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Revitalization of Christianity in Paul Doherty's *Murder Imperial*

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Revitalization of Christianity in Paul Doherty's *Murder Imperial*

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Letter of Recommendation

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Letter of Approval

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Revitalization of Christianity in Paul Doherty’s *Murder Imperial*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Arjun Sunuwar, has been approved by the research committee.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the significance of rewriting Roman history of the Conversion Era in Paul Doherty's *Murder Imperial* by putting the novel within its social, religious, and socio-psychological phenomena of early twenty-first-century during which it was produced.

Paul Doherty in *Murder Imperial* rewrites the history of early fourth-century Roman Empire, under the rule of Constantine, by focusing on those contextual factors such as religious conflicts, communal and cultural conflicts, political activities and the socio-psychology of the transitional era. The novel brings out the consciousness of the transitional era which was marked by the horror of violence and bloodshed. By dramatizing the various conflicts of the early fourth-century Roman Empire, the novel reflects and embodies the conflicts and socio-psychology of the early twenty-first-century and also embodies the Christian ideology to revitalize its religious faith.

This research brings into consideration the embodiment of history of the time in which the novel was produced. By doing this, it helps to interpret the interrelationship of any text with its various social constraints, even in a text like *Murder Imperial* that seems to be far distanced from its time of production.

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I. Revisionary History in *Murder Imperial*

The early twenty-first-century was marked by the horror of violence and bloodshed in the global political scenario. More than three thousands people were killed in the terrorist attack of Sep. 11, 2001 in the Twin Tower of World Trade Centre in the United States. The US mission of war against global terrorism backed up by the NATO force and other Western countries, their attack upon the orthodox Muslim government in Iraq and in Afghanistan had caused the increment of violence and bloodshed in the global political phenomena. The growing scale of violence and bloodshed had developed the sense of horror, insecurity, mutual disbelief and the gaps in communal relationship in the socio-psychology of the people. Moreover, Samuel P. Huntington, in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, had expressed the idea about civilizational clash as the determining factor in shaping the pattern of global politics in the twenty-first-century in 1996 (20). This idea of Huntington had also created a fear of possible violence and bloodshed in the people's psychology and had also had provided with a perspective to understand and analyze the growing conflict and violence in the global political scenario. These growing conflicts, violence, bloodsheds and the idea of Huntington were indicating the new change in the global political phenomena. Unlike the older issues, such as issue of ideologies, nationalism, imperialism and colonialism, new issues, such as terrorism, communal, civilizational and religious conflicts were emerging in the global political scenario as the main cause of violence and bloodshed. These new changes and troublesome events of the early twenty-first-century have diverse effects in all branches of human activities, including art and literature.

Paul Doherty, a scholar of history, theology and writer of historical fiction, works under these troublesome events of the early twenty-first-century. His

fictionalized history of early fourth-century of the Roman Empire in *Murder Imperial* was first published in the troublesome year of 2003 in Great Britain by Headline Book publication. The novel has historical setting of the second decade of the fourth century of Roman Empire which was the period of rising of Emperor Constantine into power. Doherty sets his novel into the time period of Constantine's victory over the Maxentius and his rising as an Emperor of the Western Empire. It is in the year 312 AD, Constantine has recently got miraculous victory over his rival Maxentius and has entered into Rome to become Emperor of the West (X). After becoming the powerful Emperor of the West, Constantine “revoke[s] all the edicts against the Christian faith to gain favor of the power of the increasingly influential Christian Church” (17).

Doherty begins *Murder Imperial* with the story of Claudia, the protagonist of the novel on the bank of river Tiber with her little brother Felix in the evening of Autumn, 311AD. Suddenly a man steps out of the shadow and kills Felix and abuses Claudia. She does not see the murderer’s face clearly in the dark but glimpses “the chalice tattooed on his left wrist” (3). With the burning passion of revenge, Claudia searches the murderer in different parts of the city of Rome and she is finally taken into the Royal Palace in Palatine by the Christian priest, Anastasius who is the chief secretary to Augusta Helena, the Empress and the mother of Emperor Constantine. Meanwhile, Constantine has the secret motive of conquering the Eastern Empire which is ruled by Licinius and to unite the rich land of the East in his own possession (36). Constantine has the guidance of his mother, Helena, in his secret motive for forming the vast Empire and winning the favor of Christian Church. But these plans are being undermined by a series of gruesome murders connected to the palace and the loyalties are brought into question because three courtesans from the Guild of Aphrodite are found dead with crosses etched on their foreheads and each cheek (25-44). Aiming at

protecting her son's future and to discover the identity of her son's enemy, his mother Helena calls upon the service of Agent in Rebus politics, the supreme body of spy network of the Royal Palace. Later, Helena recruits Claudia in the Agents in Rebus as a spy in the disguise of a servant girl (24). Claudia starts working for both Royal Palace and the Church as a disguised palace servant but carries her own secret search for the murder of Felix (85). Helena calls Claudia her "little mouse" because of her observation skill and ability to glide about without being noticed (10). But the danger for Claudia is that she can be the murderer's next victim as she was taking the place of Fortunata, the recently murdered courtesan (24).

Claudia is the Polybius' niece who owns a local tavern but her uncle doesn't know that she is a spy in secret. She goes through many adventures in search of the murderer who is still not identified whether male or female (121). She gets help from an influential Christian priest, Sylvester, popular gladiators, actors and many courtesans to find out the suspected assassin, Sicarius. Claudia, with the help of these characters and applying her sharp wit in analyzing the complicated phenomena, finally identifies and tricks him to death by poisoning him. Now Claudia gets victory not only upon the enemy of Constantine but upon the enemy of the whole Christianity and upon her own enemy who had killed her little brother, Felix, in the bank of river Tiber.

