Paul Muldoon: Tradition and Transition

The sky went out of its way for the hills
And life was changing down for the sharp bends
Where the road had put its thin brown arm round
A hill and hold on tight out of pure fear
Paul Muldoon “Good Friday, 1971. Driving Westward”

Paul Muldoon is the successor of Seamus Heaney who taught him, when he was an undergraduate at Queen’s University, Belfast. He has been widely influenced by Frost, Eliot, Yeats and Seamus Heaney. He is considered one of the poets of Northern Ireland but now a citizen of America. The previous chapters have given ample evidences to substantiate the prime argument of this thesis that the three tier symbolism of stone, tree and water in the poems of Yeats and Heaney plays a major role in establishing a tradition of landscape poetry in Irish literature. In view of it, this chapter explains how Paul Muldoon’s major poems express his voice for Irish tradition though he is increasingly influenced by the process of urbanization and globalization.

His critics have considered Paul Muldoon a poet of postmodern era, who often crosses the borders of Ireland. But this study tries to trace the Irish-Celtic elements in his poems and his stand as a poet of Celtic tradition and of the Northern Ireland’s politics, both religious and social. The following poems from his earlier collection, *New Weather* (1974) to later one, *The Annals of Chile* (1994) are taken for this critical analysis. The poems have been dealt with the three groups in terms of the symbolism with respect to stone, water and tree.

The poems that have the reference of stone image include, “Dancers at the Moy”, “Good Friday, 1971”, “Driving Westward”, “The Year of the Sloes, for Ishi”, “Ned Skinner”, “The Narrow Road to the Deep North”, “From Armageddon,

In a large number of poems, Muldoon has employed the symbol of tree in its various forms like orchard, grove, wood, forest, hedge, bush etc. They are: “The Electric Orchard”, “Wind and Tree”, “The Cure for Warts”, “The Year of the Sloes, for Ishi”, “The mixed Marriage”, “Lunch with Pancho villa”, “Duffy’s Circus”, “Immrama”, “Anseo”, “Yggdrasill”, “The Unicorn Defends Himself”, and “Oscar”.


The poems cited have been grouped separately to analyze the role of these symbols -stone, tree and water- in them respectively. Hence, this study is expected to highlight the continuity of a poetic tradition, which draws his articulative power from Irish landscape. These poems in general have focused on a three fold-theme of Father Quest, the identity as Irish Catholic while based in the United States and the political struggle in Northern Ireland. Heaney is called the ‘bog land poet’ by his critics whereas Muldoon, the poet of urban setting. So most of his poems have recorded the transformation of rural Ireland into urban Ireland. But, he never fails to recognize the places/spaces, which are associated with Irish history, culture, religion and tradition though they are situated in the cities of today. Moreover these three symbols, stone, water and tree in various forms that are part of Irish landscape are employed in his poems to mark such transformation.
“New Weather” (1975) is Muldoon’s first poetry collection that has brought him a wide popularity. Most of the poems in this collection reflect his childhood experiences in Northern Ireland and the spaces he recreated in his poems are in and around Armagh, the border county where Muldoon spent his childhood days and as John Kerrigan points out, “you can take the poet out of Armagh… but you cannot take Armagh out of the poet”. For, the places he intended to exhibit can be viewed as the backgrounds or foregrounds of Irish ‘war history’. War spirit has been a driving force of Irish resistance since the invasions of Greek, Vikings and later Anglo Saxon. His poem, “Dancers at the Moy” from New Weather, has a war setting of Athenians but it has been presented as an imagery that is metaphorically presented to trace the history of Irish war of independence. The title has the entity of Moy, which is one of navigable rivers of Sligo, a maritime county in Northern Ireland. In this poem the water imagery is shown in the form of river. Hence the river Moy represents Irish historical fluidity. As water flows the river carries with it the memories of many wars and invasions. The poem begins at a war-field, and ends in the riverbed where, local people gathered to see the white skeletons of horses that had been buried after the war was over. Being skilled in creating montage effect in his poems Muldoon has superimposed “the flat Blackwater/Turning its stones” over “the Italian square/ and circling plain”. The Blackwater is one of the rivers of Northern Ireland and had witnessed many wars in the past but remaining as a geographical evidence of these events happened in the history. The river image is suggestive of such wars held on the riverbanks and the ‘stone’ image stands for the Irish resistance against various invasions and implies the disturbance the country has been facing for centuries from the foreign intrusions. Hence, the poem is political in tone rising the voice of struggle for Irish independence on the one hand and on the other demonstrating the impact of
war and peace which are mere political games enjoyed by the ‘powerful nations over powerless one:

    Peace having been declared
    And a treaty signed.
    The black and gold river,
    Ended as a trickle of brown
    Where those horse tore
    At briars and Whins, (2)

Thus, the poem that has the ‘Blackwater’ and the ‘stone’ as refrain presents Northern Ireland as a land of war staged in Irish landscape.

    “Good Friday, 1971. Driving Westward” is the poem composed on the landscape of Northern Ireland’s coastal as well as mountain ranges and the prime imagery in the poem emerges from a sudden appearance of “heap of stones”. The poem has mapped cultural, religious, social and political landmarks of Northern Ireland. It is a journey through coastal line and through hills of Northern Ireland as the poem begins:

    It was good going along with the sun
    Though Ballygawley, Omagh and Strabance
    I started out as it was getting light
    And caught sight of hares all along the road (10).

    Ballygawley, Strabane are the cities of Northern Ireland. Omegh is a major heritage center, where the “Ulster-American Folk Park”(1976) is located and this center focuses on the experience of Irish emigrants in the United States. This reference hints at Muldoon’s life in America as an Irish-American. The protagonist says: “I moved through morning towards the sea”. John Kerrigan’s observation is: “For Irish writers of this period expatriation had special attractions”
The tour the central figure in the poem engaged in is the survey of his country’s history, culture and religion. He has crossed many places before he leaves his country. He watches ‘doves making the most of their offerings/As if all might not be right with the day”. This imagery is referred to the last lines of the poem, that details the condition of present generation of British occupied Northern Ireland: “children were warned that it was rude to stare/Left with their parents for a breath of air”. Everywhere the change is obviously seen Muldoon thus describes “people are still fighting for the last/Dreams and changing their faces where I paused/to read the first edition of the truth” that may refer to Christ and the protagonist “craved the last great frontier at Lifford/Marooned by iffing and buting herd/ of sheep/. And, it presents the transformation from Celtic to Christian religion. It is like Eliot’s Maggie in their journey, who even witnessed the death of Christ in their hallucination:

Marooned by an iffing and butting herd
Of sheep, Letterkenney had just then laid
Open its heart and we passed as new blood
Back into the grey flesh of Donegal(Good Friday,1971.
Driving Westward 11).

Donegal in ancient times was called Tyrconnell and sometimes O’Donnell’s country, the family that ruled much of the area before the 17th century. Along this Irish coast there are many ruins of castles, including that of the early Northern Irish Kings at the head of Lough Swilly and Kibarron castle, near Ballyshannon the county city in Lifford. Hence, the poem is presented as a blend of history of last Irish Kingdoms and the impact of Christ’s death and the birth of Irish-Christianity.

Now the route takes turn from coastal line to mountain ranges of Northern Ireland:
The sky went out of its way for the hills
And life was changing down for the sharp bends
Where the road had put its thin brown arm round
A hill and hold on tight out of pure fear(11).

