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Shibboleths of Grief: Paul Muldoon’s “The Triumph”

ABSTRACT

The essay explores Paul Muldoon’s elegy for the fellow Northern Irish poet Ciaran Carson with a view to showing that “The Triumph” seeks to evoke a ground where political, cultural and religious polarities are destabilized. As the various intertextual allusions in the poem are traced, it is argued that Muldoon seeks to revise the notion of the Irish shibboleths that, as the poem puts it, “are meant to trip you up.” In lieu of this linguistic and political slipperiness, “The Triumph” situates Carson’s protean invocations of Belfast and traditional Irish music as the new shibboleths of collectivity.

Keywords: Paul Muldoon, Ciaran Carson, elegy, contemporary Irish poetry.

“The Triumph,” Paul Muldoon’s uncollected elegy for Ciaran Carson, sets out to explore the role of music and poetry in shaping the communal co-existence of the polarized Northern Irish society. On the one hand, the poem tries to evoke the presence of the deceased by evoking the life the speaker shared with Carson in a way that parallels Muldoon’s earlier elegies “Incantata” (in memory of the graphic artist Mary Farl Powers) and “Sillyhow Stride” (in memory of the rock musician Warren Zevon) but also “Cuthbert and the Otters” (Muldoon’s elegy for Seamus Heaney). Whereas the attempt to recreate the world in which Carson is still a living presence points to the former two elegies, the adoption of Carson’s characteristic diction and line length is in tune with the technique Muldoon employs in the elegy for Heaney. On the other hand, though, the issues of politics and the Northern Irish Troubles are addressed as directly as in the early “Anseo” or the more recent “Dirty Data.” However, what distinguishes “The Triumph” from Muldoon’s earlier elegies and politically-inclined poems is its evocation of a ground where the essence of political, cultural and religious dissensions is challenged so that the co-existence of the divided community can be achieved.

Even though Muldoon has stressed that no poem is meant to endorse any political agendas but rather constitutes “a little world in itself” (Haffenden 141), his work has elusively responded to the Troubles, as well as, throughout volumes like *Horse Latitudes* and *Frolic and Detour*, the US’s erratic policies under the presidencies of George W. Bush and Donald Trump. Muldoon’s poems from the 1970s and the early 1980s such as “Anseo,” “Boundary Commission” and “A Trifle” have been subjects of dispute as to their treatment of politics. One side of the debate is implicit in Clair Wills’s observation in regard to “Anseo” that in lieu of endorsing agendas, “the poet’s task is to disturb and disorder” (83). Similarly, Tim Kendall emphasizes Muldoon’s ambiguous treatment of the violence in Northern Ireland in a poem like “A Trifle” that is neither scrupled over nor condemned in any outright fashion (Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* 92). By contrast, Michael Parker concludes his reading of “Anseo” by stating that its aim “is to expose the lineaments of oppression within his own natal culture and their subsequent ‘whip-lash’ effects, acknowledging that art can function as an effective form of social critique” (90–91). In a similar vein, Sean O’Brien questions Kendall’s reading of “A Trifle”: “[I]he poem would be merely a stylish display of sang-froid without the historical and political dimensions,” which must be taken into account if the poem is to reveal its depth (171; for Kendall’s response, see “Paul Muldoon’s Twins” 72–74). In an oblique response to claims such as O’Brien’s, Muldoon has suggested that a directly political reading of a poem like “Anseo” is not “as fruitful an avenue” as what he calls a “simple, fairly,

one-dimensional . . . reading" ("Paul Muldoon in Conversation" 172). The one-dimensional reading seems tongue-in-cheek, given how even short poems like "Anseo" or "A Trifle" maintain their equivocal status with regard to the subject matter. In her reading of "Cows," which in its last part addresses issues of art's relevance in a way that recalls the much earlier "Lunch with Pancho Villa," Julia C. Obert zeroes in on some of those equivocations and argues that by "turning binaries into 'twins, entwined'" Muldoon manages, though not without a residue of irony, to "deconstruct the dualisms underpinning Northern Ireland's identity politics" (163). Such challenging of the Northern Irish polarities is also undertaken in "The Triumph," which engages the work and life of Ciaran Carson in order to imagine a ground where dualisms are not so much absent as untenable. Suggesting that the community-building legacy of the deceased poet may well be the only solace after his demise, Muldoon transposes what in elegiac poetry is conventionally a matter of the individual attempt at dealing with personal grief onto a social plane: whereas there Carson's death is inconsolable for Muldoon, what succour there is remains available to the Northern Irish community.