In the novel, we find a mystery set in the historical frame in its surface. Within the story, most significant thing we find is the role of Christianity which had gained the official recognition just after Constantine had become the sole Emperor of the Western Roman Empire. Christianity plays a vital role to develop the mysterious plot through the characters like Sylvester, Helena, Anastasius and Claudia who carry the Christian ideology throughout their activities in the novel.

So, the novel presents the situation of the horror, violence and bloodshed, of the early fourth-century Roman Empire. It also dramatizes the developing relationship of mutual help, cooperation, interdependence, and the sense of coexistence between the state and the Christianity.

The presentation of violence and bloodshed resultant horror in the Roman society and the communal and the cultural clash are the issues that the novel represents through the genre of a historical mystery. These issues of the *Murder Imperial* share the similarities of the global political phenomena of the early twenty-first-century such as the horror of terrorist attack, anti-terrorism wars and the problem of possible bloodshed of communal, cultural or civilizational conflicts. Doherty seems conscious about the problems of violence and bloodshed of the both periods; early fourth-century Rome and early twenty-first-century global politics.

This research, thus, situates *Murder Imperial* between the history of Ancient Rome and the history of its own time of production, the early twenty-first-century and engages with the novel's ideology of revitalizing Christian values.

Although readers from both national and international communities have responded to *Murder Imperial*, the proto-political intent of the novel, specially, the reaffirmation of Christian faith has been overlooked. Still their interpretations are helpful to understand some of the facets of the novel such as its religious theme, historical objectivity, technique, and narrative structure. But their interpretations are diverse as they have approached the novel from their own distinct perspective. Ben Witherington takes the novel as thematically religious and rhetorically artistic. He writes:

From a Christian point of view what is important about this novel is not just its realism or the fun of solving the mystery, but we learn about

what happens when Christians gains power. We are privy to the debates between rival Christian in the presence of the Emperor, and we learn about the role of rhetoric in persuading emperors about things. (1)

Witherington realizes the important role of the Christianity in the novel. But his findings of the role of the Christianity are directed towards analyzing the novel's dramatization of what had happened in the history of Rome in the early fourth-century when the Christianity was gaining the power in the Empire. So, for Witherington the novel gives the knowledge of the rivalry between Christianity and other religions which was the historical background of the novel. Further, Witherington focuses on the "role of rhetoric" which, according to him, is artistically presented in the novel. The novel shows Emperor Constantine as swiftly persuaded by his mother Helena, Claudia and Sylvester in many issues and in taking many decisions being persuaded by their art of rhetoric. It shows that Witherington is also interested in the rhetoric of the novel which is, for him, beautiful and artistic. Though Witherington finds the role of Christianity important in the novel, he does not access its historical significance. Instead, my thesis puts the novel's theme of Christianity within its entire context in which the novel was produced. Putting the novel within its context of production gives more reliable interpretation. Thus, Witherington's interpretation of the novel is firmly based on his textual approach that undermines fictionalized historical context.

The shift in point of view is perhaps a way out for another study of the novel which J. Chippindale gives in his reviews. He takes the lens of historical realism and finds the novel more realistic in its presentation of the history of the fourth-century Rome. Chippindale, while praising Doherty as a "consummate" novelist with the profound knowledge of ancient Roman history, writes:

Paul Doherty is the consummate professional when it comes to writing historical novels. I for one do not know how he can be so prolific with his offering of books and make sure that each of them is well researched, whether they are 13th, 14th or fifteenth century they are always true to the period. His *Murder Imperial* is more a history text and less a literary text and we can find many trustworthy information of history. (1)

Chippindale's remarks on the *Murder Imperial* are simply based on the comparative reading of the history and the novel. Similar to the history texts, he finds, *Murder Imperial* as the reliable source of information of the historical events of early fourth-century Rome. For him it is well "researched" and true to its time of setting similar to the other historical novels of Doherty. Chippindale's views on the novel are marked by his utilitarian approach of gaining historical knowledge from the novel. Similar to the Witherington, he also fails in finding the history of its own time of production, which is the history of early twenty-first-century. He also fails to bring the novel's significance in the present time into the light. Thus, the novel's embodiment of the issues of our own time, are overlooked which have made their interpretation incomplete.

Some critics have analyzed the novel from the perspective of how the novel displays the mystery. J. Masson complements Witherington's and Chippindale's reviews by analyzing novel's technique and narrative structure. He writes:

I found it unnecessarily violent at times, though I appreciate the world of Ancient Rome was a violent place. I would have like it to be toned down. That aside, this is a really good story with a great central character. Claudia is a poor, young woman who was experienced much hardship in her short life and this has led her to become a spy for the

Emperor. All she has her morals and her wits and has to really use the latter to survive in such an ignorant and dark place as Rome is depicted, in the fourth century. But it is not just the characterization that's good. This book has really good pace, doesn't drag on and the plot doesn't disappoint either. It's a great read and I recommend it to anyone who loves a good mystery. (1)

Mason seems to be interested in the plot of the novel and representation of history of the early fourth-century Roman society. He agrees with the facts that "ancient Rome was a violent place" but he does not like its representation in the novel. He is interested in the plot of the novel which lacks in the reviews of Witherington and Chippindale. For him the plot has smooth running around the events in the life of Claudia. Putting her into the centre of analysis, he comes closer to the feminist criticism of the empowerment of women. Regarding the mystery in the novel, Mason claims that *Murder Imperial* is really a good piece of mystery. Though Mason goes a step ahead entering into the content and plot of the novel he still fails to relate the novel in its socio-political context of its time of production. Mason's analysis lacks the interpretation of the novel's "situatedness" within its totality of the social institution, cultural energies and codes. He does not consider the contemporary history of growing violence and bloodshed during the time in which the novel was written as being significant.

