

The relationship between myth and reality is both problematic yet essential in understanding literary perspectives of the Northern Irish Troubles.

Daniel Fynn

The strange relationship between myth and reality is embodied within the literature produced during the Northern Irish Troubles. Fictionality in a time of real-world conflict is potentially exploitative in the way physical hurt can be depersonalised for the means of entertainment or to perpetuate an agenda. However, fiction can also facilitate an understanding of events through depoliticising suffering and to an extent granting agency to those existing in a conflict zone. Contextually, the Troubles represent a period in which myth operated as propaganda with individuals and events being canonised by both sides in murals, writing and music to assist their causes. Furthermore, myth and canonicity are inherent parts of Irish identity due to the richness of Irish folklore and the centrality of religion within the Troubles. In *North* (1975), Heaney at first explores the Troubles as an ancient conflict characterised by an Irish and Northern European mythos of paganistic belief. Heaney sanctifies historical bog bodies aligning them with the modern conflict of the Troubles, eventually realising the limitations of imposing fictitious meaning upon the lost reality of the bodies. Across 'The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants' (1983) Muldoon approaches the Troubles from a playful and almost transcendent position which ostensibly seems to disregard the seriousness of the conflict. However, through vignette-like stanzas Muldoon depoliticises the Troubles exploring the complex yet sporadic nature of the conflict. Both texts present the Troubles in an original manner blurring the border between the mythic and reality.

North is divided by Heaney's inner conflict between a mythic understanding of the Troubles and the reality of the conflict. The literal split of the collection into two parts structurally depicts Heaney's inner dispute as part one develops Heaney's mythical interpretation of the conflict to then be disassembled in part two which focuses on more tangible realities. The title is primarily in reference to the Northern European phenomena of bog bodies and their connection to the wider mythology of a paganistic belief system, aligned with the hypothesis established in *The Bog People* (Glob, 1965). However, *North* is also in reference to Northern Ireland itself, thus, the form of *North* seems to echo the split of Ulster identity during the Troubles. Similarly, Heaney entangles concepts of geography and identity across the collection. In 'Bog Queen' Heaney writes in the narrative voice of a bog body, 'the plait of my hair, a slimy birth-cord of bog' (13. Ln. 2-4). The symbiosis between body and the earth suggests a deep, longstanding connection between Ireland and its inhabitants. Heaney juxtaposes the decay of the 'bog' with imagery in the semantic field of fertility with 'birth-cord' perhaps suggesting the duality of his Irish identity between pride and the realisation of Ireland's deep-rooted conflict. However, as stated by Lloyd the bog bodies that inspired Heaney are 'primarily from the bogs of Denmark' (Lloyd, 1979, p. 7). This suggests a disconnect between Ireland and the bodies Heaney writes off. Despite this, Lloyd continues to state the connection is 'in Heaney's mind' as Heaney 'associates the revenge, casual violence, and "clannishness" evident in Viking culture... with the cultural and political situation in Ulster' (Lloyd, 1979, p. 7). To expand upon this, it is evident that throughout part one of *North*, Heaney dissolves the specific socio-political context of the Troubles and aligns with the belief that conflict is an ever-present phenomenon that spans borders and time

periods. Although, the idealism of this argument falls apart for Heaney as he realises through aligning the bog bodies with the Troubles and forming his myth, he is inadvertently exploiting the past and neglecting reality. The head of 'Strange Fruit' which is 'murdered, forgotten, nameless' is given agency as 'outstaring' as Heaney becomes aware of his sacrilegious 'beatification' of the bog bodies in his creation of a fantasy which does not necessarily align with truth (Ln. 10-13). Therefore, it is evident the collection reflects a personal struggle between the mythic and reality intertwined with the wider conflict of Northern Irish Troubles.

