in *The Divine Comedy* and Jorge Luis Borges's *The Aleph*.

his poetic persona by creating for himself an imaginary existence much as Dante did when he described his descent into Hell. This is what Colonna calls *autofabulation*.

Part 4.3 argues that Muldoon's fantastic autofictions offer a very personal interpretation of the otherworld since his poems have an Irish twist to them: in fact, the Irish tradition called the *féth fiáda* similarly revolves around the 'otherworldly' and seems to have been an important source of inspiration for Muldoon's fantastic autofictional poems.[302] First, I briefly explain the main motifs of the *féth fiáda* and how they relate to the surreal; I then argue that Muldoon had already experimented with the creation of an otherworld in *Why Brownlee Left* enabling him to imagine the *possibility* of new origins and departures; finally, I turn to *Hay* and *Moy Sand and Gravel*, in which the transgression of the boundaries separating the personal landscape and the otherworld is an achieved reality.[303]

[302] The poet's interest in the *féth fiáda* is particularly interesting: discussing Ashbery's poetry in his interview with Lynn Keller, Muldoon explains that 'chaos and flux' are not a disruption, they are part of the world we inhabit (24). The creation of this otherworld alongside the real is perhaps a way to illustrate how 'chaos and flux' are integral aspects of this two-dimensional world.

[303] Wills wrote that *Meeting the British* is also a meditation on personal origins: 'Are we to understand ourselves in relation to our origins (in Muldoon's case his parental home, the small farm in Armagh), or through the journeys we take away from our beginnings? [...] How far can we ever leave our origins behind?' (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 129).

Introduction: The *Féth Fiáda*

> CECILY: Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.
>
> (Wilde 370)[304]

> Head-staggered by the heights, the cold pit
> of the depths, this coast reminds that each scene
> through which we move, in which we stand,
> is a phantasmal screen through which gleams
> a truer world that will shift and distend
> forever as we attempt to hold it.
>
> ('On Cloughey Beach' Gillis 51)

In *To Ireland, I*, Muldoon uses to a great extent the concept of the *féth fiáda* in relation to a variety of Irish writers such as Samuel Beckett, Elizabeth Bowen, James Joyce, and Louis MacNeice, to mention but a few.[305] Discussing William Allingham's poem 'The Fairies', Muldoon explains the origins of the *féth fiáda* and the mythological existence of an otherworld:

> This idea of there being a contiguous world, a world coterminal with our own, into and out of which some may move, as in Allingham's 'The Fairies', might be traced back to the overthrow of the Tuatha Dé Danann by the Milesians, for after the battles of Tailtiu and Druim Ligen, the Tuatha Dé Danann are literally driven underground. They become the *áes sídhe*, the 'fairy' or 'gentle' folk. They are made invisible by virtue of the *féth fiáda* or *ceo sídhe*, the magic mist or veil, a kind of world-scrim, that hangs about them, often allowing them to appear as animals, particularly deer. (7)

This 'magic mist or veil' is what separates the real world from the world of the imagination.[306] This veil or mist can also take the 'form of a woven fabric, a

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[304] This line from *The Importance of Being Earnest* is quoted as an epigraph to 'The Bangle (Slight Return)' (*H* 110).

[305] See Paul Muldoon, *To Ireland, I* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 17; 19; 23-24; 57-58; 93.

[306] There are several instances in Muldoon's poetry of a physical border, such as a bridge, a lane, or a river: the bridge in 'Yarrow', the lawn in 'The Glad Eye', the river in 'The Waking Father', the coast in 'Identities', the back door in 'Lunch with Pancho Villa', the backstreet in 'The Centaurs', *etc.* Interestingly, in an interview with Yusef Komunyakaa, Muldoon explains that his 'extended family lived at the ends of *lanes*' (qtd. in Sherman 76, my emphasis). These liminal places constitute a threshold, a port of call leading to an otherworld. While these physical limits are interesting because they create a threshold leading to this otherworld, my analysis also focuses on the intangible screens that Muldoon creates.

"textile"' (*TII* 24). Since the term 'textile' (from the Latin *textilis*) is closely associated with 'text', the poet therefore *weaves into* his text this imaginary screen.[307] The presence of a veil is, however, not sufficient to ascertain that the poet is referring to the *féth fiáda* since there are other characteristics that need to be present to allow for 'the confrontation with, and the crossing over to, a fairy realm': the *ceol sídhe* (delineating the moment during which the veil/border is crossed)[308] and the reference to animals (preferably hounds or deer).[309]

The poet's interest in this 'psychological trapdoor' (*TII* 8) is clearly highlighted in the opening pages of the book: 'This idea of a parallel universe, a grounded groundlessness, also offers an escape clause, a kind of psychological trapdoor, to a people from under whose feet the rug is constantly being pulled, often quite literally so' (7). This is particularly illuminating since Muldoon's poetry is characterised by this 'grounded groundlessness': as discussed in Part 4.2, while specific places seem to anchor the poems in a referential dimension, they often refer to a multitude of possible locations. According to the poet, the 'deep-seated sense of liminality' that characterises the *féth fiáda* is 'central to the

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[307] The full passage reads: 'I've dwelt on the idea of the recurring image of the *féth fiáda*, the barrier between being and not-being, between this world and some other, wondrous realm, often manifesting itself as a mist, of course, but just as often taking the form of a woven fabric, a "textile". I've dwelt on the complexity, sometimes the complicatedness, of so many of these "texts" and their "subtexts"' (24).

[308] This refers to 'some kind of time warp' materialised by the 'ringing of bells' or 'the strains of an unearthly music' (7).

[309] There are a number of references to does in Muldoon's poetry. The doe is referred to in 'Yarrow' as *eilit* (Irish for 'doe') (*AC* 104) and indirectly in 'The Birth', celebrating the birth of his daughter Dorothy: 'the windlass-women ply their shears / and gralloch-grub / for a footling foot' (31). Kendall explains that 'the verb "gralloch", derives from the Gaelic for intestines, and means to disembowel (normally, a deer)' (*Paul Muldoon* 223). The term 'doe' also appears indirectly in the name of the poet's hound since, in his Clarendon Lectures, Muldoon explains that the name Oscar means 'beloved of the deer' (*TII* 76): 'I'm wakened by the moans / not of the wind / nor the wood-demons / / but Oscar MacOscair, as we call the hound / who's wangled himself / into our bed' ('Oscar' *AC* 8). See also 'Three Deer, Mount Rose, August 1995': 'Oscar MacOscar, the hound / whose name means "deer favourite", now favored giving chase. / / The doe and one fawn got away' (*H* 55). It is ironic that Muldoon chose such a name since in the *féth fiáda* there is also a 'bitch' (the hunting dog) who tracks 'the phantom deer' (*TII* 17). The family hound (the 'deer favourite') is, paradoxically, a dog beloved by his own prey.

Irish psyche' (8) and, I would argue, lies at the core of Muldoon's fantastic autofictional poems.

There are several poems that deal with the concept of the *féth fiáda*. A first set of poems collected in *Why Brownlee Left* focuses on the possibility of alternative lives through the image of the father figure: the poet explores new personal origins and departures by *imagining* the alternative routes his father might have taken had he crossed to an otherworld. Another set of poems, in *Hay* and *Moy Sand and Gravel*, centres on the speaker's crossings of the border separating the real from the surreal. These two sets of poems therefore present two different types of fantastic *auto*fictions in relation to the *self*: while in *Why Brownlee Left* the speaker imagines an altogether alternative/fictional family life that disregards the past and in which the existence of his own 'self' is questioned, in *Hay* and *Moy sand and Gravel*, the existence of the speaker is not questioned: his sense of self and personal origins is strengthened by this journey to the otherworld.

Exploring New Origins and Departures in *Why Brownlee Left*

> In [*Why Brownlee Left*] we can perceive a metaphorical or psychological intention within most evocations of 'somewhere else' or of the voyage to the Otherworld.
>
> (Johnston, Dillon, 'Next to Nothing' 132)

> The idea of leaving is a central organising principle of the book, which considers many kinds of departures: departure from a marriage [to Anne-Marie Conway], from traditional poetic form, from life's predestined plot, and from the heterosexual norm.
>
> (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 61)

The title of the collection refers to the eponymous poem telling the story of a farm labourer who suddenly left his farm, indicating that the volume is, in general, about the search for new origins and departures.[310] Two poems are particularly emblematic of this quest: 'Immrama' and its sequel 'Immram'.[311] Wills explains that in these two poems

> Muldoon speculates about [an] alternative life history for his father (and therefore also for himself), taking his cue from a real life alternative which in the end his father did not take. In the 1930s his father and a friend decided to emigrate to Australia, and arranged a meeting place at a crossroads in Tyrone, from where they were to make their way to Belfast and beyond. As Muldoon tells the story (which turns out to be apocryphal) his father made it to the meeting place, but returned home again when his friend did not arrive. (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 71)

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[310] In a video about his work as a radio producer at the BBC in Belfast, Muldoon explains that the name 'Brownlee' does not refer to an actual person: 'Not only did I write poems in the Information Office in Broadcasting House Belfast as well as in my own office there, but, actually, there were aspects of this building that inspired me. For example, I did spend a little time most days in the bathroom in Broadcasting House and I discovered in there that the doors in the bathrooms were made by a company called "Brownlee" and that name lies partly behind the title of this poem, which is called "Why Brownlee Left"' ('Paul Muldoon on the BBC' n. pag.).

[311] The Irish word *immram* (or *imram*) refers to a traditional Irish journey: 'Irish sea-voyage stories called *immrama* flourished during the seventh and eighth centuries. The *immram* is a sea-voyage tale in which a hero, with a few companions, often monks, wanders from island to island, meets other-world wonders, and finally returns home' (Anderson, John 316). Together with the *echtrae*, this sea-voyage tale is directly associated with the otherworld: 'Traditionally, the otherworld was portrayed in *echtrae*—narratives of a hero's adventures in the underworld—or in *immra*, which recounted a heroic voyage to a series of otherworld islands' (Johnston, Dillon, 'Next to Nothing' 122).

In *Why Brownlee Left*, Muldoon has transformed this 'real life alternative' into a surreal voyage tale based on the *féth fiáda*. In fact, there are many elements that highlight the surreal dimension of these poems and the existence of an otherworld.

In 'Immrama', the speaker follows in the footsteps of his father and embarks on the trip that his own father had planned:

> I, too, have trailed my father's spirit
> From the mud-walled cabin behind the mountain
> Where he was born and bred,
> TB scarlatina,
> The farm where he was first hired out,
> To Wigan, to Crewe junction,
> A building-site from which he disappeared
> And took passage, almost, for Argentina. (*WBL* 23)

The stanzaic break between the octet and the sestet marks the transition from an hypothetical fictional story (in the octet) to the presentation of a fiction as an achieved reality (in the sestet):

> The mountain is coming down with hazel,
> The building-site a slum,
> While he has gone no further than Brazil.
>
> That's him on the verandah, drinking rum
> With a man who might be a Nazi,
> His children asleep under their mosquito-nets. (23)

The sestet represents the full embrace of the possibility of a fictional life that the octet merely signals. While the adverb 'almost' signals this transition from the real to the fictional,[312] this frontier is physically embodied by the 'mosquito-net': this veil brings us back to the *féth fiáda* tradition since it replaces the screen separating the real world from a parallel world. Furthermore, although there is no

[312] Wills argues that the 'realms of fact and fiction diverge in the poem with the word "almost"' (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 72).

deer or *ceol sídhe* delineating the transition from one world to the next, the terms 'spirit', 'took passage', and 'disappeared' evoke the supernatural and suggest that, in a manner reminiscent of the Tuatha Dé Danann, the father has disappeared from the real world and has been spirited away to this otherworld.[313]

Even though 'Immrama' is about the father's alternative life, the poet more broadly touches on paternity and the exploration of new departures. These themes are also central to 'Immram', in which the father's imagined departure is taken to a whole new level. In this longer epic journey, Muldoon offers his own take on the 'Voyage of Mael Duin' and creates an intricate family saga by blending in the motifs of the *féth fiáda*.[314] For this longer analysis, I first concentrate on how Muldoon adapts the *féth fiáda* tradition in 'Immram' in order to contextualise the fictionalisation of the father later on.[315]

'Immram' is filled with precise locations that could, at first sight, be read as tokens of sincerity since they anchor the narrative in a seemingly real setting: 'I was fairly and squarely behind the eight / That morning in Foster's pool-hall' (*WBL* 38). However, despite this precise location on the West Coast of America (California), the rest of the narrative suggests that places are not what they seem to be. In the following passage, the speaker seems to have entered a surreal dimension·

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[313] The term 'spirited' is also used in 'Immram': 'The mile-long white Cadillac had now wrapped / Itself round the Park Hotel. / We were spirited to the nineteenth floor / Where Caulfield located a secret door' (*WBL* 47). The 'secret door' also suggests that the speaker is in the presence of a liminal place.

[314] In *Reading Paul Muldoon*, Wills highlights the links between Muldoon's poem and the traditional epic journey called the 'Voyage of Mael Duin' on which it is based. Richard Kearney explains that 'Muldoon' is 'a contemporary homonym of the ancestral wanderer *Mael Duin* (140).

[315] While I concentrate on the father's fictionalisation, it is important to point out the mother's radical transformation in 'Immram': 'My mother had just been fed by force, / A pint of lukewarm water through a rubber hose. / I hadn't seen her in six months or a year, / Not since my father had disappeared. / Now she'd taken an overdose / Of alcohol and barbiturates, / And this, I learned, was her third. / I was told then by a male nurse / That if I came back at the end of the week / She might be able to bring herself to speak' (*WBL* 39). The effort of precision ('male nurse', 'third overdose') is at odds with the obvious fictionalisation of the mother figure. Fourteen years later, in 'Yarrow', Muldoon similarly transformed Brigid Regan by blurring the image of the mother character and that of a drug-addict female character (the enigmatic and self-destructive 'S—'). See Chapter Two.

So I drove west to Paradise
Where I was greeted by the distant hum
Of *Shall We Gather at the River?*
The perfect introduction to the kind of place
Where people go to end their lives.
It might have been *Bringing In the Sheaves.* (38)

While Paradise refers to an actual city in the Sierra (in the northwest foothills of California's Central Valley), these lines indicate that this place name is likely to be fictional. First, this passage highlights the cinematographic (and, therefore, *staged*) nature of this story because the speaker seems to be walking on the set of a Western film.[316] Secondly, the symbolically-charged 'Paradise' evokes the biblical Garden of Eden: this religious undertone is, in fact, reinforced by the Christian song 'Shall We Gather at the River' (38) and the reference to 'the land of milk and honey' (41). Finally, the fact that the speaker is driving 'west to Paradise' is particularly important since the West is often associated in Irish literature with the possibility of crossing over to an imaginary world.[317] Moreover, if we take the speaker at his word and look at what lies to the west of Paradise, we find, in particular, towns such as Eureka and Fortuna similarly bearing important symbolic connotations. All of these sub-texts that run through the name of

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[316] The song 'Shall We Gather at the River' was used for the soundtracks of Western films directed by John Ford (*Stagecoach*, *Wagon Master*, *The Searchers*, and *My Darling Clementine*, for example).

[317] In her analysis of 'Good Friday, 1971. Driving Westward', Wills argues that to 'go west' is associated with 'crossing the border between one world and another' (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 75). In fact, in the first stanza of this earlier poem, the speaker 'caught sight of hares all along the road / That looked to have been taking a last fling' (*NW* 23): the presence of a hare is often associated with the supernatural and the crossing over to another world, as discussed later in this chapter. This association of the westward movement and the otherworldly also features in 'Brazil': this South American country 'evokes the other world of Irish legend, Hy-Breasil, an enchanted island situated in legend somewhere off the West coast of Ireland' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 73). To go back to 'Immram', there is another instance of the speaker going West in the following passage: 'When I nudged the rocker on the porch / It rocked as though it might never rest. / It seemed that I would forever be driving west' (*WBL* 40). The rocker brings to mind another poem in which the speaker is time-travelling and crossing over to a parallel world: it is reminiscent of the young Muldoon's rocking horse in 'Yarrow'.

supposedly real Californian places (*e.g.* Paradise) suggest that the spatial dimension in which the journey is taking place is not the real, but the surreal.[318]

Readers could argue that this spatial ambiguity is similar to the overlaying of landscapes, as discussed in Part 4.2. However, there is no superimposition of an otherworld on the real landscape in 'Immram'. A 'world equally rich and strange' (*WBL* 42) exists *alongside* the real:

> Both were dead. Of that I was almost certain.
> When I looked into their eyes
> I sensed the import of their recent visions,
> How you must get all of wisdom
> As you pass through a wind-shield. (40)

In fact, when the speaker observes the two men he just killed in a fight outside the Atlantic Club, he is in the presence of this veil separating the two worlds: the wind-shield. Other elements scattered in the poem materialise this threshold: mirrors ('the wall-length, two-way mirror', 42), veils ('I was ushered / Into a chamber sealed with black drapes', 47), windows ('a hole in a tiny, stained-glass window', 43), secret passages ('narrow alley-way', 43; 'a secret door', 47), and 'sky-high' waves ('like a wall of glass', 45) through which people vanish without a trace ('the Missing Persons Bureau', 45).

Furthermore, the reader is made aware of the presence and the crossing over to this otherworld with the ringing of bells. In the next passage, there is a veiled reference to the *ceol sídhe* with the multitude of bewitching sounds (honks, blues guitar, fire-alarm) 'turn[ing] the heads of Harlem':

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[318] In addition, although the line 'So long as there's an "if" in California' (*WBL* 39) suggests spatial permanency because there will always be an 'if' in 'California'; paradoxically, this 'if' simultaneously erodes that sense of reality and spatial permanence: this geographical space only hangs by a thread, a tiny conjunction often used to introduce a clause of condition or supposition in order to express a hypothesis that is not yet realised.

And honking to Blind Lemon's blues guitar
Was a solitary, black cat
Who would have turned the heads of Harlem.
He was no louder than a fire-alarm,
A full-length coat of alligator,
An ermine stole, his wide-brimmed hat
Festooned with family heirlooms.
I watch him trickle a fine, white powder
Into his palm, so not a grain would spill,
Then snort it through a rolled-up dollar bill. (43)[319]

This drug-addict and music-loving cat evokes the 'hepcats' from the age of the Beat generation and jazz and resembles a strange creature reminiscent of the Cheshire Cat and the Mad Hatter in Lewis Carroll's novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. More importantly, this whimsical creature signals the passage to this otherworld inhabited by all sorts of strange beings, whose curious mix contributes to creating this 'strong feeling of unreality'.[320] These figures often have multiple personalities or roles:

[...] this life-guard out of Big Sur
Who made an exhibition
Of his dorsals and his pectorals
While one by one his disciples took up the chant
The Lord is my surf-board. I shall not want.

He went on to explain to O'Leary and myself
How only that morning he had acquired the lease
On the old Baptist mission,
Though this was a wholly new religion.
He called it *The Way Of The One Wave.*
This one wave was sky-high, like a wall of glass,

[319] This 'white powder' is later changed into 'angel dust' (43).

[320] The cat is one of the most eccentric figures in the poem but it is not the only one whose portrayal hints at the surreal dimension of the narrative. All the characters mentioned in this poem seem to have a double identity, such as the woman whose name might be 'Susan, or Susannah' or people 'passing for' other people ('another aide-de-camp / Who would have passed for a Barbary pirate', 42). The 'feeling of unreality' is particularly well-achieved through the eclectic mix of historical, literary, and invented characters: biblical figures (Salome, Susan); literary characters mostly taken from *The Tempest* (Caliban, Prospero, Ariel); fairies; writers (Tennyson, Fitzgerald); and entirely fictional characters (Redpath, Mr. See-You-Later). One of these invented characters is particularly interesting: 'Lieutenant Brendan O'Leary' (44). The first name evokes the theme of the 'voyage tale' since it necessarily brings to mind Brendan the Navigator, and 'O'Leary' could be an Irish version of King Lear who features in 'Yarrow'. This parallel with Shakespeare is interesting since this early modern play—*King Lear* (1605-1606)—is similarly based on multiple impersonations: Edgar, son of the Earl of Gloucester, is disguised as a mad beggar and takes the fictional name 'Poor Tom', while the Earl of Kent is disguised as a peasant and changes his name to Caius.

> And had come to him in a vision.
> You could ride it forever, effortlessly.
> The Lieutenant was squatting before his new guru.
> I would inform the Missing Persons Bureau. (45)

The life-guard is humorously transformed into a 'guru', a shamanistic figure who is presiding over this otherworld and its 'disciples' and abiding by a 'wholly new religion'.[321]

Just like the other figures pervading this poem, the father has also been transformed in the process of crossing over to the otherworld and the portrait that is drawn is more that of a 'double' father figure, who is strikingly different from Patrick Muldoon's portraits in referential poems. Although the speaker provides an identikit for his father, he 'could be almost anyone':

> His name? I already told you his name.
> Forty-nine. Fifty come July.
> Five ten or eleven. One hundred and eighty pounds.
> He could be almost anyone.
> And only now was it brought home to me
> How rarely I looked in his eyes,
> Which were hazel. His hair was mahogany brown.
> There was a scar on his left forearm
> From that time he got himself caught in the works
> Of a saw-mill near Ithaca, New York. (*WBL* 45)

Despite this very detailed physical portrait, some of these features do not add up since they do not correspond to Muldoon's real father who, for instance, had light blue eyes.[322] Furthermore, the adverb 'almost' and the use of the modal 'could' illustrate the indecisive nature of identities and their multiplicity: 'I knew how my father had come here by himself [..] / And watched his check double, and treble, / With highball hard on the heels of highball' (*WBL* 39). The image of the father no longer refers to a unified being but to a double or even a triple ('treble') entity,

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[321] Colonna compares the writer of fantastic autofictions to a shaman (*Autofiction et autres mythomanies* 31). See Chapter One (Part 1.2).
[322] *PMP*, 'Father (in color; various shots)', Box 44, Folder 26. In addition, the central element that is missing is the father's *name*, which is a crucial element in identifying the character.

fleeing from 'alias to alias' (46) throughout the narrative. In fact, in the final line of the above-quoted extract, the father figure is indirectly compared to several fictional figures: his fictitious homecoming to 'Ithaca, New York' both alludes to Odysseus's return to the Greek island of Ithaca in Homer's *Odyssey* and to Leopold Bloom's return home in the penultimate chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*.

To conclude, the analysis of these voyage tales published in *Why Brownlee Left* indicates that in fantastic autofictions identities are highly unstable and multiple, which is a feature shared with the autobiographical poems discussed in Chapter Two. Moreover, one of the main consequences of the fictionalisation of the father in 'Immrama' and 'Immram' is that the very existence of the speaker-son is questioned: because the poet imagines the alternative life his father could have led then, logically, we must conclude that the son (Paul Muldoon) could not have been a part of it. This is suggested when the father is associated with a mule in 'Immram', 'the sterile offspring of a horse and a donkey' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 42).[323] This comparison (father/mule) highlights the hybrid identity of the father and implicitly suggests that this fictional Patrick Muldoon, had he led such a life, would not have fathered a son, Paul Muldoon.[324] 'Immram' predictably ends on an image suggesting the non-existence of the speaker:

> I imagined him sitting outside a hacienda
> Somewhere in the Argentine.
> He would peer for hours
> Into the vastness of the pampas.
> Or he might be pointing out the constellations
> Of the Southern hemisphere
> To the open-mouthed child at his elbow.
> He sleeps with a loaded pistol under his pillow. (*WBL* 46)

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[323] The father is involved in drug smuggling in the poem.

[324] This is ironic since the assertion 'I am' is somehow encoded in 'Immram'. The real poet could not exist except, perhaps, in so far as this son is himself a poet of the 'in-between', a 'go-between', as Dillon Johnston argues, who, like the mule in the traffic of illegal drugs, is also Hermes-like. See Dillon Johnston, 'The Go-Between of Recent Irish Poetry', *Cultural Contexts and Literary Idioms in Contemporary Irish Literature*, ed. Michael Kenneally (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988), 172-185.

The unnamed 'open-mouthed child' remains anonymous—like the 'children asleep under their mosquito-nets' (23) in 'Immrama'—because they are the father's *hypothetical* offspring.[325] These poems offer another level of fictionalisation to the one in *The Annals of Chile*: while in 'Brazil' Muldoon imagines a fictional life for himself and his exoticised mother in South America; in 'Immrama' and 'Immram', he imagines an alternative life for his father, in which the poet plays no part. 'Immrama' and 'Immram' are therefore based on a paradoxical quest: if the fictionalised father did not father the poet, then who is the speaker narrating the story?

> It's an image that's troubled me for ages, since it underlines the arbitrary nature of so many of the decisions we take, the disturbingly random quality of so many of our actions. I would speculate on my father's having led an entirely different life, in which, clearly, I would have played no part. (Muldoon, 'Paul Muldoon Writes' 106:1)

Paternity and the relationship between father and son are, therefore, equally central to these two voyage poems as is the search for new origins. The next analysis concentrates on another form of fantastic autofiction, in which the poet's existence is no longer questioned. In *Hay* and *Moy Sand and Gravel*, Muldoon tries to find an adequate representation of 'home', by striking a balance between his Irish origins and his newly adopted American culture.

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[325] In 'Immrama', although the father and the 'I' are united in the opening line of the octet ('I, too, have trailed my father's spirit'), the speaker totally disappears in the sestet: 'That's him on the verandah, drinking rum / With a man who might be a Nazi, / His children asleep under their mosquito-nets' (23). The deictic 'that' creates a distance and seems to indicate that the speaker is showing a photograph of this imaginary father, whose 'children' are not his actual children (Paul, Maureen, and Joseph).

> So in my last book [*Moy Sand and Gravel*] I went back to the Moy where I started out, as it were. I felt I had to go back there somehow, I don't know why. And I'm glad I did. Now I won't have to go back there for a little while, maybe.
>
> (Muldoon, qtd. in Wilson, James n. pag.)