Through this narrative, Muldoon juxtaposes the changing phenomena of postmodern life on the one hand and the changeless or something resisting change, which determines the tradition of one’s country on the other. He compares life with the journey that goes ‘down for the sharp bends’ and ‘the road had put its thin brown arm round a hill’, that implies something stable or solid in life and ‘pure fear’ means the reverential piety. The protagonist walks further and says, “I glanced back once/ and there was nothing but a heap of stones”. The ‘heap of stones’ is a recurrent landscape image that is connected to Irish-Celtic ritual of stone cult. It also refers to the heroes of Irish freedom movement who sacrificed their life for that mission.

Moreover, travel imagery is recurrent in the poems of Yeats, Heaney and Muldoon and central figures in such poems probably come across the stone symbol on their way. Yeats’ poem, “Crazy Jane on the Mountain”, in which Jane says:

“I lay on the mountain”

…. 

There in two-horsed carriage
That on two wheels ran
Great bladdered Emer sat,
Her violent man
Cuchulain, sat at her side;
Thereupon
Propped upon my two knees
I kissed a stone-(208)
And, Heaney’s “The Stone Verdict” gives a note on Hermes who is the God of the stone heap:

Let it be like the judgement of Hermes,

God of the stone heap, where the stones were verdicts

Cast solidly at his feet, piling around him

Until he stood waist deep in the cairn

Of his apotheosis (222).

Thus, the stone symbol is deeply buried in the creative faculty of their minds; for, it marks Irish culture space that has been entrenched by tradition. The mountain ranges of their native land stand as an ample source to endorse the poets’ racial solidarity in their poems. For instance, Heaney in “The Stations of the West” recalls Errigal, the white sand and rocky hill of Northern Ireland; Muldoon also describes Errigal mountain in this poem; it is in the county Donegal. Its white quartzite cone is a surrounded area of peat bog in Western Donegal. The Errigal Mountain overshadows both the lake named Lough Dunlewy and the headlands, known as The Rosses, where villages spread out along the rocky coastline. It is said that Yeats’ ‘the Rose’ also symbolizes such Irish landscape.

Hill or mountain is one of the dimensions of stone imagery and Muldoon has presented various mountains in the following poems. “The Upriver Incident” details the incident of a man and a woman who drowned in the deep pool. They ran along the tops of the dark hills that heaped like the sleeping anaconda after its heavy meal. ‘Heavy meal’ is a refrain in the poem and psychologically means to be desirous of something that would be fulfilled. “The Field Hospital” also presents “a hillside of fresh grave” and by this imagery the poem describes the Irish mountain area as a war field. In these two poems, Muldoon speaks about the hilly areas of Ireland where IRA might have engaged in various rebellions. But in “The Year of The Sloes, for Ishi” he
recalls Black Hills, one of the culture areas of Native American, Muldoon is naturally fascinated by the native Americans who have been marginalized by the European settlers in America. The whole poem is a detailed account of Native American’s life with their native setting. The poem begins with a hint on Tepees. Tepee is a cone-shaped tent of animal hide once used as a dwelling by the plains’ people of North America. Long poles in a tripod were used as the framework; there were buffalo hides around the framework, sometimes as many as twenty, were stretched for enclosure. The ‘tepee’ moored to the ground with pegs but readily dismantled and transported, was most suitable as a shelter for nomadic people, such as the Dakota and Black foot.

The poem is set against the Black Hills. It is the vast inland region of the great plain culture area that stretches west from the Mississippi River Valley to the Rocky Mountains and south from present day central Canada to southern Texas. Before the arrival of Europeans, most occupants of the Great Plains lived along the rivers in the eastern regions. They were predominantly farmers who hunted bison to fill out their diets:

He caught the nondescript home
And stepped
Down into the prairies.
In the Moon
Of Making the Fat,
He killed his first bison (16).

Thus, Muldoon has valid reasons to think of the Native Americans in the place of Irish native people. This rocky coastal line resembles the coastal area of the mountain Errigal in Northern Ireland. Some wooded areas, fields of grass, along the river valley rise up from the plains and prairies such as the Black Hills of South Dakota that may remind him of Donegal and Errigal hills of Northern Ireland. The Native American’s
culture area symbolically represents the culture area of Ireland in this poem. So it is obvious that the Black Hill stands for the solidarity of tradition and culture. The poem has created a strong statement of topographical identity that is linked with cultural identity of particular country:

Long as grass would grow and water
Flow, and wind blow,
None of these things had forgotten.
In the moon
Of the black cherries (17)

Another poem written on Irish mountain as landscape and farming is “Ned Skinner” from his collection of poem, Mules. This is the poem of Irish peasantry life in which the elderly people were given due respect. “Narrow Road to the Deep North” also has a farmland setting and presents a stone image along with “the blade of grass”. The poem narrated about a Japanese soldier who stumbled out of the forest because the war had been over and he had lost his sword and had to go back to his old farm. Losing one’s sword means losing one’s identity as a warrior. The situation described in the poem implies the 20th century war culture and politics. Muldoon has hinted at what would be the condition of a soldier after the war was over. The war was not a vocation for them but a profession. After the war is over:

He means to go back to his old farm
And till the land. Though never to deny
The stone its sling,
The blade of grass its one good arm (33).

The stone is shown as a part of the land. Moreover, the stone is imagery, though used as in any dimension, and it always promotes something unchanging that attributes to tradition.
“From Armageddon, Armageddon” is another poem, which alludes to warfare in general and to the location of the final climatic battle between God, also known as Jehovah, and Satan, the Devil mentioned in the book of revelation, in the New Testament in particular. Hence the poem has religious connotation also. It is also referred to an apocalyptic catastrophe:

A summer night in keenaghan
So dark my light had lingered near its lamp
For fear if it. Now was I been afraid.
At the mustard seed mission all was darkness(36).

The wood Armageddon in scripture is known only from a single verse in the Greek New Testament, where it is said to be Hebrew, but it is thought to represent the Hebrew words Har Megido meaning “Hill of Megiddo”. Megiddo was the location of many decisive battles in ancient times. And before the II world war, the I world war was commonly referred to in the newspapers and books as “Armageddon”. In addition to “The Great War”.

The poem narrates in a summer night in Keenaghan, a place in Northern Ireland. It is a war time as the title of the poem suggests and the stone imagery used in the last stanza. “My hand might well have been some flat stone”, refers to one of the relics of Celtic Ireland and it is associated with the “Mustard Seed Mission” mentioned in the fourth line of the first stanza, “At the Mustard Seed Mission all was darkness. The mission stands for Celtic church movement spread in the early 5th Ireland the Dark Ages are known as the Age of Saints. According to many critics Patrick was a Celt and was born in England. He was kidnapped as a teenager and taken to Ireland. In the harshness of life as a slave he learned to trust god. After six years he escaped and returned home. Soon after he received a vision in which he
heard “the voice of the Irish” pleading with him to come and walk amongst them once more. Patrick and his small team not only successfully evangelized Ireland in three decades without violence or bloodshed. He also gave rise to the beginning of the believer’s movement, centuries before the reformation. The Celtic Christian movement that Patrick and his companies instigated was not a part of the Roman Catholic Church but it had some distant connections to the “Desert Fathers in Egypt”([http://www.msainfo.org/clopsub.asp](http://www.msainfo.org/clopsub.asp))

What distinguished Celtic Christian faith was that it emphasized the importance of calling people to a vital personal faith in Jesus Christ that impacted every area of life. The Celtic Christian movement was known for their care for the poor and their love of creation. They saw life as sacrament of god. Thus, ‘Armageddon’ and the ‘flat stone’ are considered to have a Celtic heritage of both war and religion.

