

The Role of the Poet in a Time of Violence: A New Historicist Reading of Paul Muldoon's "The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants"

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Abstract

The main aim of this paper is to examine how Paul Muldoon's personal experience in a strife-torn Northern Ireland affects his selection of historical subjects and his fictional representation of them adopting the New Historicism theory. It begins with a brief background on the New Historicism theory and emphasises the notion that the new historicist theorists sought to reveal truths concealed by history and to re-read or re-inscribe the past as seen from a present perspective. Both history and society combine to give various meanings and multiple interpretations to literary texts, hence studying the socio-cultural backgrounds as well as the authorial intentions help re-inscribe the past, reconstruct the social, cultural and political issues, and refigure the individual identity. The paper concludes that there is no binary opposition between history and literature or context and text and that both are subjective representations of reality. Thick description is illustrated as one of the tools that help suggest a multiplicity of social and political implications and it is concluded that both literary and non-literary texts are fictions formulated by imagination and created according to the authorial intentionalism.

The second part of the paper proves that Muldoon's poetry is intentionally obscure to manipulate and baffle readers. The paper asserts that Muldoon's poetic technique and fast-paced tone help in dedicating his willful obscurity. "The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants" delineates the hunger strikes prevalent as a kind of protest in Northern Ireland in the 1980s, revealing an ugly, unpalatable truth. Muldoon inscribes history in the images of the body. The hero's transformations coincide with the poet's changing of the traditional sonnet into a more flexible narrative form. The irregular metrical patterns, repetitions and transformations in theme and subject emphasise the fragmented identity the poet wants to reveal. Muldoon's interest in intertextuality as a poetic technique helps him confirm that official history can be fictionally re-structured and that the reader is responsible for interpreting the authorial intentionalism.

Key words: Authorial intentionalism, fragmented identity, intertextuality, New Historicism, thick description, obscurity

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دور الشاعر في زمن العنف: قراءة تاريخية جديدة لقصيدة "كلما ازداد ما يملك الإنسان كلما رغب في المزيد" للشاعر بول مولدون

الملخص

يهدف البحث إلى دراسة تأثير التجربة الشخصية للشاعر الأيرلندي بول مولدون بما شهدته أيرلنده الشمالية التي انهكها الصراع في ثمانينات القرن الماضي في اختياره للموضوعات التاريخية وتقديمها بتصوير شعري منتهجا نظرية التاريخانية الجديدة. ويبدأ البحث باستعراض نظرية التاريخانية الجديدة ورغبة منظرها في الكشف عن الحقائق التي أخفاها التاريخ وإعادة قراءة وصياغة الماضي من منظور الحاضر. ويوضح البحث أن التاريخ والمجتمع يندمجان لإضفاء معانٍ عديدة وتفسيرات متباينة للنصوص الأدبية وما يقتضيه ذلك من دراسة الخلفية الاجتماعية والثقافية ونوايا الكاتب والتي تساعد على إعادة صياغة الماضي وإعادة تصوير القضايا الاجتماعية والثقافية والسياسية وكذلك إعادة تكوين الهوية الفردية. ويخلص البحث إلى أنه لا يوجد تناقض مزدوج بين التاريخ والأدب أو السياق والنص وأن كلاهما تصوير ذاتي غير موضوعي للواقع يعتمد على وجهة نظر المؤرخ أو الكاتب. كما يتطرق البحث للتوصيف المتعمق كأحد أدوات إضفاء العديد من المضامين الاجتماعية والسياسية، وأن النصوص الأدبية والغير أدبية هي تصوير يصوره الخيال ويصيغه وفقاً لنوايا الكاتب.

ويتناول الجزء الثاني من البحث شعر بول مولدون والذي يتسم بالغموض المتعمد ليتلاعب بالقراء ويشير حيرتهم، حيث يؤكد البحث على أن الأسلوب الشعري المتغير والتحول السريع للشاعر قد ساعدا على تكريس هذا الغموض. ويركز البحث على قصيدة "كلما ازداد ما يملك الإنسان كلما رغب في المزيد" والتي تتناول عمليات الاضراب عن الطعام التي انتشرت كأحد أشكال المعارضة في أيرلنده الشمالية في ثمانينات القرن الماضي، كاشفة عن الحقيقية بوجهها القبيح البغيض. وقد استخدم مولدون الجسد في تصورات عدة لينقل لنا صوراً متباينة للأحداث التاريخية. كما استخدم الأشكال المختلفة التي يتحول إليها بطل القصيدة لتتماشى مع تغييره للشكل التقليدي لسونته حيث كسر الشاعر كافة القيود الشكلية لسونته في هذه القصيدة جعلها تتسم بالمرونة لتتماشى مع ما يريد التعبير عنه. كما تبرز الأنماط الشعرية الغير قياسية الوزن والتكرار والتنقل بين الموضوعات والهوية المنقسمة التي يرغب الشاعر في الكشف عنها. كذلك يوضح البحث أن التناص كأحد أدوات الشعر قد ساعد الشاعر على إثبات أن التاريخ التقليدي المعروف يمكن أن يصاغ من جديد بشكل قصصي يكون القارئ فيه مسئولاً عن تفسير نوايا الكاتب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نوايا الكاتب – الهوية المنقسمة – التناص – التاريخانية الجديدة – التوصيف المتعمق – الغموض

1. Introduction

1.1 New Historicism: Relationship between Art and Society

In the early 1980s, the New Historicism theory emerged as a reaction against Formalism and New Criticism by practitioners of Renaissance and culture studies who wanted to give their work a theoretical background. Those included American literary theorists such as Louis Montrose (1988-), Stephen Greenblatt (1943-) and Jerome McGann (1937-).

In their examination of literary texts, the new historicists shed light upon the dead, the oppressed and the marginalised in society. They reveal truths, secrets, mysteries and details that have been concealed throughout history. With reference to McGann, new historicists construct re-readings of the past from the perspective of the present, which re-inscribes the past and its present historical moment (Hamilton 154). The new historicists thus consider the author, text, reader and society as closely intertwined and history and society as part and parcel of producing the meaning of the literary text.

The new historicists also highlight the importance of the social and political implications of the production and reception of different canonical literary texts in addition to their relation to other non-literary texts. Such an approach proves to be significant in literary criticism insofar as new historicists closely examine the socio-cultural background of literary texts as well as the discursive practices of their political institutions, which influence the production and reception of such literary texts. In light of this discussion, it is crucial to examine the historical events surrounding both the production and

reception of a literary work to determine how the work represents the status quo and the author's intentions, on the one hand, and how it addresses the reader by delivering certain messages that may sometimes be clear or ambiguous, on the other (Harrison 367).

Furthermore, the new historicist criticism underlines how literary works can reconstruct the social, political, and cultural issues of the era that is being examined. Given that literary texts are discursive constructs which depict certain cultural values, it is of ultimate importance to examine the historical context surrounding such literary texts. In this respect, against the notion of historical transparency, new historicism sheds light upon the textuality of history in its deconstruction of the new critical notion of texts as self-autonomous objects. New historicists thus determine how such critical methodologies as deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and semiotics play a major role in the textual and cultural analysis of literary and non-literary texts (Harrison 368).

