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Notes on Contributors

Addition

For the child has hidden
The bird in his desk
And all the children
Hear its song
And all the children
Hear the music
And eight and eight in their
Turn off they go
And four and four in their
Turn and two and two
Fade away
And one and one make
Neither one nor two
But one and one off they go
And the lyre bird sings
And the child sings
And the teacher shouts
When you're quite finished
Playing the fool
But all the children
Are listening to the music
And the walls of the classroom
Quietly crumble
The window panes turn
Once more to sand
The ink is sea
The desk is trees
The chalk is cliffs
And the feather
In the ancient quill
On display
A bird again soaring skyward

Retch

Life was unbearable.
Constantly being stopped
and questioned-
"Where are you going?"
"Where have you been?"
Clothes vetted,
mileage noted,
life a minefield,
any sudden explosion
meaning days in
sleeves and sunglasses.
Worse
was that patch
of worn carpet,
where made to stand
night after night
she faced a photograph
of a white wedding,
bride 'n' groom framed
at the church mouth
covered in thrown up rice.....

- Chris Major

Obverbs II

Names

No more need for anxiety and pain:
Everything's all right now it has a name.

Sincerity

Telling eyes
Can't tell lies.

Gold & Silver

We work all week for silver, yet
at weekends drink gold to forget.

The Past

All that can last
Is the past.

Necessities I

On necessities the Prophet said:
Milk, coffee, toilet paper, bread.

Immortality

It's a pity we won't always be
Around to enjoy immortality.

Sophistry

Sophistication was the age of Solon
When the question mark was a semi-colon.

Flaming June

The crumpled lady barrels out while plodding by:
“Where’s flaming June then? – and flamin’ July?”

August 24th 2006

Holst was correct, after all, with his octo:
today they stripped planetary status from Pluto!

DIY-ity

A society of Do-It-Yourself
and every man for his shelf

The Grey

I had a shelf lined with Tolkien books;
glimpsed Gandalf in my father’s looks.

Poet

Carve your niche on a shelf;
Sell your soul to yourself.

- Alan Morrison

Moules Frites

The café stinks of the seaside
we sit outside basking
in intermittent sun,
warm and then a chill
from the sea.

The mussels arrive
hot and steaming
promising the taste
of salt.

My first memory
Of mussels was
in a dark midlands pub,
St John's Vaults,
opposite a church but
no place for saints.

Pickled in jar
The bi-valve
looked more like
a medical specimen
taken from a dusty shelf.

An old man at my
shoulder whispered that
a woman told him that
that the creature reminded her
of her sex she had viewed
from a mirror.

The long dark edged
lips and the protuberant
flesh and the taste of salt
secured this double image
in my mind.

In bright sun
I open the treasure
and take the taste
with my tongue.

- Bob Rogers

Paragon of Polygon

Long before it was ever settled which way things would go, there were always patterns coming in and out of focus through an unpredictable lens. Rude, blunt, fickle in every way, these signs and sculptures posed and passed for real things, appeared and reappeared as ancient archetype, as paragon.

Were we prescient, or rather ignorant?
Were the holes in the hassock, run through by a child's screw driver or by a pile driver, that popped and mocked guttural sounds with every thrust (like punching holes in bloated sheep)? Were they holes, or the deep ravines where we played our games of war.

Not long after it all made sense, when the integers responded to rule (the ceremonial doubling of twos—*ad infinitum*), there followed a vague apprehension as shapes began to form from shapes, lines into right angles, finally, an approved algorithm handed down for us: two raised to its highest power.

But four-thousand and ninety-six is about as high as I can go, at night, in bed, with all the glut of steel and architecture in my brain; warm April rain gives way to a longitudinal wind, greenish sea to perpendicular blue, long parallel waves to longer parallel tides, all bound by edge and angle, bound by polygon.

These patterns fill my mind, filled it then
and fill it now, patterns in the pounding in
and patterns in the pounding out. The shapely
body, the misshapen limb, flesh or birch.
The corners remain protracted only by degree.
Length and breadth have coalesced, in the end
as shapely beauty, as paragon of polygon.

- Edward Nudelman

In the Calligraphy and Painting Room

The combination of painting and poetry within the same work. (Booklet for the China: The Three Emperors exhibition, London)

I want to stand
in the cool white space
between watercolour
and brushworked letters,

as mountains scrape cloud,
a crane alights,
plumes of smoke rise
from the meditation hut

where the artist sits,
cross-legged. I want to hear
the rustle of paper
tucked inside his pocket,

the fishing-boat's low hum
as it crosses the lake.
But I recall the whir
of the Shetland ferry

rounding sea-sprayed cliffs,
far beyond the high walls
and corridors of white noise
of my life in London.