The poems “Immrama” and “Lull” also have mountain imagery and the former focuses on the theme of the legendary quest for father whereas the latter, religious politics prevailing in Northern Ireland. The poem begins with the narration about the protagonists father:

I, too, have trailed my father’s spirit
From the mud-walled cabin behind the mountain
Where he was born and bred,(40)

The quest for father is a typical representation of searching for racial identity. The wikipedia, the Internet source gives an account of Immram. It is (in plural Immrama) one of the class of old Irish tales concerning a hero’s sea journey to the other world, sea journey has been the recurrent theme of Irish poetry since the Celtic mythology came into exist. Most of the Immrama were written in the Christian era and essentially Christian in aspect. They preserve elements of Irish mythology. Moreover,
“immram” is usually translated as ‘voyage’. In Modern orthography, the word is “iomramh”.

Medieval history of Irish literature gives the names of seven Immrama of which three survive today. They are, the voyage of Maul Duin, the voyage of VI Chorra and the voyage of St. Brenden. The Immrama are identifiably by their focus on the exploits of the heroes of during their search for the other world, located in the islands far to the west of Ireland. The hero sets out on his voyage for the sake of adventure or to fulfill his destiny. He generally stops on other fantastic islands before reaching his destination and may or may not be able to return home again. This theme of voyage also resembles the wandering of Fergus, (one of the heroes of Celtic Myths) with hazel wand in his hand and the wandering of Oissin. Both Fergus and Oissin are the prime characters engaged in journey in many of the poems of Yeats and Heaney. In this poem, Muldoon also hints at Fergus as “the mountain is coming down with hazel”. John Kerrigan observes:

Muldoon was always interested in traveling around rather than one-way emigration, in transits rather than arrivals. His early poem “Immrama” notices the potential of junctions, however humdrum [he refers to the places, Wigan and Crewe mentioned in the poem] and renders destinations nugatory (the Brazil where his father never drank with a hypothetical Nazi while failing to reach Argentina). It is characteristic that in his [Paul Muldoon’s] Clarendon’s lecturer, “To Ireland, I” (2000) he should invest the Yeats paradigm and argue that the Irish are in exile in Ireland itself. (John Kerrigan, <http://jacketmagazine.com/20/kerr-muld.html>).

Thus, the myth of journey is rendered in such poems to be space specific and it is constructed on Irish landscape.
“Lull” is also religious in tone and the landscape mapped in the poem lists six counties of Northern, Ireland. Thus it presents the popular theme of border politics among the countries, especially in Northern Ireland. In this poem, Muldoon using the device of collage juxtaposes Mount of Olives and County Derry in Northern Ireland. The mountain ranges, which are depicted in the poem, are politically associated with IRA’s camps and their war strategy. The poem has simply recorded the names of six counties of Northern Ireland along with the Mount of Olives in east Jerusalem, which has religious reference:

I’ve heard it argued in some quarters
That in Armagh they mow the hay
With only a week to go to Christmas,
That no one’s in a hurry
To save it, or their own sweet selves.
Tomorrow is another day,
As your man said on the Mount of Olives.
The same is held of County Derry.
...
I know that eternal interim;
I think I know what they’re waiting for
In Tyrone, Fermanagh, Down and Antrim(41)

The different regions of Northern Ireland are frequently referred to by the names of the province’s six traditional Irish counties, though they are no longer the units of local government. These are Antrim, Down, Armagh, Fermanagh, Tyrone and Derry. And, the Mount of Olives is obviously related to the religious as well as rebellion’s space of Northern Ireland. Muldoon’s utterance of “your man” is none other than Jesus Christ. Jesus is referred to be in third person as an outsider and
because Ireland is considered the country of Virgin Mary. After the ‘Last Supper’ Jesus and his disciples went to the Mount of Olives, where, according to Matthew (26:30-32) and Mark (14:26-28), Jesus predicted his resurrection. Knowing then that the hour of his death was near, Jesus retired to the Garden of Gethsemane, where, “being in agony” (Luke 22:44), he meditated and prayed. A crowd sent by the religious authorities, and led by Judas Iscariot, arrested him in Gethsemane. And, indeed, citing this episode of Christ’s sacrifice of his life, Muldoon acknowledges the greatness of his IRA men on par with the sacrifice of Christ. The county Derry is very much associated with the Irish War of Independence and Muldoon presents Derry as an icon of Irish war history. The city is often regarded as “the cockpit of the troubles”. On Sunday January 30, 1972, 13 unarmed civilians were shot dead by British paratroopers during a civil rights march in the Bogside area. Another 13 were wounded and one further man later died of his wounds. This event came to be known as Bloody Sunday. Because of these events, certain areas of Derry produced strong support for republican paramilitaries. Up to 1972, both the Provisional Irish Republican Army and Official IRA operated in the city (www.en.wikipedia.org/The trouble).

Moreover, the following description of ‘Mount of Olives’ in a way implies the conflict and clash between the catholic majority and the protestant minority as it marks the territory between Christian and Muslim lands. Mount of Olives is known as Mount Olivet that is a limestone ridge situated in central Israel, east of Jerusalem, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967. So, it is about the occupied land like Northern Ireland. Its name is derived from a grove of olive trees that stood on its western land. The ridge has three summits. The northern most often called Mount Scopus, which is the site of the Hebrew city of Jerusalem. On the central summit, generally known as the Mount of Olives where many events of Christian history took
place. At the top stands a Muslim Chapel on the supposed site. Ascension of Jesus Christ, as described in Acts 1:2-12 (Microsoft Encarta). By using the image of Mount of Olives and County Derry, Muldoon attempts to trace the parallel between Israel-Palestine and British-Northern Ireland based on religio-political issues of these countries. And, it is the situation of political and religious subtlety found in Ayodhy and Kashmir, in India, and in Iraq and the Palestine region has been recently stunned by “the defacto partition of the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories between Hamas and Fatah” (Atul Aneja, The Hindu, Op-Ed, p.11, 26, June, 2007). In fact, the socio-cultural and biological factors of land determine the political stand of a country.

“Anseo” also projects a military setting on the Irish border and the role of IRA camping on the side of mountain region. In a county like Ireland, often Mountains as blocking stone defending against her enemies. It is a poem about one, Joe Ward:

he was living in the open,

in a secret camp

on the other side of the Mountain,

he was fighting for Ireland(49)

The secret camp stands for IRA’s camp on the mountain regions of Northern Ireland. The poem begins with the master’s calling the roll at the primary school and ends with the roll call in such secret militant camps:

And he told me, Joe Ward,

Of how he had risen through ranks

To Quartermaster, Commandant:

How every morning at parade

His volunteers would call back Anseo

And raise their hands

As their names occurred. (49)
It shows that Muldoon is unambiguous in his political stand and his voice rising for the free nation is unique, especially for the people of Northern Ireland.

“Making the Move” from *Why Brownlee Left* (1980), is written primarily on the theme of sea journey, search for knowledge and Ulysses Myth. Yet, Muldoon employs stone imagery, which is related to the books of Lord Byron, Raymond Chandler. Howard Hughes and Pascal. He writes: “Such books as one may think one owns/unloose themselves like stones” (53). Books are normally considered promoters of knowledge, and representations of certain points of views. Hence, they are political in nature and these views never be changed like stones. Tradition is something that remains unchanging in the dynamic world and celebrating war spirit in common mass is part of Irish Tradition. The poem thus in the end presents a character, a boy of thirteen or fourteen, bringing his bow along with him. The poem, “Yggdrasil” is also known for the stone image presented in the farm of “cairn”, which is a pile of stones used as a marker. Encarta Dictionary suggests: “A pile of stones are set on a hill or mountain to mark a spot for walkers and Climbers, or as a memorial to somebody who died there. “This kind of pile of stones is commonly found in the mountain regions of Ireland. They were worshiped as relics by the Celts and even now, Irish people have the practice of it.