"The Triumph" is structured around a memory of the poet and Carson driving through Belfast in a Triumph Herald Convertible to get the latter a packet of cigarettes. The light-hearted tone of that trip, however, is undercut by the realization that Carson would eventually be diagnosed as suffering from cancer caused, the poem suggests, by his addiction to smoking. It is in the Royal Victoria Hospital that Carson, nonchalantly recounting his treatment, is evoked at the start of the poem. By beginning at the end, "The Triumph" confronts death, although similarly to "Yarrow" the speaker knows that no amount of imaginary flourishes can delay the inevitable: "the bone marrow // aches for more and more cancer cells. Nor would you shrink / from piling on, alas, / your tales of Captain Chemo."¹ And yet, just as in "Yarrow" the unfolding of memory seeks to defer the moment "All would be swept away"; the "tales of Captain Chemo" soon turn to evocations of Carson's dreams that intertwine with tales of the two men's shared moments: in pubs talking about anything from French New Wave cinema to contemporary politics and poetry but most importantly Irish music, in the process undermining a dichotomous world view.

Carson regularly spoke of his dreams (even shortly before his death, as his publisher Neil Belton recalls, "he was dreaming aloud, seeing writing on the walls" [xiv-xv]), noting that the Belfast of his poems might owe its labyrinthine quality to his "dream version of Belfast which in many ways

¹ All the quotes from "The Triumph" come from the version published online on *The Times Literary Supplement* website.

I can negotiate more successfully than the real [city]" (Carson, "Out of the Pub" 16). And yet, the imaginary Belfast is not only a place of familiar multiplicity but also of "nightmares, sometimes, or dreams of containment, repression, anxiety and claustrophobia . . . often, I'm lost in an ambiguous labyrinth between the Falls and the Shankill; at other times, the city is idealized and takes on a Gothic industrial beauty" (Carson, Interviewed 5). Whatever their nature, the imaginary peregrinations across Belfast, beginning with *The Irish for No*, embody "something of the constant disintegration and reintegration of the city" (Carson, Interviewing 19). The speaker in "33333" captures some of this perpetual flux and ties it to an evocation of violence: "I know this place like the back of my hand, except / My hand is cut off at the wrist" (Carson, *Collected Poems* 101). Among many suggestions of physical threats and bodily mutilations, the volume keeps reminding us that the fluidity of Belfast is caused by the ceaseless cycle of oppression and retaliation. And yet, while Carson has denied any immediate political goals in his poetry, his consistent challenging of dichotomous constructs of thought in his 1980s and 1990s collections represents an all-out assault on sectarianism, which imagines the city both as the site of violence and, through its malleability, as a means to "resist [ing] and rebuk [ing] the idea that the spatial, social, and historical multiplicity of the city can be reduced to a polarized sectarian grid of forces and crass binary oppositions" (Alexander 25).

Carson's Belfast, "built on *sleech*—alluvial or tidal muck," as well as "of *sleech*, metamorphosed into brick" (*Collected Poems* 179, emphasis in the original), is a heterotopic place simultaneously full of familiar localities and alienating spaces, secret pathways and cul-de-sacs. Commenting on what Carson calls "one of my current recurrent dreams of Belfast" that "focuses on streets dominated by a church, St Peter's Pro-Cathedral in the Lower Falls" (*The Star Factory* 198), as they begin to resemble locales from all over the world, Neal Alexander observes that the city becomes "the navel of the world," a "reworking of the idea of the Aleph" (48, 49). Carson was attracted to the notion, which he borrowed from Borges, explaining that "aleph is one of the points in space which contains all other points" (*Fishing for Amber* 266). In the "current recurrent" dream, Belfast becomes such a pivot of the universe, though elsewhere Carson uses Aleph to evoke the idea of connectivity beyond the reference to the city. In "J," from the "Letters from the Alphabet" section of *Opera Et Cetera*, the poet sums up his contingent allusions to apparently discordant facts by observing that one thing leads to another "the way that Aleph leads to Beth" (*Collected Poems* 293). This arbitrary relatedness, which echoes Muldoon's "Something Else," represents both the freedom to imagine one's world as one pleases and a nightmarish imprisonment in

a labyrinthine, panopticon-like city in which oppressive forces exercise control over the stranded, powerless residents.