While Part 4.2 focused on poems based on the author's childhood, and in which the poet stages his *younger* self according to his former fantasies; Part 4.3 discusses poems in which the author stages his *contemporary* self in fantasies that are inspired by his surroundings: Muldoon goes as far as creating another world alongside the real. As a result, there are lines of resemblance between *Why Brownlee Left* and the poems examined in the next analysis. Nonetheless, there is a major difference between 'Immrama'/'Immram' and the next poems: in *Why Brownlee Left*, it is the father who is taking this journey to the otherworld; whereas, in the following poems, it is the author's avatar who is transgressing the boundaries between the personal landscape and a 'forbidden world' (Colonna, *Autofiction et autres mythomanies* 31): 'The author is at the core of his or her text, as in an autobiography (he is the hero), but he transfigures his existence and his identity in an unreal story that is not concerned with being realistic' (75). In the poems discussed, the author's avatar is like a shaman constantly flirting with the border separating the real from this otherworld, which is characterised by elements that are highly implausible and that do not abide by the laws of the real.[326]

Furthermore, all the poems analysed share a common quest: the search for an appropriate representation of 'home'. Muldoon argues that it is 'important to

[326] In these poems, the story still holds on to the real because these surreal elements always mingle with realistic ones or are partly anchored in the author's personal landscape.

most societies to have the notion of something out there to which we belong, that our home is somewhere else... there's another dimension, something around us and beyond us, which is our inheritance' (qtd. in Haffenden 141). Although the poet is not stating it explicitly, he is perhaps referring in this passage to the otherworld characteristic of the *féth fiáda* which is precisely about this 'other dimension' and belongs to the poet's cultural 'inheritance'. His home is both the place he physically inhabits or inhabited (New Jersey or Armagh) and that of his imagination. It is through these constant transits between the physical world and the surreal world that Muldoon finds this 'somewhere else'.[327]

First, I illustrate this quest for an adequate representation of home by analysing in detail a poem published in *Hay*, 'The Mudroom'. This opening poem is emblematic of the poet's use of the *féth fiáda* tradition and of his search for this 'other dimension'.[328] I then turn to a set of four poems published in *Moy Sand and Gravel* that pursue this quest in Armagh and New Jersey.

'The house I may yet bring myself to call mine'

*

Wills argues that *Hay* 'gives the reader the feeling of entering another world, which has its own unpredictable but consistent logic' (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 186). While it has been pointed out by critics, such as Wills and John Kerrigan, that Muldoon plays with surreal journeys in 'The Mudroom', I suggest that

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[327] Dillon Johnston argues that this 'somewhere else' may be 'the mysterious place of conception, the land of lost possibilities, irrecoverable innocence, or the destination of a cancelled journey' ('Next to Nothing' 130).

[328] As explained previously, Muldoon chose to write the title of this poem differently in *Poems 1968-1998*: the change from the two-word title in *Hay* ('The Mud Room') to the one-word title in *Poems 1968-1998* ('The Mudroom') may underline the fact that this part of the house is not a mere mud room as in other North American houses, it is a symbolic entity.

Muldoon follows once again the 'consistent logic' of the *féth fiáda* in order to find this 'somewhere else' that he may call 'home'.[329]

In this poem, the narrative hovers between Muldoon's holidays in Jura (France), his home in New Jersey, and a fantastic world. What is striking is that the poem centres on the leitmotiv of the 'blue-green line' (*H* 5), which is also referred to as a blue-green 'seam' (3), 'ditch' (4), 'path' (4), 'crevasse' (6), 'membrane' (7), 'fault' (8), and, finally, 'the precarious / blue-green, pine-ash path' (9).[330] The 'blue-green line' refers to a French cow's milk cheese called Morbier from Franche-Comté:[331]

> [...] at dusk, a farmer spreads a layer of bland
> curds on the blue-green seam
> of pine ash that runs like a schism
> between bland dawn-milk and bland dusk-milk, (*H* 3-4)

However, given the emphasis that Muldoon puts on this 'blue-green line', it seems that there is much more to it than it seems. Wills suggests that this line may be symbolic of Muldoon's reaching middle life—the poet is 'seeking to draw a line through the middle of his life, to define its mid-point' (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 188)—but Kerrigan sees it more in terms of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland

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[329] 'The Mudroom' is partly set in Muldoon's house on Canal Road in New Jersey, which also features in 'At the Sign of the Black Horse': 'the house I may yet bring myself to call mine' (*MSG* 73). Although it seems that this house does not feel quite like 'home' in 'At the Sign of the Black Horse'; in 'The Mudroom', Muldoon seems to have reached an adequate representation of what 'home' means to him.

[330] While all of these words are related to the notion of 'line' or 'border', the term 'fault' seems to stand apart. However, it is intimately associated with the *féth fiáda* since it both refers to a 'border' that could separate two worlds and to the notion of hunting that features in this Irish concept: the term 'fault' may either refer to the geological term for a 'dislocation or break in continuity of the strata or vein' ('Fault', def. 9a) or to the hunting word for 'loss of scent' (def. 8a).

[331] This region includes the department called Jura where the couple is spending their holidays. The cheese referred to (Morbier) has a characteristic vein of vegetable ash in the middle, originating from the traditional way the cheese was made, and which is now purely decorative: the 'line of ash that runs through a Morbier cheese, separat[es] yet join[s] curds made from morning and evening milk' (Kerrigan, 'Paul Muldoon's Transits' 133). Interestingly, there is also a 'seam of beryl' in the 'Chester' part of '7, Middagh Street' (*MB* 48) referring to a mineral of various colours, which can be, for instance, green or light-blue according to its variety.

('Paul Muldoon's Transits' 133). I would argue that this 'precarious' line indicates a threshold, a liminal place separating the real world from the world of fantasy.

First, it is not innocent that the 'wheel / of Morbier' (*H* 3) is stored in the mud room since it is the room that separates the inside of the house from the outside, therefore embodying a threshold, a liminal place opening to 'another half-door that would issue / on to the altar of Jehovah-nissi' (4).[332] Furthermore, throughout the poem, the speaker is 'struggling for a foothold' (*H* 8) and is led by an enigmatic animal to this otherworld that exists beyond the mud room: the she-goat embodies the crossing between the two worlds. Although it is not the conventional deer, the term goat is, in fact, not innocent, as one of the old forms of 'goat' in Middle English is 'gate' ('Goat'). This poem is flirting with the possibilities offered by the goat/gate (intentional?) pun: the she-goat embodies a surreal being in charge of signalling the presence of this gate (or veil) separating the speaker from the surreal. In many instances, this guide is standing on the threshold of this world, either on the 'slope' or on the 'scarp' of a relief:

> When she turned to us from high along the scarp
> and showed us her gargoyle-
> face stained with red-blue soil,
> I could have sworn the she-goat was walking on air,
> bounding, vaulting, pausing in mid-career
> to browse on a sprig of the myrtle of which she's a devotee (3)[333]

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[332] Wills explains that a 'mud room is a kind of porch or cloakroom common in American houses, an area between the domestic interior of the house, and the outside world, including the wilderness beyond the yard' (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 189). In 'Tell', the 'scullery door' similarly embodies this threshold separating the inside of the house from the outside, and the real from the imaginary: 'He opens the scullery door, and a sudden rush / of wind, as raw as raw, / brushes past him as he himself will brush / past the stacks of straw / / that stood in earlier for Crow / or Comanche tepees hung with scalps / but tonight pass muster, row upon row, / for the foothills of the Alps' (*MSG* 18).

[333] The last couple of lines inevitably calls to mind the first lines of 'Yarrow' introducing a narrator who is browsing 'on a sprig of *Achillea millefolium*' (*AC* 43). Furthermore, the surreal and ethereal description of the she-goat is evocative of the cows featuring in the poem dedicated to Dermot Seymour: 'That smoker's cough again: it triggers off from drumlin / to drumlin an emphysemantiphon / of cows. They hoist themselves on to their trampoline / / and steady themselves and straight away divine / water in some far-flung spot / to which they then gravely incline' ('Cows' 34).

This grotesque animal ('gargoyle- / face') acts as a guide to this surreal world, whose border is here materialised by the steep face of the mountain ('scarp').[334]

The 'piping home' of the she-goat and the cattle's uproar ('hullabaloo and hubbub') also bring to mind the *ceol sídhe* guiding the speaker:[335]

> [...] I looked back down the Valley of the Kings
> that was flooded now by the tears of things
> and heard again that she-goat pipe
> home a herd of cows, their hullabaloo and hubbub
> at dawn or dusk, saw again her mouth stained with fraochans
> (for she is of blaeberry-browsers the paragon)
> and followed her yet again through gefilte fish and garum jars,
> crocks, cruses, saucepans, the samovar
> from turn-of-the-century
> Russia, along the blue-green path of pine cinders (*H* 4)

This passage brings together all the elements of the *féth fiáda*: the animal guide, the *ceol sídhe*, and the presence of a fantastic world beyond the mud room (a vision of the Egyptian Valley of the Kings). The tears are likely to be a reference to the Ancient Egyptians' belief that the flooding of the Nile was caused by the goddess Isis's tears of sorrow following the murder of her husband, Osiris. What is crucial in this reference to ancient Egypt is that Osiris retreated to a chthonic world, the *underworld*, echoing the Tuatha Dé Danann (the 'fairy' folk), who were 'literally driven underground' (Muldoon, *TII* 7). Finally, while the time of day ('at dawn or dusk') refers to the tradition of making Morbier, it is also well-suited to

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[334] In the following passage, the blue-green line is what clearly separates the she-goat from the couple: 'Yet again something had come between / the she-goat poised in a slope on which the cattle batten / and ourselves, that rivulet / or blue-green fault' (*H* 8). The line break after 'batten' materialises this separation. This immaterial partition between the goat and the couple also features in 'Holy Thursday': 'We know, you and I, that it's over, / That something or other has come between / Us, whatever we are, or were' (*WBL* 31). The couple's break-up is similarly materialised by a line break (after 'between') and a separating veil that remains invisible to the eye.

[335] See also: 'we heard the she-goat's own pre-eminent voice / from across the blue-green crevasse' (*H* 6). Similarly, in 'Beagles', although the sound of the dogs is familiar, their barking has unusual consequences: 'That Boxing Day morning, I would hear the familiar, far-off gowls and gulders / over Keenaghan and Aughanlig / of a pack of beagles, old dogs disinclined to chase a car suddenly quite unlike / themselves, pups coming helter-skelter / across the plowlands' (*MSG* 17). Their noises are, in fact, uncanny: the beagles suddenly start running and are 'quite unlike / themselves', hinting at a possible trance or metamorphosis.

this journey between the two worlds since 'dawn' and 'dusk' are also moments of transition with the added (obsolete) mystic dimension of 'dusk', which refers to what is 'obscure, veiled from sight or understanding' ('Dusk').

In 'The Mudroom', the personal landscape is constituted of the physical landscape and the realm of the imagination: 'home' is not simply the house we inhabit, it is also what exists beyond its door. Furthermore, Muldoon is trying to find a happy medium between his heritage (Irish traditions) and his newly acquired culture (American). This balance between America and Ireland is further pursued in *Moy Sand and Gravel* through journeys between the real and surreal realms.

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With my back to the wall
and a foot in the door
and my shoulder to the wheel
I would drive through Seskinore.

[...]
I would drive through Derryfubble

and Dunnamanagh and Ballynascreen,
keeping that wound green.
('Hard Drive' *MSG* 3)[336]

Interestingly, most of the poems dealing with the otherworldly are collected in Muldoon's ninth collection: *Moy Sand and Gravel*. This collection is characterised by the author's constant navigation between Ireland and America and by the presence of the otherworld. In fact, this collection is as much about the Moy and Muldoon's life in suburban New Jersey, as it is about the surreal world. The point of my analysis is to explain the difference between the poems set in Northern Ireland and those set in New Jersey: in 'Unapproved Road', the speaker imagines the border with the Republic as an *escape* to an otherworld; whereas, in 'Summer Coal' and 'The Loaf', he imagines this liminal place as a screen bringing back *visions from the past*.

'Unapproved Road' follows directly after 'Hard Drive' and is an apt poem with which to start this analysis since it deals with the notion of borders. In the acknowledgments, we are told that this poem was commissioned for *The Border: Personal Reflections from Ireland, North and South*:

When we came to the customs post at Aughnacloy, as at Cullaville or Pettigoe,
I was holding my breath
as if I might yet again be about to go

[336] The first poem in *Moy Sand and Gravel*, 'Hard Drive', sets the tone with this image of the speaker 'driv[ing] *through*' villages in Northern Ireland such as Ballyna*screen*. The fact of 'passing through' and the motif of the 'screen' (visually echoed by the opening of the wound) pervade the collection.

underwater... (4)

At first sight, the border is, in fact, the 'frontier' with Northern Ireland since these three Northern Irish towns are all situated on the border. Aughnacloy is in Co. Tyrone, Cullaville in Co. Armagh, and Pettigoe on the border of Co. Fermanagh and Co. Donegal (Fig. 5):[337]

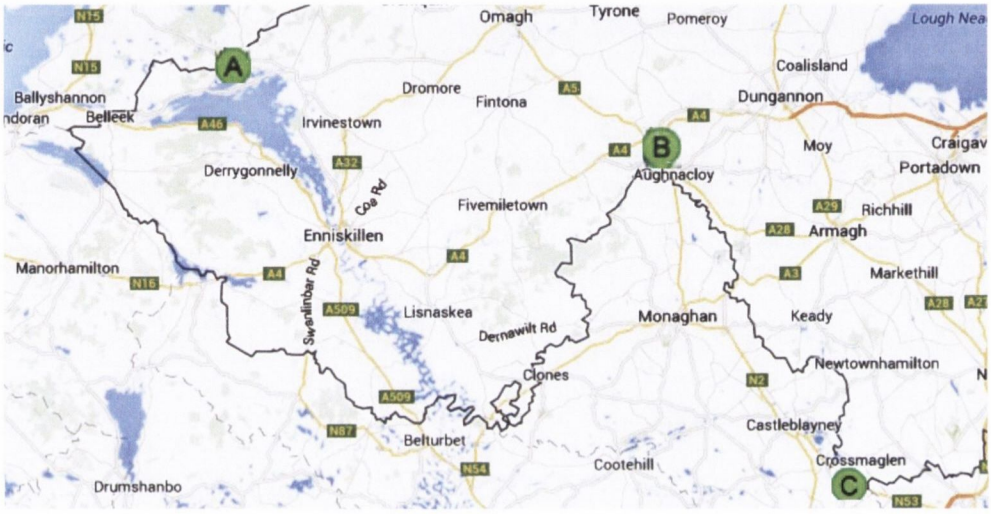

Fig. 5. Map of Northern Ireland: Pettigoe (A), Aughnacloy (B), Cullaville (C)

However, within the space created by the stanzaic break, the speaker imagines himself crossing over to an other—'underwater'—world.[338] The border separating the Republic from Northern Ireland is, therefore, also a liminal place through which the speaker is able to move freely and meet unexpected characters: 'I was

[337] Throughout the poem, we follow the border and, at the end of the narrative, the speaker arrives near 'Aughnacloy or Swanlinbar or Lifford' (6). We are this time following the border to the West of Ireland and then northward towards Derry. In 'Beagles', the narrative is similarly located either on the border, in the vicinity of Keenaghan, or near the Moy ('Aughanlig').

[338] This is not to say that the poem is not about real events that happened near the border. At the beginning of the poem, the speaker associates the border with ongoing sectarian violence. There is one particular instance where the conflict in the North is directly addressed. In fact, in the second stanza, the speaker recalls the political context in the 1950s when he was a child: 'the New Year's Eve attack / on Brookeborough ending in the deaths / / of O'Hanlon and South' (4). Two IRA volunteers, Sean South and Fergal O'Hanlan, were killed on New Year's Eve 1957 in Brookeborough, Co. Fermanagh (near Enniskillen). Several songs were written in memory of South and are collected in Henry Glassie's *Passing the Time* and *Irish Folk History*.

met by another black-coated, long fellow, though he wore a sky-blue / winding-cloth or scarf / wrapped round his mouth and nose, leaving only a slit for him to peer through' (4). This incongruous encounter with a Tuareg is particularly interesting since the 'winding-cloth or scarf' is placed in evidence in the middle line of the tercet.[339] The fabric worn by the 'people of the veil' (5) is a first hint towards the *féth fiáda*. This is confirmed later on when the Tuareg's scarf is 'woven into' the place name '*Scairbh*': the linguistic association between a veil and a physical place (scarf/*Scairbh*) strengthens the presence of an invisible threshold.[340]

Furthermore, the Tuareg represents a sort of shamanistic figure presiding over this border. In fact, this nomadic character constantly moves across national borders and could therefore symbolise the crossing over to the otherworld: '[my ancestors] drove their flocks from tier to tier / through Algeria, Mali and Libya all the way up to Armagh, Monaghan and Louth / with—you'll like this—a total disregard for any frontier' (5). In this extract, there is even a reference to one of the characteristic animals of the *féth fiáda*—the goat—since the herds the Tuaregs are driving 'from tier to tier' designate an 'assemblage [...] of sheep or goats' ('Flock'). The presence of these animals is also inscribed in the landscape:

> 'An ancestral place... A place my ancestors knew as *Scairbh*
>
> *na gCaorach'. 'Scairbh na gCaorach',* I chewed on my foul madams,
> 'is now better known as "Emyvale"
> though the Irish name means "the sheep-steeps" or "the rampart of rams"'
> (*MSG* 4-5)

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[339] One could see in this reference to a marginalised and pastoral tribe the 'double' of Republican volunteers (such as South).

[340] Later on, the place name 'Lifford' is similarly triggered by a linguistic game on 'ford': 'for *scairbh* means not "a ledge" but "a ford" or, more specifically, "a shallow ford"'. / And he immediately set off at a jog-trot down an unapproved road / near Aughnacloy or Swanlinbar or Lifford' (6). Once again, the term 'ford' bears a strong link with the *féth fiáda*: it is a shallow place allowing people to *cross* a river and is, consequently, another form of threshold.

Although the ram is not the conventional deer or stag from the *féth fiáda* tradition, the image of the stag is indirectly hinted at in one of the obsolete meanings of the term 'steep': 'the midday plunge taken by a stag in hot weather' ('Steep').[341] Finally, the '*rampart* of rams' materialises this veil separating the two worlds.

As discussed previously in relation to the father in *Why Brownlee Left*, this confrontation with the otherworld necessarily has an impact on identities: Sean South has 'changed his name to Gone West' (either meaning that he is dead or that he has vanished); the 'black-coated' Tuareg (*MSG* 4) is the doppelgänger of the 'black-coated R.U.C. man' (5); and, in section four, when the speaker and the Tuareg meet again 'thirty years later in Rotterdam', the nomad symbolically passes on the 'sky-blue / winding-cloth' (6) to the speaker.[342] This may suggest that the speaker has now become one of these figures presiding over the entrance to this new world.[343]

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[341] Although the word 'stag' is not mentioned in this passage, it is alluded to. After all, Muldoon's fanciful imagination leads him to see an 'invisible goat in [Frost's] "The Silken Tent", the goat-capers and caprioles in the "*capriciousness* of summer air"' ('Getting Round' 114). The 'sheep-steeps' and the 'rampart of rams' also evoke 'The Mudroom', in which the speaker is enticed to cross over to an otherworld by a she-goat on a 'scarp'.

[342] There is an interesting parallel between this 'sky-blue' cloth and the colours in 'Meeting the British': 'The sky was lavender / / and the snow lavender-blue' (*MB* 16). Furthermore, in this earlier poem, there is another encounter between peoples, which also takes place at the meeting of boundaries, and during which a similar gift, albeit a lethal one, is offered: 'They gave us six fishhooks / and two *blankets* embroidered with smallpox' (my emphasis).

[343] The impact of the otherworldly on the speaker's identity is even more obvious in 'Beagles'. Although this poem is a childhood poem, it similarly features a surreal encounter: 'their gowls and gulders turning and twisting after the twists and turns / of the great hare who had just now sauntered into the yard where I stood on tiptoe / astride my new Raleigh cycle, / his demeanour somewhat louche, somewhat lackadaisical / under the circumstances, what with him standing on tiptoe / as if to mimic me, standing almost as tall as I, looking as if he might for a moment put / himself in my place, thinking better of it, sloping off behind the lorry-bed' (*MSG* 17). The intrusion of the 'great hare' is uncanny because the animal is 'somewhat louche, somewhat lackadaisical' and seems, for an instant, to have replaced the speaker. In 'Beagles', there is a likeness between man and animal, as in the poem 'Horses', in which the speaker is dreaming that he might be a horse: 'I'm trying to remember, as best I can, / If I'm a man dreaming I'm a plowhorse / or a great plowhorse dreaming I'm a man' (*H* 90). As to the Raleigh cycle, it is like the rocking horse in 'Yarrow', a vehicle that the young Muldoon uses to embark on surreal adventures. In addition, although 'Raleigh' is a brand for bicycles, there may also be a veiled reference to Sir Walter Raleigh mentioned in 'Promises, Promises' (set in North Carolina). Through Sir Walter Raleigh, in turn, that earlier poem may also refer to another border between Virginia and North Carolina when it refers to the Blackwater River, the namesake for the private security firm once known as

In 'Unapproved Road', the Muldoon figure experiences the crossing over to another world when he arrives at the customs on the border between the North and the South. The border is not so much represented in terms of sectarian violence (as in 'The Sightseers', also located near Aughnacloy), but as a liminal place allowing the speaker to cross to the world of his imagination. The poet therefore transcends the image of the border and subverts it: instead of representing the customs as a constraining place controlling and limiting access, Muldoon transforms the customs into a gateway to his boundless imagination and to freedom. As in 'The Mudroom', 'home' is no longer defined in terms of the physical place we inhabit and its constrictive dimension (symbolised by the door in 'The Mudroom' and the border in 'Unapproved Road'); instead, 'home' is the combination of the real world and this 'other dimension' that exists in our imagination.

Interestingly, while the journey along the Irish border brings us far away from Northern Ireland in 'Unapproved Road', the process is reversed in poems set in New Jersey: the speaker travels back in time and *back to Ireland*. In fact, there is a similar otherworld existing alongside the American landscape only, this time, it is a medium through which the poet can get glimpses of the Irish past. This is particularly the case in 'Summer Coal' and 'The Loaf': the poet's personal landscape in New Jersey is contiguous with an otherworld offering visions of the Irish navvies who built the canal at the end of the 1880s. In 'Summer Coal', there is an evolution from a *physical* barrier ('the fence') to an *immaterial* one:

> Always the fence, always the row of bottles
> lining the fence at the end of a garden
> that runs down to the canal. From where we stand, on the barge,
> it's like looking through a curtain

Blackwater Inc., which—by the time of *Moy Sand and Gravel*—had become famous for its for-profit paramilitary excursions in the Islamic world.

of magenta glass, or saffron with snuff-mottles,
or cobalt, or viridian,
in which a cottage now puckers, now is large
as life. (*MSG* 45)

This liminal threshold ('curtain') later becomes an *invisible* screen: 'It's like looking through a chink in wattle / and daub that has yet to harden, / through a scrim of feldspar-loaded sparge' (45). The words 'wattle', 'curtain', and 'scrim' once again evoke the presence of a 'veil' or 'screen' that separates the real world from the otherworld and the past from the present.[344] In fact, in 'The Loaf', the poet inspects the wall of his house in New Jersey and observes through a hole in the 'plaster stiffened with horsehair' Irish navvies from the late nineteenth century:

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 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. (*MSG* 47)

The influence of Joyce's 'The Dead', explored through the lens of the *féth fiáda* in *To Ireland, I*, deserves to be highlighted, particularly in relation to the (unwritten) deceased Irish navvies in the above-quoted stanza; and, more generally, in relation to the world of the dead in *Moy Sand and Gravel*. In fact, in 'Summer Coal', 'The Loaf', and in Joyce's short story the border is not only (or primarily) between the past and the present, but between the living and the dead, between the workers on the Raritan canal and the poet's present. Furthermore,

344 This reading of the word 'wattle' invites us to wonder whether Muldoon would then read 'Lake Isle of Innisfree', in which Yeats dreams of a small cabin 'of clay and wattles made', as a poem of liminal threshold from the 'roadway' and 'pavements grey' of Dublin to Innisfree and, finally, to 'the deep heart's core' on which the poem ends (Yeats, *The Major Works* 19-20).

while in 'Unapproved Road' the liminal threshold enables the poet to escape from Northern Ireland and, in particular, from the images of sectarian violence usually associated with the border; in 'Summer Coal' and 'The Loaf', this invisible threshold takes the poet back to his roots and back to Ireland. Although Muldoon had already spent fifteen years in America when *Moy Sand and Gravel* came out, his physical displacement is balanced with a constant home-coming movement.

Parts 4.2 and 4.3 argued that Muldoon's autofictional poems differ on their level of fictionality depending on whether the poem is about staging the poet's younger self in a world of childhood fantasies or staging the poet's contemporary avatar in a two-dimensional world blending the real and the surreal. Part 4.4 focuses on one final form of autofiction, which is based on another meaning of the word 'fiction': namely, something relating to what is *fake* or false.