“The Frog” has a passing reference to the rubble, a broken stone image. The poem speaks about the political situation that marks the duality of change and unchanging nature of Irish population. The poem begins: “Comes to mind as another small upheaval/amongst the rubble”(26). The broken stone image and the frog image meet on one point that the former represents the change that occurs to it because of its resistance to change and the latter is changing in nature and so could adapt to live in both water and land, for it is amphibious. The poet feels that the ‘Frog’’s eye matches exactly the bubble in his spirit-level’ and he set ‘aside hammer and chisel and takes
the frog on the trowel’. The transition attitude of present Irish generation is portrayed by the imagery of putting aside the hammer and chisel; they are associated with stone, as they are used as tools to create sculptures out of stones. And, trowel is a symbol that stands for construction and so means urbanization. Such transition is inevitable under the pressure of Globalization. The poem also mocks at the political dogma of “unionism” propagated by the British government:

the entire population of Ireland
springs from a pair left to stand
overnight in a pond
in the garden of Trinity College,
two bottles of wine left there to Chill
after the Act of Union.(76)

And, Muldoon concludes the poem saying that ‘there is surely, in this story a moral’:

A moral for our times.
What if I put him to my head
And squeezed it out of him,
Like the juice of freshly squeezed limes,
Or a lemon sorbet?

This is the striking note of Muldoon’s view on postmodern values; to him, there is no such thing and trivializing the high seriousness in poetry is his strategy to defy the colonial politics. As Declan Kiberd comments on Paul Muldoon in one of his articles, “Under Pressure-The writer and society 1960-90”:

A puckish, mischievous postmodernist flickered across the sophisticated lines of Muldoon, and it was this element of wry self mockery which made his writing immensely attractive to many.
Traditionally-minded readers found his promiscuous mingling of codes and narrative often exhausting and mind mumbling; but his refusal of what Beckett once termed “the distortions of intelligibility” was quite deliberate, for he hated and still hates the fixed point of view (Kiberd Declan 611).

Like his “Making the Move” and “Immrama” poems, Muldoon in his long narrative poem “The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants” presents a “post-modern psychological voyage.” (Steven Putzelv http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3708/is_199601). It is a poem of displacement as “Gallogly, the protagonist or anti-hero, is a hazy figure who passes into and out of focus as the narrative passes through time and space. The ‘rowings around’ are replaced with vague yet politically charged action”(winter 1996). And, the poem ends abruptly as:

They foun’this hairy

Hav’ wi a drowneded Man’s grip

On a lunimous stone too bigger than a ..

‘Huh’ (104).

The use of stone imagery stands for the Celtic identity, through the poem alludes to many events, personalities of IRA, and Irish literature, English and American literary traditions and folk tales of Ireland and native Indians in America. Like T.S. Eliot, Muldoon has narrated them through his own parodic language. Muldoon’s protagonist, Gallogly, as Stephen Putzel points out, “that hybrid stranger who is not English and who is not clearly Irish either” but he resembles Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus roaming about political and culture space of Ireland. The narration has been used as a medium through which Muldoon tries to recreate his own identity. Thus, the imagery, a drowned man’s grip on a luminous stone (but in the poem luminous is given in Armagh dialect as “lunimous” as an anagram) well matches with the cultural material
of Celtic ritual as well as with the belief and practice of stone cult, which is still alive in Ireland.

“The Coney” is the poem written on Irish peasantry setting. It is important for two reasons, one is that it has again projected the father image as its central figure and the other, the image of “Whetstone”. Whetstone symbolizes tradition, which sharpens one’s memory of the past. It would be apt to quote here Paul Muldoon’s comment on Frost’s poem “The Mountain”, one of his Oxford Lectures on Poetry, he says: “the ‘body’ of the work is indivisible from the ‘body’ of the poet” (58). The poem begins with the description that the poet enters the family property of a half-acre of garden and witnesses his father:

…had always left the Whetstone
safely wrapped
in his old, tweed cap
and balanced on one particular plank
beside the septic tank (115).

And, when his father had been too ill to work, the poet had taken the scythe to discharge his father’s peasantry work. The scythe was so often honed and “the blade grew less and less a blade/the whetstone had entirely disappeared”. Then, the Coney found its place inside the cap. This reflects the transits that happen in the contemporary urbanized Ireland. Yet, the poet is ready to follow what the father image asks him to do; his father calls him from diving board to swim with him;

…he swaggered
along the diving-board
and jumped…
‘Come on in, Paddy Muldoon’,
And although I have never learned to swim
I would willingly have followed him. (116)
Thus, this poem, like Heaney’s “Digging” locates his self in his land of past and Muldoon shows his willingness to follow his father in swimming but is helpless to do so as he lives in the era of transition or migration.

“Christo’s” from the collection *Meeting the British* (1987) is the political narrative, which has the rocky area of Dingle and Tralee, a village in mountainous region of southeast Ireland as its background and IRA’s hunger strikes as its foreground. Muldoon begins the poem: “Two workmen were carrying a sheet of asbestos/down the main street of Dingle” (118) and further gives an account of militant activities of IRA:

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we watched the village dog
take turns to spritz the hotel’s refuse-sacks.
I remembered Tralee’s unbiodegradable flags
From the time of the hunger strikes (118).
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The reference to the hunger strikes of IRA against British rule over Northern Ireland signifies two things; one is the political landscape of Ireland occupied by British army and the other the historical struggles of IRA. Encarta Encyclopedia points out that the political wing of IRA, Sinn Fein, had remained a subservient mouthpiece of the military during the 1970s. This relationship changed drastically, however during the 1981 hunger strikes. Under the conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the British government had denied IRA members the status of political prisoners; instead, it demanded that IRA prisoners must be treated as common criminals, despite the fact that many of them had never stood trial. In protest of this treatment, a number of prisoners went on hunger strikes in 1980 and 1981. Ten of them starved themselves to death amidst the violence in Northern Ireland since the early 1970s. This political voice is vehemently heard from him, when the poem continues to narrate the Irish
people’s move/migration because of Britain’s rule in Ireland. The change in scenario reads thus:

We drove all day past mounds of sugar beet,
Hay stacks, silage-pits, building sites,
A thatched cottage even-
All of them draped in black polythene
And weighted against the north-east wing
By concrete blocks, old tyres; bags of sand
At a makeshift army post
Across the border. By the time we got to Belfast
The whole of Ireland would be under wraps (118).

The visual of complete Ireland wrapped by army setting is compared to Christo’s large scale environmental sculpture known as earth works. Hence, as Muldoon has been attracted towards Christo’s artistic skill of wrapping large landscapes he has titled his poem as Christo’s. Christo is Bulgarian-born American artist. His works embrace vast space, forcing his public to see familiar landscapes in novel ways. His work consists essentially of “wrapping” landscapes or large objects in a new packaging; his aim is to prove the susceptibility of contemporary consumer society to packaging (Encarta Encyclopedia, 2004). But Christo’s art of ‘wrapping’ the landscape provides Muldoon with an imagery that represents the political desire of Great Britain occupying Irish land.