In "The Triumph," this dual meaning of Aleph underlies the oneiric representation of Belfast past and present: "The idea implicit / in 'The Aleph' / is that the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is a return to a long list / of shibboleths / meant to trip you up." In "Serial," Carson points up that "the shibboleths are a *lingua franca*" (*Collected Poems* 113) and one such shibboleth is thematized in "H,"² in which the speaker wonders "Is the H in H-Block *aitch* or *haitch*?" and adds "Every thing is in the ways / You say them. Like, the prison that we call Long Kesh is to the Powers-that-Be *The Maze*" (*Collected Poems* 291). In *Judges* 12:6, the Gileadites use the word shibboleth to find out which people that are trying to pass the river Jordan were Ephraimites, who "could not frame to pronounce *it* right" (*The Bible*). In the Northern Irish context, the aitches and haitches serve a similar function, pronunciation determining matters of life and death. "H" thus problematizes the idea that language can be a space of security and a token of belonging as in Heaney's "Broagh." Instead, as David Wheatley has shown, "strategies of evasion, codes, shibboleths and other language games" have come to feature in Northern Irish poetry as indicators of the sectarian divide and its attendant linguistic codes (3).

However, in addition to evoking the contested nature of language, "H" also challenges poetic double entendre, which Muldoon has celebrated in his early poetry. In claiming that "Every thing is in the ways / You say them," "H" alludes to Muldoon's "The Country Club" and its quotation from Robert Frost's "The Mountain" in the opening stanzas that end with the whimsical declaration "But all the fun's in how you say a thing" (Muldoon, *Poems* 64; Frost 48). Muldoon has admitted that at university, so at a time when the ride in the Triumph Convertible recounted in the elegy would have taken place, "the most important thing for me in Frost was his mischievous, sly, multi-layered quality" (Haffenden 134). While "Frost provides a model of 'crooked straightness' that becomes what Muldoon calls 'singleminded swervings'" (McCurry 81), "The Country Club" suggests that no slyness can oppose brutality, as eventually it turns out Ella Stafford, with whom the speaker has had an affair, gets "shot at" by her husband, a fact relayed to the hapless romancer by Lee Pinkerton,

² Another example would be the placement of the stress in the word Belfast. In "Jawbox," the speaker ponders that "the accent / On the *fast*, as if the name was Irish, which it was (or is)" (*Collected Poems* 193). By contrast, stressing the first syllable represents the "educated" pronunciation, as Carson indicates in *The Star Factory* (45). Julia C. Obert observes in passing that in "Jawbox" the two variants of pronunciation highlight "the dangerous distance between these two inflections while making a point about (would-be, should-be) proximity of Catholic and Protestant" (49).

who is a firm believer that “it shouldn’t be true when it’s not” (Muldoon, *Poems* 64). The poem may deride Pinkerton’s sanctimonious adherence to truth but it also remains suspicious of linguistic levity.

With this in mind, “The Triumph” indicates that deception leads not only to clever wordplay but to opacity that helps perpetuate dissension within a community between those who pronounce their haitches and those who do not. However, if Aleph is a way to “trip you up,” the poem also goes on to evoke a counter vision. Canto i calls up various divisions, the Belfast Urban Motorway, “The brainchild of Captain Terence O’Neill” and the conflict-riven Northern Irish people that “don’t need the British troops / to stand between us” but concludes by invoking Carson as a figure in whom those polarities might be fused, his “name combining those of the Abbot of Clonmacnoise and a beater of the drum / for the much-vaunted Unionist veto.” The suggestion that the poet bears the legacy Saint Ciarán and Edward Carson is developed in Canto ii, which remembers “how you’d retire at nine to get a head start on your dreams.” Those prominently feature Sir Edward but unlike in “The Brain of Edward Carson,” that imagines his brain, “an inner topography of the violent world [the politician] represented” (Hufstader 241), built of “two halves” as though obsessed with enforcing divisions (*Collected Poems* 234), in “The Triumph,” he is evoked “presenting each shipyard worker in the Queen’s Island / with an autographed copy of *The Irish for No*” and later “distributing copies of *Last Night’s Fun* / to a populace pretty much inured to water cannons and tear gas.” Although the more accurate image of Edward Carson, “ready to rail / against all those who might favour / a false king,” recurs throughout the poem, the dream figure is merged with Carson the poet and the Saint, as all merge with Louis MacNeice “peeling and portioning a mule” that appears at the start of “The Triumph” being painted by Joan Miró. Thus, in Ciaran Carson’s dreams as invoked in “The Triumph,” Sir Edward, the symbol of Protestant oppression, becomes a bearer of the ecumenical message of peace, so that Muldoon’s speaker can admit that “Not all Orangemen are bigots.”