Jan R. Veenstra, in his examination of new historicism, draws upon Greenblatt and his "poetics of culture," which determines the strong relationship between literary and historical texts and their socio-historical contexts. Greenblatt's cultural poetics fosters the concept that texts are not merely a documentation of the social and political forces that make up history and society, but they also contribute remarkably to the social processes that refigure individual identity and the socio-political, historical situation (174). Veenstra maintains that Greenblatt's "economic metaphor" enables texts and their symbolic significance to prevail in society insofar as the texts'

literary devices reflect the social energy circulating in other texts that speak of the same subject matter. He further elaborates that Greenblatt's ideas on the nature of the text lead to a new method of interpretation, which foregrounds the socio-historical context that informs the text and gives it the tools by which it acquires new meanings. Accordingly, Veenstra asserts that, with reference to Greenblatt, poetry and history are "forms of poesies, a creative force that pervades all domains of human activity" (176) which need to be closely examined. Veenstra, in this regard, defines the text as "a human-made object" that "is radically informed by all the forces that condition and shape our societies and histories" (177). This argument underlines Greenblatt's ideas on the relationship between text and context and between art and society as of major significance in the new historicist approach to literary and non-literary texts.

Provided that new historicists such as Greenblatt and Jean Howard reject the notion that history is a self-autonomous text, as man is a discursive construct by the different institutions operating in society, "the historical investigator is ... [thus]... a product of his history and is never able to recognise otherness in its pure form, but always in part through the framework of the present" (Howard 13). Hence, since history is neither a stabilised nor a transparent text, as it is constructed from the historian's subjective point of view, the meaning of the text that mirrors it is not embedded within its formal structures, but is rather projected onto it by the reader's interpretation that is affected by the context of the events described. In this regard, there is no ultimate truth and there is no binary opposition between history and literature, or

context and text and, consequently, literature is not meant to be read, but to be explained (Howard 14).

Greenblatt elaborates on the notion of man as a cultural artifact by explaining the powerful effect of Renaissance literature as discourse on the individual and society in three aspects: “(1) as the manifestation of the ... behavior of its ... author, (2) as ... an expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped and (3) as a reflection upon those codes” (*Renaissance* 4). In other words, Greenblatt sheds light on how individual subjects reconstruct reality, are themselves constructs, and are aware of being continuously reconstructed by discourse. This underlines how the processes of interpretation and self-fashioning are two sides of narrativity insofar as narrating anecdotes seeks “a solid foundation of the self” (Veenstra 182), which deconstructs the objectivity of literary and non-literary texts. With reference to the French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), the reality depicted by the poet is a potential reality that is interpreted in different ways. This is referred to by Ricoeur as “the world of the text,” where the text’s linguistic aspects (meaning) re-informs reality in its negation of the first order reference to it, which, consequently, renders poetry a second order reference to reality.

On a larger scale, based on their preconceptions, readers appropriate the meaning of the text during the process of reading, which undermines the new critical notion that texts have fixed meanings. In this regard, “a literary text expropriates an interpreter as much as the interpreter appropriates the text” (Veenstra 183). Through “the world of the text,” readers are informed of a “new potentialised subjectivity,” which acts as

their horizon of expectations that is fashioned by the text's linguistic aspects. Greenblatt perceives no difference between "the world of the text" and the world of the socio-historical context, as discourse is never detached from the social structure in which it is used and through which it acquires its meaning.

Consequently, it becomes clear that while Ricoeur tries to differentiate between the worlds of the author and the reader, Greenblatt attempts to integrate them to show that there is no separation between self and society. He also believes that there is no need for the concept of a second order reference since the author's first order reference or his/her intention is definitely informed by the social context that fashions it. For Greenblatt then, the text is not autonomous and the act of reading and interpretation is an aspect of social practice and formation of identity. In other words, "the text is a function in an overall pattern of power relations that fashion self and society" (Veenstra 183). Greenblatt further suggests that what the society produces, such as "power, charisma, sexual excitement, collective dreams, wonder, desire, anxiety, religious awe, free-floating intensities of experience" is social energy (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 19). These social energies urge humans to carry out their basic activities that are a symbolic production. Social artifacts, as well as texts, are deemed part of this symbolic production, which influences the writing of literary and historical texts and the reception of their meaning (Veenstra 187).

The American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) presents another important aspect of new historicism that is "thick description," which he learned from the Oxford philosopher Gilbert Ryle

(1900-1976). Thick description urges the reader to look for different interpretations and new meanings. In his book, *The Greenblatt Reader* (2004), Greenblatt draws upon Geertz's explanation of thick description by highlighting its role in determining the social and political implications of the production and reception of literary and non-literary texts (30). Further, with reference to Ryle, Greenblatt extends his examination of thick description by explaining how the process entails a set of mechanisms in terms of "intentions, expectations, circumstances, settings, and purposes" (qtd. in Greenblatt, *The Greenblatt Reader* 32) that signify meaning. In this regard, thick description underlines the importance of critical examination by attributing deeper meaning and significance to man's actions.

According to Greenblatt, texts are fashioned by the cultures which influence their production and reception. He explains how "the multilayered cultural meanings ... [are] present in the fragments [of a given text]" and the "dense networks of meaning charted in an effective thick description [consequently] had to be traceable back to the anecdote initially held up for scrutiny" (*The Greenblatt Reader* 34). In other words, as those fragments represent the culture from which the text is drawn and such culture reflects the moment of the text's production, the prevalent power structures at the time and the assumptions of the present moment, the text becomes a historical anecdote. Geertz's thick description, in this respect, suggests redrawing boundaries between literary and non-literary texts, since both are cultural artifacts in which the underlined elements of man's lived experience record the influence of power relations

throughout history. Greenblatt thus concludes that by making both literary and non-literary works seem to be each other's thick description, one has to believe that both of them are texts or fictions formulated by imagination and that they "make sharply different claims upon the actual" (37). In light of this discussion, there is no binary opposition between literary and non-literary texts, for there is no ultimate truth as both depend on authorial intentionalism. It is through the process of reading a text that readers are able to understand their self-positioning by the multiple interpretations they attribute to it, which project different realities onto a given text and hence renders it as not fixed in meaning.

Geertz and Greenblatt believe that to be aware of man's difference from the past entails realising the significance of this difference (Hamilton 161). For Greenblatt, "artistic expression is never perfectly self-contained" (*Learning to Curse* 89) as it draws on the energies of the social practices and transmits them by making them return to the general cultural fold. With reference to Geertz, in order to understand what man really is, one has to examine the different strata he is made up of, namely the organic, psychological, social and cultural levels and to accumulate findings from anthropology, sociology, psychology, and biology over one another to determine the political implications of the discourse and culture that fashion his/her identity (38). He believes that in order to analyse human nature, one has to focus on the "synthetic" rather than the "stratigraphic" conception of the different elements of man's existence as variables in this process of analysis (44). He continues to illustrate how finding a common language for social sciences entails

bringing together various theories and concepts to reach “meaningful propositions” that determine the findings of each field of study. Geertz, therefore, highlights the powerful impact of culture on man insofar as culture provides the link between man as a free individual and as an individual subject in the light of certain “cultural patterns ... [or] ... historically created systems of meaning in which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives” (52).

Literary critic Antony Harrison proposes that the reality of the text is conceptual. Such proposition allows for a multiplicity of interpretations or “a free play of ideas” (380) on the part of the reader. In this respect, readers underline certain linguistic devices, which are used by the author, that appeal the most to them and interpret their development throughout the reading process. On a similar note, Greenblatt posits that “the work of art is itself the product of a set of manipulations, some of them our own ...many others undertaken in the construction of the original work” (*The Greenblatt Reader* 27-28). It could be inferred thus that a work of art emerges from the dialectics of negotiation and exchange between the author and the different practices of society. It is an exchange process in which the writer does not appropriate incidents, but rather gives something interesting for the reader.