“Sushi” another poem from the same collection Meeting the British, which is ironic in tone criticizing multicultural and tourist centered restaurants like sushi bar. Sushi is a popular Japanese diet made up of fish and rice. The food prepared in the restaurant is of East-Asian country and the varieties of fish the poet quoted in the
poem are of different seas of Atlantic and Euro-Asian. And, Muldoon, the Irish, eating alone in such ‘Sushi’ bar in America presents the multicultural phenomenon of postmodern world but his state of being alone voices for Irish Nationalism. He further narrates:

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
(I might just as well be eating alone)
but the tail-end of a carrot (127).

This is set against a traditional village pub of Ireland and they are known for social gathering but in this urbanized restaurant, the poet eats alone watching how an apprentice has carved rose petals out of ‘the tail-end of a carrot’. Sculptures are traditionally made out of metals or woods or stones but this carrot rose is consumable and subject to decay. On one hand it can be viewed that art has become a commodity in postmodern world and on the other it stands a contrast against Yeatsian use of rose that symbolizes Ireland hence, it implies the present condition of Ireland in the hands of Britain that causes subsequent damages to Irish tradition over the years. The poem further states that the apprentice “submitted this work of art to the Master” who stands for colonial Master as the word ‘master’ is used in the poem three times with capital ‘M’.

More over, the first part of the poem gives rather a long list of fishes –salmon, funa, yellowtail, octopus, squid, conger, sea urchins, shad and sea-bream – used as food from different seas, which depicts a scene of multicultural and multinational
America. But the second part is like a surrealist poem that begins with rose’s petals carved from carrot, but not from wood or stone and the poet through his auto-writing presents internally rhymed words like “arrogance, arcane, oregano, orgone, organs, Arigna”, And, finally Louis Aragon, who was the French poet and one of the founders of Dada and Surrealist movement:

it is not the height of arrogance

to propose that God’s no more arcane

than the smack of oregano

orgone,

the inner organs

of beasts and fowls, the mines Arigna,

The poem of Louis Aragon (127).

Among those words cited “Arigna” sounds odd and it is one of the oldest mines of Ireland, a rocky area. And, the poet says that the rose’s petals “might have been of Alabaster or Jade”. Alabaster is like a gypsum matter used in sculpture. Moreover, Muldoon describes the ‘Master who looks “to confound Duns Scotus with Scotus Eriugena”’. The former was born in Ireland in 13th century, a theologian and thinker, the latter was also Irish theologian and Neo-platonic philosopher belonged to 9th century B.C. This is settlers’ state of confusion with the names of native philosophers. The fish images of the first part symbolize the poet’s transition and ‘exile’ into American land, where as in the second part of the poem, “mines of Arigna” used as imagery points out that the poet resists against this transition. This identity syndrome is found in Muldoon who has migrated from Ireland to America.

“The Panther” is a poem of fantasy. The poem opens with a description of the panther “hung by its heel from a meat-hook in what is now our kitchen”(134). And he
ends the poem: “The air directly under the meat-hook-it quakes, it quickens;/on a flagstone, the smudge of the tippy-tip of its nose” (134). Besides, there is a note that the house looks like one “built by an Ephraim Cowan from Antrim, which is the name of a village in Northern Ireland. The fantastic visual of the panther hanging from meat-hook just above a flagstone in a kitchen alludes to the animal sacrifice practiced by the Celtic people.

“Milkweed and Monarch” is a yet another poem written on exile theme, which John Kerrigan calls “a psychodrama” (Internet source). The migration theme is very much evolved from the title itself. “Monarch” refers to monarch butterflies that are most common species of the milkweed butterflies; they are so named because their larvae feed on milkweed plants. They are found primarily in North America. They are also known for their long migrations. Each autumn the adult monarch that lives east of the Rocky Mountains in North America migrates to central Mexico. Muldoon cites two mountain ranges in the poem one is “Portland, Oregon” and the other “storm striking Irish cliffs of Moher” and both are interconnected with the theme of land possession and migration. According to Encarta Reference Book (2004), white migrants who rushed to California and Oregon Territory came into conflict with Native American as they traveled across the county. They bisected many Native American hunting, grazing and gathering territories. Another interesting note is that a Mount Peak in Oregon called Mt. Ireland. It might have attracted Paul Muldoon as a poet of Irish origin. He now settles in America and identifies himself with Native Americans. “Irish Cliffs of Moher” cited in the poem is popular for the habitats of birds on the stony area situated in the western Ireland. Thus the poem subtly reveals Muldoon’s political voice of being migrated and his longing for Irish identity. His Irish space conscious is obviously presented thus:
while the Monarch butterflies passed over
in their milkweed-hunger: ‘A wing-beat some reckon,
may trigger off the mother and father
of all storms, striking your Irish of Cliffs Moher,
with the force of a hurricane’ (156).

“In cantata” is also a long narrative that traces the Irish cultural and religious history
and the history of Irish literary personalities. There are many references in the poem
to add value to the Irish identity. One of such reference is “Book of kills”. It is an
illuminated Irish manuscript of the Gospels form the medieval 8th century. It contains
magnificent illustrations:

I saw you again tonight, in your jump-suit, thin as a rake,
your hand moving in such a deliberate arc
as you ground a lithographic stone.
that your hand and the stone blurred to one (168).

The stone imagery in various forms from mines to mountain ranges cited in these
poems are associated with geographical and political spaces of Northern Ireland in
particular. And as symbols, they have a unique focus on a single theme of ‘Muldoon’s
longing for Irish identity.

II

In this section, Muldoon’s poems are analysed to read the symbolism that
centers round the objects of Vegetative Nature, especially the trees. The tree symbols
are employed in the following poems of Muldoon. The very first line of the poem
“February” from the collection New Whatever, contains tree imagery:

He heard that in Derryscollop there is a tree
For everyday of the year,
And the extra tree is believed to grow
One year in every four (3).
The place name Derryscollop in county Armagh where Paul Muldoon was born, is known for the wonderful grove, one of the tourist spots in Northern Ireland. There are many superstitious beliefs spread about the trees of the grove. As most of the poems of “New Whether” reflect Muldoon’s childhood life in and around Armagh, this poem speaks of his affinity with the grove in Derryscollop. He also recollects: “the blind pink fledgeling fallen out of the nest” in a tree. The imagery, at the out set, represents Muldoon’s recurrent theme of going away from the native land. The month of February in a leap year is a wonder to boy Muldoon, as it is to everyone. How does that one year get an extra day is naturally a question of science. But Muldoon tries to philosophise time and its relative meaning with space. Time like tree grows and the change occurs; the falling of small bird from the nest also marks the change in time. In the last stanza, reflecting Beckettian notion on the absurdity of time, he states:

What was he watching and waiting for,
Walking Scollop every day?
For one intending to leave at the end of the year,
Who would break the laws of time and stay (3).

Muldoon views that time cannot stay; but the power of memory keep the time stay with the image of object or events or place like Derryscollop grove that makes him identify with his own native land.

