

## PAUL MULDOON AND THE IRISH LANGUAGE

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*This article examines the connections between the poetry of Paul Muldoon and the Irish language, and more generally Irish culture. For a poet who is often characterized as being of the globalized moment, he has maintained a long and vibrant connection both with poetry in Irish (through translation) and indeed through writing occasional poems in that language, most recently in *Rising to the Rising* (2016). More generally, his work provokes questions about nationalism, transnationalism and global culture that we have yet to accommodate properly within our criticism.*

On Saturday, 26 March 2017, *The Irish Times* devoted most of a page to a poem by Paul Muldoon that commemorated the Easter Rising in 1916, when a group of rebels led by Patrick Pearse, with little hope of success, took over key buildings in Dublin and proclaimed the first Irish Republic. Pearse himself, an Irish-language enthusiast who wrote poems in Irish, was enamored of the idea of blood sacrifice, frequently fantasizing about the ways that the blood of Irish men and women should be periodically poured into Irish soil. The subsequent Irish Republic, declared outright eventually in 1949, used many of the leaders as part of the nation's iconography (train station names, Proclamations in school corridors, major streets). However, when some nationalists in Northern Ireland undertook a guerrilla war in the late 1960s, that continued to the 1990s, they also made a claim on the narrative of 1916. This in turn, put the Irish Republic off 1916. The result was that successive Irish governments were reluctant to celebrate the anniversaries of the Rising in an ostentatious way, restricting themselves to some quiet wreath-laying and speech-making. It seemed that 1916 had become the property of a violent minority and not the Irish government and the majority of its people.

Since then, especially since the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, hostilities in Northern Ireland have largely come to an end, and this left the Irish government with a revised agenda for the centenary of the 1916 Rising in 2016. Now it could be reclaimed, and the plans and funding for those plans across government organizations and cultural institutions were on a grand scale.

The poem would later appear in a book published three months later, entitled *Rising to the Rising* (2016). It is a medley of takes and feints on the Irish nation, and the idea of celebrating its 100 years of existence. There is an entire poem written in Irish, and this is translated into English by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, an Irish-language poet who Muldoon had translated in the past into English. This is a kind of linguistic cross-dressing. There is the text of an oratorio which was performed in an army barracks in Dublin by a choir of 1000, with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, which unashamedly speaks, or sings, in the first-person plural of the Irish nation, reviewing its history from different perspectives, from the geological to the political. To balance the books, or book, and avoid a jingoistic emphasis on heroic struggles against the British, there is a three-page poem that follows the fates of the Irish men who enlisted in the British Army to fight in World War I. Almost 150,000 did so, and only in the last two decades has historical and national attention turned in their direction.

Nevertheless, it was surprising that Muldoon took the commission, as it would seem to align him closely with Irish government policy, and more generally with a state-sponsored nationalism. A state that has, for instance, cheered loudly while supporting the Irish language, while skimping on funding. In a lecture in 2016 Hugh Haughton remarked:

If the poem does express misgivings about recent Irish political and economic history, it is nonetheless surprisingly un-misgiving about its choric memorial task in this supposedly “post-national” age, which appears to be on the cusp of a new wave of ugly nationalisms. Skilfully as Muldoon has “risen” to the task of commemorating the Rising, it can’t stop some of us feeling astonished that the displaced, now Transatlantic poet of “Anseo” should have assumed the bardic role of proclaiming “a hundred years a nation” to the huge congregation outside Collins Barracks and on RTE.<sup>1</sup>

At one stage in *Rising to the Rising*, Muldoon remarks that “we’re certainly within our rights to reclaim the significance of the Easter Rising from some of the

<sup>1</sup> Lecture given at the University of Zurich, 30 November 2016. My thanks to the author for sending the MS.

gangs that have – literally, in some cases, hijacked it.”<sup>2</sup> And when facing the prospect of writing poetry that would form a component of a large, national celebration he describes himself as “[n]ever one to turn down a challenge.”<sup>3</sup> Behind Haughton’s remarks there is perhaps a slight disappointment that the poet has indulged in nostalgic nationalism, turning away from the more fluid identities he has explored in his preceding career. Where, indeed, does the book leave us?