1.2 The Violence and Brutality of the Political Situation in Northern Ireland in the 1980s

Muldoon’s fourth volume *Quoof* (1983) is full of terrorist bombings, army manoeuvres, shootings, and murders. It depicts a significant era of tumult in the history of strife-torn Northern Ireland, namely the hunger strikes. These hunger strikes resulted from the British government’s withdrawal of “special category”

status from the IRA/Republican prisoners who were convicted of terrorist offences after March 1976 and led them to what is known as the “dirty protest.” The prisoners were angry that they were treated as ordinary criminals rather than political prisoners so they smeared their prison walls with faeces and went on a hunger strike in 1980 in a highly secured prison called the H-Blocks. Later on December 15-16, thirty more republicans joined the hunger strike. The strike leader Bobby Sands’ election to parliament led the Sinn Fein to join the electoral politics. Later, with the death of Sands and nine others due to the strike in 1981, they secured success at the elections. However, the era was defined as “death by death, bomb by bomb with violence flourishing and politics weakening” (Holdridge 61). Outside the prisons, assassinations, bombings, and sectarian murders escalated and 1981 was marked with “more than one thousand shootings and 530 bombs planted” (Wills, *Reading* 88). Deaths continued on December 6, 1982, when seventeen more people were murdered in the Irish National Liberation Army’s (INLA) bombing of the Droppin’ Well disco in Ballykelly, Co. Derry. The Catholic Reaction Force killed three others during service in Darkley Pentecostal Church, Co. Armagh. In December 1983, the IRA bombed Harrods.

2. Paul Muldoon and Historicising the Political Situation in Northern Ireland

2.1 Muldoon’s Authorial Intentionalism

In the 1990s, the Irish poet Paul Muldoon (1951 -) was considered the most influential poet in contemporary British and Irish poetry. Like most contemporary poets in Northern Ireland, his poetry reflects the Northern Irish society at a certain period in

history that was characterised by violence. The present study poses significant questions as regards Muldoon's re-inscription of the socio-political situation of Northern Ireland as follows: 1) How does Muldoon's poetry reflect the political situation in Northern Ireland in the 1980s? 2) What is the relationship between Muldoon as a poet and his community? 3) How does he interpret the events, cultures, or political situation of his community as he seeks to connect poetry with a larger world? (Tell 91) 4) How does his imagery historicise reality? And, finally, 5) is his authorial intentionalism clear or ambiguous?

The most significant studies of Muldoon are Clair Wills' *Reading Paul Muldoon* (1998) and Tim Kendall's *Paul Muldoon* (1996), which deal with Muldoon's poetry from two different perspectives; the former aesthetic and the latter historical. However, both works give a "thorough assessment of a significant poet" (Holdridge 4) and both writers illustrate the "complexities" (Holdridge 1) readers confront in his poetry. Kendall believes that Muldoon's poetry reveals certain difficulties though his poetic technique reassures readers that all is well, thus provoking bewilderment in them. Muldoon exclaims, "part of writing is about manipulation – leaving [readers] high and dry, in some corner of a terrible party, where I've nipped out through the bathroom window" (Wills, Jenkins and Lanchester 19-20). Muldoon's poetry is thus double-edged as it always deceives readers by its apparent "sense of smoothness and readability, only to proceed to discomfort, provoke, confuse, and fascinate" (Broom 205). It "often seems intentionally obscure" and its highly accomplished style is often "bewildering" (Holdridge 4).

Muldoon describes the role of the poet in modern society in one of his BBC files titled "The Point of Poetry," where he clearly notes that though poets in ancient societies played significant roles, in the modern world their place is taken over by other experts. Poets seek to be regarded as no less important than any of these since the "public health of the nation would suffer if poets didn't resist the insidious impulse of others to use language to their own ends." Poets should have a responsibility towards language: making it clear not obscure and getting rid of the "garbage" wherever it may be "in the advertising slogan, the newspaper article, the politician's speech, the preacher's sermon" (514-15).

Bearing in mind the "public health of the nation," Muldoon's work characteristically acknowledges that poetry has "effects" (Wills, *Reading* 59-60). His idea of the poetry "effects" is strongly linked to the relationship between poetry and society (Cliff 632). Muldoon lived in Belfast from 1969 to 1985 in a time and place of violence, and his relation to the violence taking place in the near proximity was not definite (Warman 708). Despite being unassertive or indefinite towards poetry "effects" on society as some critics claim (O'Donoghue 402 and Warman 708), Muldoon's poem under study, "The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants," discusses sectarian violence, which clearly reveals poetry "effects" on society and the moral implications violence has on the people experiencing it.

Muldoon is concerned with the social and political situation of Northern Ireland since he believes that poetry has an aestheticising role that helps cure painful emotions (Holdridge 5). His volume *Quoof* that

includes "The More a Man Has" clearly represents poetry's purgatory role and emphasises that poetry is as much "a symptom as a cure" (Wills, *Reading* 87). Sometimes poetry becomes implicated in the violence it depicts or attempts to comprehend. Though Muldoon may sometimes be strongly suspicious of the efficacy of poetry, he tends to believe in the Romantic idea that poetry offers some solace (Wills, *Reading* 22).

In their writing, Irish writers were torn between "the urge to express private concerns" and "the compulsion to address identity politics, inherited atavisms and the legacy of sectarian strife" (Alcobia-Murphy, "Sonnets" 189) to represent the social and political background. Muldoon reflects what the Irish poet Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) expounds that "poetry is its own reality" and what he names "the government of the tongue" meaning that the poet is obliged to "concede to the corrective pressures of social, moral, political and historical reality" so that "the ultimate fidelity must be to the demand and promise of the artistic event" (101). After reading Muldoon's poetry, it is deemed a liberating manifesto that allows the poet to submit to "the jurisdiction of achieved form," and poetry is "its own vindicating power" (92) justifying the author's intentions.

Muldoon denies that he imposes certain views on the reader or even speaks out his political stances. In a 1985 interview, he explained the relationship between his poetry and politics saying, "It does not matter where I stand politically, My opinion about what should happen in Northern Ireland is no more valuable than yours" (Donaghy 85). Muldoon tries not to impose his personal reflections on the current scene.

However, though he claims that his political intentions are not clear through his poetry, readers can somewhat understand where he stands politically. The following analysis of "The More a Man Has" will prove that his authorial intentions are made clear through his choice of words and imagery. As a result, his contribution to the history of Northern Ireland becomes certainly obvious. However, Muldoon's poetry is always considered obscure, regardless of his linguistic experimentation and talented wordplay, due to his giving free rein to himself. Hence, critics claim that the "associational logic" of his poetry "tends towards obliquity, indecipherability and maddening lack of closure" (Alcobia-Murphy, "Sonnets" 191) making readers' task more difficult trying to understand or to relate to the political or social events.

Rajeev S. Patke emphasises the idea that Muldoon's poetry is ambiguous and lacks clues. He also claims that Muldoon himself admits that the linguistic style of "The More a Man Has" "provides a dazzle of bafflement" leading to the feeling that the poem may make sense should readers have more clues to a better understanding (281). This may be attributed to the fact the Muldoon as a poet thinks that he is somewhat restricted by the language constructions he is not choosing arbitrarily. In a 1996 interview with John Redmond, he maintained, "I believe that devices like repetition and rhyme are not artificial, that they'r not imposed, somehow, on the language. They are inherent in the language. Words want to find chimes with each other, things want to connect" (4). Consequently, he is convinced that poetic structures, word choice, rhyme and repetition are essential tools that the poet cannot do without.

However, this does not mean that the writer can lose some agency in the construction of the poem to give way to the “random potentialities of language as sound” (Patke 282). Reading Muldoon’s poetry clearly illustrates that there is hardly any random construction in any of his poems.