Whilst Heaney eventually reaches the limits of his mythical understanding of the Troubles, the concept does allow him to create parallels between ancient history and modern conflict that defy the traditional discourse surrounding the Troubles. For example, Heaney approaches the Troubles from a perspective coded in gender and sexuality enabled through mythical extended metaphors. In 'Punishment' (Heaney, 1975), Heaney aligns the death of an ancient bog body 'drowned' (3. Ln. 1) for presumed adulterousness with the reality of women punished during the Troubles after being 'accused of conducting sexual relationships with members of the RUC or British soldiers' (Wallace, 2008). The poem is structured in what seem like quatrains but are instead free verse stanzas of four lines, giving the poem the quality of witnessing short vignettes of extreme violence aligning with the speaker's position as 'artful voyeur' (8. Ln. 4). The speaker embodies a voyeuristic role in which the woman's suffering is acknowledged but not fully sympathised with 'my poor scapegoat, ... I almost love you' (7-8. Ln. 4-1). The quiet unassuming position the speaker takes of standing 'dumb' (10. Ln. 1) is indictive of a stance took by many bystanders during the Troubles which Heaney himself encapsulates as 'whatever You Say Say Nothing'. Although, the position of the speaker is morally dubious as an element of pleasure seems to be taken in the 'exact and tribal, intimate revenge' (11. Ln. 3-4). This manifests itself in the spectacle of the women's suffering as sexuality blends with violence 'it blows her nipples to amber beads' (2. Ln. 1-2). Ostalska argues that 'the speaker proves that he does not shun taking responsibility for his ethically problematic behaviour. And yet he appears to show no trace of remorse' (Ostalska, 2018, p. 92). This echoes the tribalistic behaviour of the Troubles explained by the Social Identity Theory (Hogg, 2018) in which transgressive behaviour becomes normalised within group settings. This concept calls back to Heaney's mythic approach to the Troubles as communal violence and the oppression of women transcends time, continuing to happen in a more 'civilized' age (11. Ln. 2). Moreover, fictionality plays a direct role in the women's persecution as she acts as a 'scapegoat' (7. Ln. 4) allowing the community to enforce a false sense of control over their domain. Despite the speaker's status as a voyeur there does seem to be a level of difficulty in describing the woman's suffering reflected through repeated enjambment which interrupts the flow of the poem making the violence physically difficult to read. Contextually, (if Heaney is understood as the speaker) perhaps Heaney's position as a Catholic sympathetic to nationalist belief creates an inner turmoil in which he feels ashamed of an element of pleasure taken from the 'intimate revenge' of the poem. This is especially noticeable considering biblical imagery intertwines with the dogma of staying silent as Heaney writes, 'would have cast, I know, the stones of silence' (8. Ln. 2-3). Overall, 'Punishment' presents the capability of myth to illuminate real social happenings of the Troubles associated with gender and sexuality that are not prevalent in traditional discourse.

In the second part of *North*, Heaney rejects his created myth to instead focus upon a more realistic representation of the life during the Troubles. However, as the myths of ancient Ireland intertwined with Northern European paganism dissolve, Heaney explores the formation of modern myths and fictionalities that plague Ireland during the Troubles. In 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' (Heaney, 1975) Heaney begins with 'I'm writing this just after an encounter with an English journalist' (1. Ln. 1-2) immediately establishing the transparency of the second part of the collection as Heaney effectively breaks the fourth wall, speaking directly to the reader. The poem is structured into four parts made up of alternate rhyming quatrains. This creates a lyrical tone which juxtaposes against Heaney's rejection of the fantastical spectacle of the Troubles for the harsh reality of Northern Irish life. Despite the defined structure, the poem has the quality of being in constant motion partially due to the rhyme scheme but also granted through Heaney's use of enjambment between stanzas. This movement propels the reader across Northern Ireland echoing the combusive environment caused by the Troubles. Heaney blends the established myths of the Troubles with real world experience most apparent through part one of the poem which criticises the portrayal of the conflict in the media as sensationalised. Heaney states 'bad news is no longer news' (1. Ln. 4) alluding to the normality of violence during the Troubles, a violence that is hounded by the media, 'where media-men and stringers sniff and point... times are out of joint' (1.2. Ln. 1-3). Heaney dismantles the high-strung, meaningless semantic language of 'politicians and newspapermen' (1.3. Ln. 2) as he mocks the slogans of "escalate"... 'backlash'... 'polarization'" (1.4. Ln. 1-3) instead relating back to everyday existence with 'I live here, I live here too' (1.4. Ln. 4). Throughout the rest of poem Heaney strides between the fictionality of ideological differences and the reality of almost quotidian conflict. Heaney describes 'subtle discrimination by addresses' (3.3. Ln. 3) to highlight the quiet everyday division between Catholics and Protestants existing between the more spectacular events canonised by the media. This is evidenced by a review by the Ulster University that states 'separation in residence and schooling has not radically changed in 20 years' (2018). Furthermore, Heaney uses the simile of 'half of us, as in a wooden horse, cabin'd and confined like wily Greeks' (3.6. Ln. 2-3) in reference to the myth of the Trojan Horse, suggesting that the Catholic population of Northern Ireland are 'besieged within the siege' (3.6. Ln. 4) equally parts trapped within, and a threat towards the Protestant rule. Heaney contrasts the sporting sectarianism of 'Celtic [having] won' (2.1. Ln. 3) with the violent reality of 'blasted street and home' (2.1. Ln. 1). Thus, suggesting the ostensible insubstantiality of sectarian difference as capable of sparking both cultural and tangible conflict. Throughout the poem, Heaney examines the problematic portrayal of the Troubles by the media which relies upon the canonisation of violence, whilst also relating the almost mythic status of ideological differences to the everyday life of Northern Irish people during the Troubles.