“The Electric Orchard” the very next poem in the collection, also speaks of time-change and its impact on change in human life. The tree imagery is significantly associated with the universe of time and the development of scientific mind. The poem “The Electric Orchard” opens in a tone of irony:

the early electric people had domesticated the wild Ass
they knew all about falling off
Occasionally, they would have fallen out of the tree(4).
The “fall” refers to the popular Newton’s law that is fast spread in 20th century. And, Muldoon also philosophically relates the fall to fallen. He writes: “just thinking of the fallen fallen”. There is a reference to Taranis, Celtic god of sky and lightning. He had the ‘wheel and lightning flash as his symbol’ (Therry Bordas, 24) “Having stolen his thunder/from an angry God, through the trees/they had learned to string his lightning”(4). And the grove imagery is again used in his poem “Wind and Tree”, which opens:

\[
\text{in the way that the most of the wind}
\]

\[
\text{happens where there are trees,}
\]

\[
\ldots
\]

\[
\text{often where the wind has gathered}
\]

\[
\text{the trees together (6).}
\]

Irish people are known for their social gathering and community life. They are like”: “one tree will take/another in her arm and hold”. The tree also symbolizes tradition that is a driving force organizing people into a single culture. So, it is Irish in tone recollecting the rustic life that has been undergoing many changes. Urbanization is one of the main causes to make people indulge in migration. The poet who seems to be a victim of migration says: “often I think I should be like/the single tree, going nowhere”(6). On the surface level, the poem may give an account of childhood life that Muldoon might have experienced in a grove of his native land. But one cannot ignore the political voice raised through the imagery of “Wind and Tree”. It metaphorically speaks of foreign invasions on Ireland, which is called “Emerald Island” because of its greenish appearance. The poem thus begins:

\[
\text{In the way that the most of the wind}
\]

\[
\text{Happen where there are trees,}
\]

\[
\text{Most of the world is centered}
\]

\[
\text{About our selves (16).}
\]
And, the tree undoubtedly stands for Ireland and Irish people who still suffer from the despot of United Kingdom and it is symbolically referred by “Wind”. And the poem also hints at the birth of IRA by saying: “Often where the wind has gathered/the trees together” (6). Thus, the poem traces the political history of Irish struggle for independence.

The wood imagery continues to appear in another poem, “The Cure for Warts” and its prime focus is on Irish old believes and their rites of animal sacrifice. These rituals not only mark the features of Irish tradition but they also emphasis that they are part of Irish landscape. The Celts made their sacred places in dark groves, as the poet says, “living at the dead center of a wood”. And, ‘the trees being hung with offerings or with the heads of victims’ (www.sacred text/tree and plant worship-Ireland). In the second stanza, the poet, by listing out different superstitious beliefs, points out:

In bathing yourself at the break of dawn
In dew of the black cock’s or the bull’s blood
In other such secrets told by way of a sign
Of the existence of one or other god (The Cure for Warts 9).

‘The Celts considered many animals sacred: the bull, boar, bear, horse’ (Thierry Bordar, 24) and they believed that offering them to their gods as sacrifice would heal their illness. There is a tradition in “Ireland and the ‘Isle of Man’ the thorn is thought to be the resort of fairies and the woodland fairies or “woodmen” are probably representatives of the older tree spirits and gods of groves and forests” (www.Sacred text/Tree and Plant Worship-Ireland). There is a reference to “wood-demons” (153) in “Oscar” a poem from Muldoon’s notable collection, The Annals of Chile (1994). “Oscar” is the son of Ossian, one of the heroes of Irish mythology. The Cromlech of
Howth, in Dublin Bay, is said to be the tomb of Oscar, and it is still considered more romantic object. The poem hints at the landscape, which has the significance of Irish cultural heritage. (Sacred Text/Stone worship). “Ma” is also a poem of orchard that is revealed through the medium of nostalgia: “Old photographs would have her bookish, sitting/under a willow. I take that to be a Croquet Lawn”(22). The “Willow” is one of the sacred trees of Ireland and the image of his mother sitting under a willow tree may refer to Virgin Mary.

The rural setting further continues to present a vivid picture of the full moon ‘swaying over Keeneghan, (a village in central Ireland) the Orchards and the cannery and thins to a last yellow – hammer and goes’ and the poem ends:

The neighbours gather, all keenaghan and colleglands.

There is story-telling. Old miners at Coalisland

Going into the ground(22).

Ireland is a county of peasants and it is not rich in minerals but small-scale coal mining has been pursued at Coalisland, in central Northern Ireland. It is obvious that British have occupied Ireland not for her mines but just for the land of peasants-politically for Britain’s expansion and British people’s migration to Ireland in particular. Moreover, the imagery of ‘orchards’ and people’ gathering for “story telling” implies traditional community gathering like “wake” which is a social practice observed by the Irish folks at night when a dead is kept at home. Synge’s play The Playboy of the Western World depicts such a “wake” in its opening scene.

Again, a reader can come across peasant imagery in the poem, “the Mixed Marriage”. Muldoon like Heaney presents his father as a servant boy who “took up billhook and loy/To win the grounds he would never own”(21). It is a political irony that the Irish peasants has lost their lands in the hands of British feudal and still
cultivating the lands without having any ownership of the same. The billhook was used to gather ‘mistletoe’ from the trees in the ancient Ireland, and the Celts believed that the mistletoe “cured everything” (Thierry Bordass, 20). Then the poet depicts his mother as “the school mistress”, and speaks about the twins in her class like Castor and Pollex. They were in Greek and Roman mythology, the twin sons of Leda, wife of the Spartan king Tyndareem. They were the brothers of Clytemnestra, Queen of Mycenae, and Helen of Troy. The twin sons may personify both the free Ireland and Northern Ireland. And the struggle continues. In the third stanza the poet says “I flitted between a hole in hedge”; this suggests that the poet moves quickly to hide himself behind the trees, as if he were at wartime. It also refers to IRA’s secret movements against British rule.

“Lunch with Pancho Villa” has also a passing reference to the ‘tree’ image with the setting of Irish struggle for independence. Pancho Villa was one of the foremost leaders of Mexican revolution between 1921-1930 and he remains in Muldoon’s memory as a driving force, feeding him patriotic fervour for his motherland. Now, the poet’s disposition of being migrated from his native land bricks his conscience and writes as his father addresses him:

‘Look, son just look around you.
People are getting themselves killed
Left right center
While you do what? write rondeaux?
There’s more to living in this country
Than stars and horses, pigs and trees,
…
you want to get down to something true,
something a little nearer home’ (25).
The different images like “stars, horses, pigs and trees” have symbolic significances, notably stars represent Celtic druids’ calendar; horses stand for the ancient Irish warriors, pigs for sacred animals of Celts and Trees are read to be the abode of spirits or divinities who had power over vegetation, according to Celtic mythology. In general, they are the prime cursors of Irish tradition. But Muldoon realizes that human lives that have been the victims in a war setting are more sacred than these traditional and mythical signs. The poet thus admits his transits from canonizing his own tradition to committing himself to writing about the freedom movement of Northern Ireland, especially about IRA and the people who had sacrificed their lives for the sake of their nation.

Thus, the struggle for one’s own nation that wherever Muldoon comes across in history makes him write patriotic poems. Like Pancho Villa who induced the patriotic spirit in Muldoon, Ishi in the poem “The Year of the Sloes, for Ishi” makes him share the experience of Irish with Native American folks. And, by this poem, Muldoon seems to be distancing himself from the rest of the Americans. In the foreground the poem talks about the last man of Ishi, one of the tribes of Native America disappeared in the country.