The challenge Muldoon sets himself is, primarily, to find cultural expression for a national celebration that does not devolve into cliché. Despite the public dimensions of the performance, he must find a way to knit openly celebratory phrases, like the title itself, “A Hundred Years a Nation,” which is also the last line that is sung by the choir, yet also make those of one texture, text, with more critical expressions. The point the oratorio ultimately comes round to is that the Irish nation has yet to come into existence. We are on the way there. We may well get there. But this is not it yet. This is the kind of misgiving that Haughton is talking about.

The poem in Irish is of particular interest in this context, as the language is an integral part of the Irish imaginary. It is entitled “Rós do Chroí,” or “The Rose of Your Heart.” It combines stock-imagery from nationalist poetry of the rose, the heart, bloodshed, but it artfully turns these in another direction:

Is measa linn feasta  
ná scrios ná coll.  
Bheith suaimhneasáí sásta  
le gunna báidhte i bpoll.  
[...]  
Mar anois ’sé tanughadh na fola  
an aidhm is mian linn,  
saol fada is mian linn  
faoi ghealach *aspirin*.<sup>4</sup>

We no longer favour destruction  
and the high death toll.  
Now we’d much sooner  
a gun sunk in a bog hole.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Muldoon, *Rising to the Rising* (Loughcrew: Gallery Press, 2016) 29.

<sup>3</sup> Muldoon, *Rising* 28.

<sup>4</sup> Muldoon, *Rising* 11.

[...]

For now we're mostly set  
on keeping the blood thin,  
long life our main ambition  
under the moon of an aspirin.<sup>5</sup>

The Irish poem appears on the *recto* side, inducing perhaps a momentary panic in the anglophone monoglot ("Where's the translation?"). Blood imagery takes a detour into the medical sphere, and now we concentrate on a long life rather than a heroic early death. It is a fundamental revision of Patrick Pearse's idea that the blood of young men and women should pour into Ireland's earth to renew the nation.

The Irish language, because of the small number of its speakers, its connection with some of the most undeveloped parts of Ireland (mainly pockets along the west coast) – beautiful bare rocky landscape straked by Atlantic wind and rain, a part of the country to which electricity only arrived in some parts as late as 1965 – would seem to be a perfect sign of the local, and indeed the heartland of the Irish patria. This bundle of associations recommends itself to tourism, but less so to the native inhabitants who often feel that the language and all that comes with it is connected to the primitive, impoverished past and not the sophisticated, affluent future. Importantly, the language is also associated with Irish nationalism, often thought to be the medium for its essential expression.

Because Britain is Ireland's nearest neighbour, a global power beside a small country, Irish is most often compared to English. This background, coupled with the fact that English has, since the mid-twentieth century, been a lingua franca (moreover not one that is only used to do business in, but in which major culture is produced), means that it would seem that there is a perfect binary at work, in which the Irish language stands for the recalcitrantly, narrowly local and national, while the English language stands for the flexibly, extravagantly global.

The most important theoretical forebear of globalization theory is postcolonial theory, and it draws strongly on this, for both its concepts and content. So it is worth briefly considering here Muldoon's relationship with the postcolonial framework. We might begin by imagining a generic postcolonial writer. They were born in a rural area of a country that was once a colony of the British Empire; they speak and write English but have some contact with the indigenous language that preceded Empire, live in proximity to, or actually get

<sup>5</sup> Muldoon, *Rising* 12.

involved in, a war of independence from the Empire, or a civil war after the Empire has gone; they write work that draws on oral traditions, but have absorbed Western European literary models also, and are able to accommodate their childhood experience to them. Indeed that very accommodation becomes the selling point for the work in the wider world. Our identikit postcolonial writer could be Seamus Heaney or the Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo, or many others. It could, so far, be Paul Muldoon also.

Sarah Brouillette describes what happens next:

The postcolonial author has emerged as a profoundly complicit and compromised figure whose authority rests, however uncomfortably, in the nature of his connection to the specificity of a given political location. [... W]riters' anxiety tends to stem from the dissemination of their texts to reading communities accessing privileged metropolitan markets that are often (though not exclusively) Anglo-American in location and orientation. Writers are compelled to resist, justify, or celebrate precisely this aspect of the postcolonial field's arrangement, in accordance with their own circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

Our invented writer wins international fame, gets a chair or two at a US university, and if they're lucky, they might pick up the Nobel Prize in Literature. However, our writer starts to feel a bit guilty and a bit distant from the childhood world they grew up in, and which provided, after all, the basis for their imaginative work. In both Seamus Heaney and Derek Walcott such feeling of culpability becomes a part of that work – so many of their poems are motivated by, or turn on, postcolonial guilt.