2.2 Difficulty and Obscurity of Muldoon’s Poetry

To categorise the type of difficulty Muldoon employs in his poetry, George Steiner’s essay “On Difficulty” is of major significance. Steiner distinguishes between four types of difficulty. First, “contingent difficulty” that results from obscure references which can hinder the reading process, but can finally be looked up and resolved and thus is not a serious type of difficulty. This contingent difficulty is clearly manifested in Muldoon’s “The More a Man Has,” as he uses obscure references which make readers uncertain about the author’s attitude towards them, whether willful, casual, indifferent, or deliberate.

The second type is “modal difficulty” which is concerned with historical references to cultures and sensibilities (Steiner 31-33). Muldoon’s interest in revealing the daily, violent life in the surrounding society and the harsh reality people experience, that are definitely uninteresting or unexciting, does not negate the fact that they can be full of bewildering experiences that correspond to this second category of difficulty (Patke 290).

The third type, according to Steiner, is “tactical difficulty,” which emerges according to the author’s intention when there is no balance between the author’s intention and the performative means he/she uses (33). Patke comments that failing to match

intention with performance can be accepted, however, using difficulty as a willful tactic is significantly important as the poet attempts to help readers rightly comprehend “by dislocating and goading to new life the supine energies of word and grammar” and this is exactly what Muldoon does when he gives “hackneyed phrases and clichés” (290) as manifested in “The More a Man Has” in various stanzas: “...has turned over a new leaf ...” (82-83), “Keep off the Grass” (106), “*thou art so possessed with murd’rous hate---*” (131), “Asprin-white spot” (153), “hacienda-style” (164), “She had wanted only to clear the air” (182), “keeping down-wind of everything” (210), “the eye of a travelling rat” (215), “eagle eye” (231), “hand-me-down duds” (301), “large as life” (352), “*on the spot*” (590), etc.

Steiner’s last and most significant type is “ontological difficulty” in which the writer presents readers with “blank questions about the nature of human speech, about the status of significance, about the necessity and purpose of the construct which we have...come to perceive as a poem” (40). Many of Muldoon’s poems can apply to this category if readers accept the notion that “playfulness both conceals and permits a serious intent” (Patke 290). Commenting on the difficulty of “The More a Man Has,” M. Allen suggests that it structures “a myth” that motivates the speakers and the characters, however, it “neither explains nor redeems their predicament” (71). According to Wills, the difficulty of the text gives reason for readers to accuse the poet of willful obscurity and an extremely “cynical” and “ungenerous tone” (*Reading* 86). Difficulty in Muldoon’s “The More

a Man Has” will be discussed in detail when analysing the poem.

Muldoon does not clearly declare his political convictions because, as he says, he wants to possess the freedom not to “espouse directly any political situation” (“Getting Round” 127). He guides the readers to follow him while he is engaged with the hot issues of his time as he is keen on displaying the violence prevalent in Northern Ireland at that time. Thus his authorial intentionalism becomes a major aspect in his historicising of reality. Through his “frequent use of italics, quotation marks, historical personae, dates, place names” (Alcobia-Murphy, *Sympathetic Ink* 15-16), Muldoon guides the readers towards specific readings of his poetry. He does not offer them a multiplicity of meanings since he believes in “limited connotations” as he mentions in an interview, “I believe that one of the writer’s jobs is to reduce the number of possible readings of the text” (Keller 13). This clearly suggests that Muldoon intentionally orients the readers towards the limited meanings or interpretations of his poems, represented by the poem in focus “The More a Man Has.”

2.3 Intertextuality

Rachel Buxton states that the intertextuality of the poem goes in line with the concept that reading a literary work is entering into a variety of texts (37). This notion is highlighted by Julia Kristeva’s assertion that “in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (36) and in Roland Barthes’ reminder that “the word ‘text’ originally meant ‘a tissue, a woven fabric’” (159) and that the “idea of the text, and thus

of intertextuality, depends ... on this figure of the web, the weave, the garment (text) woven from the threads of the 'already written' and the 'already read'" (G. Allen 6).

Muldoon is famous for intertextuality as he is interested in referring to names, persons, places and events of historical, fictitious or even personal significance. He also uses extracts from works of literature, either written by him or by other writers. Thus, he urges the readers to work hard for the meaning. However, despite the obscurity of Muldoon's poetry, his intertextuality guides the readers by providing clues to get the meaning intended by him and to understand how historical experiences can be "mediated through selective editing" (Alcobia-Murphy, "Sonnets" 193). This selective editing is significant and consequently intertextuality, as one of the tools employed by Muldoon, plays a major role in historicising reality, particularly in "The More a Man Has." This is referred to by Linda Hutchinson, who posits that such writing "shows fiction to be historically conditioned and history to be discursively structured" (11-12), meaning that there is a huge difference between official history and fictional recreation of historical events on the part of the writer. Consequently, this paper attempts to examine how Muldoon's personal experience affects his selection of historical subjects and his fictional representation of them to deliver certain messages to the readers.

According to Alcobia-Murphy, "When the literary or historical quotations and allusions self-reflexively manifest their status as intertexts in a poem, readers, by actively searching out the poem's links with its

sources, can produce a new reading of both the present and the past texts” (*Sympathetic Ink* 20-21). Hence, intertextuality plays a major role in comprehending Muldoon’s “The More a Man Has” and the readers’ role in interpreting authorial intentionalism is asserted. Besides, it is significant to explain how the present text reflects the past events and how Muldoon exploits both literary and historical allusions to refer to violence, without expounding his political views or beliefs. In addition, “The More a Man Has” comprises parts of other texts and poems that sometimes readers can identify and sometimes cannot, also reflecting the identity crisis. Intertextuality will be thoroughly discussed when analysing the poem.

3. A New Historicist Reading of “The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants”

Muldoon’s *Quoof* was published in 1983 in the aftermath of the Republican hunger strikes, which was definitely an extremely tough and painful time in the history of Northern Ireland. It reveals “a new darker poetic sensibility” in Muldoon’s poetry since “violence, cruelty and their archaic ramifications” are central to the book (Wills, *Reading* 86). Taking the political background into account when considering *Quoof*, it can be described as a “troubling volume for a troubling time” (Holdridge 62) as it is full of poems centered on violence. Wills asserts that “Terrorist bombings, army maneuvers, shootings, murders and reprisals” are evident in *Quoof* because Muldoon’s main concern is to enact “the bodies that suffer this violence” which culminates in what she calls “meditation of corporeality” (*Reading* 88). Thus, it is clear that Muldoon focuses on the devastating images of the

political situation of Northern Ireland in 1980s and on the scattered bodies that were the victims of bombings and shootings. He also portrays the Republican prisoners' exploitation of the body in the dirty protest showing their unwashed and unclothed bodies, their cells that were smeared with their own excrement, and their hunger strikes, all of which were used as a kind of resistance. The prisoners were using "the self as a weapon ... because they had no access to other weapons" and this was "not only a response to entrapment, but a powerful sign of protest" (Wills, *Reading* 89). The hunger strikers have drawn upon one of the well-known traditions of Irish politics of using suffering as a form of attack. Wills refers to Patrick Pearce, one of the most famous leaders of the 1916 Rising, who took advantage of the Catholic emphasis on the body, physical suffering and stressed the notion that "victory comes not to those who are able to inflict the most, but to those who are able to suffer the most" (*Reading* 89).