I remember what it was
to be stepping off that ferry
at the edge of Britain,
watching gannets soar.

Lateral Thinking: Paul Muldoon's *The End of the Poem* and *Horse Latitudes*.

Paul Muldoon would probably drool over the kinds of coincidences noted in the history of American presidents, especially between Lincoln and Kennedy. These have often been recounted but here is a brief summary. Abraham Lincoln was killed in Ford's Theatre; John F. Kennedy was killed riding in a Lincoln convertible made by the Ford Motor Company. Both were succeeded by Southern Democrats named Johnson. Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's successor, was born in 1808; Lyndon Johnson, Kennedy's successor, was born in 1908. John Wilkes Booth, born in 1839, shot Lincoln in a theatre and fled to a warehouse; Lee Harvey Oswald, born in 1939, shot Kennedy from a warehouse and fled to a theatre. And so it goes on. These facts are taken from an online article from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which, going by both his prose and poetry, is clearly Muldoon's favourite bedtime reading. Indeed the coincidental similarity between the names 'Judas' and 'Jew' or the word play indulged in by Jesus in naming Peter as the 'rock' on which the church will be built, fit firmly in the sort of readings we find in *The End of the Poem*, the collection of Muldoon's lectures given in his role as Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1999 to 2004. The 'crypto-currents' are what he seems especially concerned with in his interpretations and perhaps also give us an insight into the poems he writes.

In his discussion of Auden, Muldoon writes, 'It seems to me that all reading is, to a greater or lesser extent, involved with speculation on what's going on, consciously or unconsciously in the writer's mind, just as all writing is involved with speculation on what's going on, consciously or unconsciously, in the reader's mind.' Indeed speculation, some would say wild speculation, is at the heart of these lectures and Muldoon delights in allowing words to take him on a journey, the end of which is always promised and indefinitely postponed.

Whether discussing Frost, Bishop, Arnold or Auden, you get the impression that these chapters were written by a man who is either in a library or in the office next door, who will run across to consult Spanish or Italian dictionaries, poets' biographies, the multi-volumed OED, or his trusty Encyclopaedia Britannica. At times he seemed to be opening the biographies of his poets, turning to the index and searching for any mention of Oxford, ostensibly to flatter his original audience of dons and graduates. Nevertheless it would be wrong to see Muldoon here as being overly reverent, as Peter Conrad finds in his *Observer* review. In fact, it is not surprising to hear that some of his Oxford audiences balked at the tenuous connections he makes between and inside the poems he discusses, the apparently bizarre critical gymnastics, the reading between the lines, and the 'verbal bridges'.

Helen Vendler objects to Muldoon's 'untenable inferences' and the 'subliminal presences'. One such example is when Charles Darwin stands as a ghostly presence in 'Dover Beach', vaguely visible in the word 'withdrawing'. Georgie Hyde-Lees loiters in the background of Yeats's 'All Souls' Night'. There is a glass of wine on the table in Yeats's poem. Keats wrote about a glass of wine and mentioned 'drains'. 'Drains' can be a synonym for 'Lees'. So it all ties together perfectly.

Muldoon gets to his points by circuitous routes and we must imagine him delivering these 'stunt readings', as he calls them, with tongue firmly planted in cheek. The whimsical readings are often entertaining. They highlight the fact that readers open up poems in all sorts of ways. He seems to be saying that we should have more fun with poems, that we should read them and re-make them in our own image. That's certainly what he does and his comments are nothing less than we'd expect from a poet known for his verbal fireworks, a poet variously described as a riddler, a shape-shifter, disorienting, exhilarating, cheeky, oblique, a Puck of contemporary poetry.

The attempts to stick his neck out and deal more overtly with contested literary issues are less successful. For example, in the discussion of Bishop's '12 O'Clock News', he tries to address the point at which the poem 'stops being verse and becomes prose'. Two pages before, he referred to I. A. Richards' tenor and vehicle definition of metaphor as 'a shaggy dog story.' He then goes on to pinpoint the very word where Bishop's poem ceases to be poetry and becomes prose: 'It happens somewhere between the end of the third sentence and the beginning of the fourth, almost certainly between the word "dead" and "visibility"'. Muldoon's criteria for whether a poem is verse or prose is whether or not it can be translated into verse by chopping up the lines wherever he sees fit. This is unsatisfying, at best a shaggy dog story of Muldoon's own. It should draw a wry smile from his audience.