Thus, this research brings the embodiment of the history of the time in which the novel was produced into consideration. It also analyzes the "situatedness" of the novel in its totality of social institutions, cultural energies and codes thereby finds out the relationship of the novel with its external contextual factors. This research leads anyone into deeper understanding of *Murder Imperial* in which lies the revitalizing

discourse which is to be spread and circulated in the society of early twenty-first-century. In the era of secularism such religious inquiry is always marginalized. This present research claims that *Murder Imperial* has served in circulating the Christian ideology in the higher level along with providing objectivity, clarity, mystery and romance of the history. It is possible only through the analysis of the historical phenomena of the text in its double level; history of the ancient Rome and history of its own era of production.

To interpret *Murder Imperial* as the embodiment of the Christian ideology of revitalizing its religious faith, it is necessary to put the novel within the context and social phenomena of its time of production and also into the context of its historical setting. A methodological tool which shows the text's relationship with its various contexts of social factors becomes necessary. Therefore, this thesis employs the concepts of new historicism to show the correlation between the novel and its various factors of context. As the claims requires to show the correlation between a text with its various contexts of production and their role in the text's production, new historicism also attempts to prove any text as the production of various social constraints. So, the application of the new historical analysis is the appropriate one which proves, first *Murder Imperial* as the product of its various socio-political contextual factors and then proves the claim that it embodies the ideology of revitalizing Christian faith in the early twenty-first-century. Now it becomes appropriate to include a brief introduction of the new historicism and some of its ideas which this research uses.

Since 1980 discourse analysis has been accepted as a mode of literary study under the newly developed theory "new historicism". New historicism attends primarily to the historical and cultural conditions of any text's production, its meaning, its effect, and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations, instead of dealing

with a text in isolation from its historical context. The term new historicism itself is a broad and complex which bears multiple meanings. M. H. Abrams writes, “. . . new historicists conceived of a literary text as situated within the totality of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes” (191). In this regard, we can put *Murder Imperial* in the totality of social institutions and analyze how the socio-political factors played the role in giving the present form to the novel. We can also analyze how it interacts with those socio-political factors in regulating the Christian discourse to revitalize the ancient religious faith.

As a method of interpreting a text, new historicism rejects the earlier kind of contextual literary scholarship which used to take social and intellectual history as a background. New historicists believe that neither history is a homogeneous and stable pattern of facts and events which serve as the “background” to the literary texts nor a literary text is simply a reflection of them. “The new historicism is marked by a methodological self-consciousness rather than the old historicists faith in transparency of signs and interpretive procedures” (Habib 764). M. A. R. Habib further writes:

The new historicism, argued that analysis of literary texts could not be restricted to texts themselves or to their author’s psychology and background; rather, the larger context and cultural conventions in which texts were produced needed to be considered. (766)

According to Habib new historicists put any text within its various social factors and cultural conventions during which a text is produced and such analysis of the text only gives the reliable interpretation. Following this theoretical base we can analyze the “cultural convention” of *Murder Imperial* during which it was produced and bring out the hidden theme of religion in surface. Putting the novel within its totality of various

social factors, energies and codes we can avoid the theoretical shortcomings which are apparent in the reviews discussed above. *Murder Imperial* was produced in the troublesome year of 2003 and the plot also presents the violence and bloodshed of the fourth-century Rome. A doubt arises in the relation of novel to its “larger context and cultural convention.” And to satisfy this doubt and to find out the reliable interpretation of the novel, its correlations with the larger context of socio-political factors of the early twenty-first-century should be analyzed as it is demanded by new historicism. It is most required mode of interpreting *Murder Imperial* because new historicist puts any texts inside the power network of social institutions and analyzes the text as a product and producer of the power, knowledge and truth. It is claimed that any text is only a discourse which is produced to circulate and exercise power in the society. Discourses are produced to create “knowledge” which in turn creates “truth” as per demand of existing power. So, new historicism rejects the notion of eternal truth and knowledge and claims that these are only the product and producer of the power. In this regard Michel Foucault claims:

Truth isn't outside the power, or lacking in the power. Contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true. (444)

Foucault calls for the need of a new analysis of power instead of defining power as state law and constitution. He takes power as productive network instead of repressive.

This productive network of power “runs through the whole social body” including any literary or history texts (1139). The history of the text is, thus, essential for the analysis of its role in the network of social institutions.

Literature is one of the constraints, according to Foucault, which works to create knowledge and truth in the society. These created truths and knowledge are circulated in the society which provides the power to its circulator, either it is any social institution or any particular community or even a single person. And this exercise of power again helps to create discourse of its interest in the society. So, for Foucault discourse, knowledge, truth and power move in a circular movement determining each other. In the case of *Murder Imperial* it is applicable to analyze how it creates a religious discourse and how this discourse creates the knowledge of Christianity and truths about their glorious past. From such analysis we can reach into the core of the novel where there lies the ideology of revitalizing Christian faith that aims at empowering Christianity to face the threat and challenges of early twenty-first-century. As the novel is written by a Catholic historian in our own time in which the whole Christian civilization is getting challenges and threats from other Non-western culture, religion, politics and other social energies, Doherty creates revitalizing discourse in *Murder Imperial* to face these new challenges and threats of Christianity. So, to reach in this conclusion new historical analysis is mostly required.