Just as Saint Ciarán and Edward Carson fuse in Ciaran Carson, Terence O’Neill, the fourth Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, metamorphoses into Captain Francis O’Neill, an Irish-born Superintendent of the Chicago Police Force and an indomitable collector of Irish traditional music praised by Carson in his guide to traditional Irish music (see *Irish Traditional Music* 67). In the dream world of “The Triumph,” he is evoked as recommending that in response to the IRA’s 1956–62 Border Campaign, which saw another outbreak of bloodshed over the partition of Ireland, “a force / comprised mainly of flute players, each armed with a *camán*, // should do the trick.” This suggestion is exposed when the speaker fuses

the two O'Neills: "Along with riot shields, batons, / rubber bullets, and gasmasks, // Captain O'Neill still recommends an auxiliary force of button / accordionists to augment the flute / players already signed up to put down the Border Campaign." Aware of the fact that nothing would ever replace the brute force of the Unionist response, "The Triumph" nonetheless gives credence to musicians' efforts provided "they [were] to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, / like Ezra Pound or Christy Ring, / they'll likely happen on the single point that includes every other point in the universe."³ Whereas for Pound the attention to the music of words can ensure the right meaning is captured, for Carson, bringing poetry closer to the condition of music, rather than cementing the connection between words and reality, allows it to create a link between past and present.

In the concluding paragraphs of *Last Night's Fun*, Carson muses that "as we apprehend the tune, we enter in and out time, and mark its various times" while "ghosts of voices circulate in grooves of dust. Everything is a black gloss: corrigenda and addenda, a thousand couples" reeling in a palimpsest of dance-step patterns, as their feet step past the foot-notes" (198). This formula entwines the immediacy of musical performance—associated with the back rooms of pubs where "art was happening right now, that it was of the split second" (qtd. in Crosson 103)—with the permanence of tradition, creating a unique meeting point between the celebration of cultural legacy and an ongoing revision of this legacy in the fleeting continuity of the present moment. Carson points to that nature of music, and his "genre-defying" poetry, when he says that "since every tune recalls other circumstances in which it has been played . . . [t]he music is always renewable in the light of the now" (Carson, "For All I Know" 15). It is to such infolding of the permanent in the transient and contingent that "The Triumph" alludes in its analogy between traditional Irish music and Aleph as "the single point that includes every other point in the universe."

For Carson, the transtemporal connectivity that lies at the heart of music serves as a means of undermining the sectarian divides in Northern Ireland. Critical of attempts to impose ideologies on music, he argues in *Irish Traditional Music* that "Orange and Green might be mirror images of each other" and cites Hugh Shields, a historian of traditional Irish music that

³ Unlike the other two requirements, "Direct treatment of the thing" and "To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the expression" (3), that Pound set out in "A Retrospect," the insistence that poems be "compose[d] in the sequence of the musical phrase" would endure in his appreciation of poetry. When he defines kinds of poetry some sixteen years later, Pound adopts new terms: phanopoeia, or "a casting of images upon the visual imagination" (25) and logopoeia, "the dance of the intellect among words" (25) but continues to stress the musical quality of poetry as determinant of meaning, which he terms melopoeia.

Carson keeps in high esteem: “party songs are culturally complementary: while expressing different allegiances they use similar themes, forms, styles and melodies” (47). In effect, songs of the opposing camp “are sung in a spirit of irony, or a desire to show that one knows the other side, as well as one knows one’s own” or maybe “because they are good songs” (*Irish Traditional Music* 47). In *Last Night’s Fun*, he further objects to the idea of a “party tune,” attributing the political reading of music to the “verbal labels and the perception of the hearer” (185). In a similar vein, Edna Longley has argued that Carson’s poems are “replacements for the communal narratives that a seanachie could once command” and interpret “the way in which more contingent and fluid relations are breaching local, familial, clannish and theocentric horizons” (59). While in his poetry he uses soundscapes of Belfast to ambiguous purposes, evoking the city’s potential dangers (sounds of patrolling helicopters, explosions, constant interrogations), as well as its pub music sessions, Carson’s employment of the musical analogy in prose and interviews to describe his 1980s and 1990s work tends to attack the kind of binary divisions of the Northern Irish community mentioned by Longley.