Muldoon shocks readers with disturbing descriptions such as a pair of severed hands, a woman that is first-fucked all night until the morning that never comes, another woman that is tarred and feathered, and a local councilor blown to pieces by a car-bomb and his scattered body parts that can never be collected. Wills considers *Quoof* as "a tour de force" praised for its technical vigour and hard-edged view of reality, since it consistently sets out to assault notions of decorum and decency with the ugly, unpalatable truth. Muldoon employs "modern-day realities to crush all forms of sentimentality and idealization" (*Reading* 86). Hence, *Quoof* portrays violence and brutality in Northern Ireland through the various

images of violated women and fragmented body parts. It is also dedicated to the physical body and its nutritional and sexual needs. Such emphasis on the body parts and physical body needs shows “entrapment” with imprisonment and with the “spectacle of the body” then being enacted in Northern Irish prisons (Wills, *Reading* 87). Muldoon portrays the body as the most personal and corporeal property. He seeks to teach readers how to overcome confinement within the body and to fight entrapment. In this regard, the focus should be on how such portrayals reflect reality, and the significance of the political and psychological implications behind them.

Muldoon’s emphasis on the body and the most intimate aspects of the self as represented in what goes into or out of the body such as food, drugs, semen, urine and faeces represent a significant theme, namely, violence against the self. However, Muldoon is able to show how the body and its different products can be transformed. It is, therefore, imperative to highlight the poetic significance of the body/self image in Muldoon’s poetry since he is inscribing history in such images, namely body politics and personal body. The hero of “The More a Man Has,” Gallogly, transforms into different shapes and different sizes so that he cannot be arrested. Wills posits that his ability to change coincides with the poem’s creative impulse as represented in the metamorphosis of the traditional sonnet form into a flexible narrative form (*Reading* 90) as shown in the poem. Yet, this transformation ability can be both destructive as well as creative as exemplified by the hunger-strikers who make use of their bodies to serve their revolutionary ends. The poem traces the

adventures of Gallogly as illustrated in the change of settings, transformations of characters, and the multiplicity of images and historical events woven as intertexts in the poem.

“The More a Man Has” is also strongly related to the political context as it discusses body politics. Each body part brings to mind a bombing or a terrorist attack and each act of oppression an assault by either the police or the army, so the poem clearly seeks to both “mirror political reality” and to “transform it” by “widening the scope of the action, historically and geographically” (Holdridge 63). Muldoon’s disturbing description and poetic style in “The More a Man Has” remarkably embody the tumultuous and increasingly bleak political situation, particularly by distorting the traditional English lyric form, the sonnet (Phillips) as he writes forty-nine fourteen-line stanzas as a free narrative without abiding by the rules of writing the sonnet. Muldoon thus clearly describes the violent political situation and the way he perceives it in “The More a Man Has.”

In “The More a Man Has,” Muldoon does not only represent general distressing events, acts, thoughts and fantasies, but rather describes them as his own. He shows “how violence and brutality coexist with a sentimental vision of the family and the home, and may indeed, be nurtured by it” (Wills, *Reading* 87). Nonetheless, the poem “blurs the boundaries of personhood through a deliberately ambiguous use of personal pronouns” (Broom 195). In the first three stanzas, the reader becomes uncertain and unable to identify correctly the agents in the narrative, which highlights the identity crisis the writer aspires to show.

The poem is about Gallogly and his alter-ego and nemesis, Magnas Jones. The “He” in the third stanza is believed to refer to Magnas Jones, who was the focus of the second stanza. However, at the end of the second stanza, the reader gets the impression that it refers to Gallogly. This confusion continues throughout the poem making readers unable to identify who is responsible for the narrative. Also, the names do not indicate certain identities, e. g. the man who is arrested is described as “Gallogly, or Gollogly, / otherwise known as Golightly, / otherwise known as Ingoldsby, / otherwise known as English” (513-516). The name “golightly” “evokes the image of treading on egg shells” and when related to the political situation is considered a “testimony to the lack of resolution by politicians as they go-lightly around the issue” and it also associates with Gallogly who is described as the “heavy handed IRA man” (Fulford 115). Hence, the identity crisis and the split between self and other are manifested throughout the poem.

In Ireland, the name Gallogly is the Irish version of the word “gallowglass” or “galloglash,” which is used to refer to Scottish mercenary soldiers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the English obliged to leave Scotland. Gallogly is also known as “Ingoldsby, otherwise known as English” related to the legend of a Kentish man, the fighting knight Sir Ingoldsby Bray who was in love with Lady Alice which is related by Richard Barham (1788-1845) in *The Ingoldsby Legends* (1840). On the other hand, Golightly is linked to the English, Irish and Scottish. Therefore, when Muldoon combines the names Gallogly and Golightly or the IRA man on the run and the English “Gall,” he brings together two opposites as they refer

to the names of a native and a foreigner. According to Wills, Muldoon's "polysemous use of words" is a "postmodern characteristic of linguistic interchange that erodes differences between meanings in a moment of exchange." Such use of words also indicates "the hybrid aspects of language and identity" ("The Lie..." 123), which emphasises the fragmented identity of the hero. Consequently, the speaker in the poem demolishes all distinctions between two contradictory sides. He is dislocated at a borderline and he is unable to judge which side to join. The poem is thus divided into two readings as the speaker provides "a passage between identities" as well as creating "a cleavage between self and other" (Fulford 116). Both the split between self and other and the confusion of the speaker as to belong to which side contribute to the bewilderment of readers and the obscurity of the poem.

The story of Gallogly starts in Belfast at four a.m. when his girlfriend left him with his "own pelt" (8). He goes out borrowing things all day: a bed sheet, a milk van, clothes, and finally a Cortina that he gets rid of in the town of Callan. The hero's character goes through various transformations while the poem's setting is also transformed from Belfast to New York and from the Armagh jail to an Edward Hopper's painting "of a gas station / in the mid-West" (646-647). The poem thus becomes like a hall of mirrors, making the readers and the protagonist uncertain of what is reality and what is distortion. The time sequence is interrupted, creating "a hallucinatory effect," while the anti-hero's lack of compassion, like "A hole in the heart," leaves readers unsure whether to respond with "agony or laughter" (McCracken 102).

At the beginning of the poem, Muldoon uses animal imagery to describe the transformation of Gallogly. He “squats in his own pelt” (8) during the sexual act, then he becomes like a fox “among hen runs and pigeon lofts” (14). He travels from Florida to Aldergrove airport outside Belfast and meets Magnas Jones. He then goes into the city that looks like an industrial wasteland and steals a milk van by beating the driver and making things chaotic. He watches the police looking for him in his last address and meets a milkman who takes his clothes and his Cortina. Muldoon’s long and detailed description of characters gives an idea about the identity of both the characters and the readers:

... a milkman
 who’s double-parked his van
 closing your front door after him.
 He’s sporting your
 Donegal tweed suit and your
 Sunday shoes and politely raises your
 hat as he goes by.
 You stand there with your mouth open
 as he climbs into the still-warm
 driving seat of your Cortina

 leaving you uncertain
 of your still-warm wife’s damp tuft. (86-98)

Also, there is no clear answer as to whether the milkman who always rings twice as a cliché used by Muldoon has made love to his/your wife. Violence is related to a husband who believes that his wife is unfaithful and readers are confused not knowing whether Gallogly has raped or slept with her or has just taken her husband’s clothes. The poet then asks

for the help of the “Child of Prague,” symbolising the infant Jesus wax medieval statue found in the majority of Catholic homes in Ireland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries:

Someone on their way to early Mass
will find her hog-tied
to the chapel gates -
O Child of Prague -
big-eyed, anorexic. (99-103)

The appearance of the church in the middle of the stanza refers to public violence as the society seeks to control female sexuality and to impose harsh rules on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Having the church mentioned here indicates that such a respected institution can play a significant role in “condoning” or even “advocating” such “brutal” practices, hence it is no wonder that Gallogly’s behaviour is also violent (Broom 198).