The lectures are a mixture of great leaps of interpretation and detailed close reading. In the lecture on Lowell's 'George III', while discussing the word 'poor', he says, 'I'm sent back, however, to three other occasions on which Lowell uses the word "poor" as the opening word of a poem.' This is where the reader will accelerate, racing ahead to the ever-receding point, or to the page where Muldoon takes up another thread.

These threads are traced subliminally, reading between or below the lines, and also through near versions and crypto-currents and Freudian 'verbal bridges'. They allow Muldoon to take his interpretations in all sorts of unusual directions. The tenuous connections, however, can at times appear arbitrary. Muldoon is aware of the 'hazardous' nature of speculations on an author's intentions and sees this as giving him free reign for his own apparently outlandish insights. He invokes Baudrillard as justification, pointing to the fact that such word play 'allow[s] the pure materiality of language to show through'.

By the time you get to the lecture on Auden, you just know Muldoon is going to find echoes of that Aud- part of the name in all sorts of places. Indeed, it crops up in the poem title "Aubade", in Saint Augustine, and in the Latin motto 'Audi, ne moriamur'. Earlier, in the lecture on H.D., Ezra Pound puts in an appearance in 'Sea Poppies', not as one who advised or even edited her words, but as the inspiration for phrases like 'grated shells' or 'split conch shells', these being, of course, caused 'by the pounding wind and waves'. Richard Aldington appears in another H.D. poem, anagrammatically in 'acrid fragrance / hardened'. It's as if poetry has become one huge crossword puzzle.

By the final chapter Muldoon can take this method for granted. Heaney's 'A Brigid's Girdle' is dedicated to Adele Dalsimer. We are given the lines, 'I heard the mocking bird / And a delicious, articulate / Flight of small plinkings from a dulcimer'. Muldoon then tells us that 'dulcimer' rhymes with Dalsimer, but leaves out any mention of the given name in 'A *delicious*'. It is as if by now he doesn't have to point out the subliminal references.

In that last chapter three poems are tackled in succession. This perhaps is the weakest part, without the time to develop his reading and extend the references. I for one would have liked to have heard more on the Heaney poem. The final paragraph is also less than satisfactory, which is not entirely out of kilter with a book about open ends.

In those Oxford lectures Muldoon takes lateral thinking to extremes. The word lateral itself shares its etymological roots with 'latitude'. *Horse Latitudes*, Muldoon's tenth collection was published around the same time as *The End of the Poem* and it requires the reader to employ as much lateral thinking as they can muster in unravelling the tangled threads of narrative and meaning.

The collection is pervaded by death. This is one of the reasons for the reference in the title to the area known as the doldrums. Whether it is the dedication to Muldoon's sister or the poems where he recalls dead friends and relatives, intimations of mortality are implied in the loss of others.

There is a high body count in this book, especially in the title sequence, a kind of potted history of warfare, refracted through battles starting with the letter b, refracted again through the dying 'Carlotta' (with her grandfather's enigmatic utterings from the sidelines), and refracted once more through the many instances where horses are used as an instrument of war. It has been noted that the battles hint at a missing Baghdad, or the missing place name Bermuda, located in the doldrums, the place where things notoriously go missing.

Rather than give an overview of the collection, it may be worth using the example of the 'rodeo reading' of *The End of the Poem*, attempting, as it were, a Muldoonian reading of a Muldoon poem.

'Brandywine' is the 12th poem in the opening sonnet sequence:

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

Like Muldoon sitting in his office, surrounded by reference books, the reader must show a little initiative here. The internet might also be of help. This way, you can easily discover that the Battle of Brandywine was a disastrous episode for the Americans in the Revolutionary War. The battle took place, significantly enough, on 11th September 1777. The opening salvoes were fired when the British came upon an American

reconnaissance party in a saloon. The Americans immediately retreated out the back door, leaving their horses tied up at the front. We should remember at this point that the Horse Latitudes are so-called because sailors notoriously threw horses overboard to make progress through the becalmed waters. So the start of the Brandywine battle chimes neatly with the title of the collection.