Interpretation of any text in new historicism is mainly based upon the finding a text’s reciprocal relations with the totality of its context. Here totality of context refers to the totality of the social practices, discourses, social institutions and the cultural practices of the time during which a text is produced (Abrams 190). New historicism regards that there is always interaction between a text and its totality of context. On the one hand a text should be analyzed as both product and producer of the cultural

energies and the cods in the society and on the other hand its totality of context should also be analyzed as both producer and the product of the discourses and ideologies of a text. The new historicist thinker Louis Montrose puts:

Though sometimes reproducing the methodological shortcomings of such older idealist and empiricist modes of historical criticism, but also often appropriating their prodigious scholarly labours to good effect, the new historical criticism is new in its refusal of unproblematized distinction between “literature” and “history”, between “text” and “context”, new in resisting a prevalent tendency to posit and privilege a unified and autonomous individual-whether an Author or a Work-to be set against a social or literary background. (779)

For Montrose new historicism rejects the older distinction between literature and history and between text and context. It also rejects the formalists’ claim of the autonomy of author and the text. Montrose claims that there is the constant interaction between text and context, between literature and society and the reliable interpretation can be derived only when these relations are problematized. Thus, a text should be put inside the totality of its contexts of production and should be analyzed in the regards of its problematized relations with different social factors such as politics, religion, culture, psychology, economics, and so on.

To understand *Murder Imperial* one has to access the implications of history in literature. Use of history in writing fiction has many objectives. To show the contradictions in the historical events, to develop the sentiments of the past in the present, to include the omitted issues of history, to promote historical sense in the readers are some of the main objectives behind using history in fiction. Another objective is to create discourse in the society and thereby to achieve power to dominate

other existing discourses in the society. For Friedrich Nietzsche, human beings are “historical” and they require the “services of history”. He has listed three methods of using history as per the needs of people; a “monumental” method, an “antiquarian” method, and a “critical” method. Regarding a “monumental” method of using history, he writes:

Now what purpose is served for contemporary man by monumental consideration of the past, busying ourselves with the classic and rarities of earlier time? He derives from that the greatness which was once there at all events was *possible* and therefore will really be possible once again. (187)

And for this Nietzsche claims man needs some exemplary figures and events of the past. “History belongs, above all, to the active and powerful man, the man who fights one great battle, who needs exemplary men, teachers, and comforters and cannot find them among his contemporary companions” (186). This claim of Nietzsche, thus, demands the contextual analysis of any text that has used history as a monument.

These ideas of Nietzsche fit exactly in interpreting *Murder Imperial*. As the novel is set in the glorious past of the Christianity, that is the Constantine Rome, during which the whole Empire was conversing into the Christianity. There were the Christian heroes like Miltiades, Sylvester, Constantine, Helena, and so on to make the Christianity state religion. *Murder Imperial* dramatizes this glorious past and makes an invocation of the past spirit in the early twenty-first-century during which the Christianity was degrading and facing many problems. The revitalization of Christian faith in *Murder Imperial* is the “monumental” use of Christian past or history in Nietzsche’s view. Thus, the Nietzschean idea also demands the analysis of the text in its larger context similar to the new historical analysis which is applicable to reach in

the claim of this research, that is, the novel embodies the ideology of revitalizing Christian faith.

These concepts of new historicism and of Nietzsche support to make a reliable interpretation of *Murder Imperial*. The analysis of the roles of social, political, religious, cultural, psychological, etc. conditions of the context during which the novel was produced, helps to find out the ideology in the novel. They also help to understand the events in the novel, such as the murders of the courtesans, Claudia's motivation towards finding the assassin, Helena and Constantine's growing fascination towards Christianity, Sylvester's interest in the murders and his will to help the Emperor, and so on. Overall, the application of the new historicism helps to understand the cultural, political, religious and psychological conflicts which are presented in the novel and which were the contextual reality of the novel's time of production. For this purpose this research compares and contrasts the novel, on the one hand, with many official history texts of H. A. Davis, A. H. M. Jones, Edward Gibbon and Suetonius, on the other hand with the similarities of global socio-political phenomena of the early twenty-first-century with the application of the above mentioned concepts of new historicists.

I. *Murder Imperial* in Different Social Relations

Any text is the product of its social energies. In other words many social factors such as religion, culture, history, socio-psychology, economic, social institutions, prevailing ideology, etc. play vital role in the production of any text and a text also plays a role in determining the social phenomena. But still the role of some factors appears to be more effective and others' less in comparison. The same is the case with the text also; a text effects all the social factors but the effects seem more in some factors and less in other factors. In the case of *Murder Imperial* we see the social factors such as religion, culture, politics, socio-psychology, and economics as the determining factors in the production of the text and we also see the text's effects more in these factors. Thus, it becomes necessary to analyze the problematic relationship of text with these social factors.