But does this model fully fit Muldoon? Certainly, he seems fully globalized. He was poetry editor of the *New Yorker* from 2007 to 2017 (and I should disclose that he published my own poetry there). He lives mainly in that city, which is, if not the capital city of the United States, then perhaps the capital city of the world. In 2013, the *New York Times* ran an article in the Real Estate section about the Muldoons' choice of an apartment "on the Upper West Side near Riverside Park in a gracious five-room rental with French doors and moldings."<sup>7</sup> His reading

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 4.

<sup>7</sup> Joanne Kaufman, "The Poetry of Downsizing," *The New York Times*, 18 December 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/22/realestate/the-poetry-of-downsizing.html> (accessed 18 June 2018).

schedule for 2017 entailed about six Atlantic crossings, and every month in New York he hosts Muldoon's Picnic, which brings together writers and bands from all corners of the anglophone arena. He has won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, and the T.S. Eliot Prize (one of the major prizes in the UK). He has also been Oxford Professor of Poetry, and holds important positions in key institutions of poetry. If not then a poet of global importance, he is perhaps the closest we have to it in the English language at the moment.

What interesting is how this life, which has him flitting around the world, fits on a fundamental level with the poetry itself. One of the challenging things about reading a poem by Paul Muldoon is its range of reference. For instance, "Dirty Data," a poem from the collection, *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* (2015), brings together some of the following elements: *Ben Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1880), the book by General Lew Wallace, along with its 1959 film adaptation (with various references to the actresses involved – Haya Harareet and Cathy O'Donnell, but none to the former president of the NRA), Mescalero and Chiricahua Apaches, the funeral of Winston Churchill, Roman Britain, Billy the Kid, the National Bank of Moldova, and the Roman goddess Pomona – in the space of twenty sonnets. We can linger in one or other dramatic moment from each of these locales and scenes, and if the poem's voice is to be believed, there are causal or analogical connections between them. The whole thing is addressed to General Wallace (there's a repeating phrase, "That's right, Lew..."), as though explaining to him the complex spirals of image and event that have unspooled from his massively popular novel.

The world is a big and complex place, and Muldoon's poem holds out the vision of a narrative that would bind large and variegated tracts of it together. In this, the poem is a good example of his many others which move so agilely through farflung places and historical periods. Apart from the use of narrative turns of phrase, another device by which he sinews these miscellaneous vignettes together is rhyme. He is master of the near-macaronic rhyme, as well as the macaronic near-rhyme (schlock / Antioch; tumble-de-drum / titanium; ad hominem / hem; *gliomach* / stomach; Gúm / plume; Harareet / pleat; underwater / Magna Mater, etc.).

Globalization is often figured as a homogenizing process, where for instance national cuisines are reduced to a few steam table pans and chafing dishes in a food court. Certainly there's a strong sense in which Muldoon's poetry reduces each of the elements to a same-sized stainless steel dish. Certainly we are dizzied by the range of reference, as though we've flown through too many time zones too quickly, sampling something essential in each one until they all blur one into the other. Certainly this major feature of Muldoon's work is consonant with

what some of us experience now in the world, or how we experience it as simulacrum through, say, the internet. Which brings us to the title of the poem itself, “Dirty Data,” which means corrupt data in a computer system. Perhaps Muldoon’s global story is just a series of errors in the system, or as he says, “It must have been during the process of data capture / there was some mash-up....”<sup>8</sup> And this is the last sense in which the poem seems to reflect our present moment, through its overarching idea taken from technology. So here we have him, high above the Atlantic’s waves and covering clouds, writing poems that zigzag through diverse contexts – Paul Muldoon as global poet writing global poems.

But this is only a partial picture of the poet. First, we recall “Rós do Chroí” above, but more generally his work has continuously and profoundly engaged with material connected to Ireland. He was born in Northern Ireland in 1951, as his website tells us, “to Patrick Muldoon, a farm labourer and market gardener, and Brigid Regan, a schoolteacher, Paul Muldoon was brought up near a village called The Moy on the border of Counties Armagh and Tyrone.”<sup>9</sup> This is the kind of rural area that waited till the 1960s for electricity. “Dirty Data,” also, despite its globetrotting, turns to the politics of Northern Ireland in the 1970s, as he brings us back repeatedly to parts of Armagh that saw a lot of terrorist activity in this period; as well as to An Gúm, the state agency for the promotion of literature in Irish, in particular Seosamh Mac Grianna who translated *Ben Hur* into Irish (*Ben Hur: Scéal fá Chríost* [1933]). Mac Grianna also connects us with the Donegal Gaeltacht, where he was born and where he died.