4.4. Biographical Forgeries

> 'Your old man was an ass-hole.
> That makes an ass-hole out of you'.
> My grand-father hailed from New York State.
> My grand-mother was part Cree.
> This must be some new strain in my pedigree.
> ('Immram' *WBL* 38)[345]

While Part 4.2 explained how Muldoon creates the illusion of fiction in his boyhood fantasies, Part 4.4 argues that the poet creates the illusion of reality

[345] Muldoon has often mentioned his family origins in poems and interviews. In 'A Hare at Aldergrove', the speaker's 'own DNA is 87% European and East Asian 13%' (*Plan B* 59). This discovery was confirmed by the poet in a recent interview: 'One of my discoveries over the last year or so has been that I was given as a present by someone a DNA test, and, when I sent off my DNA test—I am not sure what I was expecting—but anyways it came back and the burden of it was that I was, as it were, let's say it says 85% European, whatever that means, and 15% East Asian. And this is a phenomenon that's quite common in Ireland, and I'm not entirely sure what it means. It's a phenomenon that I'm pretty sure very old [*sic*]. It may go back to the Vikings and it may go back further, much further, to a time when middle Europe had influences from further east. So I rather delight in that' ('Are you an American poet or an Irish poet?' n. pag.).

when weaving lies or biographical inaccuracies into his narrative. By way of introduction, I first concentrate on 'Cuba' (an emblematic poem illustrating this practice), I then turn to a set of biographical forgeries: Muldoon's elegies for his father that predate the death of Patrick Muldoon.

Muldoon's Older Sister in 'Cuba'

'Cuba' reads, on first reading, as a straightforward autobiographical poem. The oral quality of the direct discourse that pervades the poem presents the narrative as a spontaneous, unmediated reminiscence of the poet's sister during 'the weekend of the Cuban Missile Crisis, in the last week of October, 1962':

> My eldest sister arrived home that morning
> In her white muslin evening dress.
> [...]
> I could hear May from beyond the curtain. (*WBL* 13)

As explained in the introduction to this thesis, one might believe that this sister character is based on a real older sister called May: the settings are credible (dining room/church), there are no obvious fictional or surreal elements as in fantastic autofictions (Part 4.3), and the extradiegetic poet does not interfere with the narration, which is 'mainly in reported speech, as if allowing its characters to speak for themselves' (Smith, Stan 191). However, although this poem creates the illusion of autobiography, it is partly a biographical forgery because, in reality, Muldoon had a younger sister called Maureen born in 1953.

Some critics may argue that this is not an autobiographical poem but an entirely fictional one. I contend, however, that this poem is autofictional since this sister character is not that far removed from the real referent: the fictional

name is very close to the actual name of Muldoon's sister since 'May' almost visually echoes the first syllable of 'Maureen'.[346] Secondly, whether this is intentional or not, 'May' is also the exact first syllable of the adverb 'maybe'—'Maybe you should make your peace with God' (*WBL* 13)—which directs our attention towards the impermanence of identities and the fact that 'May' is perhaps a partly fictionalised sister. Finally, the line—'Who the hell do you think you are' (13)—somehow reveals the forgery.[347] For a first group of readers who know about Muldoon's siblings, this poem reads as an autofictional piece and, for a second group of readers, it reads easily as an accurate memory of what happened in October 1962 when the poet was ten or eleven:

> A very, very dear friend, a woman I went out with briefly, years ago, said to me once, How's May? I said, Who's May? She said, May's your sister, isn't she? So then I got it. There's a poem called 'Cuba' in which there's mention of a sister called May, who doesn't exist. And yet the poem, in many ways, is historically accurate and in some ways happened. But not quite in the way that's suggested. (qtd. in Wilson, James n. pag.)

In this interview, the poet acknowledges that he has invented this sister character and that his intention was to create the illusion of autobiography:

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[346] This onomastic change is, in fact, a recurrent device used in autofictions, as explained in the introduction to the thesis.

[347] This fictionalisation of the sister and the instability of identities in general also impact on the father. In the second stanza, the father makes references to God. This is surprising since in most of Muldoon's poetry (and, in particular, in 'Yarrow') it is the mother who is a particularly fervent Catholic. Furthermore, in the final stanza, a different 'father' figure is mentioned: the priest. It is as if the real father figure had been substituted by the priest-father figure: '"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. / I told a lie once, I was disobedient once. / And, Father, a boy touched me once". / "Tell me, child. Was this touch immodest? / Did he touch your breast for example?" / "He brushed against me, Father. Very gently"' (13). The setting has changed from the family house ('the breakfast-table') to the local church. Moreover, the presence of the curtain not only refers to the one in the confessional, but it could also be a liminal place allowing the transformation of the father into the priest figure. We might also point out that, while the name Kennedy refers to the flesh and bone American president whose ancestors came from County Wexford and who visited Ireland in June 1963, he is only 'nearly' Irish. Muldoon confirmed the fictionalisation of his father in his interview with Noble: 'in that poem "Cuba", for example, where I present this picture in which not only have you got this non-existent older sister, but my father would never in million years have said any of those things. First of all he wouldn't have pounded the table, secondly he would never have said things like, "this Kennedy's nearly an Irishman"' (n. pag.).

> the poem is at pains to present itself as being something that happened, to such an extent that it's the kind of poem that might even be dismissed as being, as they say, 'merely anecdotal'. But, it is a complete fiction, none of it ever happened yet as I say, the poem is at pains to insist on the likelihood of it having happened. (qtd. in Noble)[348]

In the absence of an autobiography written by Muldoon or a biography of the poet, it is not an easy task to find biographical inaccuracies in the poet's referential poems. Unless we know about Muldoon's family history or are given epitextual documents directly addressing the referentiality of the poems, we may read some poems as straightforward unmediated autobiographical pieces when, in fact, they are biographical forgeries.

Muldoon himself recognises the importance of the reader's knowledge (or lack of it) of the author's biography. In fact, in his discussion of Lowell's poem 'George III' in *The End of the Poem*, Muldoon addresses 'questions having to do with who writes a poem and, then, who reads it' (169). He explains that in the case of a deeply personal poem such as 'George III', the reader has to 'appeal to an inappropriate extent to information beyond the bounds, or bournes, of the poem' (171). In return, the writer should be aware of the information his or her reader needs in order to interpret correctly a particular poem:

> Despite the exhortations of every two-bit teacher of creative writing that his or her students should write about what they know, there are major stumbling blocks in blindly following such an exhortation. Chief among these is the increased difficulty, when one is writing about what one knows, in determining just how much one *doesn't* know, in weighing how much information a reader needs, in assessing how much writer and reader may take for granted.

Depending on the amount of information available on the author's life and depending on the clues given by the author about the characters in the poem, the

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[348] It is important to note that Muldoon offers contradicting views on 'Cuba' in these two interviews: while he argued that the poem was entirely fictional in his interview with Jennifer Noble, he later nuanced this, arguing that the poem was 'in many ways' 'historically accurate'. Despite these conflicting accounts, what is essential is that the poet's intention was to write a poem 'at pains to present itself as being something that happened'.

reader might fall in a trap and, in the case of 'Cuba', might take for granted the fact that the 'eldest sister' is the poet's real sister. Ambiguous poems such as 'Cuba' are, therefore, *amphibological* since they can be interpreted in two different ways.[349] This is particularly true of some of the poems anticipating Patrick Muldoon's death.

Muldoon's Elegies for his Father

Muldoon's father died on 28 February 1985, yet there are several poems that anticipate his death. If the reader does not know the year of Patrick Muldoon's death, s/he may take these poems for genuine elegies. Interestingly, Muldoon wrote one of these poems in (almost) each of the collections published before 1985: 'The Waking Father' in *New Weather* (1973), the unpublished poem 'The Apartment' (collected in the drafts for *Mules*, 1977), 'Come into My Parlour' in *Why Brownlee Left* (1980), and 'The Mirror' in *Quoof* (1983). These four autofictional poems could be divided into two categories: while the earlier poems tend towards fiction ('The Waking Father' and 'The Apartment'), the later poems tend towards autobiography ('Come into My Parlour' and 'The Mirror'). Consequently, there is a gradation within this set of poems marking Muldoon's progression as a writer: the closer we get to the mid-1980s, the more genuine these elegies seem to be.

If we look closely at these two groups of poems there is even a gradation within each set of poems. First, there is a progression within the first group of

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[349] Hubier reminds us that classical grammarians used the term *amphibologique* to designate narratives that can be interpreted in two different ways. According to the critic, this term applies to autofictions in general since autofictions can either read as fictions or autobiographies (125). The original reads: 'Rappelons que les grammairiens classiques utilisaient ce terme pour désigner un énoncé susceptible de deux interprétations différentes. L'autofiction, qui peut être lue comme roman *et* comme autobiographie, est amphibologique'.

poems: in 'The Waking Father', the young Muldoon fantasises about the possibility of his father dying; then, in 'The Apartment', this possibility becomes an achieved reality. However, in both poems, the extensive amount of fictionalisation offsets any authentic dimension these poems may have. In the second group of poems, the genuine tone and lack of artifice endow both 'Come into My Parlour' and 'The Mirror' with more authenticity. These poems read as genuine elegies. There is also a progression within this second set of poems: while the father's death is mentioned only in passing in 'Come into My Parlour', the death of the father and his wake pervade 'The Mirror'. The latter therefore reads as the most genuine elegy of all four poems. This is however paradoxical because it is the only poem that was *not* originally written by Muldoon. It is, in fact, a translation of Michael Davitt's poem, 'An Scáthán'. Nonetheless, this fourth poem reads as the most authentic elegy because of the numerous echoes between this translation and Muldoon's later (real) elegies for his father.

'The Waking Father' and 'The Apartment'

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'The Waking Father'—'which [is], of course, not a true elegy' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 55)—is a childhood memory, in which the young Muldoon's imagination transforms a seemingly real event into a surreal one implicating the *possible* death of the father. As discussed in Part 4.2, the fact that the poem is based near the family farm (the Oona River) and starts with a seemingly real event (a fishing trip) invites us to read this piece as an autobiographical poem. However, the narrative soon takes a surreal turn and ends on a question mark: is the father dead or alive?

Or I wonder now if he is dead or sleeping.
For if he is dead I would have his grave
Secret and safe,
I would turn the river out of its course,
Lay him in its bed, bring it round again. (*NW* 10)

This image of a dead male figure cannot be Patrick Muldoon since the poem was published twelve years before his death.[350] This poem is Muldoon's first elegiac poem anticipating the father's death.

Unlike 'The Waking Father', the death of the father figure is this time an achieved reality in 'The Apartment'. There is, therefore, a progression from *New Weather* to *Mules*. However, the extensive level of fictionalisation similarly offsets the autobiographical potential of the poem. This undated poem is collected in Muldoon's archives in a box entitled 'Mostly *Mules*' so that the poem was necessarily written before the collection came out, in 1976 or 1977:[351]

My first time out, I was twenty-one.
My father saw me off at Cobh.
[...]

His death a decade later,
In the full gaze of a public bar,
Was brutal as a Six-day War.
His face was a watch
From the Persistence of Memory. (n. pag.)[352]

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[350] This image of a dead or asleep male figure lying near a river is strikingly evocative of Rimbaud's famous sonnet 'Le Dormeur du Val' ('The Sleeper in the Valley'), which starts with the description of the bucolic landscape and ends on the image of a dead soldier who seemed to be asleep throughout the poem: 'It is a green hollow where a river sings [...] / / A young soldier, his mouth open, his head bare, / And the nape of his neck bathing in the cool blue watercress, / Sleeps; he is stretched out on the grass, under clouds, / Pale on his green bed where the light rains down. / / His feet in the gladiolas, he sleeps. Smiling as / A sick child would smile, he is taking a nap: / Nature, cradle him warmly: he is cold. / / Odors do not make his nostrils quiver; / He sleeps in the sun, his hand on his breast, / Quieted. There are two red holes in his right side' (*Complete Works* 47, 49).

[351] I date this poem to 1976 or 1977 because in the list of documents in the Muldoon Papers, the box predating '*Mules*' is '*Spirit of Dawn*' dated to 1975.

[352] *PMP*, '"The Apartment", multiple typescript drafts', Box 11, Folders 6 and 7. There are several drafts: the one I chose to quote is the draft I assume is the final one (even if there are no dates written on the drafts, the corrections indicate that the draft I chose is likely to be the final version).

The fact that the poem is written in the first-person voice would invite us to read it as a personal poem. However, despite its personal tone, there are many details that point to the fake dimension of this elegy. There are, in fact, temporal inconsistencies. First, since the poem was written after the father character's death, then the father's death took place before 1976 or 1977, a decade (or more) before Patrick Muldoon's actual death. Furthermore, when the death occurred, the speaker was ten years older ('a decade later') and is now aged at least thirty-one when he narrates this memory. Muldoon cannot be the speaker-character since he was in his mid-twenties when he wrote the poem. To make this analysis clearer we could draw the following timelines (Fig. 6):

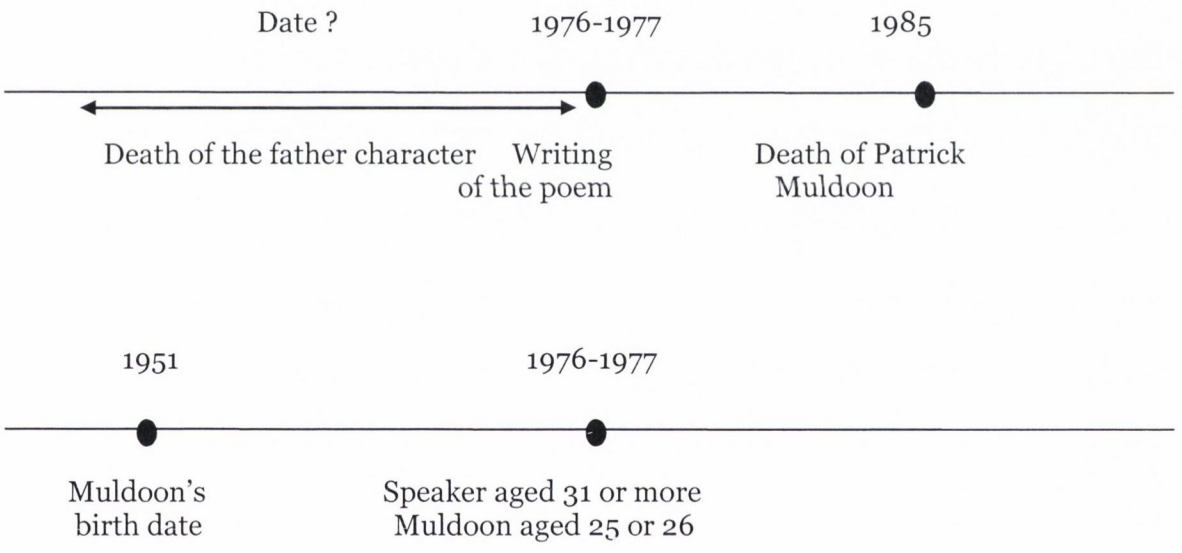

Fig. 6. 'The Apartment'

Not only are the speaker's age and the father's death date inaccurate, but the mother figure has also been fictionalised: 'Mother could only be proud of me, / Come so far for the funeral. / And my apartment? Did I have a view?' (n. pag.). In fact, while Muldoon's father was alive when Muldoon wrote this poem, his mother has passed away only a few years before, in 1974. As a result, one might imagine

that this poem was, in reality, written in response to *her* death and that this 'displacement' to the father figure coupled with the extensive fictionalisation of the family circle was a way for the poet to articulate his loss.[353]

'Come into My Parlour' and 'The Mirror'

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While in 'The Waking Father' and 'The Apartment' the use of the surreal in the former and the fictionalisation of the family circle in the latter offset any autobiographical dimension these poems may have, in 'Come into My Parlour' and 'The Mirror', the genuine tone and the lack of artifice are misleading: these poems read as authentic elegies for Patrick Muldoon.

In 1980, Muldoon wrote 'Come into My Parlour'[354] depicting a visit the poet made to the cemetery where his parents are buried:

> And I saw over his tilting shoulder
> The grave of my mother,
> My father's grave, and his father's;
> The slightly different level
> Of the next field, and the next (*WBL* 36)

The reference to the Collegelands graveyard tended by the local man, Coulter, and the authentic tone of the poem present it as a genuine personal poem with an elegiac tone. Furthermore, although the speaker does not dwell on his father's death, the words 'My father's grave' stand out because of the repetition of the word 'father' in the same line. However, although the poet may well have visited his mother's grave, he is once again anticipating his father's death. Consequently, if the reader does not know that Patrick Muldoon died in 1985, then s/he will read this poem as a straightforward autobiographical piece just like 'Cuba', collected in

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353 The dead father was American, the son lives in Boston, and the mother is still alive.
354 This poem was formerly entitle 'The Flight' (*PMP*, 'Miscellaneous Poems, *c.* 1978-1983', '"The Flight", single corrected typescript', Box 12, Folder 34).

the same volume.[355] This father poem, published five years before Patrick Muldoon's death, indicates that the older the poet is, the more genuine these seemingly elegiac poems are. This is confirmed in the volume following directly after *Why Brownlee Left.*

When we set out to read 'The Mirror', published in *Quoof*, we might think that this is Muldoon's elegy for his father since the title is followed by the italicised line '*in memory of my father*' (12). However, this poem is a *translation*: the final line of the poem is followed by '*—from the Irish of Michael Davitt*' (13). It is only when we reach the final line that we understand that this is not Muldoon's elegy for his father but a translation of Davitt's own elegy for his father. It is impossible to know this without Muldoon commenting on it, but it is likely that delaying Davitt's name until the end of the translation was an intentional authorial choice since Muldoon's translations featuring in collections published after *Quoof* almost always feature the original poet's name *in the title*.[356] Interestingly, in *Quoof*, while Muldoon proceeded in a similar way for his *ekphrastic* poems,[357] the name of the original poet is deferred until the end of the two translations published in the 1983 volume.[358] Because of this authorial choice, 'The Mirror' reads as an original piece written by Muldoon until we reach the final line. This impression is strengthened by the fact that, because Davitt was born in 1950, both poets would have experienced the same traditional wakes and

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[355] 'Come into My Parlour' therefore belongs to the group of poems published in *Why Brownlee Left* that centre on the fictionalisation of Muldoon's relatives ('Immram', 'Immram', and 'Cuba', for instance).

[356] For instance: 'Ovid: *Metamorphoses*' and 'César Vallejo: *Testimony*' in *Madoc*; 'Rainer Maria Rilke: *The Unicorn*', 'Anonymous: *Myself and Pangur*', and 'Rainer Maria Rilke: *Black Cat*' in *Hay*.

[357] 'Mary Farl Powers: *Pink Spotted Torso*' and 'Edward Kienholz: *The State Hospital*'.

[358] 'The Hands', the other translation in the volume, is based on a poem written by German writer Erich Arendt.

funerals: Davitt's description of his father's wake would have struck a chord with Muldoon.[359]

Furthermore, there are several lines of correspondence between 'An Scáthán' and some of Muldoon's own father poems published after 'The Mirror'. Consequently, for readers who have read Muldoon's subsequent volumes (and, in particular, *Meeting the British*), this poem seems very much authentic:

> He was no longer my father
> but I was still his son;
> I would get to grips with that cold paradox,
> the remote figure in his Sunday best
> who was buried the next day. (*Q* 12)

There is a strong connection between Davitt's poem and Muldoon's elegy for his father, 'The Fox', published four years later in *Meeting the British*. First, both poems are written in the first-person singular and have, therefore, the same personal and intimate tone. What is more, they both present an instance of *prosopopoeia*: the father figure is brought from the dead and is conversing with his son. In 'An Scáthán', the speaker is frightened because he thinks his dead father is still breathing through the 'old Victorian mirror / with the ornate gilt frame' that took the father's breath away:

> When I took hold of the mirror
> I had a fright. I imagined him breathing through it.
> I heard him say in a reassuring whisper:
> *I'll give you a hand, here.* (13)

The 'Victorian mirror' has been replaced in 'The Fox' with a 'venetian blind' and the dead father similarly reassures his frightened son:

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[359] It is also important to mention that, unlike his translations of poets such as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Muldoon is loyal to the poem written by Davitt.

I got up and opened
the venetian blind.
You lay
three fields away

in Collegelands
graveyard, [...]

You seem engrossed,
as if I'd come on you
painfully writing your name
with a carpenter's pencil

on the lid
of a mushroom-box.
You're saying, *Go back to bed.*
It's only yon dog-fox. (*MB* 24)

Furthermore, the ending of these two poems is strikingly similar: at the end of 'The Fox', the father is carving his name on his coffin; in 'An Scáthán', the poem ends on the image of the son driving 'home / the two nails' suggesting that this is not simply to fix the mirror on the wall, but to fix the board on the coffin:

And we lifted the mirror back in position
above the fireplace,
my father holding it steady
while I drove home
the two nails. (*Q* 13)

Finally, Davitt's father (the 'remote figure in his Sunday best', 12) is later echoed in 'Brock' ('my father in his Sunday suit', 13), another poem about Patrick Muldoon also published in *Meeting the British*. There is, therefore, a number of parallels between Davitt's elegy in *Quoof* and Muldoon's own elegies for his father in the 1987 volume.

While in the previous poems ('The Waking Father' and 'The Apartment') there are obvious biographical inaccuracies, the case of this translation is more complex: Muldoon is not weaving lies since he does acknowledge the fact that this is a translation, and yet, this poem reads as the most genuine elegy. As a result,

there is a progression from *New Weather* to *Quoof*, paradoxically culminating in a translation: the older Muldoon grew, the more genuine these elegies read. A few poems after 'The Mirror', Muldoon writes that 'Cherish the Ladies' is his 'last poem about [his] father' (*Q* 25). *Quoof* is a turning point in his poetic career regarding the representation of the father because 'Cherish the Ladies' happens to be Muldoon's final poem about his father during Patrick Muldoon's lifetime: the next poem featuring Muldoon's father is the poet's first elegy, 'The Coney', published in the volume following directly after *Quoof*, *Meeting the British*, which is dedicated to the memory of Patrick Muldoon and marks the son's emancipation from the father figure, as discussed in Chapter Two (Par 2.2).

There are interesting echoes between the use of fiction in these elegiac poems and the use of fiction in poems examined in Parts 4.2 and 4.3. First, in 'The Waking Father' and 'The Apartment', the poet addresses death through the lens of childhood fantasies (in the former) and through an extensive fictionalisation of the family circle (in the latter), which anticipate his more extensive use of fiction and childhood fantasies in his elegy for his mother, analysed in Part 4.2. Secondly, one could argue that, in all of these elegiac poems, Muldoon resorts to fiction in order to meditate, more generally, on death and fatherhood, just as the use of the surreal in his voyage tales enables him to reflect, by and large, on new origins and parenthood, as discussed in Part 4.3.

4.5. Conclusion

In the introduction to this chapter, I explained that I would explore Muldoon's use of autofiction by concentrating on several types of fictionalisation involving three aspects of personal writing: the personal landscape, family, and the self. There are two conclusions that arise from this chapter. First, all three elements are necessarily connected since two (and sometimes three) of these aspects of autobiographical writing are fictionalised in the same poem (in 'Brazil, for instance, the mother and the landscape are fictionalised). My second conclusion arises from the discussions in Parts 4.2 and 4.3: Muldoon does not use the same autofictional devices when the speaker embodies his younger self and when the speaker represents his contemporary self. In boyhood fantasies, the poet stages his poetic persona according to his former fantasies; whereas in poems featuring his contemporary avatar, he replaces these fantasies with the 'otherworldly' by aligning the real world and the otherworld, the mundane and the surreal. It is as if the fantasies from his childhood, these *re-creations* of stories (inspired by books or films), had later given way to original *creations* of an altogether surreal world.

In Part 4.2, I used the word 're-creation' for two reasons. First, it evokes the image of a copy (Muldoon is reproducing well-known stories and transposing them onto childhood memories). Moreover, this term also evokes the idea of amusement, entertainment. Most of the poems discussed are, in fact, about a child's imaginative life, a world of boyhood games and fantasies. In Part 4.3, the term 'creation' was used because it implies the interference of a sort of divine agency: the author's avatar is a shaman figure who is able to cross over to the otherworld. The aim of Part 4.4 was both to discuss another use of the term

fiction (the false/fake) and to contrast it with the use of fiction in boyhood fantasies: in Part 4.2, the overlaying of fantasies on memories creates the appearance of fiction; in contrast, in Part 4.4, Muldoon's elegiac forgeries create the illusion of reality. The poet's autofictional artistry either draws these poems towards fiction or towards autobiography.

Given that some of these autofictional poems present the illusion of fiction or autobiography depending on Muldoon's use of fictional tropes, this necessarily suggests that these poems are partly governed by authorial control. My concluding chapter therefore focuses on *authorial agency*. It explores the ways in which the author willingly transgresses the ontological boundaries between the extratextual world and the textual world, the activity of narrating and the product of this activity. Chapter Five discusses, in particular, Muldoon's direct authorial interventions and the mischievous (but playful) dimension of his mythopoetics.

CHAPTER FIVE: The Trickster Poet

Authorial Intrusions and Poetic Shenanigans

Of course I sometimes make little jokes and I do, quite often, engage in leading people on, gently, into little situations by assuring them that all's well and then—this sounds awfully manipulative, but part of writing is about manipulation—leaving them high and dry, in some corner of a terrible party, where I've nipped through the bathroom window.

(Muldoon, qtd. in Wills, Jenkins, and Lanchester 19-20)

What can I tell you? Though your quarry
lies exhausted at the bottom of an exhausted quarry,

to follow that lure
will almost certainly end in failure.

While I did indeed sink
like a stone among bottles, cans, a fridge, a sink,

a slab of marble, granite
or slate I'm not. By the window of an All-Nite

Café or a 24-Hour Bank
I, too, stretched as if on a flowery bank

and admired
my shiny, former self, a self even then mired

in the idea that what you saw
was what you got.

Why would a hostage's hand hacked off with a hacksaw
weigh on me now like a blood-spattered ingot

from that 24-Hour Bank, I who once cut such a figure
in its drive-up window? Go figure.