Attentive to Carson’s keen poetic ear, “The Triumph” deploys what Obert calls the “(non-sectarian) collectivity” of Carson’s “clattery” rhythms and wry wit of the Belfast seanchai” (53–54) in order to imagine an alternative to the Aleph that enables divisive shibboleths. As Muldoon uses the long lines typical of *The Irish for No* and the subsequent volumes up until *Breaking News*, his poem keeps associating everything with everything else. Thus employing the technique that Muldoon singles out in Carson’s ekphrastic poems from his posthumous collection *Still Lives*: “everything, including Carson’s keen sense of impending death from lung cancer, gets into these poems” and “this odd freedom derives largely from Ciaran Carson’s ability to range far and wide while sticking very close to the purview of the painting in hand” (Muldoon, “Final Testimony”). Piling up seeming trivia, “The Triumph” endeavours on the one hand to recapture the presence of the deceased friend and, on the other, to project a porous community in which networks of intellectual and artistic affinity, cooperation and inclusivity stretch beyond political but also temporal borders: “Just as O’Carolan was influenced by Vivaldi so our trademark *tri rínn agus amhrán* / owes something to the Italian sonnet” and “Corkery and Mac Cuarta / might yet make common cause / with Calvino and Kundera.” The characteristically Gaelic form of *tri rínn agus amhrán* is no insular development of Irish verse but is shown to function in an international web of poetic experiment, similarly to how ostensibly local Irish-language poets, Daniel Corkery and Seamus Dall Mac Cuarta, share (antedate, in fact) the boisterous inventiveness and bawdy humour of giants of modern prose.

Mac Cuarta reappears in "The Triumph" to suggest that poetry, specifically in translation, may prove to be a community-building effort on a par with music. Recalling the 1974 "firebombing of your beloved market in Smithfield," the speaker muses: "we tried to translate 'An Lon Dubh Báite,' Seamus Dall's mock-heroic tear-gulper / about a bird belonging to an O'Neill princess that's perished / in a pail of whitewash." The lines imply a feeling of guilt central to part four of Heaney's "Singing School," in which "While the Constabulary covered the mob / Firing into the Falls, I was suffering / Only the bullying sun of Madrid" (132). But whereas Heaney discovers what Yeats called the "befitting emblems of adversity" in Goya's "Shootings of the Third of May" and "that holmgang / Where two berserks club each other to death / For honour's sake," Muldoon underwrites Carson's critique of Heaney's attempt to mythologize, and so offer "sufficient ground for understanding and absolution" of violence in Northern Ireland ("Escaped from the Massacre?" 184). In "The Triumph," the joint translation of Mac Cuarta's poem serves to open the path to a dialogue between languages and cultures, which Carson highlights in his own translations, particularly of Dante's *Inferno*. He has observed that Dante's "Florence was not so far removed from Belfast in its entanglements of politics and language" (Carson, Interviewing 22), which points to a cross-temporal and cross-national connection between himself and the Italian poet, an idea that "The Triumph" inscribes in its evocation of the drive that led Carson and Muldoon "from Notting Hill by way of Illinois, / Dante's Ravenna, and the Tropical Ravine / in which Ireland would later train for the Samoa match." While Notting Hill can be found in Belfast, the state of Illinois cannot (though there is a street of that name in Crete, Illinois), which marks an intercontinental aspect of the trip just as the mention of the Samoa match alludes to its temporal inclusivity, for Ireland "wip[ed] the floor with" Samoa at the Rugby World Cup on 12 October 2019, two days after Carson's funeral. Thus, Carson's life and death, as well as the fates and fortunes of the country (not only at sports) all fuse in the single ride in the Triumph Herald Convertible, as the event is translated into other trips jointly undertaken by the two poets.

One such excursion is implicit in the allusion to Muldoon's "Gathering Mushrooms" by way of mentioning Clannad's song of the same title and Muldoon's concluding image of the poet hallucinating that his "head had grown into the head of a horse" (*Poems* 106). In "Gathering Mushrooms," the speaker goes with a friend, who "The Triumph" suggests is Carson, to gather mushrooms in "Barnett's fair demesne" but in the process they consume the hallucinogenic kind and end up tripping "in some outbuilding" (*Poems* 105). The context of "the fire-bomb / that sent Malone House sky-high / and its priceless collection of linen / sky-high" (*Poems* 105)