2.1 Religious Awareness

In *Murder Imperial* Doherty dramatizes the increasing religious awareness of the Roman citizens in the early fourth-century. The most recurring issue, in the novel, is its characters' growing faith in the Christianity. Helena, the biological mother of Constantine and the strong supporter of the Christianity, is one of the most strong and determined characters in the novel who expresses her desire to make the West a powerful Christian Empire. She strongly helps her son, Constantine, in his growing interest and favors for Christianity after the victory of Milvian Bridge. We find Helena's strong support and favors for the Christianity and for the interests of her son, Constantine, in her conversation with Claudia. She informs Claudia about the growing popularity of the Christianity in the Empire. She says:

‘ We have, in Rome two empires. We have the columns of Trajan, Titus’ triumphal arch, the Collosseum, the Forum, but beneath the city run the catacombs, dug out by the Christians to burry their dead and secretly perform their rites. . . . The monuments are beginning to decay but life in the catacombs is as vigorous as ever. . . . What I do care about, and so does Constantine, is that Christianity has become a second empire.’

(17)

Augusta Helena analyzes the contemporary situation of the Empire. Being the mother of Emperor and a mouthpiece character of Doherty, she comprehends the division of Roman Empire into two empires on the basis of religious activities; the first one is the Paganism which has still strong influence in the Roman citizens and another one is the Christianity which is developing vigorously and rapidly in the Empire. According to Helena Christianity is growing and the Paganism is decaying. Christianity, once, was suppressed and dominated by Paganism. Previous Emperors were mainly Pagans who made Christians to suffer great persecutions time and again (Jones 27). Thus, Christians used to burry their dead in hide. They used to perform their rites secretly. For this they had dug out the catacombs beneath the city. They started to use the catacombs “as hiding-holes, cemeteries, and even place of worship” (Doherty 74). But now Helena claims that the Christianity is developing rapidly and becoming second power in the Empire. Helena claims that her son Constantine also acknowledges the growing power of the Christianity.

This remark of Helena, in the first chapter, indicates that Rome and its citizens were divided into two different religious sects and they were rivals to each other. During such critical moment of religious hostility Constantine issues the Edict of Toleration for

Christians withdrawing all edicts made against the Christian faith by previous Emperors (Jones 96). In the novel Helena also declares her favor towards the Christianity. So, the situation becomes favorable for Christians and difficult for the Paganism which once had supreme power. Helena opines that it's glorious past and monuments are fading now.

Conflict between these two religions brings a new awareness in the Roman citizens. Doherty dramatizes this growing religious awareness through the activities of his characters and the events in the novel. The murders of the courtesans show that the conflict existed between the old and new religions which raise the religious awareness in the Roman citizens. The etched cross on the forehead and on each cheek of the murdered courtesans and a mockery scrawl, "In hoc signo occides" and leaving a "defixio" on the swan-feather shows that religious rivalry is one of the most probable cause behind these murders of the courtesans (Doherty 40). Such events increase religious awareness in the characters gradually. Claudia, who knows the situation better, advises her ignorant uncle, Polybius, about the Constantine's favors for Christianity. She says, "There is a new Emperor in the Rome, the tavern gossips say that the Christians are to be tolerated" (63). Claudia's religious awareness is more remarkable. Being very close to the palace, she knows better about the Emperor's position in the religious matters. Being a spy in the Agents in Rebus she is unable to talk directly to her uncle Polybius about such matters but informs him indirectly for not to hate or dominate Christians anymore. Polybius is a follower of the Paganism and her wife, Pappaoe, is the strong supporter of him. But the growing fascination of people towards Christianity shakes his faith in the old religion and when he faces the problem of a mysterious death of a wine merchant, Arrius, in his tavern and threatened by the Imperial Police to close his tavern, he regrets for his misfortune

blaming himself for fascinating towards the new religion. He says, “I wish I had followed Pappae’s advice, she had advised me to buy a wolf’s beard and tie it to the door posts to fend of ill-luck” (62). Polybius’ regrets for not following his wife’s advice indicates that his growing awareness of the religious practices of the Paganism.

Sylvester, the principal priest in the Christian community in Rome and the envoy of Pope, Bishop of Rome, is one of the important characters in the novel. He knows better about the situation. He makes Claudia clear about the people’s growing confusions and awareness caused by the change of the Emperor’s policy and the murders of the courtesans. He talks with Claudia:

‘The bloody crosses also discredit your faith?’

‘Yes, they do, Claudia. In some places Christianity is still regarded as blood-thirsty, deviant movement, its real purpose cloaked in secrecy. People might argue that these murders prove that neither Constantine nor Christianity can really be trusted.’ (78-79)

Sylvester, the mouth piece character of the author, realizes that the murders have really caused the religious awareness in the people. The change of ruler, his new policy towards the Christianity, the mysterious murders of the courtesans and the attempt to discredit both new ruler and the new religion really causes the development of the religious awareness in the characters.

Doherty’s presentation of the developing religious awareness in the Roman citizens of the conversion era comes closer to the various versions of the history texts. During this time of transition people were in the confusion due to the changes in the throne and the changes in the religious matters. Historian H. A. Davis writes:

In the year 313 the Emperor Constantine, by the Edict of Milan, announced that Christianity was to be tolerated everywhere throughout the Empire. . . . Christianity became firmly established as the official religion; other religions rapidly disappeared or were absorbed, and from the fifth century onwards the only priest and temples in the Roman Empire were Christians. (211-212)

The similarities, in the description of the religious matters of during early fourth-century Rome in other history texts, proves that the novel is faithful and trustworthy in its presentation of the growing religious awareness of the Roman citizens.