Across 'The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants' (Muldoon, 1983) Muldoon develops a myth that playfully spans Irish folklore, Native American culture, mythology, and pop culture to engage in a fantasy that equally mocks the Troubles and illuminates the absurdity of the violence occurring in Northern Ireland during the time. The poem depicts a series of violent acts that indicative of the Troubles, seem loosely connected yet deeply sporadic; these acts are largely committed by the character of 'Gallogly' (1. Ln. 8). Gallogly is a character with folkloric connections as Gallogly seems to be a corruption of Gallowglass a word which itself is an anglicisation of gallóglai. The Gallowglass were a form of mercenary warriors

described as 'men of great and mightie bodies, crewell without compassion' (Dymmok, 1842). This draws comparisons to Heaney's parallel between Viking settlers and the Troubles. Gallogly truly embodies the mercenary figure 'without compassion' as whilst Gallogly seems to be aligned to the IRA due to his murder of a 'U.D.R. corporal' (19. Ln. 1), his intentions seem to serve his insatiable appetite for sexual deviancy and violence. Muldoon's depiction of Gallogly as a force of needless chaos seems to act as a comment upon individuals using the IRA and the theory of a 'just war' (Simpson, 1986, p. 73) to justify a personal desire of committing violence. Muldoon's first depiction of violence presents Gallogly giving a 'milkman a playful rabbit punch' (5. Ln. 9-10) an act of senseless violence that is described as equally humorous and cruel. Firstly, the violence is conducted against a non-combatant as was often the case in the Troubles. Moreover, a 'rabbit punch' is a punch to the back of the skull with the serious potential to cause brain injury. Muldoon's addition of the modifier 'playful' has the effect of compounding Gallogly's nonchalant cruelty. However, Gallogly seems to operate above the traditional realm of humanity as he engages in metamorphosis throughout the text, transforming from a humanoid character to resembling a 'bear' (12. Ln. 12) later Gallogly seems to resemble a beaver with 'paws [and] velveteen shoulders and arms' (45. Ln. 5-14). This aligns with the metamorphosis of early Irish mythology such as the story of Túan mac Cairill (Duffy, 2015). Although, metamorphosis also facilitates a more contemporary meaning as the lexicon of Gallogly's name and identity change from Irish to English, 'Gallogly...otherwise known as Golightly...otherwise known as English' (37. Ln. 10-12). This situates Gallogly as ambivalent in his allegiance either side of the Troubles, further suggesting his role as a trickster. The archetype of the 'trickster' (Radin, 1956) also plays a role in Native American folklore, a mythology Muldoon includes in the poem through the addition of 'Mangas Jones' (2. Ln. 6). The reader may expect Jones and the IRA leaning Gallogly to be aligned due to their ostensibly similar situations as people subjugated in their own nations. However, Muldoon contorts expectations and presents them as adversaries due to the implication of Gallogly belonging to a 'family tree of an Ulsterman who had some hand in the massacre at Wounded Knee' (17. Ln. 13-14). Despite Muldoon's Catholic heritage (Potts, 2001), the allegorical consequences of Gallogly as an oppressor unsettle the traditional narrative of the Troubles as the IRA as fundamentally subjugated underdogs. Therefore, Muldoon uses tropes of mythology embedded in a contemporary environment to subvert expectations and comment upon the absurdity of violence during the Troubles.

Throughout 'The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants' Muldoon interweaves sexuality with violence as the two become almost interchangeable denotations to the wider issue of the Troubles. Similar to Heaney, Muldoon also includes a passage relating to the public humiliation of woman accused of sexual deviance during the Troubles. Muldoon writes, 'someone on their way to early Mass will find her hog-tied to the chapel gates- O Child of Prague- big-eyed, anorexic. The lesson for today is pinned to her bomber jacket. It seems to read Keep off the Grass' (8. Ln. 1-8). In comparison to Heaney's covert use of biblical imagery, Muldoon draws direct parallels between Christianity and the persecution of the woman whose innocence is aligned with the infantile Jesus, 'Child of Prague'. Moreover, the use of the darkly humorous, 'lesson for today...Keep off the Grass' suggests the normalisation of such acts being ordinary everyday occurrences against women. The women, named 'Beatrice' (8. Ln. 10) is humiliated linking to the fact that her sexuality and domestic relationship is 'ruined' by the sexual deviance of Gallogly who dominates her and