Even before the initial skirmishes of this battle, the horses had already suffered. The British troops travelled for thirty-four days before landing near Philadelphia and many horses died on the voyage. Wikipedia tells me that the landing proved a problem as the river was shallow and clogged with mud. Lots of horses, of course, died in the battle, which eventually led to the English taking Philadelphia. A not altogether 'arbitrary' title then, as Helen Vendler would have it.

The opening of the poem finds the speaker crouched in 'Little Ease'. A quick internet search will tell you that this was the name of a notorious cell, 1.2 metres square, in the Tower of London. The Catholic martyr Edmund Campion was the most famous inmate. The reader might ask whether this is simply a way for Muldoon to describe his emotional suffering due to his friend's illness, or is there more to the reference?

Carlotta's tumour is identified on the scan by a nurse who is 'keen sighted as a lanner'. The lanner is a female falcon. The mention of any falcon in a poem is likely to remind the reader of Yeats's apocalyptic image in 'The Second Coming'. Yeats's gyres, the analogy for a cyclical theory of history, chimes neatly with the framework of repetitive battles.

Carlotta and the speaker of the poem sit by the pool of the Vanderbilt hotel in Nashville. Carlotta is diving in the pool. The impact of the tumour surfacing is like Carlotta herself surfacing in the pool, her snorkel clogged, like the shallow, muddy Elk river that proved problematic for the British forces. Her goggles had become fogged and indeed Wikipedia tells us that September 11, 1777 began with a heavy fog. So it is that Carlotta surfaced 'like flot'. 'Flot' does not appear in any of my

dictionaries, except as the acronym, used by the US military, for Forward Line of Own Troops, stretching the already extended military metaphor to breaking point.

One would presume Muldoon was thinking of 'flotsam' here. The word 'flot' points up the relation of the root word to both 'flotilla' and 'fleet', reminding us again of the fleet that sailed up the Elk river to engage the American forces. The word 'fleet' is also suggestive of 'fleeting', linking neatly, of course, to an underlying theme in the sequence and in much of the collection, that being the transitory nature of experiences, introduced as early as the first poem, with its closing lines: 'For now our highest ambition / was simply to bear the light of the day / we had once been planning to seize.'

Yeats hovers in the background of this poem in the same way that Pound or Aldington loiter behind the H.D. poem. The tumour that turns up, or Carlotta, who emerges from the pool, are like the lees drained off the wine in a barrel. The mention of lees here sends us back to the first Oxford lecture in *The End of the Poem* where the ghost word 'lees' conjures up the figure of George Hyde-Lees and sends Muldoon off to Keats's Nightingale. Keats's 'dull opiate' makes him sink into Lethe. Carlotta rises out of the Vanderbilt pool but will eventually sink into the opiates of palliative care. George Hyde-Lees is behind Yeats's ceremonial sharing of wine with the dead on All Souls's Night and Muldoon's poem, entitled 'Brandywine' is a conjuring up of a friend with a terminal illness.

The 'turnings and tilts' of Muldoon's poems only serve to remind us that, while they might appear 'a tad impenetrable' at times, a little research can open up various alternative readings. It will always be up to the reader to decide whether, when it comes to Muldoon's allusive and elusive poems, the ends justify the effort it takes to unravel them.

I doubt whether this book will come to be seen as vintage Muldoon, but as always, there are poems here - The Old Country and Eggs among them - that are up there with his finest and there are poems that are perplexing and apparently impenetrable enough to keep the avid Muldoonian guessing until the next collection comes around.

Horse Latitudes

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- Stephen Brown

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Alan Morrison had his first selection of poetry published in *Don't Think of Tigers* (The Do Not Press, 2001). Since then he has appeared in numerous poetry magazines and has had chapbooks published by Sixties Press and Waterloo Press. His recent collection, *The Mansion Gardens*, was nominated for the 2006 T S Eliot Prize.

Edward Nuldeman is a graduate of the University of Washington and has written two books on an American illustrator. He has received awards for his prose and currently has a short story on Amazon Shorts. He owns a rare book company which specializes in nineteenth century English and American literature, in the Boston area and is currently working on a book of poems.

Bob Rogers was born in Staffordshire, and is now living and teaching in Norfolk. He has published two pamphlets of poetry and has had poems published in *Poetry Review*, *Bananas*, *Jo Soap's Canoe*, *Tuba* and *Grand Piano* in the 80s and early 90s. He has returned to writing poetry after a break to complete academic work.