('Rune' *H* 96)

5.1. Introduction: A 'calculated capriciousness'

> At first sight, this lack of an organising subjectivity in Muldoon's poetry might suggest that his work should be viewed in terms of postmodern practices of random accumulation, as an experiment in serendipity. But at the same time it is impossible to miss the poetry's strong sense of purpose and direction—impossible partly because Muldoon keeps emphasising his authorial control over the proceedings (as in the recent riddling poem 'Rune', which concludes with a message to the reader: 'Go figure').
>
> (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 13)[360]

In her introduction to *Reading Paul Muldoon*, Wills insists on the fact that,

> [a]s opposed to those forms of postmodern poetry in which it is up to the reader to produce connections, Muldoon keeps dropping hints that there is indeed a purpose and a pattern which we should try to understand. Despite the often apparently chaotic surface of his verse, and the lack of a single coherent perspective, there is a sense in which every element has been ordered and nothing is random. [...] the 'whimful' character of Muldoon's work, far from suggesting arbitrariness, indicates a high degree of authorial control. (13-14)

This final chapter expands on the content of the previous chapter by focusing on other types of autofictional devices in order to examine Muldoon's authorial control in his poetry. Chapter Four analysed the ways in which Muldoon fictionalises his family, personal landscape, and self. It explored several types of autofictions from the appearance of fiction (boyhood fantasies) to the creation of an otherworld (fantastic autofictions) and, finally, to the illusion of reality

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[360] Wills emphasises Muldoon's polarised positions when it comes to authorial control: 'In "Getting Round: Notes Towards an *Ars Poetica*" he argues on the one hand for a kind of Keatsian negative capability [...]. On the other hand he offers a dizzying reading of Robert Frost's poem "The Silken Tent" which uncovers (or perhaps forces) mind-boggling levels of literary and autobiographical allusion. So far from "unknowing", Frost's poem, in Muldoon's reading, exemplifies an intense knowingness. Using a phrase perhaps more fitting for himself Muldoon calls it "calculated capriciousness". [...] What's disorienting about Muldoon's work is that he represents the extremes of both positions. In claiming that the poet is "the first-person to read or, more importantly, to be read by the poem", he stresses the spontaneous and unpredictable creativity of language, in opposition to notions of authorial intention and initiative. Yet he also underlines the primacy of the poet ("the first-person to read..."), and so rejects contemporary theories which would put the poet in the same position as any other recipient of the work, or even at a disadvantage' (13-14).

(biographical forgeries). This final chapter pursues the analysis of Muldoon's autofictional artistry by focusing on two categories briefly mentioned in Chapter One: specular autofiction and intrusive autofiction. These two types of autofiction are quite different from Muldoon's practices examined in Chapter Four. While in the poems discussed in the previous chapter the focus was on the fictionalisation of family, personal landscape, and self; in these other autofictional forms, the emphasis is not on the mythicisation of the personal history but on the *metafictional* dimension of the poems: the extradiegetic author directly intervenes in his text, drawing our attention to the fact that the poem is a fictional construction.[361] These forms of autofiction therefore highlight the presence of the author in the text and his control over the narrative and its reception. In fact, although there is (to a certain extent) a serendipitous and unconscious quality to Muldoon's poetry,[362] I would argue that one should not ignore the breadth of Muldoon's authorial control.

Chapter Five continues the exploration of the different 'strata of the self' (Hubier 123) characteristic of autofictional texts and places the emphasis on the ambiguous nature of the 'I': since the author intrudes in the text, the nature of the 'I' is more complex than in the previous chapters. While in the preceding analyses the focus was on the *diegetic* speaker (Muldoon's poetic avatar was part of the narrative), the emphasis in this final chapter is on the intrusion of the *extradiegetic* author: the author is intruding in the text *in propria persona* ('in one's own person'). Although Cohn argues that there is no such 'metalepsis in homodiegetic narratives but only in heterodiegetic narratives' ('Metalepsis and Mise en Abyme' 106), the critic singles out one exception, Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, which is a homodiegetic narrative that features a metalepsis at the

[361] Some poems belong to several types of autofictions: 'Immram', for instance, is both a fantastic autofiction and an intrusive/specular one.
[362] See my introduction to Chapter Two.

discourse level: 'Proust, the true, the actual "author of this book", intervenes explicitly in the text and reveals a highly ambiguous difference in identity between his narrator and himself. This exception relates clearly to the equivocal status in Proust's novel between fiction and autobiography' (106-107). The homodiegetic poems discussed in this final chapter are about precisely this 'equivocal status', since they present a metalepsis on the discourse level: there is a very thin line between the speaker who is part of the text (diegetic level) and the author who exists outside the text (extradiegetic level) because the 'I' of the speaker stands in for the extradiegetic poet. As a result, the speaker is not just the author's poetic representation of himself in the text, but a medium through which the author more directly addresses the reader and intrudes in his text.

Specular and intrusive autofictions illustrate different forms of authorial presence and control. Colonna uses the metaphor of the mirror to explain what *autofiction spéculaire* stands for. This type of autofiction is characterised by the 'reflection' of the author (or of his work) in the text: the author is either in the periphery of the text (like a 'silhouette') or in the centre of it (when, for instance, a character bears the same name as the author). Colonna explains that whether or not the author is a mere presence or a central figure in the text, what is important is that 's/he positions him- or herself in a corner of his work, which then reflects his presence just like a mirror' (*Autofiction et autres mythomanies* 119).[363] The

[363] The original reads: 'Reposant sur un reflet de l'auteur ou du livre dans le livre, cette orientation de la fabulation de soi n'est pas sans rappeler la métaphore du miroir. [...] l'auteur ne se trouve plus forcément au centre du livre; ce peut n'être qu'une silhouette; l'important est qu'il vienne se placer dans un coin de son œuvre qui réfléchit alors sa présence comme le ferait un miroir'. This is the case, for instance, in the visual arts when a painter paints his or her easel and canvas within the painting (Diego Velázquez's 1656 *Las Meninas*), in photography (Hippolyte Bayard's 1840 *Autoportrait en noyé* [*Self Portrait as a Drowned Man*]), or in literature when the identity of the author (and/or the title of one of his or her works) is mentioned in the text. The most famous example in literature is probably the opening lines of Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*: 'You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly—

presence of the author and/or of his work in the text is characteristic of several Muldoonian poems. This chapter insists particularly on the *playfulness* and *mischievousness* of the poet's specular intrusions (*personnages d'auteur* and narrative self-reflexivity).

The other autofictional form, *autofiction intrusive*, is a narrative in which the writer's avatar is a *raconteur* (Colonna, *Autofiction et autres mythomanies* 135); in these texts, the voice of the extradiegetic author intrudes in the text as that of a 'narrator-author'.[364] Although this other form of autofiction is extremely interesting, Colonna's definition only applies to narratives written in the third-person voice and told by an author-narrator who does not take part in the story s/he narrates. Since my intention is not to confine Muldoon's work to theoretical strangleholds, the poems analysed feature a narrator-author who is, in fact, a *raconteur*, but in which the narrative is written in the *first*-person voice. These intrusive autofictional poems feature a self-conscious authorial figure who narrates the story in the first-person voice and who often plays an active role in the story and, more importantly, its reception.[365]

My chapter is loosely based on these two forms of autofiction and is divided into two parts. Part 5.2 explores all forms of authorial intrusion by looking at both the author's *figural* presence (specular autofiction)[366] and the author's *voice* in his text (intrusive autofiction). Part 5.3 focuses on a particular type of intrusive 'narrator-author': the *tall tale* narrator.

Tom's Aunt Polly, she is—and Mary, and the Widow Douglas, is all told about in that book—which is mostly a true book, with some stretchers, as I said before' (13). Chapter Five later comes back to the importance of Twain in the discussion of the tall tale (Part 5.3).

[364] 'L'avatar de l'écrivain est un récitant, un raconteur ou un commentateur, bref un "narrateur-auteur" en marge de l'intrigue'.

[365] There are not many autofictional poems that comply with the third-person criterion in Muldoon's work.

[366] 'Figural' characterises something pertaining to someone's figure of shape. Muldoon's figural intrusions are either characters who share his name or characters that he impersonates.

As mentioned previously, the unifying theme of this final chapter that brings together these various forms of authorial intrusions is *metafiction*: since the border between the diegetic and the extradiegetic levels has been crossed, Muldoon's various authorial intrusions shatter the illusion of a 'seemingly unmediated reality', to borrow Hutcheon's words (xiv).[367] Lodge argues that metafiction is 'fiction about fiction: novels and stories that call attention to their fictional status and their own compositional procedures' (206).[368] In other words, there is a shift from the *énoncé* (the utterance or statement) to the *énonciation* (the *act* that produces the *énoncé*) (Gasparini, *Est-il je?* 119), since this self-reflexive fiction 'includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity' (Hutcheon 1). Furthermore, since the metafictional text's 'own paradox is that it is both narcissistically self-reflexive and yet focused outward, oriented toward the reader' (7), any study of metafiction necessarily focuses on the relationship established between the author and the reader.[369] Parts 5.2 and 5.3 therefore cover several metafictional themes: the author's interference with the narrative and its reception, the poet's narrative procedures, and the relationship between author and reader based on intimacy and manipulation.

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[367] On the origins and the meaning of the term 'metafiction' see Bernd Engler's article in *The Literary Encyclopedia*.

[368] This is the case, for instance, in 'Bechbretha': 'Now that I had the floor to myself / I launched into a small meditation / on Loughbrickland. / I described the "brick" in Loughbrickland / as "a stumbling block" / and referred to Bricriu Poison-Tongue / of *Bricriu's Feast*' (*MB* 19). This extract underlines the metafictional nature of the poem since it emphasises the poem's compositional procedures: there may be the cryptoccurent of the trademark Lego in 'lough' since the speaker is insisting on the *bricks* and *stumbling blocks* that are characteristic of this game. The speaker is making up this imaginary place name ('Loughbrickland'), putting together three different semantic elements (lough, brick, and land) the way he would pile up plastic Lego bricks. This example perfectly illustrates what Lodge says about metafictional writers: they expose the 'nuts and bolts of their fictional constructs' (11).

[369] Hutcheon argues that 'while being made aware of the linguistic and fictive nature of what is being read, and thereby distanced from any unself-conscious identification on the level of character or plot, readers of metafiction are at the same time made mindful of their active role in reading, in participating in making the text mean. They are the distanced, yet involved, co-producers of the novel' (xii). Moreover, it is important to point out that metafiction is also about the author's manipulation of our interpretation of his text since 'the disrupting of the traditional reading process' is one of 'the devices that are most often listed as unquestionable signs of metafictionality' (Engler n. pag.). This disruption and manipulation of the reading process lies at the core of this chapter.

The analysis of Muldoon's authorial intrusions and other autofictional strategies in this final chapter is particularly important for the rest of this thesis because, as well as illuminating autofictional or autobiographical elements in his poems, these very strategies are important to his work more generally. In fact, this examination of intrusiveness in Muldoon's autofictional poems ties into broader, fundamental questions regarding the ways in which his poems involve (and play with) the reader, and the complexity of the poetic voice. In other words, while these metafictional intrusions are most clearly seen in Muldoon's autofictional and seemingly autobiographical poems, the following analyses show that these very idiosyncrasies engage the reader and complicate the autobiographical or autofictional nature of the poems across his entire *œuvre*.

5.2. The Intrusive Author: Muldoon's Metalepses

This analysis of Muldoon's intrusive strategies relies on what Genette calls *métalepse*.[370] In 'Metalepsis and Mise en Abyme', Cohn argues that that there is a difference between the metalepsis at the *discourse* level (the intrusion of the extradiegetic author in the diegesis) and the metalepsis at the *story* level (the intrusion of 'diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe') (105).[371] In the former, the transgression is between the extradiegetic and the diegetic worlds; in

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[370] Genette dedicated a book to diverse metaleptic phenomena in *Métalepse: De la figure à la fiction*. He reminds us at the beginning of his study that the term 'metalepsis' comes from the Greek and designates 'all sorts of permutations' (8).

[371] The second half of Cohn's essay title—*mise en abyme*—refers to 'one of the major modes of textual narcissism' (Hutcheon 4). A *mise en abyme* is a metafictional feature since it is a direct reference to one of the writer's works within the text. Colonna argues that, while the *métalepse de l'auteur* 'mostly reflects the writer (or the reader)' in the text, the *mise en abyme* 'mainly reflects the work' of the author (*Autofiction et autres mythomanies* 132). 'The Mudroom', for instance, presents a particularly interesting example of *mise en abyme*: 'the stack of twenty copies of *The Annals of Chile* ($21 hardback)' (*H* 7). This chapter later explores some of Muldoon's *mises en abyme*.

the latter, the transgression is between the diegetic and the metadiegetic worlds (the primary story and the secondary story), as seen in the analysis of 'The Glad Eye' (Part 4.2). Part 5.2 focuses on the metalepsis at the discourse level: the figuration of the author (*personnages d'auteur*) and the voice of the author (narrative self-reflexivity) in his text. Genette calls this authorial intrusion: *métalepse de l'auteur* ('the author's metalepsis'). By transgressing the 'sacred' line between two 'worlds'—'the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells' (Genette, *Figures III* 245)[372]—Muldoon draws our attention towards his omnipresence in the text and his control over our interpretation of it. More generally, Muldoon's various intrusions in these poems exemplify his interaction with the reader across his entire work.[373]

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[372] The original reads: 'frontière mouvante mais sacrée entre deux mondes: celui où l'on raconte, celui que l'on raconte'.

[373] In his discussion of Emily Dickinson's poem 'I tried to think a lonelier Thing', Muldoon insists on the importance of the relationship between writer and reader: 'I'm even more interested in the larger, more general, issue of when we read any poem, the relationship between any writer and any reader and, as I mentioned in the first chapter, "the extent to which one determines the role of the other, one completing the other". This demarcation, or lack of it, between writer and reader, reader and writer, is all the more fascinating in the case of Emily Dickinson, who seemed resigned to the idea of her poems' not being read, though she had a very powerful sense of the effect a poem might have once it *has* been read' (*EP* 115). Muldoon even mentions the notion of a 'covenant' between reader and writer: 'The immortality of the poem requires not only a reader but a reader able to make "judgements", to distinguish the good seed from the bad, the wheat from the chaff, the sheep from the goats. This reader will have made a "covenant" with the writer, one which will involve his or her taking an active role in the process of remaking the poem' (136). This final chapter, particularly the analysis of Muldoon as a tall tale narrator, is based on this 'covenant' established between poet and reader.

The Polymorphous Figures of the Author: *Personnages d'auteur*

> What I have [...] is a variety of impersonations I can do, [...] a troupe of players that I have internalized, a permanent company of actors that I can call upon when a self is required, an ever-evolving stock of pieces and parts that forms my repertoire.
> (Roth 325)

The author's figuration in the text has often been used by metafictional writers. In *The New York Trilogy*, one of the characters, himself a writer, bears the same name as the writer: Paul Auster. Consequently, the voice of Paul Auster-author is heard through that of Paul Auster-character by way of a metalepsis of the author (Pluvinet 30-31). Since this character is, himself, a writer, Pluvinet calls this 'writer-character' a *personnage d'auteur* (a character whose profession is that of a writer).

My analysis covers Muldoon's 'troupe' of *personnages d'auteur*, whether they are (near) eponymous characters or the poet's impersonations of other writers.[374] This analysis emphasises the fact that these various authorial characters are all devices used by the poet to *play games* with his reader: Muldoon either appears under a slightly modified name or borrows the traits of another writer. Furthermore, these two types of authorial figures also have in common the fact that they reflect the *multifaceted* aspects of the poet's presence in his text and, therefore, the multiplicity of the 'I'. The chapter considers these myriad figures in order from the most obvious (near eponymous characters) to the most cryptic forms of authorial metalepses (impersonations).

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[374] Eponymous characters are characters who bear the poet's first and/or family name(s).

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When Muldoon appears in his text under his own name, he may be compared to actors or public figures who appear in a film as themselves (in their own role).[375] Whether the name of the author remains unchanged ('The Bangle (Slight Return)') or whether Muldoon uses onomastic strategies to modify his name ('Sleeve Notes' and 'Capercaillies'), these (near) eponymous figures point to the intrusive poet's manifold identities, illustrating his omnipresence in the poems. This *autofiction spéculaire* is characterised by the author's presence at the *core* of the text.[376]

In the restaurant poem 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', the poet plays with his reader by dropping a few clues so as to disclose his authorial metalepsis progressively. In fact, the poem is made of thirty sections but the authorial intrusion is only revealed in the second half of the poem. In sections eleven and fifteen, the 'I' is called '*Monsieur l'épicure*' (*H* 121, 125) by the waiter, which is a nod in the direction of the poet who often portrays himself as one having a taste for the pleasures of the table.[377] Then, in section sixteen, the poet provides the reader with an approximate age and a physical portrait for this epicurean figure:

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[375] Genette mentions King Vidor's 1928 film *Show People*, in which several famous actors play their own role in the form of cameo appearances: Charlie Chaplin, Marion Davies (who both plays a young actress, Peggy Pepper, and herself), and director Vidor, among many other public figures (*Métalepse* 72).

[376] Furthermore, it is important to note that, just as in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, each utterance of the poet's name is voiced by one of the characters and not by the speaker himself. Gasparini argues that from a narrative point of view nothing forces the 'I' to disclose his or her identity and that it is often other people who name him or her (*Est-il je?* 40-42). The original reads: 'Remarquons que, d'un point de vue narratif, l'anonymat du "je" autodiégétique est parfaitement conforme à la logique d'énonciation. Rien n'oblige ce "je" à décliner son identité. C'est à autrui qu'il revient de le nommer, soit en parlant de lui à un tiers, soit dans une situation de communication teintée d'affect'. This analysis is a brief look at the most transparent interjections into the poems, before moving on to longer considerations of more complex, sustained authorial interjections later in this chapter.

[377] See *The Prince of the Quotidian* (featuring passages about Cajun cuisine) and Muldoon's other restaurant poems ('Sushi', 'Holy Thursday', among others). See also Tim Hancock, 'Dining Out with Paul Muldoon: Personal and Poetic Relations in the Restaurant Poems', *Paul Muldoon: Poetry, Prose, Drama. A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2006), 85-99.

It was downhill all the way after that. The opprobrium
of the waiter of waiters. To have your cake
and eat bigarroons *and* Bonderay au Foin? His new imperium
sweeping clean through the muskeg

in which my da and your man had ridden their cock
horses roughshod over my *crise*
d'un certain âge, my da trying in vain to kick-
start the cow-pony, my calling out 'Creusa, Creusa, Creusa'

as the packet reached the midway- and turning-point.
A French edition of *Chaos*. James Gleick.
I'm sure I overheard one of the Hennessys' '*Il est très...*

Il a un certain... embonpoint'.
Which brought a faint smile to the prim little mouth of this lookalike
of a reporter I used to know back in Troy. (*H* 126)

First, the speaker is referring to his 'mid-life crisis' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 211)—'my *crise d'un certain âge*'—drawing an even stronger parallel with Muldoon, who was in his early fifties when the collection came out. Secondly, a woman and her friends 'the Hennessys' 'make pointed remarks about his girth' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 211): '*Il est très... / / Il a un certain... embonpoint*'.[378] The poet's figure is therefore progressively shaped since we are given an approximate age and a physical self-portrait. The only element that is missing in order to confirm this authorial intrusion is obviously the poet's *name*.

The poem keeps delaying the appearance of the speaker's name. In fact, we expect to hear the poet's first name after the line 'To have your cake' (*H* 126) because, in 'Symposium', this phrase is followed by 'Paul': 'To have your cake is to pay Paul' (27). However, in 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', after the line break following 'cake', the first name is not revealed and is replaced, instead, by another item on the restaurant menu: 'To have your cake / and eat bigarroons' (126). Since 'Symposium' was published in the same collection as 'The Bangle (Slight

[378] This humorous self-deprecating description continues throughout the poem: '"*Notre ami...*" said the other Hennessy, "*il a une grande bedaine...*"' (*H* 130); 'the Hennessys continued their talkee-talkee / / about my waist-line' (135). A *bedaine* translates as 'punch' in English.

Return)', the resonance between the two poems is all the more obvious. Furthermore, the sonorous ending of 'bigarr*oons*' calls forth 'Muld*oon*', or even 'Muldoons'. This passage obliquely hints at the poet's name (*and* pluralised identity) through both the internal echoes between the two poems and the resonance in the rhyming pair bigarroons/Muldoon(s).[379] This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that Muldoon first uses the French name for this variety of cherry 'bigarreaux' (121) and then chooses the spelling 'bigarroons' (126): in the second instance, the change in spelling (combined with the phrase 'To have your cake') indicates that Muldoon is playfully hinting at his family name. It is only more than half way through the poem that the speaker's name is finally revealed: 'Mul-do-on, *non? Avec trois syllabes?*' (127).[380] The detailed portrait of the epicurean speaker is now given a name. Although it was obvious from the start that the speaker was a *personage d'auteur*, the appearance of the author's name in the poem has a more immediate impact than the anonymous speaker (in the first half of the poem), since the reader is reminded of the presence of the writer (whose name is on the cover of the collection) *in* the poem. Moreover, the fact that this passage appears almost at mid-point in the sequence is perhaps a strategy to imprint the author's signature at the core—or *cœur* ('heart'), as it were—of the poem. Unlike poems in which the autobiographical diegetic speaker is painstakingly coming to terms with his identity and has difficulty in inscribing his own name in the text (Part 2.2), the intrusive extradiegetic author not only imprints his authorial signature in the poem, but he even mischievously delays this authorial intrusion.

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[379] This encoding of the poet's name in the text is also a characteristic of Frost. As explained by Muldoon in his analysis of 'The Mountain', the line 'the *frosty* spines and bristles' calls forth the American poet's family name (*EP* 58). Once again, the way Muldoon reads the work of other poets in his critical prose sheds light on the interpretation of his own poems.

[380] Although this delaying of the author's name in the text is on a much smaller scale, this reminds us of the deferred appearance of the first name 'Marcel' in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.

Hancock argues that the 'near-identification of [the author] as narrator of this poem [...] leaves sufficient room for doubt as to the unity of author and speaker', seeing, instead, a critical distance on the part of the author towards the speaker ('Dining Out with Paul Muldoon' 95). In fact, while some readers might argue that the 'I' simply refers to the diegetic speaker, a number of metafictional tropes confirm that the first-person singular is, indeed, that of the extradiegetic author: the presence of the author's name is coupled with the authorial *voice*, which is heard through various authorial comments, such as '(See overleaf.)' (*H* 133), and a series of errata towards the end of the poem.[381] The intrusion of the poet's voice, which is analysed later in this chapter, confirms that this eponymous character is a *personnage d'auteur*.

In 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', despite the waiter's mispronunciation of Muldoon's family name, the poet's name remains unchanged. In other instances, the author's first and family names are slightly modified, increasing the playfulness of Muldoon's authorial intrusions. This is the case in 'Sleeve Notes' and 'Capercaillies'. In fact, there are many hints pointing to an authorial intrusion in Muldoon's elegy for his friend Warren Zevon:[382]

BLONDIE: *Parallel Lines*

It had taken all morning to rehearse
a tracking shot

with an Arriflex
mounted on a gurney.

The dream of rain
on the face of a well.

'Ready when you are, Mr DeMilledoon'.

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[381] Although these errata are voiced by a character named 'Virgil', I later explain that the author may use this character as another *personnage d'auteur*.

[382] 'Sleeve Notes' is 'a sequence of lyrics which [...] offer a version of [Muldoon's] autobiography—using music to chart stages in his life from school and home in the Moy, through marriage, Belfast and the BBC, and finally to America and family life again' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 196).

Another small crowd

on the horizon.
We should have rented a Steadicam. (*H* 40)

First, the title of this section (which refers to an album by American rock band Blondie) sets the tone: the author is creating for himself a parallel existence, a *textual* role. Furthermore, this 'role' he is creating for himself is accentuated by the cinematographic vocabulary. The presence of two motion picture cameras ('Arriflex' and 'Steadicam') and the verb 'rehearse' in the first line emphasise the *staging* of the author. Finally, the poet's name appears directly in the text since it is encoded in 'DeMilledoon', a conflation of 'Muldoon' and film director Cecil B. DeMille.[383] Muldoon is, therefore, not just directly intervening in his text as a mere actor but as the *director* in charge of supervising and controlling the film/poem. In other words, he is stating here that he is *on the set* of his poem.[384] Although Gasparini argues that the family name is less attractive, less malleable, and that writers hardly ever play with it (*Est-il Je?* 36),[385] Muldoon's family name lends itself easily to onomastic games: Muldoon's alias—'Mr. DeMilledoon'—also brings to mind the words *deux mille* (meaning 'two thousand' in French), highlighting the multifaceted aspects of Muldoon's authorial metalepsis.[386] This is also the case in 'Capercaillies': 'Paul? Was it you put the *pol* in polygamy / or was it somebody else?' (*MM* 6). Once again, the name of the author is mentioned

[383] Along with the similarities between the two family names (Muldoon/DeMille), it is also very interesting to point out that DeMille similarly made several cameo appearances or played himself in films such as James Cruze's 1923 *Hollywood*, George Marshall's 1947 *Variety Girl*, and Billy Wilder's 1950 *Sunset Boulevard*.
[384] Once again, this Muldoon figure is an authorial intrusion because of the presence of a *mise en abyme*: the poet makes a direct reference to 'the wild and wicked poems in *Quoof* (*H* 38).
[385] In the original text: 'Le nom de famille offre, semble-t-il, moins d'attrait et de plasticité que le prénom'.
[386] The pair 'DeMilledoon'/'*deux mille*' also evokes the plant '*Achillea Millefolium*' in *The Annals of Chile*.

through the voice of another character[387] and it is slightly modified since it is assimilated to the prefix '*poly*'. Just as 'DeMilledoon' evokes two thousand authorial facets, 'poly' comes from the ancient Greek (πολυ-) and means 'many', pointing to Muldoon's multifaceted *personnages d'auteur* and his omnipresence in these poems.[388]

Muldoon therefore features as himself in several key poems, all of which emphasise the poet's penchant for onomastic games and the multiplicity of identities.[389] In the following analyses I concentrate on Muldoon's indirect authorial metalepses: the poet hides behind another writer-character. In this more mischievous form of authorial figuration, Muldoon does not settle for one single impersonation but for multiple impersonations within the same poem. While Muldoon's (near) eponymous figures are usually based on onomastic games suggesting the author's multiple identities in the text, Muldoon's impersonations literally feature multiple Muldoon figures in the same poem, each with their own facets. The next analysis pursues the investigation of the complexities of the authorial voice.