cuckolds her husband through his mythic role as a trickster. The use of 'Child of Prague' if interpreted as sincere suggests the woman's innocence further evidenced as Gallogly seems to assume the identity of the husband sporting his 'Donegal tweed suit' (7. Ln. 6). Muldoon positions the reader as the cuckolded husband with the repetition of 'your' (7. Ln. 5) giving the effect of being personally dominated by Gallogly. Similarly, the deviance committed by Gallogly is as much homosocial as it is sexual, suggested through the stress on masculine possessions such as the 'Cortina' (7. Ln. 11) which acts as a yonic parallel to the wife through the repetition of 'still warm' (7. Ln. 10). Whilst the fairy tale humour of the stanza may be interpreted as exploitative, it may be argued that Muldoon's fictionalisation of real issues subverts standard discourse and allows for deeper exploration into the relationship between sexuality and the Troubles. Thus, it may be suggested sexual exploitation at the expense of women, becomes a ground for conflict between masculine dominance and status comparable to the wider climate of the Troubles in which 'masculinity and violence become fused' (Ashe, 2012, p. 15). Therefore, comparable to Heaney, Muldoon situates fictionalised and absurd imagery alongside social issues to illuminate said issues without politicising them.

'The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants' is structured in a fashion that interlinks sporadic vignettes into a wider narrative that at times seems incoherent. The form of the poem seems translatable to the erratic nature of the media coverage around the Troubles which arguably warped loosely connected acts of violence into a larger established and cleanly packaged narrative. Contextually this aligns with Muldoon's experience employed at the BBC as a producer during the time of writing the poem (Potts, 2001). Despite the poem being in free-verse, Muldoon remains strict to the form of individual fourteen-line sonnets which make up the larger narrative structure of the poem. As a sonnet is traditionally understood as one contained poem made up of fourteen lines, the poem gives the impression of quick glimpses into the journey of Gallogly and the happenings around him, that seem to traverse periods of time and place such as 'Las Vegas' (17. Ln. 4) to a 'sheugh' (20. Ln. 1) in the Ulster countryside. The uniform structure of the sonnets is corrupted through the final sonnet which consists of the singular word, "Huh" (50. Ln. 1) this destabilises the narrative of the poem as we are left with a final vignette that restrains from the sporadicity of the rest of the poem to instead deliver a declaration that seems to highlight the meaningless of the previous events. Despite the acts of violence throughout, Muldoon seems to suggest that the happenings are inconsequential in the larger narrative of the Troubles. Another perspective may be that the "Huh" denotes the meaningless of events in a climate oversaturated by media relating to Heaney's statement, bad news is no longer news in 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' (Heaney, 1975, 1.1. Ln. 4). This links to the media's obsession with sensationalising violence which arguably 'sustain[s] the legacy of the conflict and constrain[s] debates about the way forward in Northern Ireland' (Rice, Taylor, 2020). Muldoon compounds the dangers of oversaturation to violence and its coverage in media through the description of a 'local councillor' (28. Ln. 1) killed by a car bomb. Muldoon describes the aftermath of violence in mundanity as his body 'doesn't quite add up' comparing his foot to the everyday suburban image of a 'pruned-back shrub' (28. Ln. 10-14). Therefore, through structural technique, dream logic and the erratic nature of the poem Muldoon comments upon a new kind of myth perpetuated by modern media.

In conclusion, both Heaney and Muldoon, whilst verging on the edge of exploitation, are able to harmonise fiction with elements of reality. The two writers weave myth and fantasy into the real-world conflict of the Troubles to offer insight into issues that are often swept aside. In *North*, Heaney initially disregards the political dialogue of the Troubles in exchange for focusing on division that is equally ancient yet resonant with the modern conflict of Ireland. Later in the collection Heaney realises the urgency of the conflict explored in 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' as Heaney explores the nature of a modern mythos created by propaganda and sensationalist media that perpetuates the sectarian division. Equally, across 'The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants', Muldoon creates a surreal landscape that echoes Heaney's folkloric understanding of the Troubles, whilst also conveying the sporadic and oddly indiscriminate nature of violence within the conflict. Additionally, Muldoon hints at the Troubles as being exploited by both those seeking violence such as the figure of Gallogly, as well as a conflict used by the media to profit. Overall, Heaney and Muldoon explore mythology as an inherent part of the Troubles in its representation in modernity allowing problematic issues such as sex, violence, and media coverage to be revealed.

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