However, Muldoon not only follows *Ben Hur*’s path into Irish translation in 1933, and the subsequent fate of its translator, but he goes further. These are indices of the broad extent to which Ireland and the Irish language are integral parts of Muldoon’s imagination, well exceeding the images and ideas gleaned on his more flighty whistle-stop tours. David Wheatley has written of Muldoon’s wide-ranging and varied engagement with the Irish language – from translations of Irish poets, occurrences of Irish-language vocabulary in the poems to writing poems on several occasions in the language itself.<sup>10</sup> Muldoon did not come from an Irish-speaking household, but learned it at school and has spoken highly of one particular teacher, Seán O’Boyle, for alerting him to Irish-language culture. Muldoon even toyed with the idea in his teens of becoming an Irish-language

<sup>8</sup> Paul Muldoon, *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015) 106.

<sup>9</sup> “About Paul Muldoon,” Paul Muldoon Official Website, <https://www.paulmuldoonpoetry.com/about-paul-muldoon> (accessed 18 June 2018).

<sup>10</sup> David Wheatley, “The Aistriúchán Cloak: Paul Muldoon and the Irish Language,” *New Hibernia Review*, 5.4 (2001): 123-34.

poet. Wheatley remarked that his initial lack of success “may have robbed us of a brilliant monoglot Irish-language poet, but his achievement has by no means reneged on the ‘marvellous heritage of song and culture’ to which O’Boyle introduced him.”<sup>11</sup>

So, insofar as Muldoon is fully globalized as a poet, even as he engages imaginatively with both the Irish language and Irish subject matter, he seems to fit our profile above. Yet one element is missing: guilt. Wheatley, for instance, remarks that he is not “nostalgic for a vanished organic tradition,”<sup>12</sup> contrasting his engagement with the Irish language with that of another Irish poet, “whose translations are characterized by an austere and guilt-ridden fidelity.”<sup>13</sup> Muldoon seems to shrug blithely at such an idea, which implies we have to look elsewhere for a better theoretical description.

Since the 1990s, various writers such as Arjun Appadurai and Bruce Robbins have been urging us to hold back from what is often called binary thinking about globalism. Robbins says that “cosmopolitanism or internationalism does not take its primary meaning or desirability from an absolute and intrinsic opposition to nationalism.”<sup>14</sup> He urges, rather, to see how the global and local are, and ever have been, inextricably interwoven. This suggests that at the very least we should complicate our idea of what a cosmopolitan culture might look like. Robbins again insists that this cosmopolitan elite, “is inevitably as various, fissured, and problematic” as the formations with which it is usually contrasted.<sup>15</sup> This variety, these fissures, and these problems will have different contours in different writers.

Wheatley remarks how in his poem “Immram” Muldoon “graft[s] Irish source material onto [...] Chandleresque excursions” and that some people might see this as “an unapologetic act of cultural mongrelization” and indeed perhaps as unforgivable, imagining that the Irish material should be left unsullied by the trash of modern culture. But Wheatley does not accept this, and looks more closely at that Irish source material, discovering that it is “itself an extremely hybridized cultural product.”<sup>16</sup> Another critic, speaking in more general terms about the way that Irish nationalism exploited Irish-language materials in the nineteenth century, argues that it deliberately suppressed its hybrid features,

<sup>11</sup> Wheatley 133.

<sup>12</sup> Wheatley 124.

<sup>13</sup> Wheatley 127.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce Robbins, *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 17.

<sup>15</sup> Robbins 111.