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[387] This character is most likely Muldoon's wife, whose name 'Jean' has been changed into 'Saint Joan' (6). Since, the identification of the 'I' with Muldoon is slightly delayed, it is only in retrospect that we decipher within 'Joan' the real referent, Jean Hanff Korelitz. This slight modification of a relative's name is a recurrent practice in autofictional texts. Nonetheless, we should not exclude the possibility of fiction given the fictional dimension of this poem: 'Saint Joan' could refer to the historical character Joan of Arc or to the eponymous character in George Bernard Shaw's 1924 play.

[388] However, unlike 'Sleeve Notes', this poem contains no reference to one of Muldoon's works that would strengthen this authorial intrusion. Nonetheless, an authorial figure is mentioned in the line that directly comes before the reference to 'Paul': 'the cock will hop on each in turn and, unhurri- / edly, do three or four push-ups, / reaching all too soon for a scuffed Elizabeth Bishop' (6). By drawing our attention towards an other writer and, moreover, a *poet*, Muldoon is indirectly pointing to the figure of the author of this poem: himself. Similarly, in 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', the presence of 'Publius Vergilius Maro' throughout the poem (from the very first line to the final section) necessarily draws our attention towards the author of the poem: Muldoon.

[389] In 'The Key', also published in *Madoc*, '*hoodlum*' (4) is not only 'back-slang' for a gangster leader, but it is also '(nearly) Muldoon backwards' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 141). This onomastic play (hoodlum/Muldoon) also acts as a reminder that Muldoon is the *enfant terrible* of contemporary Irish poetry who has at heart to unsettle both readers and critics. Furthermore, this authorial metalepsis is perhaps hinted at in the opening line—'I ran into Foley six months ago in a dubbing suite in Los Angeles' (*MM* 3)—because the term 'dubbing suite' could read as 'dubbing *suit*', indicating that the speaker is the author's understudy.

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> But you know how over every Caliban
> There's Ariel, and behind him, Prospero;
> Everyone taking a cut, dividing and conquering
> With lactose and dextrose,
> Everyone getting right up everyone else's nose.
> ('Immram' *WBL* 43)

Pluvinet argues that a character who is a writer is 'no ordinary character': 'whether it is drawn from autobiography, whether it is historical or imaginary, this character is defined by his or her literary activity that necessarily binds him or her to the real author of the text' (97).[391] Here, Pluvinet draws on what Gasparini previously stated regarding the relationship between this *personnage d'auteur* and the author of the text:

> If there is one biographical trait that allows, by itself, the identification of the character with the author, it is the profession of the writer. This professional identification has the advantage of not requiring any paratext: the author is indisputably a writer; his or her book testifies it. If s/he endows the hero with this habit, s/he signals *ipso facto* a point in common between them by using the easiest and most efficient means; s/he establishes a mirror-effect that will structure their relationship and, consequently, influence the generic assessment of the text by the reader. (*Est-il je?* 52)[392]

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[390] I use the term 'stolen' because, as it happens, a 'muldoon' is a *stolen* object. At the end of 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', the waiter asks the speaker if the credit card he wants to pay with has been stolen: *'("Cette carte de crédit est volée?")'* (*H* 130): 'amidst the almost terminal confusion, the poet discovers he is unable to pay for his meal—it turns out that (in American slang) a "muldoon" is a stolen credit card. In a book so concerned with how to hold a line, with how to define and preserve an identity, as your life becomes entwined with others and death becomes a felt possibility, to discover your credentials are fake may seem like the final blow. A fundamental way in which we define our identity is in terms of the past, but in this poem the past is all made up' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 214). In fact, although the main story is about the speaker having dinner with his wife in a 'restaurant off the Champs-Elysées' (*H* 113), several narratives are intertwined in this poem, one of which is about the father's fictional emigration to Australia. This apocryphal story is written along the lines of the Australian song 'Waltzing Matilda': 'Even now my da and that other jolly swagman would rake / their horses over the manganese-bright stones' (117).

[391] In French: 'Le personnage de l'auteur n'est pas un personnage comme les autres: d'inspiration autobiographique ou non, historique ou imaginaire, ce personnage se définit par son activité littéraire qui le lie nécessairement à l'auteur réel du texte'.

[392] The original reads: 'S'il est un trait biographique du personnage qui autorise, à lui seul, son identification avec l'auteur, c'est l'activité d'écrivain. Cette identification professionnelle présente l'avantage de ne nécessiter aucun recours au paratexte: écrivain, l'auteur l'est, incontestablement, son livre l'atteste. S'il attribue cette manie à son héros, il signale *ipso facto*, par le moyen le plus simple et le plus efficace, un point commun entre eux; il instaure un effet de miroir qui va structurer leur relation, donc déterminer l'appréciation générique du texte par le lecteur'.

The critic states, however, that this is not a 'necessary and sufficient criterion' (53). In fact, not all of the *personnages d'auteur* who feature in Muldoon's poetry are necessarily masks behind which the poet is hiding. They may be fictional or anonymous minor characters,[393] historical or contemporary writers featuring as minor characters,[394] historical writers featuring as recurrent characters in long poems,[395] contemporary writers featuring as the narratee,[396] anonymous speakers,[397] or historical writers featuring as speakers.[398] Nonetheless, just as 'over every Caliban / There's Ariel, and behind him, Prospero', some *personnages d'auteur* are masks behind which the poet is hiding; Muldoon is impersonating these writerly figures. Furthermore, all the poems discussed present *multiple* impersonations ('Immram', 'Lunch with Pancho Villa', and 'The Big House'), since Muldoon hides behind several *personnages d'auteur* within the same poem. The order in which the following poems are discussed illustrates the various levels of complexity of Muldoon's impostures.

In 'Immram', among the plethora of characters, one minor character is of particular interest, Alfred Tennyson:

> I strode through the cavernous lobby
> And found myself behind a nervous couple
> Who registered as Mr and Mrs Alfred Tennyson.
> The unsmiling, balding desk-clerk
> Looked like a man who would sell an alibi

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393 The young children's book writer in 'The Big House'.
394 Gertrude Stein, Henri Thoreau, and Ralph Emerson in 'The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants'; Nerval in 'Something Else'; MacNeice and Frost in 'Yarrow'; Medbh McGuckian, Seamus Deane, and Heaney in *The Prince of the Quotidian*.
395 Alfred Tennyson in 'Immram', Coleridge and Robert Southey in 'Madoc: A Mystery', Plath in 'Yarrow', 'Publius Vergilius Maro' in 'The Bangle (Slight Return)'.
396 Joseph Brodsky in 'The Hug', for instance.
397 The young writer in 'Lunch with Pancho Villa'.
398 Wystan Hugh Auden, Chester Kallman, Carson McCullers, and MacNeice in '7, Middagh Street'. Furthermore, in this long poem concluding the volume *Meeting the British*, there are within each of the seven sections references to other writers: Christopher Isherwood in the 'Wystan' section, André Breton in 'Salvador', Richard Wrights in 'Carson', and Delmore Schwartz in the final 'Louis' section.

To King Kong on the Empire State building, (*WBL* 41)

Muldoon may, actually, be hiding behind this *personnage d'auteur* who is like a 'silhouette', to borrow Colonna's term, standing in the periphery of the poem. If the 'I' is partly autobiographical, then for obvious anachronistic reasons Muldoon could not have encountered the nineteenth-century writer: 'Tennyson' is likely to be a pseudonym taken by someone assuming a false identity. The edginess of the couple, the phrase 'register as', and the fact that the clerk looks 'like a man who would sell an *alibi*' all suggest that the character is trying to be taken as Tennyson and that this figure may be a character behind whose traits Muldoon is hiding.[399] In fact, Muldoon based his *Immram* (Irish for 'voyaging') on the Irish tale *Immram Mael Duin* of which Tennyson wrote an English version ('The Voyage of Muldoon'). By staging a character named Tennyson, not only is Muldoon referring to the author of the 1880 version he has 'purloined', but he is also pointing to the author of the version we are reading: himself.[400] Tennyson could be one of Muldoon's 'purloined' or 'borrowed' identities. How would we then explain the presence of the author in his text as both the speaker and the Tennyson figure? The first explanation could be that these two figures are one and the same person:

I shimmied about the cavernous lobby.
Mr and Mrs Alfred Tennyson
Were ahead of me through the revolving door.
She tipped the bell-hop five dollars. (*WBL* 47)

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[399] A more literal possibility would be that Tennyson is simply a character having an affair under an assumed name.

[400] In an interview, Muldoon said: '"Immram" of course is based on this older Irish text, what Tennyson was basing his—again, a terrible terrible poem, though not quite so bad as "Madoc"—his work on. I'm borrowing, or purloining, great mediocre artists. Who was it who said, "mediocre artists borrow, great artists steal"? —Keller: I think it was Eliot. —Muldoon: Eliot. He did a lot of it, too. It's not as if I think that if I steal, I'll become a better poet; there's no little syllogism in there. But yes, the voice of "Immram" is stolen, you might say. Purloined from Raymond Chandler and Byron. It's a pastiche of those styles and voices. In a sense, it's stolen, borrowed' (Muldoon, qtd. in Keller 15-16).

Although the speaker seems to be a distinct person from the Tennyson character, there are hints that point to a possible association of the two figures since the speaker is tagging along with the couple, standing right 'behind' Tennyson, possibly suggesting that the Muldoon figure (speaker) has stepped into Tennyson's shoes and written his own version of the Irish tale. The second explanation could be that, just as actors occasionally play two roles in the same film, Muldoon is here distributing his identity by taking on the traits of two different characters: the speaker *and* the Tennyson figure.[401] The poet may therefore be acting two roles, that of the speaker and that of the Tennyson figure. This is not a once-off trick since Muldoon had already experimented with these multiple *personnages d'auteur* within the same poem in 'Lunch with Pancho Villa', one of Muldoon's most well-known authorial intrusions. The case of this poem is even more complex than 'Immram' because the extradiegetic poet is not impersonating two but *three* characters.

The poem opens with a discussion between the young speaker (an aspiring writer) and the Mexican revolutionary guerrilla fighter Pancho Villa, '[c]o-author of such volumes / As *Blood on the Rose*, / *The Dream and the Drums* / And *How It Happened Here*' (*M* 11). From the start, the *young* authorial figure (called 'son' by Villa) stands in for Muldoon, who was only in his mid-twenties when the collection came out: 'Muldoon's opening poem, "Lunch with Pancho Villa", describes a fictive meeting with the "celebrated pamphleteer", living on "a quiet suburban street", who upbraids the Muldoon figure for his self-indulgence in writing about rural themes and images irrelevant to the current "revolution"' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 44). Wills further argues that not only is the young

[401] For example, Michel Serrault plays both Martial Perrin and Gilbert Brossard in Pierre Tchernia's 1979 *La Gueule de l'autre*. This is one of several examples given by Genette in *Métalepse* (76).

author a 'Muldoon figure', but so are the Villa character and the other young writer mentioned at the end of the poem: 'Muldoon is of course both the pamphleteer (he lived at the time on a suburban street in Belfast when he was working for BBC Radio Northern Ireland), and the callow youth, a young man from the country' (45).[402] This game of multiple authorial reflections is once again a way for Muldoon to play with the reader—whose task is to look for the poet's various impersonations in the poem ('But where (I wonder myself) do I stand', *M* 12)—and a way to highlight the multiple authorial facets.

This series of impersonations is further accentuated in the third poem collected in *Mules*, 'The Big House', in which the poet's numerous impersonations are combined with a *mise en abyme*:

> I was only the girl under the stairs
> But I was the first to notice something was wrong.
> I was always first up and about, of course.
> Those hens would never lay two days running
> In the same place. I would rise early
> And try round the haggard for fresh nests.
> The mistress let me keep the egg-money.
>
> And that particular night there were guests,
> Mrs de Groot from the bridge set
> And a young man who wrote stories for children, (15)

At first sight, 'The Big House' reads as a short extract from a fictional autobiography: an anonymous female speaker writes a short poetic/diary note on an event that happened to her. Such a reading would prevent any obvious identification of the 'I' with Muldoon. The latter seems to be hiding, instead,

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[402] The final lines read: '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' (13). The final line obviously brings to mind Muldoon's own rural poems. If we look, for instance, at the poems published in *Mules*, there are pigs in 'Ned Skinner'; trees in 'How to Play Championship Tennis', 'Big Liz', 'The Wood', 'At Master McGrath's Grave', 'Bang', 'Duffy's Circus', and 'Armageddon, Armageddon'; stars in 'At Master McGrath's Grave', 'Largesse', 'Duffy's Circus', 'Mules', and 'Armageddon, Armageddon'; and horses in 'Keen' and 'The Ducking Stool'.

behind the 'young man who wrote stories for children'. Even if the young authorial figure has a marginal role, this minor character is twice singled out by the female speaker. The reader's attention is drawn towards this enigmatic character. We could, therefore, argue that, if Muldoon is hidden behind this minor character, this authorial metalepsis is a cameo: a 'short literary sketch or portrait; a small character part that stands out from the other minor parts' ('Cameo').[403]

The 'young man' is likely to be one of Muldoon's *personnages d'auteur* for several reasons. First, Gasparini argues that, by not naming the speaker (in our case, a character), 'several [autofictional] writers deliberately leave the identification issue open to an autobiographical interpretation on the part of the reader' (*Est-il Je?* 41).[404] Although this anonymity neither validates nor invalidates the character's identification with Muldoon, it allows the poet to leave it up to the reader's imagination to identify this character with himself. Secondly, as previously discussed, the fact that this character is himself a writer invites the reader to identify him with the author of the poem: Muldoon. Readers could argue that this identification falls short since the authorial figure 'wrote stories for children', whereas Muldoon had not yet published a children's book when writing this poem.[405] Nonetheless, the poet was in his mid-twenties when *Mules* came out and was, therefore, a *young* writer himself. Finally, there is a strong echo between this 'young man' in 'The Big House' and the 'callow youth' in 'Lunch with Pancho Villa'. Since the latter poem is printed a few pages before 'The Big House', we could draw a parallel between the two young authorial figures; as the 'callow

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[403] This character is a 'minor character', slightly more present than a mere 'walk-on' (to borrow Paul Franssen and Ton Hoenselaars terms), because he is only referred to twice and does not play any role in the main story nor in the gothic tale of the squire's death.
[404] The original reads: 'En laissant vacante la nomination du narrateur, nombre d'auteurs, sciemment, laissent le champ libre à une interpretation autobiographique du lecteur'.
[405] His first book for children (*The O-O's Party*) came out three years later in 1980.

youth' stands in for Muldoon, it is likely that the 'young man' is also one of Muldoon's *personnages d'auteur* who may (or may not) be based on the 'callow youth' of the preceding poem. All of these details indicate that referentiality is suggested although it is not stated explicitly. This authorial metalepsis becomes even clearer in the very last line of the poem when the female speaker realises that the person she thought was a children's book writer is not the person she thought he was: 'The young man's stories were for grown-ups, really' (*M* 16). The young writer's identity is somehow discredited *in extremis* in the last line. If the female speaker was mistaken about the young man's stories, then he may well be someone else, another *personnage d'auteur* (like Tennyson), behind whom the real author of this poem is hiding. Logically, the reader may then also question the identity of the female speaker who may not be the person she pretends to be.

'The Big House' is an infinite composition based both on multiple authorial metalepses and on a more deceitful game of authorial intrusion than 'Immram'. There is, in fact, more than meets the 'I' in 'The Big House' since the 'young man's stories' may well refer to the actual story narrated by the *girl*. For instance, it is curious that the first-person voice in the opening line ('I was only the girl under the stairs') shifts to the third-person in the final line ('The young man's stories were for grown-ups, really'). The adverb 'really' is put to the fore by the comma and by its key position as the final word of the poem: the author is winking at us and inviting us to question which identity (if any) is 'real'. Since the female speaker encourages us 'to put two and two together', we might argue that the speaker and the writer-character are one and the same person and that, as in 'Immram' and 'Lunch with Pancho Villa', Muldoon is simultaneously playing both roles (the female speaker and the young writer). This poem, which is partly about the enigmatic death of a squire, therefore has a 'way of melting down under the

searchlights': the reader, turned sleuth, is 'left to reconstruct the sense of a snowman [the poet] from the evidence of two coals and a carrot' (Mathews 13).[406] Like Russian dolls, the poet is hiding within the young man who is himself hiding within the speaker. Similarly, the various stories are nested one inside the other: just as the young man's stories are for 'grown-ups', the girl's story too is ill-suited to a young readership given that it tells the ghastly story of the squire's death and that of a ghostly 'elder brother'. As a result, the young man's stories could be the girl's stories, creating a *mise en abyme*, a structure without an end: the young man's stories are those of the girl, which are, in turn, those of the poet.

To conclude this analysis of the polymorphous figures of the author, whether Muldoon appears as himself or impersonates other authorial figures, this analysis has emphasised the multiple facets of Muldoon's authorial intrusions: Muldoon is a Protean figure putting on and taking off masks, 'a shape-shifting Proteus to readers who try to pin him down' (Eder n. pag.).[407] Just as the poet invents various diegetic personae in his boyhood fantasies (Chapter Four), he also emphasises the multiple facets of his extradiegetic presence in these metafictional poems. There are several conclusions that arise from these analyses of Muldoon's *personnages d'auteur*.

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[406] Mathews's comment is about the 1983 volume but could be applied to a number of poems across Muldoon's career. I call the reader a 'sleuth' because, while 'The Big House' is not a detective story, this poem mostly centres around the death and—maybe—the *murder* of a man. In fact, in the early drafts, Muldoon wrote: 'the house was haunted by a *murderer*' (*PMP*, '"The Big House", multiple typescript drafts with title page', Box 11, Folder 11). Hutcheon argues that a detective story hinging on a puzzle or enigma is a very 'self-conscious' text and that 'the reader of a murder mystery comes to *expect* the presence of a detective-story writer within the story itself' (31). Although this is not entirely true of mystery/crime fiction in general, this comment may apply to a narrow slice of mystery fiction such as 'The Big House', in which we expect the presence of the extradiegetic author of this intriguing murder story.

[407] The metamorphic nature of the Protean figure is often referred to in studies of autofiction. The term 'Protean' is, for instance, used by Gasparini in his discussion of the protagonist in Colonna's novel *Ma vie transformiste* (2001).

First, while Muldoon's borrowed identities feature mostly in early collections,[408] his (near) eponymous roles appear in later collections:[409] the transition from borrowed identities to characters bearing the name of the poet signals a more obvious authorial presence in Muldoon's collections published after his departure from Ireland. Furthermore, whether Muldoon impersonates another authorial character or features as himself in the poem, all of these *personages d'auteur* are characterised by Muldoon's playful attitude towards the reader, which is characteristic of his *œuvre* in general. More importantly, since the presence of a *personnage d'auteur* 'influence[s] the generic assessment of the text by the reader' (Gasparini *Est-il je?* 52), then this examination of Muldoon's figuration in the poems ties into the main themes of the thesis: autobiography and autofiction. In fact, this analysis has shown that *personnages d'auteur* complicate both the autobiographical or autofictional status of the poems and the nature of the 'I': although the reader is likely to lean towards an autobiographical reading of the poems by identifying the author with the character, these poems are not unmediated autobiographical pieces. Finally, as briefly discussed in occasional passages, almost all of these authorial figurations are accompanied by authorial *comments* directed towards the reader ('See overleaf') or are coupled with references to Muldoon's work (*mises en abyme*). Without these other metafictional tropes, these Muldoon figures could have been interpreted as mere diegetic characters; thus, these figures could have been read as autobiographical/autofictional characters based on the real Muldoon but existing in the diegesis, anchored in the narrative. However, because of the presence of Muldoon's voice alongside these authorial figurations, all of these authorial

[408] 'Immram' was published in *Why Brownlee Left*; 'Lunch with Pancho Villa' and 'The Big House' were collected in *Mules*.
[409] 'Capercaillies' and 'The Key' were published in *Madoc: A Mystery*; 'The Bangle (Slight Return)' and 'Sleeve Notes' were collected in *Hay*.

intrusions mark a transgression of the boundaries between the diegetic and extradiegetic worlds.

The Voice of the Author: Narrative Self-Reflexivity

> To appease a *moon*-goddess, no? How to read that last line
> in that last poem? Does it describe
> the moon or the woman? I mean at the very end
>
> of 'Edge'; 'Her blacks crackle and drag'.
> Whose 'blacks'? Is it the woman on the funeral urn
> or the moon? Are they both 'masturbating a glitter'?
>
> ('Yarrow' *AC* 59)[410]

> [Metafiction] provides, within itself, a commentary on its own status as fiction and as language, and also on its own processes of production and reception.
>
> (Hutcheon xii)

The intrusion of the author's voice is a form of narrative self-reflexivity that has been widely used by authors across centuries: Miguel de Cervantes in *Don Quichotte*, Denis Diderot in *Jacques le fataliste*, Laurence Sterne in *Tristam Shandy*, and twentieth-century writers who used more 'complex forms' of self-reflexivity.[411] All of these texts characterised by narrative self-reflexivity have in common the fact that the writer 'writes that he is writing' (Pluvinet 27)[412] and that he 'claims a kind of authority [...] with a certain ironic self-consciousness' (Lodge 10). Furthermore, this narrative self-reflexivity (also called auto-commentary or 'discourse on discourse') is a common denominator of *autofictional* texts: 'the second criterion that is unanimously considered to characterise the new genre is the intensive use of internal commentary' (Gasparini *Autofiction* 309). Gasparini

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[410] In this passage the Muldoon figure is trying to understand Plath's poem 'Edge' and is therefore placing himself in the position of the reader. This auto-commentary is a metafictional device that constitutes a digression from the main narrative just like any other form of textual self-reflexivity.
[411] For critics such as Robert Alter and Hutcheon, Cervantes's work is 'not only the first "realistic" novel but also the first self-reflective one' (Hutcheon 4).
[412] Pluvinet is here quoting Jean Bessière and Daniel-Henri Pageaux, *Le Roman du poète. Rilke, Joyce, Cendrars* (Paris: Champion, 1995), 11.

argues that auto-commentary is one of the main features of the autofictional practice since it tends 'to problematise the relationship between writing and experience' (311). For this reason, like his *personnages d'auteur*, Muldoon's auto-commentaries and criticisms similarly complicate the reader's assessment of the poems.

Not only do these metafictional devices highlight the fact that Muldoon is writing, but they are also a way for the poet to build a relationship with the 'you', whether the second-person singular refers to a reader or a critic. However, it is important to point out that, while the presence of a narratee creates the illusion of exchange, the 'you' 'is always a rhetorical device, a means of controlling and complicating the responses of the real reader who remains outside the text' (Lodge 81). In fact, these authorial intrusions are a means for the poet to assert his role in his text by either addressing critics (auto-criticisms) or manipulating readers (auto-commentaries). Given that the critic/reader is addressed directly by the author, the following examples are 'overt forms' of metafiction (Hutcheon 7).

Auto-Criticisms: Muldoon in Dialogue with his Critics

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Pluvinet points out that metafictional writers have a 'sneaky' habit of incorporating potential criticism into their texts: 'the depreciation of the author leads in a number of texts to a real accusation voiced by the authorial character him- or herself or by others' (204). In fact, most of these criticisms are not voiced for the sake of driving the reader's attention towards authorial presence or towards the fictional dimension of the text; instead, they are related to the 'author's attitude towards others and towards the society s/he lives in': 'The author's trial, which is taking place in the narrative, is coupled with an attempt to undermine his or her literary art: the authorial character is both accountable for

his or her actions and for their *implications in reality*' (204-205, my emphasis). This attitude is, therefore, 'never separate from his or her *artistic practices*'.[413] These auto-criticisms are particularly well illustrated in *The Prince of the Quotidian* and in 'Incantata'. In both cases, the criticisms are directed towards the author's 'artistic practices' and their seeming lack of 'implications in reality'.[414]

The first example, taken from 'Incantata', perfectly illustrates one of Muldoon's auto-criticisms regarding the relationship between his poetry and reality: 'you detected in me a tendency to put / on too much artificiality, both as man and poet, / which is why you called me "Polyester" or "Polyurethane"' (*AC* 17). This interesting passage is both a figuration of the author in his text—the first name 'Paul' and the word 'poet' are encoded in 'Polyester' and 'Polyurethane'—and a criticism made by Muldoon's former lover, Mary Farl Powers. In this passage, Muldoon is put 'on trial' (Redmond, 'Indicting the Exquisite' 73) and this accusation is directed towards his poetic 'artificiality'. Although we might think, on first reading, that the poet is making a reference to a discussion he had with his former lover, this is, in fact, an instance of *auto*-criticism, Muldoon is speaking *in propria persona*:

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[413] The original reads: 'La dépréciation de l'auteur conduit dans un certain nombre de textes à une véritable accusation, formulée par le personnage lui-même ou par autrui. Les crimes dont se rendent coupables les personnages d'auteur sont de plusieurs ordres [...] tous ces crimes concernent l'attitude de l'auteur envers d'autrui [*sic*] et envers la société dans laquelle il vit, attitude qui n'est jamais indépendante de ses pratiques artistiques. Le procès de l'auteur engagé dans le récit se double en effet d'une mise en cause de son art littéraire: le personnage doit répondre tant de ses actes que de ses œuvres et de leurs implications dans la réalité'.