The sense of guilt associated with sexual malfeasance leads to the image of a girl punished and victimised in the streets by shaving her head and covering her body with tar and feathers:

The lesson for today
is pinned to her bomber jacket.
It seems to read *Keep off the Grass*.
Her lovely head has been chopped
and changed
For Beatrice, whose fathers
knew Loius Quinze,
to have come to this, her perruque
of tar and feathers. (104-112)

Muldoon fosters the character of Gallogly and Magnas Jones who have different shapes by referring to a trickster figure in Native American mythology in

the Winnebago cycle of tales which is made clear through the use of animal imagery to describe Gallogly: “hared / among the top-heavy apple orchards” (119-120), “ a baggy-kneed animated / bear” (165-166), “His eye like the eye of a travelling rat” (215), as well as the typically Muldoonian insertion of a “Winnebago camper” (328). In the Native American mythology, the trickster combines a multiplicity of qualities, “straddling animal and human, natural and supernatural, he is sent to earth to help humans, but also manages to get himself into a series of scrapes.” The protagonist is depicted as “instinctive, undifferentiated, unethical, irresponsible, clumsy and ignorant – but at the same time he is humorous, likeable and well-meaning” (Broom 195). Muldoon goes on to describe Gallogly:

His six foot of pump water
bent down
in agony or laughter.

Keeping down-wind of everything. (207-210)

Muldoon’s description of the protagonist’s character also suggests violence as he relates Gallogly’s escape from prison where he seems to turn himself into a beaver. Wills believes that such a description “signifies the bestial, nihilistic origins of violence” and Gallogly is depicted as forever hungry, both for food and sex, without any responsibilities or allegiances, and driven by desire (*Reading* 108). Gallogly then can be seen as “Everyman” or even the poet himself who is notorious for all elusiveness or slipperiness. These lines do not suggest bestiality but rather pain as represented in “agony” that does not seem a physical pain, hence “Keeping down-wind of everything” implies more than just the “animal instinct of self-protection” and

therefore, “Muldoon hints at the subjectivity that is (like Trickster) simple, clumsy, violent, but also hurt and vulnerable” (Broom 196). There is a sharp contrast between the intimate portrayal of Gallogly manifested in “one low cry of anguish / and agrees to come quietly” (517-518) when he is arrested and the various examples of violence readers attribute to him when there are no other actors to take the blame.

“Bent down in agony or laughter” is typical of a mischievous trickster. However, readers form some kind of affection for this trickster as they think he is Gallogly. Readers visit him in private, intimate moments when he is lying down in the sheugh “to munch / through a Beauty of / Bath” (268-270) and finds “that first ‘sh’ / increasingly difficult to manage. / *Sh*-leeps” (273-275). Furthermore, there are intertextual allusions to the legendary figure Sweeney, the cursed king who was turned into bird-man from the Irish mythology to reflect the self-pity of the outcast and how lonely and passionate he is.

Muldoon introduces afterwards several images of sectarian violence and it becomes so difficult to tell who is who. The theme of the mythical violence of change is further reflected in this metamorphosis:

In Ovid’s conspicuously tongue-in-cheek
 account of an eyeball
 to eyeball
 between the goddess Leto
 and a shower of Lycian reed cutters
 who refuse her a cup of cloudy
 water
 from their churned-up lake,
Live then forever in that lake of yours,
 she cries, and has them

bubble
 and squeak
 and plonk themselves down as bullfrogs
 in their icy jissom. (281-294)

The poem's intertextuality is evident in referring to Leto, mother of Apollo and Artemis, who was impregnated by Zeus. She was rejected by everyone in her travels seeking refuge from Hera's wrath and for fear of having so great a God like Apollo born in their lands. Muldoon believes that she is an outsider who has been punished unfairly and this explains her quick punishment of those who do not treat her nicely. Holdridge asserts that "The idea that one is cursed to suffer in a place because one has failed to perform the essential duties of humanity is at the root of Northern problems and the poem's meditations" (76) and this is the origin and structure of Greek tragedy.

It is not only mythology that plays a significant role in Muldoon's poem, but also art. Gallogly travels from one continent to another and enters into Picasso's painting of the Spanish civil war when the city of Guernica was bombed. He enters the horse in the famous work while still in New York before returning it to Spain after Franco's death according to Picasso's request:

Gallogly has only to part the veil
 of its stomach wall
 to get right under the skin,
 the spluttering heart
 and collapsed lung,
 of the horse in *Guernica*.
 He flees the Museum of Modern Art
 with its bit between his teeth. (309-316)

This series of destructions depicts Gallogly's life which is a symbol of everyman's. Gallogly's going out of the Museum of Modern Art symbolises man's escape from high culture because he is obliged to remember all his failings as a human being: his animal nature, his being driven by desire, his watching sports, having sex or killing a man rather than his better abilities.

The horse imagery is also made clear as Muldoon depicts Gallogly, the IRA man, getting "under the skin...of the horse in Guernica" (311-314). Guernica is protest art that represents a type of modernism characterised by primitive art. Having Muldoon placing Gallogly into Picasso's horse reflects the "primitive political basis of his own postmodern art" and "its concealed atavistic origins" (Bentley 115). This horse image has a multiplicity of meanings. In *Quoof*, Muldoon is concerned with nakedness, hunger, as well as his own filth, which creates a strong relationship between him and the political prisoners in Northern Ireland. Just like the political prisoner who uses his own filth to deliver a message, Muldoon as a writer deploys the strategies of "secretion" to express melancholia, particularly the "abjection that disrupts the boundaries on which both language and state are founded" (Batten 185). Muldoon speaks about pain, loneliness, and poverty that make themselves clear despite all the pretended cheerfulness "no matter how culturally powerful their performative potential may be" (Batten 195). Taking into consideration Muldoon's insistence on shit, soil, filth, and arses, it becomes clear that he sympathises with the dirty protesters and the hunger-strikers even though he denies having any political inclinations. Furthermore, Muldoon does not only mention art works and artists such as Picasso,

Hopper (645) and Jackson Pullock (588), but he also includes Irish heroes like Wolfe Tone and Napper Tandy (425). These quick transformations of the protagonist's character coincide with the "fast-paced shape-changing difficult poem" (Holdridge 77).

Though the poem highlights the violence that takes place daily in Northern Ireland, it never answers the question: Who is to take the blame for it? Therefore, as Broom explains, in the poem, "motivation and purpose are elusive, and individuals blur into one another so that responsibility cannot easily be assigned" (195). This adds to the difficulty and the ambiguity of the poem and leaves readers totally bewildered. However, political motivation in the poem can be attributed to Magnas Jones rather than to Gallogly. This is because the former is described as "busily tracing the family tree / of an Ulsterman who had some hand / in the massacre at Wounded Knee" (236-238), which shows that he is seeking revenge or reconciliation as possible motivations. These lines also show that there are similarities as well as differences between the Irish and Native Americans as the Irish became settlers in America, taking over the Native American territory. Thus, both the histories of England and of Ireland were not happy ones and Muldoon was deeply affected by this violent reality as he said in a 1994 interview with Christopher Cook, BBC radio 3, "I'd want to go to the extent ... where one would say that this was absolute genocide, as one might say of what happened in North America" (Kendall 145). However, it is difficult to attribute any motivations to Gallogly, except that of the physical stimulus of hunger. All allusions to political motivations are shown in a "fragmented, free-

floating manner” so it becomes difficult to attribute them to Gallogly in a “definitive way” (Broom 197). “The Croppy Boy” (364) is sung by “Beatrice” who wants to shave Gallogly’s head to commemorate the ’98 and the French revolution (356-358). The desire for a united Ireland can be the motivation attributed to Gallogly so as to represent him as a Republican terrorist. However, the poet narrates Gallogly’s journey while the goal of this journey remains obscure, therefore he becomes enigmatic and so does the readers’ attempt to understand the violence that prevails in the society. He can be described as “mindless” or bestial” and more complicated ideological motivations can be attributed to him, yet neither is satisfactory to readers. Consequently, readers remain unable to understand the causes of violence and their powerlessness is symbolised in the sixteen-year-old “whose face is masked by the seamless / black stocking filched / from his mum” (348-350).