“Ishi (1860-March, 25,1916) was the name given to the last member of the Yahi, the last surviving group of the Yane people of California. Ishi is believed to be the last Native American in Northern California to have lived his life completely outside the European American culture. He emerged from the wild near Oroville, California, after leaving his ancestral homeland in the foothills near Lassen Peak”. (From Wikipedia). Ishi means man in the Yahi dialect; his real name was never known because it was taboo in Yahi society to say one’s own name. And, Sloe in the title of the poem refers to the fruit of the Blackthorn; a tree, that was held in high
esteem in ancient Ireland. This view is confirmed by the fact that in “Calde’s hearing of the scholars”, an ancient Celtic Catechism. It was classified as chieftain tree, in spite of its relatively small size. It is said to be a relic of the Druidic tradition. According to the “Tree Calendar”, it represents the 11th moon of the year from 30 September to 27 October. (http://www.the.tree.org.uk/blackthorn). Every stanza of the poem begins with the imagery of moon, which creates a gloomy mood. For instance, the last stanza briefs the death of Ishi; “In the moon/ of the Tree Popping, two snails/glittered over a dead Indian”(18).

Thus, Ishi as an identity of native tribal of Northern America and the Sloe refers to its blackthorn tree that stands for Celtic identity and both merge in a point to raise the voice for oppressed people in Northern Ireland as well as in Northern America. In the poem, Muldoon also records the pangs of transition felt by migrating one place to another. He narrates that Ishi moves one place to another for his survival:

In the moon

Of the Black Cherries

While he was looking for a place

To winter,

He discovered two wagons

Lying side by side

That tried to be a ring

There were others in blue shirts

Felling trees for a square. (17).

The imagery of “felling trees” marks not only the impact of urbanization but also damages caused to the tradition, Muldoon thinks that the change is not a fruitful one. The Black thorn is referred as “the fairy thorn” in the poem “Our Lady of Ardboe”. In
this poem Muldoon makes stray statements to defend Catholicism. This poem is the blend of Catholic Christianity and Celtic pagan beliefs and so it marks the unique nature of Irish Christianity. The poem brings out the religious - historical records associated to Ardboe, a village in county Tyrone in Ireland, which is known for two great events: 1. The Old Cross; It is believed to be the first High cross of Ulster, standing at 18.5 feet high and 3.5 feet wide and its 22 panels depict various Biblical scenes. There are also remains of a Church and abbey. The abbey was founded by St. Coleman in 590 A.D. and the church is believed to have built in the 16th century and last line of the poem has the significant reference to the cross: “the fairy thorn no less true than the cross”. 2. the holy visionary of virgin Mary appeared in Ardboe, in 1954 is recreated thus in Muldoon,s words:

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Just there, in a corner of Whin-field,

Just where the thistles bloom,

She stood there as in Bethlehem

One night in nineteen fifty-three or four (28).
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Virgin Mary’s visionary was seen by John Quinn and Anne Hannah of Ardboe and has been recorded in the ordinance of Vatican. <http://www.sacred-heart-publications.net/Walk_Stars/Marian-Apparitions.htm> Muldoon’s staunch belief in the worship of Virgin Mary is the Irish belief that makes him acknowledge the black thorn on par with Her Holiness. To him the fairy thorn has more religious importance than the cross.

Robert Graves notes, “The ancient Celtic name for Black thorn, “staiff”, is related to words such as ‘strive’ and ‘strife’. And, he also points out that “Black thorn is traditional wood to make fighting sticks; the traditional Irish Shillelagh or Cudgel is one of a weapons made with this wood. There is an element in the ancient Celtic meaning of the “strive tree”(http://www.thetree.org.uk/blackthon.html). It
undoubtedly reveals the struggling and the war spirit of Irish people. This spirit of resistance to guard the Celtic tradition is that Yeats has revived in his poems and he has left it behind him as an Irish poetic tradition. It continues to find a place in the poems of Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon admits it earnestly as he belongs to this tradition though he is the poet of transits in postmodern context.

“Duffy’s Circus” also stands proof for the use of tree image that is part of Irish landscape poetry. The opening stanza of the poem presents the popularity of Duffy’s circus in Ireland.

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 said so (34).

Duffy’s circus refers to the popular Irish circus troupe. It has a significant history of its own. For the past three centuries, Duffy’s Circus has been amusing audience throughout Ireland. A Dublin shoemaker Patrick James Duffy developed a love for foreign circuses visiting Ireland. After learning various circus skills, he became a famous acrobat and his son John started his own circus, the John Duffy circus. John had three sons, John, Tom and James. It was from James that Duffy’s circus developed into what is today (http://www.users.nwon.com/panline/Duffy.html). This is also one of the father figure-poems in which Muldoon’s father appears but as the poet says, “I had lost my father in the rush and slipped out the back”(34). The imagery of father missing, in other way, implies Muldoon’s exile and reflects the poet’s suffering from identity crisis. His father who disappeared in the crowd may well suit with the imagery stated in the first stanza that “God may as well have left Ireland and gone up a tree”. The tree is always in Irish mythology treated as an analogy of divinity. Hazel is one of such trees and is associated with Aengus, Irish mythical god.
The poems “Immrama” focusing on father quest and “Anseo” dealing with war theme, have the references to this hazel wood. “The Irish Druids attributed special virtues to this wood … , which was used in magical ceremonies described in Irish texts”(Tree and plant worship, Sacred Text). For, Muldoon views trees as a symbol of his own country and culture so he writes in his poem “The Unicorn Defends Himself”: “you were out of your tree/you hadn’t a baldy/where you were or who you were with”(77). Thus the tree is not only a symbol employed as a part of landscape poetry but is a culture-material that attributes identity to the self in the larger context of society and politics. Also in the poem, “Yggdrasill” which is so titled that in Scandinavian mythology, refers to “the world tree”, an evergreen ash tree that has been tended by the Norns goddesses of past, present and future. This is read deeply to associate with the holiness of ash tree in Ireland. Such trees are venerable for they continue to grow as part of the vegetation of land and part of the beliefs of the soil and these beliefs alone keep the tradition alive. It proves that the Irish belong to the people of an ancient culture like the natives of Canada or the Indians and Chinese of Asia, in whom one finds a strong element of nature symbols.

III

In the same way, “water” as a symbol, with its various forms, finds its place in Muldoon’s poems as a culture material that is a part of Irish landscape. As he asserts in his own voice, it is like “the fixity of running water”(Our Lady of Ardboe, 28), that symbolizes the precondition of the life and its continuity in the presence of tradition. Muldoon’s “The Waking Father”, one of his earlier poems from the collection New Whether, speaks about the greatness of tradition. This is a poem primarily centers round the father figure and provides a base for his later poems on “Immrama” theme. So, it can also be classified as a poem written on the theme of exile, which is a dominant subject found in Muldoon’s poems. The poem opens with an occasion
where: “my father and I are catching spricklies/out of the Oona river”(8), in British Colombia(Canada). In the next stanza the poet imagines that his father stood out in the shallows and says:

It occurred to me that

The spricklies might have been piranhas

The river a red carpet

Rolling out from where he had just stood, (8)

The imagery well states the fact that the fish incorporate, a variety of meanings, ‘reflecting the many essential facets of its nature’. The Dictionary of Symbols points out: “Scheider mentions that for some people the fish has a phallic meanings, whereas for others, it has a purely spiritual symbolism”(102). In this sense, the father and the son relationship is spiritually inclined. And, the expression, “the spricklies might have been piranhas” that in Spanish meaning “devil fish”, implies the spiritual transformation of vice into virtue; and so to the poet, “such benevolence is astounding”.

Moreover, there is a valid reason for the poet who wonders now:

…if he is dead or sleeping

for if he is dead I would have his grave

secret and safe.

I would run the river out of its course

Lay him in its bed, bring it round again (8).