[414] We could also mention passages that blame Muldoon's 'attitude towards others', which is another type of auto-criticism listed by Pluvinet. Such is the case in the final poem of his 'January Journal' when a talking horse addresses the speaker-writer: 'Above all else, you must atone / for everything you've said and done / / against your mother: meet excess of love / with excess of love; begin on the Feast of Saint Brigid' (*PQ* 41). Interestingly, the same year *The Prince of the Quotidian* was published, Muldoon published his masterful elegy for his mother 'Yarrow', which effectively answers this criticism.

> I know there's a line in 'Incantata' which is given to Mary Powers about me being artificial as a man and a poet. It's actually something which she never said to me; they're words I've put in her mouth. I suppose for whatever reason I actively welcome being put down, something which perhaps goes back to my upbringing—that accusation of not being worthy which could be laid at one's door. Historically, it goes back to her calling me 'Polyester', which was a comment on my taste in shirts. Of course, all poetry is in a sense artificial: at its root is the idea of artifice, something which is made in this world, something which is constructed. But at the same time one wants to give the impression that it arises naturally, that it is made, as it were, with natural fibres. One of the kinds of poems I'm interested in writing is one which gives the impression that it had to be the way it is. But the artificiality you speak of is one which one or two commentators and I think it is only one or two, including John Carey of Oxford have picked up on. The burden of his complaint in so far as it coheres (and I don't think it does cohere) is that the poems are literary and highflown and so on. But I don't think that's a problem at all—all poems, including those of Seamus Heaney (which Carey would especially valorise), are in a dialogue with other works of art. That's obvious, I think. (Muldoon, qtd. in Redmond, 'Interview with Paul Muldoon' 2-3)

This example from 'Incantata' is both an indirect way for the poet to answer some critics and a way to acknowledge the necessary use of *artifice* in poetry since, etymologically, a poem *is* an artefact, it is *made*.[415] This extract from 'Incantata' addresses external criticism. This is also the case in a passage from his 'January Journal', which is both about his poetic practice and its impact on the real:

> 'What's with you, *a mhic*?
> Apart from the "eel-grass and bladderwrack"
>
> there's not an image here that's worth a fuck.
> Who gives a shit about the dreck
> of your life? Who gives a toss
> about your tossing off?' 'I know, I know, but...'
>
> 'But nothing: you know it's dross;
> you know that "Erasmus" stuff is an inept
> attempt to cover your arse;
>
> leave off your laundry-lists and tax-returns
> and go back to making metaphors...'
> Something in that 'go back' reminds me of Xanthus. (*PQ* 40)

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[415] 'Often, to the dismay I'm sure of my students, I remind them again and again of the etymology of the word "poem", which is simply something that is made in the world, a construct in the world, a piece of architecture, a piece of engineering. Something that has to be built, I think, to withstand various pressures' (Muldoon, qtd. in Marantz n. pag.). In his discussion of Bishop's '12 O'Clock News', Muldoon further explains that this etymology comes from 'the Greek word *poiesis*' (*EP* 86).

Unlike in the previous extract from 'Incantata', there is an exchange between the character making the criticisms (the poet's father) and the Muldoon figure. Nonetheless, given that the 'here' in the third line indicates that this criticism is directed towards the collection itself, Patrick Muldoon could not have voiced this criticism because he had passed away when this collection came out. This is, therefore, another instance of auto-criticism through ventriloquism.[416] There is nonetheless a major difference between these two poems. While the criticisms made in 'Incantata' are about the artificial dimension of Muldoon's work, those voiced by the father are almost the exact opposite: they criticise the poet for dealing with topics that are too down-to-earth, too prosaic. This contrast illustrates the variety of approaches to Muldoon's poetry: while some critics have condemned the 'wilful obscurity and whimsical excess' of his poetry (Roche 63), others have criticised the 'insignificant' dimension of some of his poems (Quinlan 190), particularly those collected in *The Prince of the Quotidian*. Through auto-commentaries, Muldoon's poetry both answers *and* anticipates a variety of external criticisms. In fact, while in 'Incantata' the poet is addressing current or previous criticisms, in *The Prince of the Quotidian*, Muldoon is anticipating the negative criticisms he may receive once the book comes out.[417]

McDonald writes: '*The Prince of the Quotidian*'s air of domestic cosiness goes together with an unusually confrontational attitude to the climate of the

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[416] I use this term because 'Muldoon has noted his consistent interest "in ventriloquism, in speaking through other people, other voices"' (qtd. in Cliff 614). Writing on Frost in 'Getting Round: Notes towards an *Ars Poetica*', Muldoon also imagines (in Frost's vein) what his father could have said to him: '"Get over yourself, three-person'd God" or "For God's sake, hauld yer wheesht, and let me love", which is how my father might have put it, had he been inclined to put anything much at all' (108).

[417] In fact, this volume received lukewarm responses from critics such as Quinlan and Roche. See Kieran Quinlan, rev. of *The Prince of the Quotidian*, *World Literature Today* 70:1 (Winter 1996), 190-191; and Anthony Roche, rev. of *The Prince of the Quotidian*, *Poetry Ireland Review* 45 (Spring 1995), 63-68. For Schneider, although *The Prince of the Quotidian* was presented as a journal, it 'is not in fact a diary where the reader can get to know Paul Muldoon': Muldoon 'subverts confession by a writing of the self that is conspicuously personal' (194). In contrast, Bolton argues that Muldoon—'a self-proclaimed "Prince of the Quotidian"'—is 'capable of transmuting the fodder of the everyday into the stuff of poetry' (49).

poet's own critical reception' (*Mistaken Identities* 153).[418] Not only is the poet aware of the upcoming academic response to his volume, but he is even pulling the carpet from under the critics' feet by imagining their possible riposte:

> 'inconsequential journalese', 'a klieg light
> masquerading as the moon'; none will,
> I trust, look for a pattern in this crazy quilt
> where all is random, 'all so trivial', (*PQ* 29)

The made-up criticisms quoted in this passage anticipate the unfavourable criticisms the collection may receive once it is published.[419] Furthermore, the lines 'none will, / I trust, look for a pattern in this crazy quilt' invite the critics to think twice before passing judgement on the apparent superficiality of this 'all so trivial' collection. In fact, Muldoon is also suggesting that there is more to this 'shallowness' than meets the eye by flagging the key word that lies at the core of this volume: 'trivial'.

In the following passage, while Muldoon is criticising the way art is perceived in Northern Ireland, he is also making his point about what the so-called triviality of 'this crazy quilt' means:

> Much as I'm taken by Barry Douglas playing Rachmaninov
> with the Ulster Orchestra
> I remember why I've had enough

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[418] Part of this volume is Muldoon's 'scornful account' (153) of 'the politics of Northern Ireland's culture industry' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 161): 'the direct engagement with a statement by Seamus Deane (on Muldoon's being "in exile" in Princeton), or a coolly scornful account of "the casuistry / by which pianists and painters and poets are proof / that all's not rotten in the state", or a treatment of the Field Day enterprise as "balladeers and bards" who "add up to so much less than the sum of its parts / like almost every Irish stew", all make for a sense of Muldoon's speaking, *in propria persona*, against the various distortions and political presumptions of the cultural intelligentsia' (McDonald, *Mistaken Identities* 153).

[419] Similarly, 'The Key' seems to present an instance of auto-criticism that anticipates the critics' responses to *Madoc: A Mystery*: 'These past six months I've sometimes run a little ahead of myself, but mostly I lag behind, my footfalls already pre-empted by their echoes' (*MM* 4). Although, on one level, this poem deals with the speaker's duality or 'doubleness', it may also read as an instance of authorial self-criticism: given that 'The Key' is the opening poem in *Madoc*, the poet may be referring to the fact that he got 'ahead of himself' while writing this collection, whose final poem has puzzled most critics.

of the casuistry

by which pianists and painters and poets are proof
that all's not rotten in the state:
amid the cheers and the cries of 'Bravo'
I hear the howls of seven dead

at a crossroads between Omagh and long Cookstown.
The 'trivial' happens where 'three roads' meet.
Does Saint Augustine

'trivialise' the sack of Rome? (*PQ* 35)

The use of quotation marks around 'trivialise' is another authorial device used to draw the critics' (and readers') attention towards the fact that *The Prince of the Quotidian* hinges on what belongs to the quotidian *and* the tragic:

> the sudden irruption into the poem of Northern Irish violence is followed immediately by an etymological explanation of 'trivial', one which hints at the ominous overtones of a place where 'three roads meet' (it was in such a location, for example, that Oedipus murdered Laius, not knowing him to be his father—an apparently random incident which proved to be part of a larger design). Saint Augustine's ability to 'trivialise' the sack of Rome (by Alaric in 410) issues in *The City of God*, a text which was to be profoundly influential in the Middle Ages, and which itself, arguably, enacts its own Christian 'sack' of the classical world; here again, the 'trivial' is made complex and difficult as an idea, for it bears traces of both the contingent and the designed: an accident is something over and above an accident, and details are something other than random. (McDonald, *Mistaken Identities* 155)

In the above-quoted poem, the speaker is torn between two planes of reality as he is projected from his comfortable seat in the concert hall into the reality of the conflict in the North: the sonorous analogy between the public applause and the victims' cries allows the tragic news to surface.[420] It is as if the blast had travelled

[420] As Muldoon was writing these poems, several major and traumatic events took place in Northern Ireland. On 3 January 1992, two civilians were shot dead in Muldoon's childhood village, the Moy. Furthermore, 17 January would later be remembered as the Teebane bombing when a land mine, planted by the Irish Republican Army, killed eight Protestant construction workers who had been travelling in a minibus past Teebane crossroads, and seriously wounded six others. This attack involved the worst death toll in Northern Ireland since the explosion of an IRA bomb in Enniskillen in November 1987 (Schmidt n. pag.). If Muldoon did indeed write a poem a day and if the poems were published in chronological order, then the above-quoted poem (the 25th in the collection) was written on 25 January, eight days after the Teebane bombing. As a result, there is a collision between the image of the concert Muldoon is listening to on 25 January ('Barry Douglas playing Rachmaninov') and the news that reaches him of the Teebane bombing, which

all the way across the Atlantic. Time is momentarily suspended, the howls of the dead put an end to the linearity of the time sequence, and the accent is placed on the *kaïros*: this contingent and yet fateful moment when the victims reached this precise location ('where "three roads meet"') at the exact time of the explosion. The term 'trivial' therefore carries more ominous significations and indicates that the poet *is* in touch with reality: the 'trivial' refers both to the poet's daily activities (they are banal, insignificant) *and* to the atrocities in Northern Ireland, particularly those that happened at the Teebane crossroads (these events are related, this time, to the origins of the term trivial—the meeting of three roads).

In 'Incantata' and *The Prince of the Quotidian*, the authorial voice justifies the poet's poetic practice and enters into dialogue with the critics. In Muldoon's 'January Journal', this defence is coupled with directions that enable the readers/critics to uncover more meaning. In fact, although *The Prince of the Quotidian* involves neither the elegiac impulse nor the autobiographical depth of *The Annals of Chile*, published the same year, the author's emphasis on the word 'trivial' illustrates a different way of recording one's personal experience through the encounter of the quotidian and the tragic. These authorial commentaries contribute, this time, to assessing the personal dimension of the volume.

'By indirections find directions out': Muldoon in Dialogue with his Readers[421]

*

There are instances of authorial comments in Muldoon's work that help the reader interpret the poems and assess the autobiographical or autofictional nature of the poem/collection. Nonetheless, his directions are more often

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happened a week before. The daily activities of the authorial character in America are therefore mingled with the atrocities of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

[421] Muldoon once said that his 'favourite line in Shakespeare is spoken by Polonius—"by indirections find directions out"—and might easily be [his] motto' (qtd. in Randolph 183).

*mis*directions meant to disorient the reader and complicate the assessment of the poems:

> If I were feeling much friskier than I am today I might steer you in the direction of a synonym for [...] The synonym I'm thinking of is [...] But I'm not feeling frisky today, so I won't bother. I will bother to guide, and goad, you in the direction of the guide with his goad. (Muldoon, *EP* 69)[422]

The repetition of the term 'bother' is a way for Muldoon to point to the importance of this term and its lesser known significations (as he did with 'trivial'). An obsolete meaning of the verb 'bother' is, as a matter of fact, synonymous with 'to confuse, to muddle' ('Bother').[423] Just like Frost's, Muldoon's work is characterised by a 'mischievous, sly, multi-layered quality under the surface' (Muldoon, qtd. in Haffenden 134): in numerous poems, the poet seems to steer us in the right direction when, in fact, he is either misleading us or entangling the meaning of the poem even further. Some of the poet's authorial commentaries, for example, spread doubts in the reader's mind by simultaneously limiting *and* expanding the sphere of interpretation, therefore complicating the reading process.[424] There are two main types of misleading auto-commentaries: parenthetical clauses and errata.

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[422] Muldoon is here commenting on Frost's 'The Mountain' in his Oxford Lectures.

[423] Furthermore, although the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for 'to bother' states that the etymology of this verb is unknown, 'the earliest instances occur in the writings of Irishmen (T. Sheridan, Swift, Sterne), and the word has long formed part of the vocabulary of the *comic* Irishman of fiction and *the stage*' ('Bother', my emphasis). There is, therefore, an interesting parallel between my interpretation of Muldoon's use of this verb in *The End of the Poem* and the earliest uses of this word.

[424] This analysis focuses on authorial asides that are meant to mislead the reader. It is important to note that there are other types of auto-commentaries such as those highlighting the fake dimension of the story narrated. This is the case in 'Bechbretha': '(and half-remembering how those hives are fake)' (*MB* 18). This authorial intrusion is used not simply for the sake of creating the effect of direct communication with the reader, but also to draw the reader's attention towards what lies below the surface of the poem. Not only are the hives *fake*, but so are the bees disrupting the political gathering. The reader is, therefore, invited to look further into the signification of these bees. According to Barbara Buchanan, the swarm of bees may refer to the Troubles or 'the unruly natives' (318). Alternatively, we could claim that the word 'bees' stands for the *B* Specials with the swarm's 'roll[ing] all its thingamy / into one *ball*' referring to a bullet, accentuating the connections between the bees and this armed police force. While the authorial commentaries in

> Milady's shoulder (not Milady Clark, who helped the U.D.A.
> run a shipment of Aramis
> into Kilkeel
>
> but Milady *Clarik*, whose great-great-grandfather led the I.R.B.
> invasion of Canada, the one who helped foil
> the plot in which the courier
>
> was none other than herself, her) ('Yarrow' *AC* 85)

This long parenthetical authorial commentary, which interrupts the narrative momentum in 'Yarrow', seems, on first reading, to be intended to guide the reader. The author uses the negative particle 'not', which limits the number of 'possible readings':

> the writer should be alert to all these possible readings. And alert to the curtailing of possible readings that are not productive. [...] It's about opening himself, or herself to the floodgates, what it's about is discovering the extent of limits, the confinement, the controlling of readings, of possible readings. (Muldoon, qtd. in Wills, 'The Lie of the Land' 124-25)[425]

Muldoon's intention to 'curtail' the list of possible readings encourages rather than resolves ambiguity. The name of this fictional female figure could refer to another undercover agent (neither Republican nor Unionist) since it also evokes a well-known fictional secret agent: Cardinal Richelieu's alluring spy in Alexandre Dumas's novel *The Three Musketeers* (1844). In fact, even if the poet dwells at length on the difference between the two Milady figures who are both related to the Northern Irish sectarian conflict, he also 'throws in' the name of one of Dumas's musketeers, 'Aramis', in the first stanza. Consequently, even if the authorial figure narrows down the possible interpretations to one identity (Milady Clarik), the fact that he refers in passing to one of Dumas's characters necessarily

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The Prince of the Quotidian emphasise the *personal* dimension of the volume, this metafictional extract from 'Bechbretha' highlights the *fictional* nature of the event described.

[425] Muldoon also said: 'The point to which I've been getting round is that it's the poet's job to take into account, as best he or she is able, all possible readings of the poem' ('Getting Round' 120).

encourages the reader to continue exploring the list of homonyms for 'Milady' and/or 'Clar(i)k', leading to countless interpretative possibilities.[426] This multidimensional name is an instance of 'plurisignification' (Hutcheon xiii) that tends to confuse the reader since it complicates more than it actually untangles the meaning of the narrative. It also sheds doubt on the plausibility of the narrative because it is unclear whether this female character is drawn from history or fiction. This metafictional comment questions, once again, the personal dimension of this passage.

This strategy of simultaneously limiting and widening the scope of interpretation is also central to Muldoon's lists of corrections in poems such as 'Errata' and 'The Bangle (Slight Return)' both published in *Hay*:[427]

> For 'mother' read 'other'.
> [...]
> For 'feather' read 'father'.
> [...]
> For 'Jane' read 'Jean' ('Errata' 88)

This other type of authorial commentary similarly asserts the author's presence in the text and his control over its reception. These corrections read as an index that the reader has to abide by when reading the poems. Once again, however, these directions actually promote a multiplicity of possible interpretations. Do these corrections apply to the entire collection? If so, given that some of these errata are mentioned half-way through a collection ('Errata') or delayed until the end of a

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[426] It is interesting to note that even Dumas's spy goes by *several* names and is, therefore, emblematic of the multiplicity of identities. Among her numerous aliases we may list: Milady Clarik, Lady de Winter, Baroness of Sheffield, and Anne de Breuil, wife of musketeer Athos (whose name is itself a pseudonym for Comte de la Fère).

[427] This is another interesting parallel between Bishop's and Muldoon's writing practices. In *The End of the Poem*, Muldoon argues that '12 O'Clock News' is 'a wonderful instance [...] of Bishop's trademark tendency towards the corrective phrase "—rather, to have been—", particularly when it's mimetic, once again, of the activity it describes, that of "correction" by "erasure"' (98-99). This 'sense of Bishop's poems being made up of erasure upon erasure' (99) is also central to Muldoon's lists of errata in *Hay*.

collection ('The Bangle (Slight Return)'), they have retrospective repercussions on the poem and, moreover, on the entire collection. If we were to revisit previous poems, then their autobiographical dimension would also have to be re-examined because some of these errata relate to Muldoon's relatives. The presence or absence of these names necessarily impacts on the generic appreciation of the poem. If 'Jane' is, in fact, 'Jean', then how can the reader ever be sure of the referential dimension of the poems? Are we, for example, also asked to read 'Jean' instead of '*Janet*' in 'The Little Black Book' also collected in *Hay*? Should we also read 'Milady Clark' instead of 'Milady Clarik'? Or is this just another strategy to blur our reading of the text? Although Muldoon seems to help the reader by limiting the number of interpretations ('not X, but Y'), these corrections may also be part of his numerous tricks so that the negated alternative interpretation ('not X') may be the valid one: the line 'For "errata"', Virgil *smiled*, 'read "corrigenda"' (140, my emphasis) seems to indicate that these corrections should not always be taken at face value.[428]

Engler argues that in 'self-consciously displaying the fictional nature of all representations of reality, metafictionists [point] out that our knowledge of the world is always mediated through language' (n. pag.). Given that most of the time Muldoon's errata fail to make any sense ('For "Wooroonooran", my darlings, read "Wirra Wirra"', *H* 140), we could argue that these corrections emphasise the arbitrariness of the linguistic system. Since all of these authorial comments (parenthetical clauses and errata) are primarily a way for Muldoon to play with the multiplicity of readings and show that it is impossible to impose a single

[428] In fact, in 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', behind Virgil's smile and 'wink' hides a playful authorial figure who is undoubtedly addressing his readers ('my darlings'), whose trust is put to the test: 'For "lass" read "less". / Time nor tide wait for a wink / from the aura / / of Ailsa Craig. For "Menalaus" read "Menelaus". / For "dinkum" read "dink". / For "Wooroonooran", my darlings, read "Wirra Wirra"' (140). This form of address ('my darlings') contributes to Muldoon's role as a playful authorial figure who engages in an exchange with his reader that sometimes necessarily involves *seducing* the reader in order to secure his or her trust.

interpretation on a text, they emphasise the postmodern dimension of the poet's work. More generally, Part 5.2 has highlighted both the impact of authorial intrusions on the reader's assessment of the poems and the playfulness and mischievousness of Muldoon's authorial metalepses. His multiple *personnages d'auteur* and authorial comments (which are most visible in these autofictional poems) emphasise the extent to which the poet interacts with (and plays tricks on) his reader across his entire work. These intrusive strategies, which are central to the autofictional poems analysed previously, are, therefore, important to reading Muldoon's work in general. These metafictional tropes are characteristic of a particular type of intrusive author who also challenges the reader and puts his or her trust to the test: the *storyteller*. While Part 5.2 analysed the different forms of authorial intrusions across a number of poems, Part 5.3 focuses specifically on one type of authorial intrusion: the poet as a tall tale narrator. The following analyses continue the in-depth analysis of Muldoon's mischievous authorial intrusions and argue that his poetic tall tales are emblematic of the author/reader relationship in his broader work.

5.3. The Tall Tale Narrator

> The qualities that characterized those early volumes [*New Weather*, *Mules*] have remained his hallmark: a lively storyteller's wit combined with a crypticism that fascinates rather than defeats the reader.
>
> (O'Donoghue, qtd. in Chevalier 685)

> Seamus Heaney has described reading Muldoon's poetry as akin to being faced with two informants, one who always tells the truth and one who always lies; 'the problem is to formulate the question which will elicit an answer from either one that can be reliably decoded'. This aptly conveys the untrustworthiness of Muldoon's first-person voice, which lures the reader with the promise of autobiographical confidences, but ultimately evades, misleads and obscures.
>
> (Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 209)

The logic puzzle put forth by Heaney highlights the fact that Muldoon's mischievousness is twofold: it keeps mesmerizing and bewildering the reader but it also breeds doubts over the writer's true intentions and his sincerity. In fact, as illustrated by the errata, Muldoon often plays with the truth so that it becomes difficult for the reader to know whether or not the intrusive extradiegetic author is reliable. This two-faced informant could therefore be called a *trickster* figure since Muldoon plays tricks on the ever-doubting, aporetic reader.[429] Furthermore, the Trickster often plays an important role in the American tales Muldoon is so

[429] 'The Winnebago word for trickster is *wadjunkaga*', which could translate as '*the tricky one*' (Radin 132). The Trickster is 'an archaic *speculum mentis*' (x), which translates, literally, as 'mirror of the mind', and is related to the creature's constant tricks. The specular author, Muldoon, could well be called the *speculum mentis* of contemporary Irish poetry. There are, in fact, similarities between the poet and the Trickster. For instance, just as the trickster moves in and out of worlds, Muldoon's poetic personae move between the real and the surreal worlds (Part 4.3), and the author himself often moves in and out of his text (Part 5.2). Several critics have called Muldoon a trickster figure, such as Kerrigan (*Archipelagic English* 63), Okuda (36), and Wills: 'If *Quoof* evidenced a turn to narrative as a possible way out of entrapment, metamorphosis as a means of escape, that narrative turn is brought to a halt in Paul Muldoon's next book. In representing the poet as a Trickster figure, transforming himself as a pragmatic means of evasion, Muldoon's interest was in metamorphosis as a way of moving the narrative on, having more alternatives, having a place to go without necessarily having a direction' (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 111).

fond of, as evidenced in his epic poem 'The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants', which freely draws on the Winnebago trickster cycle.

Part 5.3 provides a brief introduction to the American and Irish storytelling traditions before turning to the similarities between Muldoon's poetic practice and the tall tale artistry: the communicative aspect, the cooperative principle, and the suspension of disbelief. This discussion of Muldoon's various storytelling tropes also exemplifies their impact on the assessment of the poems and the poet's *interaction with the reader*, which is characteristic of Muldoon's poetry in general. Moreover, it places the emphasis even more strongly on the mischievous and deceitful dimension of the poet's authorial strategies.

Irish Storytelling and the Tall Tale

> Heard a piece of Roscommon folklore the other night. At some village or other, they lay pipes full of tobacco on the graves of the new burried [*sic*] in case they may like a draw of the pipe. A wild American Indian kind of business it seems.
>
> Letter from W. B. Yeats to Douglas Hyde, October 1889.
> ('One Last Draw of the Pipe' *MSG* 21)

The 'art of storytelling in Ireland goes back over a thousand years' (Kiberd, *The Irish Writer* 44) and has had a profound impact on Irish writers:[430]

> I'm still very conscious of coming from a society where storytelling was much prized and praised. I was reminded the other day that the Celts had a god of eloquence by the name of Ogmios. Ogmios was still lurking in the back of the minds of my neighbors. They loved poems, songs, good stories. And still do. (Muldoon, qtd. in Wilson, James n. pag.)[431]

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[430] See Declan Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005). Carson, for instance, re-enacts some of those Irish traditions and myths, and celebrates Irish traditional music in his prose works such as *The Star Factory* (1997) and *Last Night's Fun* (1996).

[431] Muldoon also remembers various tales from his childhood involving mysterious remedies and divination: 'My uncle-in law, Dinny McCool, besides having a cure for ringworm, was a water-diviner. So Dinny McCool pointed us in the direction of water, and they started to sink a well. It was as if the house was some kind of adjunct or annexe or afterthought to the well. That the well

Muldoon also evokes the Irish storytelling tradition in his poetry, such as in his early poem 'Seanchas':

> [...] For the past hour
> We heard the seanchai relearn
> What he has always known,
>
> Region of heroes, gentle maidens,
> Giants that war and landgrab.
> Each phrase opening like a fern.
> Till some make fists of themselves, like the stones
> In a landslide, a cadence
> That comes in his way. (*NW* 25)

Traditional Irish storytellers were important figures in Ireland (especially in the Gaeltacht and in rural areas), and, depending on the nature of the tales narrated, were either called '*sgéalaí*' or '*seanchaí*' (Kiberd, *The Irish Writer* 47). In *The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story*, Angela Bourke explains, on various occasions, that one should, however, be careful in assuming too readily that the audience was credulous since the notion of belief could mean a wide variety of things for the people who listened to these tales.