<sup>16</sup> Wheatley 126.

and with huge amounts of wishful thinking, imagined it to be a pure Irish source. Matthew Campbell remarks that in this context “authenticity itself is a synthetic construct,” and we are left with the realization “that the hybrid, the bogus and the counterfeit lurk at the roots of modern Irish culture.”<sup>17</sup>

On the face of it, we seem to have two Muldoons: the first writes poems that reflect and partake in our globalized moment, flitting with serendipity and speed from one time and place to another, cosmopolitan to their core; the second intensely engages with Irish culture and the Irish language, even going as far as writing in it occasionally. But looking more closely at his poetry, we see that this division is more our own imposition. Why, to paraphrase one of Muldoon’s poems, should we not have the best of both worlds? If Muldoon’s work provides us with a way of thinking about a globalized literature in English that is no longer defined by a postcolonial framework, it also allows us to think about fissures and problems in the new dispensation.

Use of Irish material – whether it is the use of untranslated Irish words or phrases in English poems, making references to Irish mythology of contemporary culture, or writing poems in the language itself – might be considered what Gayatri Spivak calls withholding. In “The Politics of Translation” she argues that a true globalism will involve the learning of other languages, and especially not only the major ones. The opposite is the idea is that anything worth our attention is available through English:

In the act of wholesale translation into English there can be a betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest. This happens when all the literature of the Third World gets translated into a sort of with-it translatese, so that the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan.<sup>18</sup>

She then traces various examples of writers who *withhold* information or sensibilities from this homogenized anglophone global culture. They insist that you will not get the full picture unless you make some effort.

But such withholding is not somehow the diametric opposite of absolute global legibility. Such a text, along with a text that withholds absolutely, is a chimera. What we have instead of this, as we read texts each day, is a spectrum: some

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Campbell, *Irish Poetry under the Union, 1801-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 1.

<sup>18</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Politics of Translation,” *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 182.

poems and novels might be in another language, or might incorporate large tranches of text in another language; while others again, might just use a foreign word here and there. In the Irish context, this is called using the *cúpla focal*, or “the couple of words” in Irish, to give a flavor of otherness to the anglophone text, much as one sparingly might add flakes of ghost chilli to food.

A writer’s place on such a spectrum is intimately connected with matters of style, audience, and biography. In the case of W.B. Yeats, as we read him against other nineteenth-century attempts to use Irish-language material by, for instance, Samuel Ferguson or James Clarence Mangan, we realize that part of his genius was to estimate brilliantly the amount of Irish proper names and mythological background a general anglophone reader can take. Such adroitness is essential for the successful transfers of material from one culture and language to another. Likewise, Muldoon, we might say, curates his Irish material with care. One index of this is the fact that *Rising to the Rising* was not released by Faber and Faber in the UK and Farrar, Straus, and Giroux in the US, his usual trade publishers, but The Gallery Press, a smaller Irish publisher in Loughcrew, Co. Meath. Addressing a putatively smaller audience he can thus draw on shared knowledge and common interests.

Moreover, the choice of Irish for a poem and other brief passages in the book has a different acoustic for such an audience than it would beyond Ireland. While the Irish Republic has enthusiastically appropriated the language as a component in its ideology, the exponents themselves of that culture – that is, writers in Irish – have been underenthused by the connection between the language and the nation. One of the major living Irish-language poets is Máire Mhac an tSaoi, about whom one critic has accurately remarked: “Níor mhiste a rá, bíodh go bhfuil breis agus *petite patrie* amháin aici, nach léir aon cheangal *le grande patrie*, ná dílseacht dá leithéid” (It may be worth mentioning that although she has more than one *petite patrie* there is little evidence of any affiliation or loyalty to any *grande patrie*).<sup>19</sup> What this means is that while Mhac an tSaoi has above all aligned herself with Dunquin and its community there, she has not aligned herself with the Irish nation. The Irish state lays claim to the Irish language and its literature, only for those writers to promptly wriggle out of the embrace. So, paradoxically, she instructs us to decouple the Irish language from the Irish nation.

<sup>19</sup> Seán Mac Réamoinn, “Athnuachan an traidisiúin,” *Comhar*, 48.12 (1989): 22-26. Qtd in Máire Mhac an tSaoi, *The Miraculous Parish: Selected Poems*, ed. Louis de Paor (Winston Salem, NC: Wake Forest University Press, 2014) 28.

