

## PAUL MULDOON'S POETICS OF EMPATHY

### **Description for the General Public**

Paul Muldoon is among the most gifted and most widely-recognisable contemporary poets writing in English. In his work, he touches on even the most delicate issues of social, historical and cultural importance both to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland as well as the United States (he has been an American citizen since 2003). Owing to the allusive and frequently ironic style of his poetry, a number of critics have suggested that he lacks genuine feeling, is overly intellectual or simply hides behind the veil of encyclopaedic knowledge. Nevertheless, Muldoon remains a poet astutely sensitive to the harm done to another person, especially one who is incapable of defending oneself. In the present research project, it is my aim to critically analyse this aspect of Muldoon's oeuvre with a view to showing that his poetry, drama, libretti and criticism are imbued with empathy towards the other. Among those others, present in Muldoon's work, there are figures subsisting on the margins of societies (ethnic minorities, political dissidents, immigrants, renegades) as well as animals both domesticated and wild.

In the project, I explore not only the entirety of his so-far published works but also such materials as his correspondence, notes for lectures and autobiographical writings, all of which are available in university libraries in the USA (Atlanta and New Jersey), Northern Ireland (Belfast) and the Republic of Ireland (Dublin). Investigating the development of his poetry from volume to volume, but also the process of writing of individual poems, one is quick to observe a growing interest in matters of responsibility and empathy towards the other. It is therefore crucial that this thread of Muldoon's work – foundational for his poetic practice as it seems – be given ampler attention. Because critical studies on the ethical element of his poetry are few and far between (often repeating some of his ideas without taking into consideration the wider context in which he addresses certain issues), time is ripe for a more thorough treatment of this aspect of his work.