This is also the case in the American storytelling tradition, which presents unbelievable events narrated to an audience in a public manner. Several poems written by Muldoon evidence a real interest in American tall tales that are intimately related to the lore of the American frontier:[432] they are spun around

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had some kind of priority. That sounds fanciful, but it's how I felt about it' ('A Tight Wee Place' 19). Furthermore, 'Muldoon recalls [in 'A Tight Wee Place in Armagh'] that he always felt the house was somehow an "afterthought to the well". But when the mains water supply eventually reached the house, the well became defunct; it was boarded over and bricked up "like the door of a room where someone had claimed to have seen a ghost"' (Muldoon, qtd. in Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 11). This comment is interestingly evocative of 'The Big House', which draws on a mystery involving the ghost of an 'elder brother' and includes an 'old boarded-up door' that has been 'flung open'.

[432] Carolyn Brown explains that the 'flush times of the American literary tall tale fit roughly into the period of 1831 to 1860. [...] Just as it was settling into a respectable genre—like a frontier becoming civilized—the literary tall tale was disrupted by civil war' (3). Among the most well-known literary tall tale writers one cannot but mention Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* (1883). On

the extraordinary deeds of larger-than-life heroes (either fictional or based on real people), they are often characterised by repetitions and simple syntax, and are very entertaining due to the storyteller's exaggerations and wit.[433] Furthermore, when tales are performed in front of the public, this oral form of recreation creates a strong interaction between the storyteller and his or her audience.[434] All of these characteristics inherent to the tall trade tradition find an echo in Muldoon's poetic practice, particularly the *interaction between poet and reader*. I therefore believe that there is an interesting parallel to be made between Muldoon's storytelling artistry and American tall tales, a parallel that has, to my knowledge, received little or no sustained analysis. The following analyses cover metafictional tropes used by the poet that are specifically related to the tall tale. They all create a strong interaction with the reader and complicate the autobiographical or autofictional assessment of these tales.

Muldoon's interest in Native American stories, see John Goodby, 'Hermeneutic Hermeticism: Paul Muldoon and the Northern Irish Poetic', *In Black and Gold: Contiguous Traditions in Post-War British and Irish Poetry*, ed. C. C. Barfoot (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 137-168; Catherine McCracken, 'Two Streams Flowing Together: Paul Muldoon's Inscription of Native America', *Paul Muldoon: Poetry, Prose, Drama. A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2006), 49-70; and Andrew Fox, 'Transnational Displacement: "Native American Material" in Paul Muldoon's *New Weather*', *New Hibernia Review* 17:4 (Winter 2013), 55-73.

433 Some of Muldoon's poems are peopled with tall tale characters such as Davy Crockett and Mike Fink in 'Yarrow'. The surreal description of animals is also central to tall tales and to Muldoon's poetry (from the talking rabbit figure in 'The Coney' to the talking horses in *The Prince of the Quotidian* and 'Gathering Mushrooms'). The vivid naming of certain characters, such as 'Redpath' and 'Mr See-You-Later' in 'Immram' (*WBL* 44), is another tall tale feature.

434 I am here referring to tales told by *speech* rather than in writing (*literary* tall tales).

Poetry in Performance

> Every narrative was, strictly speaking, a drama where as much depended upon the acting of the raconteurs as upon the actual narration.
>
> (Radin 123)

Since the term 'storytelling' is not so much about the story in itself but the *process* of telling the story, this analysis focuses on the delivery of poetry and the performative dimension of some of Muldoon's poems. The oral dimension of poetry (whether it is read aloud or not) contributes to creating a climate of confidence by simulating an exchange between author and reader, enabling the poet to manipulate his audience/readers.

The notion of poetic performance goes back to the origins of poetry and plays an important role in Muldoon's public readings, during which he enjoys interacting with his audience.[435] Some poems lend themselves more easily to a comparison with the storytelling process; this is the case, for instance, with 'Symposium' and 'The Loaf'. When reading these poems, Muldoon visually interacts with his audience (or interlocutor) by pausing as if he were telling us a story or by 'winking' at us to generate laughter. In 'The Loaf', for instance, the audience is entertained by variations on the refrain, which is 'on the borderline, as so many refrains are, between sense and nonsense' (Muldoon, qtd. in Marantz n. pag.). Moreover, not only does this refrain entertain the public, but it also encourages the listeners to participate. After hearing the first two variations

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[435] Glassie emphasises the parallels between poetry, the spoken narrative, and Native American tales in *Passing the Time*: 'Recently noting similarities between spoken narrative and modern verse [...], we have begun to think of them as poetry. [...] Some American Indian people do order their narratives into lines and stanzas, and setting any tale out on paper as though it were verse assaults the reader's complacency by forcing the story's words into visibility. [...] As a poet will read against meter and rhyme, tellers will sometimes repeat the first words of sentences, streamline their grammar, form parallel constructions, then hurry the "lines" together without beat or shots of silence' (39-40).

(*'with a pink and a pink and a pinkie-pick'*; *'with a clink and a clink and a clinky-click'*), even someone who has never heard this poem before can guess the ending of each further variation (*'with a stink and a stink and a stinky-stick'*; *'with a wink and a wink and a winkie-wick'*) (*MSG* 47). This device is central to tall tales:

> 'For a work of art to be effective', says Roger Abrahams, 'it must not only communicate with an audience, but it must also excite its participation. [...] The idea that lies behind a performance is a remarkably simple one: to set up rhythms and expectancies which will permit—indeed, insists upon—a synchronised audience reaction. (Brown, Carolyn 31)[436]

In this rhythmic refrain, Muldoon both 'communicate[s] with [his] audience' and 'excite[s] its participation' in an often deadpan pose, which is characteristic of the folktale narrator (Brown, Carolyn 28). Although the reader's engagement is facilitated through the use of a refrain, his or her deduction skills are also involved when poems echo one another.[437] These more visible instances of engagement with the reader ('The Loaf' and 'Symposium') are, therefore, central to reading Muldoon's work in general and are not limited to poetic tall tales. In an interview, Muldoon acknowledged this important dimension involving participation *and* manipulation in poetry readings:

> You see, poetry reading is such a manipulative thing. I can make—this sounds like a terrible thing to say—you can make anything happen that you want to happen. It's no accident that you can make people laugh, and that of course is one of the great risks in it, because it's one of the few things where you can get some visible, audible response. [...] it is a social occasion, people are there to be entertained, there's a strange contract between the writer and the audience. (qtd. in Noble n. pag.)

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[436] Brown is here quoting Roger Abrahams's 'Folklore and Literature as Performance', *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 9 (1972), 78.

[437] This was the case, for instance, in Part 5.2 with 'The Bangle (Slight Return)' and 'Symposium' that share the line 'to have your cake'.

This comment is particularly interesting because it confirms that Muldoon is conscious of his role as entertainer and that there is a 'contract' between himself and his audience, which I later discuss in my analysis of the cooperative principle.

This 'manipulative' dimension of the poetry reading is more effective in such a 'social occasion'. Nonetheless, the effect of direct communication is also achieved when one reads these poems at home. Muldoon uses diverse ways to enhance the communicative dimension of his poems so that the storytelling effect is similarly achieved when reading the poems. This is the case in 'Immram', in which Muldoon applies some of the metafictional tropes and techniques of storytelling. Throughout the poem, the extradiegetic poet uses the voice of the diegetic speaker to create the illusion that he is in conversation with his reader. For example, just like a storyteller, he sometimes apologises for the lengthy parts or detours in his narrative—'I suppose that I should have called the cops / Or called it a day and gone home / And done myself, and you, a favour' (*WBL* 38)—or, he pretends that he is directly addressing the reader: 'His name? I already told you his name' (45); 'What can I tell you?' ('Rune' *H* 96). In 'Ma', the poet even imagines what the reader would say:

> [...] the stranger on the motor-bike.
> Not my father, no. This one's all crew-cut
> And polished brass buttons.
> An American soldier, perhaps. (*M* 23)

Wills argues that, in this poem, the 'conversational tone of the octet is accentuated by using seemingly redundant colloquial phrases which suggest we are being given the poet's thoughts as he thinks them ("I take that to be", "no doubt", "not my father, no", "perhaps"), and reinforced by the very marked enjambment' (*Reading Paul Muldoon* 52). In fact, the 'conversational tone'

strengthens this proximity between poet and reader and emulates the process of *telling* stories. This is the case, in particular, when the poet uses words with a conative function mimicking direct speech such as 'or, hold on' in 'Yarrow' (*AC* 49), or the '—you'll like this—' in 'Unapproved Road' (*MSG* 5).[438] As these examples show, Muldoon uses various linguistic devices in order to simulate an interaction between poet and reader so as to reproduce the oral interaction of storytelling, creating an effect of authenticity. By doing so, the poet also wins the reader's trust since this conversational tone establishes a climate of confidence. In the previous chapters, I explained how Muldoon's relationship with his reader is characterised by 'distance and proximity, indiscretion and participation, extraneity and complicity' (Sermet 81).[439] In the following analyses on the 'cooperative principle' and the 'suspension of disbelief', I further explore this complex relationship by turning to the impact of metafictional devices and storytelling on the interaction between author and reader.

The Cooperative Principle

H. P. Grice's 'cooperative principle' is 'a form of tacit agreement among speakers who, in the interest of effective communication, consent to restrict their discourse to the area mutually covered by the linguistic repertoires of the participants

[438] All of these examples of conversational tone and conative words are very similar both to the tall tale and the Russian oral form of narrative called 'skaz': '*Skaz* is a rather appealing Russian word (suggesting "jazz" and "scat", as in "scat-singing", to the English ear) used to designate a type of first-person narration that has the characteristics of the spoken rather than the written word. In this kind of novel or story, the narrator is a character who refers to himself (or herself) as "I", and addresses the reader as "you". He or she uses vocabulary and syntax characteristic of colloquial speech, and appears to be relating the story spontaneously rather than delivering a carefully constructed and polished written account. We don't so much read it as listen to it, as to a talkative stranger encountered in a pub or a railway carriage. Needless to say, this is an illusion, the product of much calculated effort and painstaking rewriting by the "real" author. A narrative style that faithfully imitated actual speech would be virtually unintelligible, as are transcripts of recorded conversations. But it is an illusion that can create a powerful effect of authenticity and sincerity, of truth-telling' (Lodge 18). David Lodge argues that in American literature the 'crucial impetus was given by Mark Twain'. There is, therefore, a strong link between the tall tale and skaz.

[439] Sermet's comment applies to all author-reader relationships.

engaged in conversation' (Wonham 23). The importance of shared references and linguistic repertoires was pointed out by Muldoon in an interview with Ingersoll and Rubin. When Ingersoll asked the poet who his readers were, Muldoon answered that, while he does not have a particular audience in mind, he knows that one of his responsibilities is to ensure that his readers relate to the language he uses:

> The first thing to be said about [my readers] is that there are usually very few. At some level, I obviously know that some of them live in Britain and Ireland, and that there are some in this country too. I mean, just to answer your question in a banal way, I do know for the most part that both groups will understand pretty much most of what I write in terms of those allusions, those references, the language I use, or if they don't, they have the opportunity to look up a few words. [...] One's constantly trying to make decisions and judgments like 'Can I really write "Saran Wrap" in this poem? What are the problems that are going to arise with that? My English readers are not going to get it. Is that going to be a problem?'. At some level, one should be thinking all those things. But really one would go mad if one were to think through the ramifications of every word. I mean, they have to be thought through; that's part of the writer's job, to make sense of the possible ways in which each of these words will be read. (n. pag.)

The last line supports the idea that the choice of specific words is another form of authorial control over the interpretation of the text.

Muldoon puts this principle into practice during poetry readings. Since his readers may not all share the same linguistic repertoires, he sometimes explains references before reading his poems as a way to make his audience feel included:

> something springs to mind about one of those poems I read last night, a poem called 'Footling' about the birth of my daughter by Caesarean section. In the poem I used the brand name Saran Wrap, which of course doesn't feature in Irish and English supermarkets—Cling Film, or its equivalent—so there's occasionally an allusion like that *that has to be clarified.* I think probably the context would clarify it. [...] one uses slightly different vocabulary in each country and so that's obviously going to *affect the way that one writes.* (Ingersoll and Rubin n. pag., my emphasis)

Although Muldoon does not engage in storytelling in 'Footling', this comment emphasises the importance of his audience's linguistic repertoire and the way it

affects both the poet's writing and delivery of poetry. The short tall tale 'The Waking Father' is a good illustration of the cooperative principle:

> My father and I are catching spricklies
> Out of the Oona river.
> They have us feeling righteous,
> The way we have thrown them back.
> Our benevolence is astounding. (*NW* 10)

Like a tall tale *raconteur*, Muldoon chooses a local Irish landscape to anchor his tale (the 'Oona river') and uses a colloquial term ('spricklies') to refer to the fish: the 'poem is made more intimate and "real" by the use of the colloquial word "spricklies" for minnows' (Mahony 94). In fact, given that this poem was published in one of Muldoon's earliest collections, his readership would have been mostly Irish and would have known this shibboleth. Furthermore, by using a colloquial word, the parochial dimension of the poem is strengthened; the spricklies confirm the local Irish setting. Nonetheless, while this word emphasises the pseudo autobiographical dimension in the first half of the poem, it also complicates the reader's assessment since the final lines of the poem indicate that the poem is not a straightforward personal piece, but an autofictional one (as discussed in Part 4.4). The surrealism of the final lines offsets the plausible autobiographical possibility of the opening lines: the tall tale narrator anchors his narrative in a local and convincing setting but later metamorphoses this seemingly real landscape into an imaginary one. Although the extradiegetic author is not directly intervening in the text (via a *personnage d'auteur* or auto-commentaries), the authorial choice of a specific shibboleth that belongs to the author and readers' shared linguistic repertoire, like metafictional tropes, is another device that impacts on the readers' interpretation of the poems. This ambiguity regarding the autobiographical or autofictional nature of the poems

often calls for what Coleridge calls the 'suspension of disbelief', corresponding to the reader's willingness to let go of any suspicion regarding the truthfulness or untruthfulness of the story.

The Suspension of Disbelief

> The entire population of Ireland
> springs from a pair left to stand
> overnight in a pond
> in the gardens of Trinity College,
> two bottles of wine left there to chill
> after the Act of Union.
> ('The Frog' *Q* 29)

Like many tall tales or folk/legendary tales, 'The Waking Father' is about a piscatorial event, which often lies at the core of tall tales: '[t]he marvellous accomplishments of hunters and fishermen, or the spectacular deeds of creatures themselves are extremely numerous in variant details in the tall tales' (Loomis 121).[440] Muldoon would have been familiar with the well-known Irish story 'The Salmon of Knowledge' and may be transforming a (perhaps historically accurate) fishing trip into his own piscatorial tall tale:

> When my father stood out in the shallows
> It occurred to me that
> The spricklies might have been piranhas,
> The river a red carpet
> Rolling out from where he had just stood (*NW* 10)

This surreal metamorphosis, characteristic of many tall tales, calls for the reader's suspension of disbelief. We must forget about the implausibility of the narrative

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[440] For examples of piscatorial tales, see C. Grant Loomis, 'The American Tall Tale and the Miraculous', *California Folklore Quarterly* 4:2 (Apr. 1945), 122. We could also mention examples from popular culture such as Tim Burton's fantasy adventure film *Big Fish* (2003), based on Daniel Wallace's novel of the same name, which is centred on a tall tale narrating the catching of an enormous fish. Incidentally, there is a strong relationship between father and son in the film and in 'The Waking Father'.

in order to immerse ourselves in this surreal tale. Furthermore, the metafictional line—'No one would question'—in the final stanza, is also a storytelling device that encourages the readers/audience to continue suspending judgment regarding the implausibility of the story:

> No one would question
> That he had treasures or his being a king,
> Telling now of the real fish farther down.

In fact, this final stanza is indented, as if suggesting that the last lines should read as a theatrical 'aside' addressed by the intrusive extradiegetic author to the readers/audience.

This poem therefore presents several characteristics of the tall tale, among which, the cooperative principle and the suspension of disbelief. The latter enables the extradiegetic author to enthral his readers so that they rise to the *bait*: as suggested by Christina Hunt Mahony, if 'spricklie' is the word used to refer to a 'minnow' then it not only refers to a small type of fish ('Minnow', def. 1a), but it is also an artificial *bait* 'imitating a small fish' (def. 2b). Moreover, 'minnow-fisher' is also used in American English to refer to the 'green heron', a bird with which Muldoon associates himself in 'Yarrow'.[441] Since this poem is a piscatorial tale, we could argue that the reader of this tall tale is the poet's bait: even though there is the idea of a close-knit audience through the use of the term 'spricklies', this shibboleth is also a lure stretching the reader's credulity. The 'real' fish is somewhere else, 'farther down'.

This analysis of the poet as a tall tale narrator has shown that the extradiegetic author controls the reception and assessment of the poems by engaging the

[441] 'I myself flap like a little green heron' (*AC* 50).

reader's participation via a number of metafictional performative tropes, by choosing specific shibboleths that create a climate of confidence, and by encouraging the reader's suspension of disbelief. All of these storytelling devices exemplify the strong interaction between Muldoon and his readers and the fact that the poet is often a manipulative and unreliable intrusive author: as argued by the poet himself, '[w]e mustn't take anything at face value, not even the man who is presenting things at face value' (qtd. in Haffenden 135).

5.4. Conclusion

Muldoon has often described the balance he tries to strike when writing poetry between the serendipitous and the designed, between the unknowing and the knowing. Nonetheless, regardless of what Barthes claimed, Muldoon does assert that the author is very much present in the text:

> On one hand I'm arguing for the supremacy of 'unknowing', for the Keatsian model of poet as conduit, channel, the 'belly' from which a poem is ventriloquised [...]. On the other I'm arguing for the almost total 'knowing' of Robert Frost [...]. Let the theorists get over themselves. Let Barthes claim that there is no 'father-author'. Let Derrida proclaim against 'phallologocentrism'. Let them try to get round the ungetroundable fact that the poet is the first-person to read or, more importantly, to be read by, the poem. ('Getting Round' 120)

Muldoon is both writer and reader, both outside and inside his own text, thanks to the multiple metafictional tropes analysed in this chapter: *personnages d'auteur*, narrative self-reflexivity, and storytelling devices. As seen in this chapter, the poet is sometimes on the set or stage controlling the performance (*personnages d'auteur* and storytelling tropes) and, at other times, he is slyly

nipping through the 'bathroom window',[442] leaving his readers clueless (errata). The most important example of this image is without a doubt the enigmatic poem 'Rune': 'to follow that lure / will almost certainly end in failure'. The multi-layered term 'lure'—which is almost an anagram for 'rune'—is a bait used to catch the reader's attention: the poet is gently leading the readers on in the first line ('What can I tell you?') and then 'leaving them high and dry' in the final line ('Go figure').

Furthermore, the poems analysed in this chapter are strategically positioned either at the beginning or at the end of the collection, allowing for the author's *entrance* in or *departure* from the poem and, therefore, from the collection: the white page before the first poem and after the final one represents this liminal threshold, this 'bathroom window'. Among the poems discussed in this final chapter and in which the extradiegetic author makes his entrance in the text, some are in fact the opening poems of the collection. This is the case with 'Lunch with Pancho Villa' in *Mules*[443] and 'The Key' in *Madoc: A Mystery*. As explained previously, in the former, the author impersonates multiple figures; in the latter, the speaker stands in for the extradiegetic author. In these two opening poems, the intrusive author's entrance in the text also marks his entrance *in the volume*. In contrast, other autofictional poems are strategically placed at the very end of the collection, symbolically marking the author's departure from both the final poem and the collection: *Why Brownlee Left* concludes with 'Immram', which is both a fantastic autofiction (Part 4.3) and a tall tale characterised by narrative self-reflexivity and a multitude of *personnages d'auteur* (Part 5.2); *Meeting the British* concludes with the 'wholly ventriloquized poem' (Cliff 614) '7, Middagh Street'; *The Annals of Chile* concludes with 'Yarrow', in which the

[442] For the full reference, see the first epigraph to Chapter Five.
[443] Although 'Armageddon, Armageddon' was not discussed in this chapter, it is 'a reply to Pancho Villa' (Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* 56) and concludes the volume. This mirror-patterned collection marks both the entrance of Muldoon in the volume ('Lunch with Pancho Villa') and his departure from it ('Armageddon, Armageddon').

authorial voice sometimes corrects the 1963 'I' (Part 2.4); and *Hay* concludes with 'The Bangle (Slight Return)', at the core of which Muldoon's family name is even inscribed (Part 5.2). The 1998 volume is particularly interesting because not only does it conclude with the extradiegetic author's address to his 'darlings' (*i.e.* readers), but it opens with 'The Mudroom', which, as discussed in Part 4.3, is characterised by the diegetic speaker's crossing of an other liminal threshold: the veil of the *féth fiáda*. As a result, all of these poems emphasise the presence of a variety of thresholds analysed throughout this thesis, particularly the extradiegetic/diegetic (Chapter Five), the real world/otherworld (Chapter Four), but also the text/peritext (Chapter One), since the opening and final poems are respectively preceded by the collection's publication information, contents, acknowledgements, and title; and followed by the back cover editorial blurb.[444]

Muldoon has explained that the ordering of poems is partly a process of discovery;[445] nonetheless, he does acknowledge, paradoxically, that the arrangement of the poems remains an authorial choice. When James Wilson asked him if the composition of his books was 'deliberate', the poet answered:

> Oh yes, I think a book should be a piece of engineering or architecture in itself. That's not to say one sets out to make it a book. I certainly don't. What I do is to write away, and as I write the poems, I keep them in a little folder. And they change their relationship to each other, and *the way in which they're read changes as one changes the order in which one reads them*. (n. pag., my emphasis)

The placement of the above-mentioned autofictional poems at the beginning or at the end of a collection is not entirely random. If we take the opening poem in

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444 The acknowledgements in *Why Brownlee Left* and *Horse Latitudes* feature at the end of the book.

445 'The kind of structure these books have had runs the risk sometimes of looking a bit programmatic, as if I've set out with a plan, as it were, and the book is going to have *that* beginning and *that* end. But really it's a process of discovery, and the ordering of the poems in the books—while it's very important to me and while there's an argument—an arc through each of these books—it's something that's discovered in the course of putting the book together' (Ingersoll and Rubin n. pag.).

Mules as an example, in the early tables of contents kept in the Muldoon Archive, 'Lunch with Pancho Villa' did not even feature in the list of poems to be published and was only added later on and placed at the very beginning of the collection.[446] The fact that this poem was chosen as the opening piece in the volume puts to the fore one of Muldoon's most well-known authorial intrusions—and a multiple one at that—marking the poet's entrance in the 1977 collection.

Furthermore, the positioning of these poems at the beginning or at the end of a volume is coupled with a direct reference to this 'bathroom window' that materialises the liminal threshold separating the text from the world outside the text, the diegetic sphere from the extradiegetic one. This 'window' is, in fact, present (through various forms) in most of the poems analysed in this chapter: the door in 'The Big House' ('That old boarded-up door / Was flung open'), the 'cavernous lobby' and the hotel's 'revolving door' in 'Immram', the 'half-opened / window' in 'Capercaillies', and the 'front door' in 'Lunch With Pancho Villa':[447]

> 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. (*M* 12)

These are places that symbolise the entrance of the poet in his text and his departure from it. This liminal place in 'Lunch with Pancho Villa' is also associated with the ringing of 'the [door] bell', hinting at the convention of the *féth fiáda* (discussed in Chapter Four) and allowing for the authorial intrusion in the second part of the poem. These final two chapters on Muldoon's various autofictional practices have therefore examined the multitude of liminal thresholds present in Muldoon's poetry: the one between the real world and the

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[446] *PMP*, '*Mules*, early tables of contents and related holograph notes', Box 9, Folder 78.
[447] Moreover, the line break after 'boarded-up door' and 'half-opened' materialises the opening of the door/window in 'The Big House' and 'Capercaillies'.

surreal world (Chapter Four), and the one between the extradiegetic world and the diegetic world (Chapter Five).

Finally, not only has this final chapter pursued the examination of Muldoon's autofictional tropes started in Chapter Four, but it has also explored the complex nature of the first-person voice, analysed at various stages throughout this thesis. In Part 5.2 the examination of Muldoon's *personnages d'auteur* has shown the manifold facets of the intrusive author; the pluralised identities of the extradiegetic author were particularly visible in the poet's onomastic games and multiple impersonations within the same poem. While the previous chapters explored the fragmented nature of the diegetic speaker, Chapter Five has emphasised the complexities of the extradiegetic 'I'. Furthermore, this investigation of Muldoon's intrusiveness in this concluding chapter has shown that the poet's autofictional and seemingly autobiographical poems are central to reading Muldoon because they shed light on the ways in which the poet uses the first-person voice to engage (and play with) the reader in his *œuvre* more broadly.

CONCLUSION

In the first taxi he was alone tra-la,
No extras on the clock. He tipped ninepence
But the cabby, while he thanked him, looked askance
As though to suggest someone had bummed a ride.

In the second taxi he was alone tra-la
But the clock showed sixpence extra; he tipped according
And the cabby from out his muffler said: 'Make sure
You have left nothing behind tra-la between you'.

In the third taxi he was alone tra-la
But the tip-up seats were down and there was an extra
Charge of one-and-sixpence and an odd
Scent that reminded him of a trip to Cannes.

As for the fourth taxi, he was alone
Tra-la when he hailed it but the cabby looked
Through him and said: 'I can't tra-la well take
So many people, not to speak of the dog'.