To readers outside Ireland, Muldoon's choice of language might seem to bring him closer to the cloistered heart of the nation, but bearing in mind my comments at the outset, we know that in fact it only serves to *exclude* most Irish readers from what is being said (at least temporarily, until they read the translation, which, like they say a lover can't be, is both beautiful and true). Another possibility is that Muldoon's relationship with the Irish language has less to do with Irish nationalism than with his engagement with the Ulster Gaelic heritage (much like Mhac an tSaoi's *petite patrie* above).<sup>20</sup> The Irish language has a troubled relationship with Irish nationalism. The use of Irish in *Rising to the Rising* may well serve to provoke some Irish readers to anger, even as further others may be satisfied by its small, unobtrusive instances, a *cúpla focal* added to the predominantly anglophone mix.

By way of conclusion, I wish to move back from the language politics of the book to the larger anglophone context, with reference to US poetry. Over two decades ago, the poet Charles Bernstein published an essay entitled, "Poetics of the Americas" (1996), in which he argued for an idea of poetry that was not nationalist in a narrow sense, but would better reflect the array of Americas within America:

Any unitary concept of America is an affront to the multiplicity of Americas that make U.S. culture as vital as it is. America is, to echo Perednik, an "unclassifiable" totality. For there is no one America. The U.S. is less a melting pot than a simultaneity of inconsolable coexistences – from the all-too-audible spokespeople of the state to the ghostly voices of the almost lost languages of the sovereign nations of Arapaho, Mohawk, Shoshone, Pawnee, Pueblo, Navaho, Crow, Cree, Kickapoo, Blackfoot, Cheyenne, Zuni...; though in truth there are no sovereigns, only sojourners.

For writing, or reading, to assume – and consequently "express" or "project" – a national identity is as problematic as for writing to assume a self or group identity. However, in jettisoning such presumptions, some sense of what such entities might be may be revealed.<sup>21</sup>

Bernstein returns us an idea of national poetry in which the nation is blown open so wide as now to include the world. This connects with another strong

<sup>20</sup> I am grateful here to one of the anonymous peer-reviewers for this idea.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Bernstein, *My Way: Speeches and Poems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 114.

argument in recent American literary criticism, spear-headed by scholars such as Wai Chee Dimock, Joshua Miller, Jonathan Arac, and Donald Pease, which encourages us to dispense with the United States as a framework for thinking about literature. In James Clifford's phrase, we should think about the routes not roots of literary works; that is, the way they travel and not the way they stay fixed in certain polities. Dimock, for instance, blows open America by considering its culture as part of a continuum of world culture stretching over centuries if not millennia. In her view, the works of Thoreau and Emerson are not an expression of an exceptional national tradition, but rather a temporary stop on a longer, more complex journey. In some respects, Muldoon makes common cause with such cultural criticism. He, too, wishes to blow open the idea of Ireland. For him, the nation may be celebrated, but only if it is made more generous to other views and other languages.

But what are we to do with all these exploded nations lying around the place? After we have deconstructed the cultural framework of the nation, are we left with anything beyond an economy to celebrate? Both Muldoon and Bernstein loosen the national frame as way of considering culture, but do they dispense with it? Or, does their work begin the journey away from the nation? If we allow the preceding point that Bernstein's "poetics of the Americas" must include formal resources beyond those he espouses, then does not a poet like Muldoon also belong there? Resident in the US since the late 1980s, writing poetry that engages thematically with the US, firmly ensconced within literary institutions in the US (to the degree that he becomes a target in Bernstein's latest book as, in the words of one reviewer, one of the "prominent arbiters of the poetic mainstream"),<sup>22</sup> Muldoon could not, I think, be omitted from a good history of US poetry of the period. Likewise, as Bernstein argues, the postmodern aesthetic of language writing created commonalities across national divides to the degrees that the idea of the "Americas" gradually becomes defunct as a way of understanding poetry.

Muldoon, in his poetry at least, does not have something as simple as a 'position' on these issues. Rather his work raises them, plays with them, and finds strange rhymes for them. Certainly, *Rising to the Rising* was a celebration of Irish nationalism, but read within the more general context of his *oeuvre*, this collection of poems does not celebrate the Irish nation exclusively. Next week might find our poet back in the US celebrating an occasion specific to that

<sup>22</sup> Jules Smith, "Charles Bernstein's Aesthetic Probe," review of Charles Bernstein, *Pitch of Poetry*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 31 August 2016, <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/private/aesthetic-probe> (accessed 18 June 2018).

*Justin Quinn*

country and its citizens, among which Muldoon is numbered. Such lack of exclusivity may disappoint chauvinists, even as it chivvies cosmopolites, reminding them that their local liens and allegiances do not have to be undone.