introduces an ambiguous parallel to the two friends being sky-high on mushrooms, which precipitates the italicized conclusion spoken by the horse-headed poet: “*Come back to us . . . If sing you must, let your song / tell of treading your own dung, / let straw and dung give a spring to your step*” (*Poems* 106). Muldoon has dismissed the Republican voice in the conclusion of the poem by noting the ironic effect of the fact that “it is spoken by a horse” (“Paul Muldoon in Conversation” 176) but in “The Triumph,” the speaker confesses “The horse’s head / through which I used to speak wasn’t part of some masquerade / but represented who I truly was.” Thus the elegy challenges the former dismissal of the concluding image of “Gathering Mushrooms,” which in Wills’s reading of the poem represents “conformity with the Republican ideals of suffering and sacrifice” that is implied to be “fanatical, deluded, masochistic” (99). What “The Triumph” leans to is a more straightforward vision of reconciliation of “the public and private, the aesthetic and political, the divine and animal” (Holdridge 66).⁴ And yet, what is crucial to how “The Triumph” revises the earlier poem is that the horse-head’s message of peaceable unity, “*Lie down with and us and wait*” (*Poems* 106), is possible within the framework of song, the only other passage in the poem being the quotation, also in italics, from Clannad’s “Gathering Mushrooms.” While Muldoon’s “Gathering Mushrooms,” as Wills rightly shows, remains elusive of any complaisant gestures essentially in tune with the Republican agenda, the attitude of collectivity is implied to be intrinsic to song, and “The Triumph” picks up on that view. Rejecting equivocation, the speaker updates Carson’s belief in traditional music as a means to patching up the fractured Northern Irish community by stressing that this is the function of music of any genre.

As it is revised in “The Triumph,” the Irish Aleph changes from a silent syllable that allows for divisive shibboleths into a point where all dissentions meet. The myriad trivia that Carson’s poems are packed with initiate the transition from the language conceived as “a fusillade of question marks” (Carson, *Collected Poems* 93) to one that seeks to represent some of the fleetingness and immediacy of music as “it’s hitting you from all sides, . . . here in front of your very eyes and ears, right now” (Carson, Interview 81). It is this lesson that the poet of “The Triumph” learns from *an fear níos glíce*, Muldoon’s version of Eliot’s invocation of *il miglior fabbro*: Pound. In the realization that poetry can undermine the “enduring dysfunction underlying the conflict in Northern Ireland,” which derives from “the

⁴ Although he tends to be less attentive to the ironies of the poem than Wills or Tim Kendall, Holdridge does point to the ambiguity in the conclusion of “Gathering Mushrooms” that aspires “to transcend reality, though it remains doubtful whether the ‘soiled grey blanket of Irish rain’ and everything it represents . . . will ever be ‘bleached white’” (66).

problematic conflation of excluding, affiliative, bounded tropes of sectarian sociospatial identity with political organisation" (Stainer 373), the speaker of "The Triumph" comes to understand that taxonomies bespeak no more than a lack of imagination. His initially wistful admission that "The fact you've now been squeezed / into a columbarium in Saint Patrick's might be the first time you've been pigeonholed" by the end of the poem is altered to suggest that the burial place is where singularity and infinity coalesce: "As for the Aleph, the single point in the universe that includes every other point, // that's surely the columbarium / in which your ashes lie." While in Borges's story, the Aleph is located on the nineteenth step in Carlos Argentino's cellar, in "The Triumph" it is in the columbarium where Carson's ashes are laid; in both cases, though, the one point contains the limitless universe, as Borges says, "the *multum in parvo*" (12).

As in Borges, Muldoon's staggering assembly of oneiric images that re-create the world he shared with Carson must seem infinitesimal insofar as the poem seeks to apprehend the here and now of his friendship with the deceased, a task as futile as it is necessary. Throughout "The Triumph," Carson scuds through the congeries of images, simultaneously palpably present in this *omnium gatherum* and completely absent from it. Trying to capture some of what Muldoon has called Carson's "capaciousness," the poet of "The Triumph" partakes in "the rubble and rumpus and riddling of day-to-day life in Belfast" (Edemariam) that Carson evoked in his poems. By the end of its run, though, he can no more than echo Borges's memorable phrase: "I felt infinite wonder, infinite pity" (Borges 14). Where the wondrous lies in the intricate network of connections, in the immediacy of music and poetry that unthread all binaries of Irish sectarianism, the pity, as always in elegy, comes when, having run its course, the poem must end where it began: in the realization of loss, for which poems are a relief for the community if not for the grieving friend.

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