The most remarkable thing in this matter is that Doherty seems to be having information of not only of the history of Roman Conversion but also of his own time, that is, the early twenty-first-century. The early twenty-first-century is also remarkable for the growing awareness of religious belongingness and communal identity. Similar to the situation, dramatized in the novel, there were events such as the terrorist attack of the Sep. 11-2001, Iraq War, Afghan War, and many other terrorist attacks made by Islamic extremists. These events caused the people across the world to rethink about their religious and communal identity to face the new threat and challenges of the communal conflict. Similar to the conflict of early fourth-century Rome, the conflict of early twenty-first-century were also more communal and religious in their nature than the national and political. Regarding this new situation of the twenty-first-century Charles Townshend writes.

At the end of the 20th century the world faced a revival of religious fundamentalism, quite puzzling to many people who had assumed that the

process of secularization was, although perhaps erratic, an irreversible liberal assumption that the rise of modern society and the decay of religion were two sides of the same coin was suddenly thrown into doubt; and the shock effect of this was soon registered in writing on terrorism where religion had confidently been consigned to the margins of terrorist motivation. (96)

Townshend, writer of the terrorism in our own time, finds out that the popular motto of secularism and religious tolerance of the nineteenth and twentieth-century are being thrown into suspicion in the break of the twenty-first-century. People's faith in the rise of "modern society" which was based on the concept of secularism began to be problematic. The religions are decaying, once they thought. According to Townshend these beliefs of people were "thrown into doubt" when terrorists' activities were found mainly based upon their religious interests. So, for him the writings about terrorism, in the early twenty-first-century, have become another form of writing about the revival of religious consciousness of our time (96). It provides the linkage of the novel's presentation of the religious violence and consciousness to its own time of production. It proves that Doherty is also dramatizing the issue of religious awareness that appeared in the beginning of the early twenty-first-century along with the Roman citizens' awareness of religion in the early fourth-century in his novel *Murder Imperial*. Thus, putting the novel within the contemporary context of religious fundamentalism is a way of analyzing the novel showing its relation to the early twenty-first-century and the novel's relation to its contextual factor. From this analysis we find that *Murder Imperial* is the product of

Doherty's consciousness of contemporary religious conflict viewed in the light of ancient Roman history.

While presenting the developing religious awareness of two different ages in the form of a literary work, Doherty revives the spirit of the Christians' glorious past in the present. He makes his protagonist win over the anti-Christian assassin (280). The victory of Claudia, or the Christian Emperor, certainly appeals to the increasing religious faith in its contemporary Christians readers. So, *Murder Imperial* dramatizes the religious awareness at two different levels and also enhances the awareness more in its Christians readers to build a religious solidarity to confront the threats and challenges of the early twenty-first-century.

2.2 Cultural Conflict

Murder Imperial presents the cultural conflict of the transitional period of the Roman Empire. Under the reign of new Emperor, Constantine, the Rome was heading towards the new religious order and new cultural practices. But there were many problems in the society due to the emergence of new cultural practices (Jones 59). One of the most fascinating issues, the novel dramatizes, is that of the cultural conflict which is artistically presented in the novel. Doherty presents this cultural conflict sometimes in explicit and sometimes in implicit ways. The beginning of the story signifies the cultural conflicts of the Roman society. In the prologue Doherty introduces the cultural conflict which later becomes the main cause for Claudia's joining in the service of the palace and entering in the Agents in Rebus. Doherty writes:

They [Claudia and her brother Felix] were so engrossed in their task that the man who stepped out of the shadows of the deserted quayside made them

both start. Claudia couldn't make out his face, though his toga and sandals were costly. She glimpsed the chalice tattooed on his left wrist. . . . The knife he drew glittered in the moonlight, and with one quick slash he cut the young man's throat. (3)

This man with the "chalice tattooed on his left wrist" kills Claudia's little brother, Felix, by cutting his throat and abuses her. Claudia's father, Julius, was the friend of the Christian priest Sylvester and was also the follower of the Christianity. Claudia also has the favors towards the new religion. But the man with the "chalice tattooed on his left wrist" is from another religion and cultural background. The chalice tattooed is "a sign used by members of the Mithras cult" which was followed in Roman Empire since first-century (263). In the beginning there was the good sense of religious tolerance and cultural harmony. Many new religions and cultural practices were emerging within the Empire. Egyptian cult of Isis, worship of Mithras, Zoroastrainism and Christianity were prominent among them (Davis 208). Followers of these new religions developed their own cultural practices and positions in the society. They did not always have cooperation and integration between and among each others. Their religious and cultural practices, sometimes, used to violate each others' cultural practices. In such violations there used to occur serious social problems like persecution, cultural negation, and communal hatred. Moreover, the Emperor's favor for any particular religion and cultural practices, used to play vital role in the development and sustenance of any particular cultural practices in the society. Christianity, in the early centuries, did not get favors from the Emperors and like the Jews they suffered the mass persecution, social negation and communal hatred. Similarly, Jews also never abandoned their faith and once refused to admit even the order of the Emperor Caligula to set his

statue in the Holy of Holies (Davis 208). Christian also rejected to join Roman legions, refused to sacrifice animals in front of the idols of the Olympian or Pagan gods and goddesses. For this Christians were persecuted during the reign of Diocletian, Galarius, and Maximian just before Constantine became the sole Emperor of the West (Jones 103). And when Constantine gave “Edict of Toleration” the situation changed drastically. Christian culture flourished vastly in the Empire and others cultural practices began to disappear gradually. But still there were some strong supporters of the old cultural practices and social order. Even in the Eastern Roman Empire Christians were, still, suffering under the rule of Licinius (Gibbon 272). In the novel Doherty implicitly and explicitly dramatizes these cultural conflicts through the activities of different characters.