To emphasise intertextuality in the poem, Muldoon gives a pastiche of lines and themes taken from other poems in *Quoof*: “Gathering Mushrooms” and “Aisling,” which are written in italics:

*Was she Aurora, or the goddess Flora,
Artemidora, or Venus bright,
or Helen fair beyond compare
That Priam stole from the Grecian sight?
Quite modestly she answered me
and she gave me her head one fetch up
and she said I am gathering musheroons
to make my mammy ketchup.*

.....

And she said I am gathering musheroons

to make my mammy ketchup O. (491-504)

It then becomes clear that the voyage has become to nowhere and the action has become all action including sex, violence, and travelling. The pastiche reminds the readers of the songs sung in a Las Vegas revue and the readers reach the poem's title line which becomes so urgent, so powerful, and so undeniable: "*The more a man has the more a man wants*"

*The more a man has the more a man wants,
the same I don't think true.*

*For I never met a man with one black eye
who ever wanted two.*

In the *Las Vegas Lounge and Cabaret*

the resident group---

pot bellies, Aran knits---

have you eating out of their hands.

*Never throw a brick at a drowning man
when you're near to a grocer's store.*

*Just throw him a cake of Sunlight soap,
let him wash himself ashore*

You will act the galoot, and gallivant,
and call for another encore. (603-616)

In the following stanza, Muldoon takes a line that was mentioned before and uses it to write a fourteen-word stanza, one word per line. This stanza denotes that the purgation Muldoon was looking for throughout all the travels, battles, and sex has been cut down to these lines: "*a / cake / of / Sunlight / soap, / let / him / wash / him- / self / ashore*" (634-644).

The poem takes several portraits from several artists according to their perspectives and aesthetics beginning with Hopper then Derricke's woodcuts (661-662) until it ends with the death of Gallogly or

Magnas Jones by a quartz stone, the chosen weapon (645-666). The quartz is a stone Magnas Jones brought from America and is deemed an ambivalent symbol since it comes from the earth, but at the same time, it is luminous like stars in the sky. The quartz indicates things that cannot be expressed in human nature like corruption, desire and transcendence, and, finally, it becomes a symbol of destruction.

Critics such as Kendall (115) and Steven D. Putzel (106) question who actually died: Is it Gallogly or Magnas Jones? This unclear situation adds to the confusion of readers. Readers cannot even get a clear conclusion at the poem ending. Putzel writes that during a poetry reading, Muldoon warned his audience against expecting his poems to have conclusions, “final chords or the snap of a lid” and for them to get any conclusion for the poem, they have to go beyond the “Huh” (687), the last word in the poem. So, as they proceed, Muldoon’s warning must be kept in their minds. Hence, according to Putzel, “The More a Man Has” is a complex and difficult poem that baffles readers and Muldoon expects them to enjoy such bafflement (106).

At the end of the poem, it seems that Gallogly is arrested by British paratroopers and imprisoned at Armagh jail (542). His imprisonment neither solves the problem he is part of nor slows it down. While he is in his cell, a new bomb in a brewery lorry is waiting to explode:

The brewery lorry's stood at a list
by the *Las Vegas*
throughout the afternoon,
its offside rear tyres down.
As yet, no one has looked agog

at the smuts and rusts
of a girlie mag
in disarray on the passenger seat. (547-554)

Thus, it becomes apparent that the main event the poem revolves around is the violence and civil strife prevalent in Northern Ireland in the 1980s. Also, though “The More a Man Has” is divided into stanzas of fourteen lines each, it does not follow the sonnet form. It is “a wild acrobatic chase of clever wordplay” and is a “narrative” with “a fair amount of drama and violence” (“The Complete Review”) in an attempt by the writer to reflect the chaotic political situation of the time. In the poem, Muldoon refers to the Native-American literature to get the poem’s major analogy. He also makes use of trickster myths taken from Winnebago Indians. He goes deep into identity and the validity of concepts about oneself, others, and events.

3.1 Muldoon’s Poetic Style and its Effects on Readers

Muldoon’s poetry is characterised by circularity which “is both a thematic and aesthetic principle” and he has “deployed the large-scale circular structures, with repeated rhyme words” (Twiddy 18). For example, the weapon of destruction, the quartz, is mentioned at the beginning of the poem (25), and the poet refers to it again at the end of the poem (686) to describe the protagonist’s end. Muldoon is well-known for his technical versatility that emphasises the surface effects of his poetry such as: “the inclusion of outrageous rhymes, literal clichés, the avoidance of a determinate tense, his self-referential wordplay, his anecdotal, misdirecting narratives” yet such strategies reflect the technical ingenuity of a poet at his full powers and suggest that his literary allusions are not

employed arbitrarily, but rather they guide readers to assimilate the hot issues surrounding them and on top of them the role and responsibility of the writer in a time of violence (Alcobia-Murphy, *Sympathetic Ink* 15).

In *Quoof*, Muldoon shows how assassinations, car bombs, terrorist attacks, and hunger strikes in Belfast become part of the daily routine. However, he reports violence in a somewhat humorous manner. His main aim is to shock readers to show to what extent violence is appalling. He believes that the British should not have been in Northern Ireland and shows by different means how he hates all forms of violence. "The More a Man Has" "engages the dissenting techniques in the creation of a tragi-comic portrayal of the situation in Northern Ireland of the 1980s." Muldoon portrays Northern Ireland by "modifying common phrases, employing clichés, and colloquialisms." He also uses non-literary expressions in a way similar to mass media jargon that gives an "irrefutable version of reality" (Olszewska 115). In "The More a Man Has," it is reality that gives shape to language and reflects its various aspects. Muldoon's selection of syntactic patterns underlines his intentions behind this representation of historical events.

Taking into consideration Muldoon's style, it becomes evident that he systematically uses "syntactic repetition" and patterns that "highlight specific words whose partial similarity in sound is accompanied by semantic contrariness" (Patke 283). Muldoon uses noun phrases accompanied by prepositional phrases: "he wakes / to the yawn of brakes, / the snore of a diesel engine" (1-3), and "The scum of the Seine" (6), or noun phrases and verb phrases: "He carries only

hand luggage” (22), “He opens the powder-blue attaché-“ (24), and “He follows the corridor’s” (27). Muldoon also employs a variety of tenses: the present simple tense “Gallogly squats in his own pelt” (8) and “the bar man unpacks a crate / of Coca-Cola” (47-48); the present perfect tense “has brought a new dimension / to their black taxi” (10-11) and “skinheads / have formed aquorum / round a burnt-out heavy-duty tyre” (37-39); and the present continuous tense: “He is going to put his foot down / on a patch of waste ground” (29-30), “Gallogly is wearing a candy stripe / king-size sheet” (57-58), “He is driving a milk van” (61), and “He is trying to keep a low profile” (70). The poem is full of parallel structures in the same tense such as “A sergeant and eight constables / pile out of a tender / and hammer up the stairs” (73-75) and “as he climbs into the still-warm / driving seat of your Cortina / and screeches off towards the motorway” (94-96). As for the words partially similar in sound and semantically contradictory, the names attributed to the main character refer to opposite identities: “Gallogly, or Gollogly, / otherwise known as Golightly, / otherwise known as Ingoldsby, / otherwise known as English” (513-516), as mentioned earlier. Such syntactic repetition, irregular metrical patterns and transformations in both theme and subject give emphasis to the fragmentation of identity represented in “The More a Man Has,” one of the significant themes reflecting the Northern Irish society at the time of writing the poem and clearly manifested in the images and descriptions used by the poet. Moreover, they contribute to the difficulty of the poem.