Though the river stands for the irreversible passage of time and, in consequence, for a sense of loss and oblivion (262) his father figure that internally refers to his own identity is deeply buried in his inner consciousness. This image also traces the poet’s historical spaces and time.
Thus, this theme of father affinity turns to be a spiritual exploration that the last lines of the poem alludes to the Holy Grail myth as it ends:

No one would question
That he had treasures or his being a king
Telling now of the real fish farther down (8).

Thus, “Fishing amounts to extracting the unconscious elements from deep-lying sources—the ‘elusive treasure’ of legend, or, in other words, wisdom” (The Dictionary of Symbols, 103). And, “the waking father” wakes in Muldoon a spiritual identity along with his earnest quest for Celtic identity. The Dictionary of symbolism also views that “to fish for souls is quite simply a matter of knowing how to fish in the soil. The fish is a mystic and psychic animal that lives in water (and water is symbolic of dissolution and, at the same time, of renovation and regeneration). The fisherman is able to work upon the very sources of life because of his knowledge of those founts. This is how it comes about that Parsifal meets the king of the Grail as a fisherman (103). While giving an account of war setting in the poem “The Field Hospital”, the poet uses the fishing imagery and asks: “will use to weight fishing lines/who died screaming for ether/yet protest our innocence”(14).

“The Upriver Incident” in which the water imagery draws the reader’s attention as it repeatedly represents continuity of time and tradition. The last line of the poem reads thus: “Let us thank waters for not keeping still”(13). The same meaning is conveyed in his poem on Ishi, the poet says:

long as grass would grow and water
flow, and the wind blow
none of these things had forgotten,(the year of the sloes, Ishi,17).
The poet believes that, though he has migrated from his native land, the flow of water, as a medium, could suggest the space-time continuum, which is significant in landscape poetry. In “Our Lady of Ardboe” also water source remains as the religious space marker and the holy wells are still found in the Irish mapping of pilgrimage and such “holy well”, says the poet, is no more shallow nor plummetless than the pools of Shiloh”(28). Shiloh was the religious center in ancient Israel, located in Jerusalem. It was destroyed by Philistines about 1050 B.C. the site called Saylon is in north of Jerusalem what is now the West Bank. The pool in Shiloh is believed to cure leprosy. It is a symbol of Christian faith but the holy well that Muldoon cited is one of the popular Celtic water cults. Thus as a poet of Northern Ireland, Muldoon asserts that he belongs to Irish-Celtic tradition.

“The Merman” also prominently focuses on the sea symbol. Though merman belongs to sea he is introduced in the beginning of the poem, as:

he was ploughing his single furrow

though the green, heavy sward

of water I was sowing winter wheat

at the Shoreline, when our farms met(32).

The phrases, “ploughing his single furrow”, “heavy sward of water”, “sowing winter wheat” and “farms” create a setting that attributes the peasantry tradition to Irish land and poetry. The poem also reflects the land politics in which “merman” symbolizes both Celtic sea warriors who fight for their land and Irish native people who have been forced to reach the last resort of Ireland that is the shoreline from where they would be on exile as if he were to the sea itself. Hence the poet asks: “Had he no wish to own such land/as he might plough round in a day”(32). Thus, land as well as sea is a landmark of not only Irish geography but also of Irish political history, which includes Irish war for independence. Wherever the ‘sea’ or the ‘river’,
as water symbol, is used in the poem, it tends to trace the history, invading the island through sea”. “Making the Move” is such a poem that presents war setting. “were I embarking on the wine-dark sea/I would bring my bow along with me”(53).

The same imagery is set in the poem “Promises, Promises”, in which the narrator speaks:

I am with Raleigh, near the Atlantic
Where we have built a stockade
Around our little colony (51).

The word “Stockade” means a long wall built for Defense and so it forms a war field. The war theme is seen in the poem “Immram”, a long narrative poem on voyage subject that has been popular since medieval period in Ireland and, “the hero Mael Duin, the son of a warrior and a nun, wanders among at least thirty-three different islands only to end back at the first island. In the reconstructed saga, Mael Duin spurred on by a “poison tongued man”, sets out toward the west for “the island of Murderers” where he plans to avenge the murder of his father”(D. Steven Putzel, Internet sources). Thus, in this poem the wanderer visits many islands and crosses many seas.

Thus invasions are not new to Ireland and “Yggrdrasill” is the poem, which not only centers round the tree imagery but also creates (in general) the base for water imagery by which the poet expresses how the country is exploited by the rulers of foreign lands. The poem ends thus:

It may not be today
Or tomorrow, but sooner or later
The Russians will water
Their horses on the shores of Lough Erne,
And Lough Neagh.(67)
The Lough Erne and Neagel are the lakes in Ireland. “Gathering Mushroom” also points out the war spirit of Irish people. There are lines in the poem that alludes to Cuchulain, the Celtic sea warrior who fought in the sea: “He is one of those ancient warriors/before the rising tide”(69). The sea - scape of Irish natural geography contains much space for her mythical and legendary beliefs beyond history. Whenever this space is rendered into a part of poetic diction and such poems make the country’s tradition dynamic and carry it to next generation. Its fluidity helps it flow like life that evolutes from water. It is symbolically represented in the following line of the poem of “The Frog”, “The entire population of Ireland/Springs from a pair left to stand/ Overnight in a pond” (76). Like the Frog, which originates from water, symbolizes biological sources. “The entire population of Ireland” emerges from her cultural as well as traditional sources that mostly evolve from the landscape of Ireland.

This is very natural to see using water imagery in the form of river that is found in Muldoon’s “Immram” type poem, “The More a Man has the More a Man Wants”. The protagonist was in search of his father;(the father quest is one of the common themes of Muldoon) and asks; “Had you followed the river Callan’/Pelorus Jack”(96). The river Callan is in Northern Ireland that join the river black water. The river Callon has many references to Irish war. Polorus Jack is a Dolphin which for many years around 19th and 20th century, guided ships through the French pass, a channel through the D’Urville Island off New Zealand. This dangerous channel is full of rocks and strong currents. Here, Muldoon has used Polorus Jack as an image representing the Irish fighters on sea who attempted to protect his nation from various invaders. The poem “Footling” also presents the sea imagery with “Groyne”, which means long sea - wall, to protect the land from the sea. In some other poems like “Cows” Muldoon uses water imagery in order to create a setting of cattle farming tradition, which now undergoes transition because of urbanization.
Thus, this three tier-symbolism, stone, tree and water used in these poems provides a space for discussing Paul Muldoon’s emotional involvement towards Irish tradition that evolves from the mythical, religious, cultural, biological, geographical and historical materials, though Muldoon tends to settle in other land, America, from his motherland.

The dominance of the elemental images and landscape imagery which could be justified only in terms of Muldoon’s wish to be identified as an Irish Catholic. His poetry draws its strong points from history and mythology, which are invariably intertwined with Irish landscape. His identity with the American natives and his transfixed identity as an Ishi and the like could be rationalized only in terms of bondage with Irish land and politics. Thus, when one opens the mind of the poet with the help of the nature symbolism, the identity of Paul Muldoon surfaces. Him comfort zone of Irish culture is ascertained though he is based in the modern world of technology and urban transferences. His poetry survives, thanks to his journey into his memory lanes, somewhat archetypal in nature. So his art of poetry and choice of themes place him in the grand chain of continuity of Irish tradition that dates back to the mythical and historical past and it becomes easy for one in finding him in the company of Yeats and Heaney.
Chapter 5

Notes and References

Books and Nonperiodical Publications


*The Bible*, King James Version.

Electronic Sources


<http://www.the.tree.org.uk/blackthorn>.