('The Taxis' MacNeice, *Collected Poems* 583-584)

> MacNeice is a quite remarkable poet, particularly later MacNeice and even posthumous MacNeice—I mean the poems published after he'd died—absolutely, extraordinarily nightmarish nursery rhymes, poems like 'The Taxis' and 'The Introduction'. Quite extraordinary poems, really nothing like them. And they're poems that have been, to some extent, influential in some of the things I do. There's a tone, a strain in what I do that belongs to that same strand of slightly disturbing, nightmarish activity.
>
> (Muldoon, qtd. in Ingersoll and Rubin n. pag.)

When I first met Paul Muldoon at the Louis MacNeice Centenary Conference and Celebration held in September 2007 at Queen's University, Belfast, I asked him why he chose to read 'The Taxis'. He told me that he was extremely fond of MacNeice's poetry and that he would have loved to have written this poem, which he considers to be MacNeice's '1961 masterpiece' (*TII* 94).[448] When Muldoon read this poem, I thought, for an instant, that it was *his* poem and not MacNeice's. Indeed, there is 'a tone, a strain' in Muldoon's poetry that belongs, to use the poet's words, to 'that same strand of slightly disturbing, nightmarish activity' that characterises the work of his fellow countryman. Writing about 'The Taxis', Muldoon explains that the speaker, who has 'bummed a ride', is '"incorrigibly plural" here, underscoring the speaker's own fractured self' (*TII* 94). In fact, as the poem unravels, the speaker multiplies: the 'I' evolves from a single entity ('he was alone') to a manifold being ('So many people'). Similarly, reading Muldoon's poetry, one realises that the poet often shatters the illusion of a unified self (put forth by some theorists of autobiography) by portraying, instead, a multi-faceted and fragmented poetic self.[449] MacNeice's poem is, therefore, a perfect illustration

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[448] Muldoon gave more space to MacNeice than to any other poet in his *Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* (1986) and dedicated part of his Oxford lecture series to him in the chapter entitled '*Alone Tra La*' in *To Ireland, I* (89-96).

[449] See, in Chapter One, Linda Anderson's arguments regarding the autobiographical practice.

with which to draw to a close this discussion of Muldoon's poetic representation of the 'I'.

As explained in the introduction, the aim of this research was to bring the reader on a journey through the 'adventures of the letter "I"'. This thesis has sought to focus attention on the various ways in which Muldoon positions his poetic self between autobiography and autofiction. In doing so, this research has shed light on 'one of the most disconcerting features of Muldoon's poetry', which is its 'chimerical manipulation of the first-person voice': 'In any one lyric the speaker seems authentic, but the subject matter is often repulsive or inconsistent with another "I" encountered elsewhere in his verse' (Wilson, William 321). In fact, as seen throughout this thesis, Muldoon's personal poems are characterised by both distance and proximity between the lyric 'I' and the empirical 'I': while in one poem the unified 'I' refers to the author, speaker, and protagonist, this triple identity is disrupted somewhere else in his verse. This shift from intimacy to distance (and *vice versa*) also creates an ambivalent relationship between author and reader. When the 'I' is a unified autobiographical self (author, speaker, and protagonist are one and the same person), there is intimacy between the author and the reader since the author has gained the trust of the reader, who feels included in the author's private circle. However, when the identity of the 'I' is disrupted and refers to an autofictional self (author, speaker, and protagonist are no longer a unified entity), the author's trustworthiness is questioned and a greater distance is established between the author and the now suspicious reader. This constant oscillation between intimacy and distance is what lies at the core of the debate on autobiographical poetry and autofiction.

The point of this thesis was not to impose restrictive approaches on Muldoon's poetry; instead, the aim was to offer a multiplicity of interpretations and a variety of reading models while using a wide array of theories on autobiography, poetry, memory, and autofiction. Together with this theoretical framework, the methodology of close-reading has allowed for a concrete, detailed, and in-depth analysis of the poems. In this respect, Muldoon's bewildering Oxford lectures in *To Ireland, I* (2000) and *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures* (2006) were of particular importance. I have tried to emulate these close, experimental, and creative readings—characterised by open-minded and sometimes outlandish interpretations, and a strong capacity to connect a wide array of poems—while simultaneously striving for an almost scientific objectivity. It is my hope that this objectivity (as evidenced, for instance, in the discussions of pronouns) has served to provide a structure and helped my readings to avoid fragmentation, while still respecting the versatility of Muldoon's poetry.

Two main conclusions have emerged from these readings: namely, that the first-person voice in Muldoon's personal poems is 'incorrigibly plural', and that autobiography and autofiction share a number of thematic and formal traits when mediated through poetry. The detailed analyses in the preceding chapters have in fact shown that, far from being a unified entity, the first-person voice in Muldoon's personal poems is split or pluralised. Each chapter took as its focus a particular way in which the 'I' is fragmented and the diverse causes of this fragmentation. The discussion of autobiography formed the core of Chapters Two and Three, while Chapters Four and Five discussed Muldoon's autofictional practice. The entire thesis is structured as a series of mirror-images: Chapter Three explored the causes for the fragmentation of the autobiographical 'I', as

discussed in Chapter Two, while Chapter Five analysed the main authorial devices behind the autofictional strategies which Chapter Four showed to have been deployed by Muldoon.

Chapter Two challenged the assumption that Muldoon's poetry lacks an emotional core and emphasised the harrowing dimension of his most personal poems, particularly his elegies for Mary Farl Powers and for his mother. Following on from Chapter One, in which I explained the importance of reconsidering the term 'autobiographical' as applied to the study of poetry, this second chapter attempted to delineate the main characteristics of autobiography written in verse, as exemplified by Muldoon's writing. What emerged from this delineation is that the association of poetry and autobiography is characterised by a highly unstable first-person voice: the fracturing of identity is, in fact, the common denominator of Muldoon's personal poems (family poems, failed romance poems, and elegies). This chapter argued that what chiefly characterises the confrontation of autobiography and poetry is the fact that the autobiographical drive both disrupts the identification between speaker, author, and character (an identification lying at the heart of Lejeune's autobiographical pact) and subverts traditional poetic patterns (such as the sonnet). This was particularly obvious in elegies such as 'Incantata' and 'Yarrow', poems in which Muldoon is personally exposed. In this way, Chapter Two evidenced the limits and idiosyncrasies of autobiography written in verse.

Since autobiographical writing necessarily relies on memory, the thesis then logically proceeded to an examination of the process of memory when mediated through poetry. This served to better understand that fragmentation of the self highlighted in Chapter Two. What was seen in this third chapter was that the process of anamnesis is strained when memories are articulated in verse.

Focusing on two main elements that are central to any study of memory—time and space—this chapter first argued that the treatment of temporality in autobiographical poetry differs from that observed in prose autobiography, because poetry is less likely to follow a necessarily linear time sequence. This is mostly due to the various lines of association (linguistic, sensory, *etc.*) that partly govern the composition of poetry. Consequently, the disruption of chronology caused by this associative process proved to be one of the main causes for the instability of the poetic 'I'. In 'Yarrow', in particular, the 'I' is split because of the constant to-and-fro movement between the contemporary 'I', writing the poem, and the younger 'I', who is being remembered. Furthermore, although it initially seemed that *memori loci* helped secure memories—and, therefore, the unity of the self—a close analysis of a particular 'place of memory' (namely, the family farm) revealed that, far from anchoring memories, this place of origins actually contributed to the very fragmentation and uprooting of the self, discussed in the preceding chapter.

After exploring in Chapters Two and Three the fragmentation of the autobiographical 'I', the thesis then turned to my second major concern—autofiction—as Chapters Four and Five explored the plurality of the autofictional 'I'. While Chapters Two and Three evidenced that the fragmentation of the autobiographical 'I' reflected the mediation of autobiography and memory through poetry, Chapters Four and Five focused on the multiplicity of the 'I' caused by the poet's autofictional strategies. Unlike the passive fragmentation of the autobiographical 'I' (occasioned by the use of poetry), I argued that the instability of the autofictional 'I' was *actively* produced by the author's boundless imagination, experimental spirit, and playfulness. In Chapters Four and Five, the expansive range of Muldoon's autofictional techniques was revealed by closely

examining his poetry in light of a wide array of theories. If these final two chapters shared an interest in autofiction, they differed in the respect that Chapter Four emphasised the multiplicity of the Muldoon figure as a *diegetic* speaker, while Chapter Five focused upon the multifaceted *extradiegetic* author who intrudes upon, and enters directly into, his text.

Chapter Four explored the wide array of autofictional strategies deployed by Muldoon in order to stage his poetic self. This chapter also illustrated how these strategies differ according to the age of the speaker: if the 'I' is the young Muldoon, then the poet represents his younger self in a re-created world of fantasies; whereas if the 'I' is his contemporary self, Muldoon invents a parallel world, which is coterminal with our real world and bears strong similarities to the *féth fiáda*. There is, therefore, a difference between the appearance of fiction in boyhood fantasies and the use of the otherworldly in surreal autofictions. The chapter concluded by considering a more extreme form of autofiction—biographical forgeries—in order to illustrate how Muldoon's autofictional devices range from the appearance of fiction (boyhood fantasies) to the illusion of reality ('fake' personal poems). This chapter endeavoured to avoid a one-dimensional biographical approach by reading the poems in a critical and sometimes suspicious way in order to sidestep Muldoon's numerous traps: the poet constantly flirts with the truth and plays with his personal history (*e.g.* 'Cuba'). This final analysis of Muldoon's biographical forgeries constituted an appropriate bridge between Chapter Four and Chapter Five, dedicated to the various tricks Muldoon plays on his reader.

This final chapter, which further explored Muldoon's use of autofiction, was designed both as the pendant to Chapter Four and as a concluding chapter for the thesis as a whole: since Muldoon's poems present the illusion of

autobiography or fiction depending on his use of *biographèmes* and fictional devices, this suggests an important degree of authorial control. While Muldoon argues that the poems are written through him, he also acknowledges the importance of the role of the author, regardless of what Barthes claimed. In fact, Muldoon describes himself as a 'shamanistic writer' in so far as he is a 'medium' through which the poem is written (Noble n. pag.), yet he also argues that the 'author is not dead'. The final chapter therefore focused attention on authorial control, particularly on the various forms of authorial intrusions and metalepses. This examination of authorial intrusiveness explored a number of these *metafictional* strategies, ranging from Muldoon's heterogeneous company of *personnages d'auteur* and narrative self-reflexivity to various storytelling tropes. In myriad ways, the poet illustrates how he freely moves in and out of his text, transgressing the boundaries between what exists outside the text and the text itself. By focusing on the complexities of the multifaceted extradiegetic 'I', this chapter pursued the analysis of the various strata of the self that constitute the first-person voice in Muldoon's personal and autofictional poems, and which have been explored throughout this thesis. This chapter has also shown that Muldoon's various metafictional tropes are central to his work in so far as they complicate the reader's assessment of the poems.

The decision to focus this thesis exclusively on Muldoon's poetry despite the versatility of his broader body of work—including libretti, plays, translations, and children's books—owes itself primarily to the following three reasons: first, since this analysis aimed to offer an in-depth exploration of Muldoon's poetic opus (currently including more than twenty volumes), reasons of space required that this research be limited to his poetry; secondly, although Muldoon has stated that

there are ways in which other works, such as *Shining Brow*, 'refer to [his] life' (qtd. in Keller 6), the autobiographical drive is confined almost exclusively to his poetry; and, finally, because it is when autobiography is mediated through poetry that it most resembles autofiction. The inherent fragmentation of the 'I' explored throughout this thesis is what brings together autobiography written in verse and the autofictional enterprise. Consequently, by focusing upon poetry, this thesis has revealed the fallacy of an overly simplistic opposition between the supposed 'wholeness' of the autobiographical self (Anderson, Linda 3) and the pluralised autofictional self. Rather, it has been observed that autobiography in verse and autofiction are in many ways similar.

The collections discussed in this research span over a period of more than thirty years from *New Weather* (1973) to *Horse Latitudes* (2006). They have shown how Muldoon's set of autobiographical and autofictional practices has evolved across his career. However, apart from a few references, this research has not discussed Muldoon's most recent collections published after *Horse Latitudes*: *Maggot* (2010), *General Admission* (2006), and *The Word on the Street* (2013). Although these works have not been analysed, it is important to note that the autofictional practices outlined in this thesis and used as tools to read a number of Muldoon's collections do not come to an end with the publication of *Maggot*. In fact, in the 2010 collection, 'The Side Project', for instance, features a shape-shifting and deceitful poetic persona (or trickster author figure), reminiscent of the intrusive authorial figures described in Chapter Five. Furthermore, in this long poem, the narrator navigates between the real and the chimerical, historical (or personal) events and his own fanciful whimsicalities, which is characteristic of fantastic autofictions, as described in Chapter Four. The reason why *Maggot* has not been discussed in this thesis is because this later collection, just like

Muldoon's other recent publications—*General Admission* and *The Word on the Street*, for example—intensifies the notion of *performance* and signals an *evolution* in his career.

Muldoon's 2006 collection of fifty-five song lyrics written for his band Rackett constituted, for some critics, a 'mid-career move' (Johnston, Maria, 'Another Side of Paul Muldoon' 77).[450] In fact, the poet 'has been leading a double life' (78) as a poet and as a lyricist since the publication of *General Admission*. Although it would have been very interesting to discuss these poems/lyrics in the section dedicated to 'Poetry in Performance' (Part 5.3), the analysis of such poems would have required other theories and would have broadened a theoretical framework already dense. Furthermore, the poems analysed in the section 'Poetry in Performance' emphasise the performative dimension of Muldoon's poetry *in general*, and not of his song lyrics written to be performed on stage. In addition, although the poems published in *Maggot* are not song lyrics as those in *General Admission* and *The Word on the Street*, the notion of performance is also emphasised in 'The Side Project', which revolves around nineteenth-century sideshows and in which the figure of the poet blends into that of a trickster circus-owner. Muldoon therefore does not radically change his set of practices but places greater emphasis on the notion of *poetry as performance* in his collections published after *Horse Latitudes*, both in his thematic concerns (*Maggot* and 'The Side Project', in particular) and in his mode of writing (*General Admission* and *The Word on the Street*). For this reason, it would be interesting to use autofictional theories in order to read *Maggot* and Muldoon's work in performance, but this analysis would require examining these collections as part of another development in Muldoon's career, namely his career as a lyricist. This

[450] Muldoon is now a member of the band *Wayside Shrines*.

research would therefore raise a number of complex questions such as the relationship between poetry and song, and the author's 'split personality' or 'new incarnation':

> The cover design of *General Admission* enforces this idea of a divided identity with its cartoonish drawing of a cozy, professorial Muldoon in obligatory tweed suit reciting from a book titled *Best Loved Fireside Verse* while behind him looms his over-sized shadowy counterpart, the dark side of Muldoon—an unnerving, long-haired rock-guitarist going at it with gusto. (Johnston, Maria, 'Another Side of Paul Muldoon' 78)

This evolution in Muldoon's career needs to develop more before engaging in a thorough study of Muldoon's role as a performer and lyricist in these later collections.

As explained in the introduction, the aim of this thesis was to permit new and original ways of reading Muldoon's poetry, and to illustrate the cross-connections between autobiography and autofiction. This thesis has therefore sought to query boundaries between autobiography and autofiction, emphasising their porous nature. Re-reading Gasparini's definition of autofiction in *Autofiction. Une aventure du langage* (2008), one realises that there are, in fact, a number of similarities between autobiography mediated through poetry and autofiction. In this book, Gasparini argues that an autofictional text is an '*autobiographical and literary text that presents numerous oral features, formal innovation, narrative complexity, fragmentation, alterity, contrast, and auto-commentary that tend to problematise the relationship between writing and life experience*' (311). The oral qualities of the poetic form have been shown to lie in a number of poetic features (rhymes, rhythm, *etc.*) and in that tendency on the part of certain writers to emulate the style of oral storytellers (witticisms, auto-commentaries, *etc.*), which I analysed in my final chapter. The 'formal innovation' that characterises

autofictional texts also finds an echo in autobiographical poetry, where the impact of the autobiographical impulse reshapes formal patterns. Chapter Two, for instance, argued that Muldoon subverts the formal constraints of the Petrarchan sonnet when writing about failed relationships. Such formal innovation and technical aplomb are also clearly visible in the elaborated structure of his elegies, particularly 'Yarrow', constituted by 'twelve, intercut, exploded sestinas', whose rhyme scheme has been the topic of much detailed research. Furthermore, 'Yarrow' provides an example of the fact that the 'narrative complexity' that defines autofiction is also central to Muldoon's longer poems: as discussed in Chapter Three, the intricate narration evident in Muldoon's elegy for his mother arises from the constant to-and-fro movement between vignettes set in the year 1963 (when Muldoon was an eleven- or twelve-year-old boy in Armagh) and vignettes taking place in the year 1992 (when the poet visited the family farm long after his parents' deaths). Moreover, within the 1963 vignettes, the narrative is made even more complex by the layering of multiple boyhood fantasies over actual memories, a technique explored in Chapter Four. The final chapter pursued this discussion of narrative complexity by analysing the poems' *self-reflexivity*, focusing, in particular, on auto-commentaries and self-criticisms. Finally, the 'fragmentation' and 'alterity' which, in Chapters Four and Five, were shown to be so characteristic of autofictions, were also, in Chapters Two and Three, found to be essential to autobiography as mediated through poetry. Therefore, it is clear that, if Gasparini concludes his definition by stating that autofictional texts tend to '*problematise the relationship between writing and life experience*', one can say the same regarding autobiographical poems.

In *Littératures intimes: Les expressions du moi, de l'autobiographie à l'autofiction*, Hubier explains that the poetic self is far from being an authentic

unmediated representation of the historical writer. The critic argues that poetry *recreates* the author's identity,

> which is not exactly that of the writer and which is, *despite everything*, not exactly another's. The first-person therefore has a role in a game of masks that transforms and protects this author whose temperament and experiences it only partly reveals. Undefined, it enables him or her to successively stage his or her different *selves*. (134)[451]

This poetic identity enables the author to 'transform him- or herself into a character', which is *precisely* the purpose of autofiction, according to Colonna's definition. Although Hubier's analysis cannot be applied to all forms of personal poetry (particularly the more openly 'confessional' poetry), the critic rightly argues that lyric poetry, like autofiction, leads us to question 'the gap between fiction and reality, between character and author'. This strong link between these two modes of writing is made even more obvious when Hubier further explains that lyric poetry is not 'strictly autobiographical' but that 'its study raises the issue of the thresholds, of generic borders and that, by doing so, it belongs to these personal inventions of which autofiction is the pinnacle' (134). This 'issue of the thresholds, of generic borders' lies at the core of autofiction *and* lyric poetry (as written by writers such as Muldoon), because they both question traditional generic boundaries. The existence of borders and liminal thresholds has been explored throughout this thesis, not only in relation to the line between fact and fiction, but also in a number of analyses related to the particularities of

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[451] The original reads: 'Celle-ci, en effet, recrée une identité figurée qui n'est pas tout à fait celle de l'écrivain et qui, *malgré tout*, n'est pas tout à fait une autre. La première personne est alors au service d'un jeu de masque qui transforme et protège cet auteur dont elle ne révèle qu'en partie le tempérament et les expériences. Indéterminée, elle lui permet de mettre en scène, successivement, ses différents *moi*, de reprendre, comme à son compte, les inventions textuelles de ses prédécesseurs, de se métamorphoser en personnage. La poésie lyrique conduit le lecteur à s'interroger sur l'écart existant entre la fiction et la réalité, entre personnage et auteur. Le pacte autobiographique est bel et bien sollicité, nonobstant qu'il soit immédiatement contesté, éludé, voire renversé. La poésie lyrique n'est pas strictement autobiographique. Mais son étude pose clairement la question du seuil, des lisières génériques; et, en cela, elle appartient à ces inventions personnelles dont l'autofiction est le faîte'.

autobiographical poetry and autofiction. In Chapter Two, the analysis of Muldoon's autobiographical poems revealed that there is a gap, a border between the lyric 'I' and the empirical 'I'. Chapter Four examined the existence of a liminal threshold in Muldoon's autofictional poems, particularly in relation to the otherworldly. Finally, Chapter Five provided an in-depth analysis of the crossing of the border between the extradiegetic and the diegetic worlds.

Hubier is certainly right in stating that generic boundaries should be challenged because—despite recent attempts made at re-defining terms such as 'autobiographical' and 'autofictional'—there remains a strong need for reconsidering such labels.[452] Discussing various forms of fictional texts, Pluvinet argues that

> these novel borderline-forms are often difficult to define and some confusion prevails, with regard to both terminology and definition: a great number of generic 'labels' seem fragile when their scope is too restricted (*i.e.* reduced to a small number of texts), too loose (*i.e.* bringing together texts that are very diverse), or when the categorisation they serve to define is in direct competition with another. (20)[453]

The autofictional practice, which belongs to these 'borderline-forms', is particularly difficult to define because 'it is neither a codified genre, nor a simple form, but a sheaf of converging practices, *a complex form*' (Colonna, *Autofiction* 15).[454] If theories of autofiction have been used in this thesis in order to open up new ways of reading Muldoon's poetry, careful attention has also been paid to the limits of some of these theories and the fact that they cannot be unconditionally

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[452] I am here referring to the recent debate on poetry and autobiography discussed in Chapter One, which has raised necessary questions but has failed to arrive at a consensus on what the term 'autobiographical' means in poetic studies.

[453] In the original text: 'ces formes-frontières inédites sont souvent difficiles à circonscrire et il règne une certaine confusion tant au niveau de la terminologie que de la définition: bien des "étiquettes" génériques semblent fragiles, lorsque leur champ d'application est trop restreint (réduit à quelques textes), trop lâche (rassemblant des textes très divers), ou bien encore lorsque la classification définie se trouve en concurrence directe avec une autre'.

[454] The original reads: 'il ne s'agit ni d'un genre codifié, ni d'une forme simple, mais d'une gerbe de pratiques conniventes, d'*une forme complexe*'.

applied to poetry. To give an example, although the field of autofictional studies is in constant development, very little attention appears to have been given to autofiction written in verse. As a result, a number of traits that are commonly defined as 'autofictional' simply do not lend themselves easily to a discussion of poetry: the presence of the author's name in the text, for instance, is rarely found in a poem. As a result, the onomastic criterion could not be systematically applied to my analyses of Muldoon's autofictional poems (and autobiographical poems for that matter).[455] Furthermore, and as I explained in Chapter Five, although Colonna argues that *autofictions intrusives* are written in the third-person voice and are told by an author-narrator who does not take part in the story s/he narrates, this definition cannot be readily applied to Muldoon. In fact, Colonna's theory requires a number of changes to account for the fact that Muldoon's intrusive autofictional poems are characterised by a self-conscious authorial figure who narrates the story in the *first-person* voice and who plays an *active* role in the story and its reception. As this example illustrates, recent theories concerning autofiction do not always provide a satisfactory theoretical structure when it comes to poetic texts.

Throughout this thesis, I have therefore carefully used a number of theories, while always bearing in mind both the fact that some of these terms (such as 'autofictional') remain somewhat uncertain and that they should not be uncritically applied to Muldoon's poetry. Thus, if this thesis refers to various theories put forth by a number of writers and philosophers (such as Lejeune, Bergson, Ricœur, Yates, and Colonna), it has always favoured the uniqueness, specificity, and *originality* of Muldoon's poems over the broad authoritative

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[455] The onomastic criterion (author, speaker, and character share the same identity and the same name) is not an essential feature of autofictions but it is mentioned in a number of theories (*e.g.* Colonna's and Lecarme's). It is, moreover, a crucial element in numerous autobiographical studies.

statements of theoretical trends. This was the case, for instance, in Chapter Four, when analysing Muldoon's re-appropriation of the *féth fiáda* in his fantastic autofictional poems, and in Chapter Five, when comparing his authorial intrusions and poetry readings with the tall tale artistry.

Undoubtedly, even had recent theoretical approaches to autofiction proved more suited to poetry, applying such theories without adapting them to the specificities of Muldoon's own writing, and to poetry in general, would have imposed a theoretical grid that would have been detrimental to my analyses. As this thesis has shown, this is particularly true of 'autobiography' and 'autofiction' when one deals with *poetry*. Poetry makes the analysis of autobiography and autofiction infinitely more complex. Consequently, just as a number of issues have been raised regarding the relationship between poetry and autobiography in recent years, so too may we expect a similar debate to arise in the field of autofiction. That there has been no such debate to date may owe, at least in part, to the fact that autofiction largely remains a theoretical haze, a term that is too often used in a loose fashion. Nevertheless, there remains much to hope from future studies into autofiction, particularly autofictional *poetry*.

By constantly shifting between autobiography and autofiction, between authenticity and artfulness, Muldoon often leaves the reader in doubt as to whether or not the facts narrated are taken from his own lived experience or his whimsical imagination. This thesis has shown that reading his poetry does not involve choosing between, but rather choosing to *engage with* both elements of its seeming dichotomy, namely, that of the autobiographical *and* the autofictional. Muldoon is a playful, Janus-faced figure, a guardian presiding over the poems and blurring the nature of the text. The reader does not know whether

or not s/he should believe the Trickster poet and, as a result, has to engage in a reading that questions the wilfully equivocal words of Muldoon's poems. In fact, the fundamentally equivocal character of these poems suggests that the reader is being actively encouraged to question their nature and decipher the identity of Muldoon's elusive, shape-shifting first-person voice. Analysing the idiosyncrasies of the poet's autobiographical and autofictional strategies has thus demonstrated that reading his work is not a passive activity and that these very strategies are central to his poetry, not just in terms of assessing the nature of his poems, but in terms of reading and understanding his work more broadly. This reappraisal of Muldoon's poetry in light of the concept of autofiction ties into larger, fundamental questions regarding the ways in which his poetry engages and *plays with* the reader. In short, embarking on the adventures of the Muldoonian 'I' requires the reader to tread on shifting sands and play by the rules of a poet whose *je* is often inseparable from his *jeu*.[456]

[456] The French word *je* means 'I', while *jeu* means 'game'.

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