“The More a Man Has” manifests all the hardships and atrocities of the political situation in

Northern Ireland as well as the fragmentation of identity through the distortion of the sonnet. The poem is praised for “its wit, energy and iconoclasm, as well as its exploration of ‘postmodern’ narrative techniques such as a fluid sense of personal identity, narrative instability, and intertextuality” (Wills, *Reading* 86). Thus, the identity crisis is demonstrated with reference to a historical and political background.

“The More a Man Has” approach to violence is deemed outlandish since it favours “imaginative over rational (and, therefore, moral) logic,” and its story about a terrorist on the run does not have a narrative sequence as it moves from one scenario to another, but depends on “dream logic, ties of equivalence, and arbitrary connection, rather than rational continuity” (Warman 715). It also displays a multiplicity of scenes, which shows the creativity of language with its meticulous attention to details in the linguistic usage represented in employing a variety of registers that provides a “plentiful material for speculation” and the “poem’s uncontainable variety means that no interpretation can be comprehensive” (Warman 716) giving readers the opportunity to have different possible interpretations of what they read.

According to Broom, “The More a Man Has” “directs readers towards the issue of what makes individuals choose violence” (205) and this reiterates what Wills says about the poet’s use of “you” in the seventh stanza (85-98) to address the male readers “only to suggest that Gallogly has assumed their identity – he is wearing your jacket” (*Reading* 108). This relation between the reader and Gallogly is well-established by the affection and the intimacy used in the narrative when describing Gallogly in addition to

the hints of emotional trauma which assert that readers cannot separate themselves from the central character. Finally, it becomes clear that it is not the society that is totally responsible for the violence surrounding humans, but the human beings are definitely involved in creating such violence.

Muldoon's evasive approaches to violence are deemed "a cover for a moral sensibility too aware of the inadequacy of language and the dangers of political appropriation to speak directly, but one which, nonetheless, has ultimately ethical aims" (Warman 717) and Kendall so persuasively describes "The More a Man Has" as a "brilliant brutal parable for contemporary Northern Ireland," and as an allegorical embodiment of the moral opacity of the violent political situation in Northern Irish: it "obliquely conveys the terrible 'Truth' that in a violent society perspectives quickly become lost, motives and identities obscured" (116-117).

"The More a Man Has" is remarkably separate from the conventional morality so as to be free to find out more innovative ways towards a variety of meaning. Such creative meaning is totally reacting against the formal, well-known versions of Irish history. The poem's medium is its political message that is considered "metamorphic" and "Muldoon's metamorphoses melt or expand rigid understandings of history; make us experience history as an arbitrary kaleidoscope, a form of mental illness" (Longley 210). It clearly displays violent republicanism by using colloquial and idiomatic language along with literary allusion and a fragmented structure that triggers an atmosphere of confusion and disorder that coincides with the different forms of terrorist activity that show

simultaneously in the poem (McCracken 100-101). Hence, "The More a Man Has" explores not only the violent situation in Northern Ireland, but also the violent experiences that anyone can experience and the role undertaken by the poet to explain and mitigate such violent experiences. Though what the poem offers is a dark state, it celebrates moments of light by the poet's sense of humour and manipulation of language. It becomes clear that society is not totally to blame for the violence surrounding humans, but they are involved in creating such violence.

4. Conclusion

New Historicism theory emerged in the 1980s at the hands of theorists whose main aim was to reveal truths that had not been revealed by history and to re-read and re-inscribe the past from a present perspective. They advocated the notion that both history and society are intertwined to give multiple meanings to a literary text. Hence, studying the socio-cultural background as well as the authorial intentions helped them interpret literary texts, explain their influence on readers, reconstruct social, political and cultural issues, and refigure individual identity and the socio-political, historical situation.

Greenblatt's ideas indicate that both poetry and history are creative forces totally shaped by the way man perceives reality, that history is constructed upon the historian's subjective point of view, and that the text that discusses history is projected into the readers' interpretation that is determined according to the context of the events portrayed. Thus, there is no ultimate truth and no binary opposition between history and literature. Consequently, there is no difference between the world of the text and the

world of the socio-historical context, for the former can never be detached from the latter through which it acquires its meaning and the author's intention is informed by the social context that figures it.

Ricoeur deconstructs the objectivity of literary and non-literary texts by concluding that reality is a potential reality that can be interpreted in a variety of ways and that the world of the text re-informs reality. Geertz propagates for "thick description" that suggests a variety of political and social implications and deeper meanings behind literary and non-literary texts. Since literary and non-literary texts are each other's thick description, they are fictions formulated by imagination and have different interpretations of the actual. Also, there is no binary opposition between both of them as they both depend on authorial intentionalism. Readers thus become able to comprehend their self-positioning through the varied interpretations they attribute to a text that project various realities onto a text and give it several meanings.

Muldoon believes in poetry's aesthetic role that helps cure agony and pain and offers some solace. He endorses the notion that poetry is its own reality and that fidelity must be to the demand and promise of the artistic event. He believes that poetry is the vindicating power that justifies the author's intentions. Though Muldoon's poetry is deemed obscure and indecipherable, his political stance and authorial intentions are made clear by his word choice and imagery. Muldoon's "The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants" reveals four types of difficulty, contingent, modal, tactical, and ontological, that render it intentionally obscure and give readers the

right to accuse the poet of willful obscurity and ungenerous tone. However, Muldoon guides readers to follow him making his authorial intentionalism a major aspect in historicising the actual situation in Northern Ireland in the 1980s. He frequently uses italics, quotation marks, historical personae, dates and place names to guide readers towards specific readings of his poem.

Muldoon reports violence in a way that is disturbing, horribly literal, half humorous and tactically shocking to assert how shocking violence is. He uses modifying common phrases, colloquial expressions or non-literary expressions to give an irrefutable version of reality. His selection of syntactic patterns underlines his intentions behind this historicising of historical events.

Muldoon also presents several images of sectarian and mythical violence to foster intertextuality. The poem includes a multiplicity of scenes, creative language, and meticulous attention to details in the linguistic usage of a variety of registers that offers a huge material for readers to ponder on the different possible interpretations of what they read. He refers to names, persons, places, and events of historical, fictitious, or personal significance about which readers have no clue. Consequently, he urges readers to work hard for the meaning. His intertextuality indicates that history can be discursively structured making a huge difference between official history and the writer's fictional recreation of historical events. The intertexts provoke readers to search for the original text and give a new reading to both past and present texts; hence the

authorial intentionalism interpretation is attributed to readers.

Muldoon draws upon the well-known tradition of Irish politics and Catholic emphasis on the body and physical suffering. He presents a hard-edged view of reality revealing the ugly, unpalatable truth in “The More a Man Has” which describes violence in Northern Ireland by images of violated women and fragmented body parts as well as the nutritional and sexual needs of the body. The physical transformations of the hero into different shapes coincide with the metamorphosis of the traditional sonnet into a flexible narrative form. The poem’s pattern is fragmented as reflected by the irregular metrical patterns which correspond with the identity crisis and the split between self and other.

At the end of the poem, the goal of the hero’s journey remains obscure. Readers neither understand the causes of violence prevailing in society, nor can they separate themselves from the central character. Finally, it becomes clear that it is not society that is solely responsible for the violence prevalent in society, but human beings are definitely involved in creating such violence in a society where perspectives become lost and motives and identities obscure.

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