In chapter two Helena says, “You [Claudia] don’t believe in anything, do you? Big fat gods or goddesses who thrust their nipples out and raise their legs” (16). For Helena, to worship the Olympian gods and goddesses is a nonsense cultural practice and she advises Claudia not to follow such cultural practices. Sylvester also informs the Emperor Constantine about the growing interest of people towards the new cultural practices based upon the new religion. He says, “Your Excellency! The palace is full of servants and slaves. Very few of them burn incense before idols. Go into their quarters You’ll find our symbols, the Chie and Rho, the fish and the word Icthus” (38). According to the Sylvester the cultural practices were changing in the Roman society. The old practices of worshiping idols were disappearing gradually from the society and the new one was taking their place. Instead of worshiping idols, praying to the Christ and honoring the Christian symbol, cross, were gradually developing in the society (Jones 93). Polybius’ rejection to follow his wife’s advice “to buy a wolf’s beard and tie it to the door posts to fend ill-luck” is another

example of the conflict in cultural practices (Doherty 62). Similarly, the murders of the courtesans, the assassin's leaving of the "defixo on the swan feather" for the followers of the new cultural practices and leaving a coin in each murdered courtesan's hand to pay Charon, the God of Underworld when he crosses the river Styx, are all the dramatization of the conflict prevailing in the society during early fourth-century Rome (103).

When the novel was published in 2003 AD, the world was also going through the conflicts among different cultural practices. In August 12, 2001 Taliban government in Afghanistan had arrested and put into prison eight Christians for promoting Christianity and executed sixteen Afghan citizens in accusation of supporting them (*International Forum* 12). In October 28, 2001 sixteen Christians were killed in the random firing by a Muslim insurgent, during their time of prayer in the St. Nominneek church which is situated in Behawalpur, 60 mile away from the Multan city of the Punjab province of Pakistan (*International Forum* 13). Taliban government had also destructed the ancient statues of Lord Buddha in different parts of the country and had ordered not to follow any other cultural practices in the country. Similarly, the government of Iran and the Muslim religious leaders strictly prohibited to celebrate Christ-Mass festival, New Year of Christian calendar and Valentine Day within the country and also requested the whole Muslim community for rejecting the non-Muslim cultural practices. All these contemporary events show the growing cultural conflicts across the world in the beginning of the twenty-first-century. Doherty dramatizes this issue of cultural conflict in the form of ancient Roman history. In *Murder Imperial* the cultural clash between Christians and the anti-Christian is one of the main sources of conflict that plays a vital role in the novel. It proves that being a Catholic scholar of both history and theology, Doherty is well aware

about the cultural problem of both ancient Rome and early twenty-first-century which he has artistically dramatized in the novel, *Murder Imperial*.

New historicism claims that any literary text can never be a “self-sufficient and self-autonomous” entity as it was claimed by formalist critics. Instead, new historicism takes a literary text as the product of the social phenomena and, thus, embody many cultural issues of the society of the time during which it is produced (Sinfield 808). In this regard, the cultural conflicts in the novel, as illustrated above, leave some traces to understand the cultural conflict in the society of the era during which the novel was written. *Murder Imperial* does not reflect only the cultural conflict of its time of production but it also connects to its Christian readers. Showing the Christianity victorious over its rival religions, it shows the strength of Christianity to survive and flourish even in most critical time of history. Implicitly, it urges the Christian community to unite to face the present threat of cultural conflict collectively as it is shown in the novel in which the collective attempt of Claudia, Sylvester, and the Helens establish Christian culture and values in the novel. So the revitalization of cultural and religious faith is even clearer in this issue of the novel.

2.3 Revisionary History and its Politics

Murder Imperial is a political novel in the form of historical mystery. Doherty has an analytical stand-point in dramatizing the Constantine’s rise and his future plan to win Licinius in the East. His mother, Augusta Helena’s perspective upon the political moves and ambitions of the Emperor are the remarkable to mention and her choice to recruit Claudia as the member of Agents in Rebus is also significant as they link the novel’s plot to the global politics of the early twenty-first-century. Helena informs Claudia:

‘My son intends to become sole Emperor. Oh, he’ll swear eternal friendship. However, when Licinius makes a mistake, Constantine will march east, bring him to battle, destroys his army, than kills him. If Licinius has half a brain, he’ll try and do the same to my son. They’ll smile and exchange the kiss of peace, call each other brother, sign the most wonderful-sounding peace treaties. . . . But we are back in the amphitheatre, Claudia. One of them must die. It must be Licinius,’ (16-17)

These remarks of Helena make clear the motives of Constantine’s policy of friendship with the Licinius, and it also clarifies Doherty’s position in rewriting the ancient history of the Roman Empire. It is historical facts that after the Constantine’s victory in the battle of the Milvian Bridge there were only two emperors in the Roman Empire; Constantine in the West and Licinius in the East (Jones 42).

In the year 313AD Constantine and Licibius had meet and signed a treaty of peace and cooperation in the city of Rome. Constantine had given his half sister to Licinius in marriage (Jones 204). Helena’s speech, which has been cited above, indicates that events happened just after the historical treaty between Constantine and Licinius. Helena makes us clear about Constantine’s plans. According to her, the peace treaty between the West and the East is only a political mask to show the public that they were friends and care for each others’ well-being. In fact both Emperors took each other as rivals and wanted to defeat and kill each other in the war to prove their own supremacy. Helena associates the on-going murders in the Empire with these political ambitions of the Emperors. She is eager to help Constantine and see him victorious over the Licinius. Even before the victory of the Milvian Bridge, Helena had sidelined Severus, the chief minister of Maxentius. She

had done it with the help of an unknown professional assassin Sicarius. When the things become complicated and Claudia gathers more information about the murders of the courtesans, she finds the higher probability of the involvement of the unknown assassin, Sicarius, as she was informed by Sylvester. Then Claudia urges Helena to tell more about the Sicarius. Helena finally confesses:

‘We’ve known about the Sicarius for months. When my son, the Divine Emperor, was planning his march on Rome, we used his service to have a certain opponent [Severus] quietly removed. . . . I did,’ Helena answered. ‘A simple letter with mu seal attached and, of course, the necessary money, neatly tied in two leather bags, one of our spies, a merchant, left the little parcel at the Horse of Troy. (122)

Next day Severus was found dead and a rumor spread that he was killed by a woman. Helena becomes surprised that “whether the Sicarius was a man or a woman” (121). But after Constantine becomes the Emperor of the West Helena invites the Sicarius in a banquet and Buruss, her bodyguard, kills him as planned by Helena (124). These were all the parts of the Helena’s politics to support his son to become the Emperor. Now, the supposed killed assassin, seems to be responsible for the murders of the courtesans. The doubt also goes for the role of Licinius who might be using the assassin against Helena and Constantine to discredit them in the publics’ eyes (131). So, the plotting of the murders seems to be political as well as religious and cultural. Even the novel’s sub title, *Political Intrigue in Ancient Rome*, makes the readers to take the novel’s plot as political history of the Roman Empire.

Helena assigns Claudia to find out the assassin, so, the supposed Licinius' plotting would be a failure and there would be a cause for Constantine to march into the East. Regarding the politics of 313AD we find only the explanation of Constantine's victory over Maxentius in the war of the Milvian Bridge, his edict of toleration from Milan, and the historical treaty between Constantine and Licinius in the city of Rome, which have been mentioned in the different version of Gibbon, Davis, Jones and Suetonius. The death of Severus is nowhere clear in their books. Gibbon and Suetonius write only "mysterious death" and Jones writes "found killed in his private chamber" (231). It seems Doherty has used this unclear event of the Roman history to create a mystery in the novel. His presentation of the Severus' death may seem contradictory to other history texts but it is also difficult to ignore him because the history itself is unclear about the event. Doherty's use of the unclear event of the history can be an intentional use. The distorted presentation of the Severus' death may be to serve Doherty's higher intention to dramatize the political development of his own time. So, it is necessary to glimpse the political phenomena of the early twenty-first-century.

Murder Imperial presents the political development of the early fourth-century Rome that appears to be similar to the global political phenomena of the early twenty-first-century in many respects, during which the novel was written. Similar to the division of the Roman Empire into the West and East, the early twenty-first-century had already divided the whole world into the West and the non-West by many critics and political analyst like Huntington and Edward Said. Similar to the Constantine West, the leading country of the West, United States, was suffering from the series of terrorist attacks. The Sep. 11 attack, Anthrax attack, bomb attacks in the US embassy in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and many

others. The international community labeled such attacks as the “International Terrorism.” Whatever it was but the political supremacy of the West had been challenged and threatened. United States also waged war against the terrorism in 2001 and attacked Iraq and Afghanistan. It was supported by the Western alliance and the British Prime Minister Tony Blair had played the vital role in gaining the international consent to justify the cause of Iraq and Afghan wars. The NATO’s search for Osama bin Laden and the other leaders of al-Quida were much intensified in the global politics of early twenty-first-century.

In *Murder Imperial* we find the reflection of such recent political phenomena in different forms. The political rivalry between Constantine and Licinius, series of gruesome murders, mockery of Constantine’s supremacy and Christian faith, search for the unknown assassin Sicarius and Helena’s pleading help and consent from other characters, etc. are all appear as the masked or disguised version of the political events of the early twenty-first-century. But to proceed ahead, a doubt raises that why Doherty is dramatizing all these within the history of Rome? He could have write it in the setting of our own time like Ian Fleming, Narayan Wagle and Andre Rhekhoneskov, who have demonstrated the politics of their time with the time setting of the present. For the reliable interpretation one should see how the conflict ends in the novel.

Murder Imperial ends with success of Claudia in her search for the unknown assassin and the murder of her little brother, Felix. It ends with the victory of Helena and Constantine who were challenged by the unknown assassin, Sicarius and it could be Licinius’ plan to weaken the Empire of Constantine. It also ends with the victory of the Christianity over its pagan rivals. As the assassin is truly a pagan who mocks the faith of Christianity and supremacy of the Emperor, the findings and killing of the assassin by

Claudia indicates that Christian faith and the Western supremacy is the ultimate solution of the present conflict of the global politics. So, *Murder Imperial* dramatizes both the political activities of the Roman Empire and the politics of early twenty-first-century, in the deeper level. By dramatizing such issues the novel imparts a sense of the need of political solidarity in the Western world to confront the new challenges upon its political supremacy in the world.

2.4 Socio-psychology in Two Different Periods

Another important issue we find in *Murder Imperial* is the presentation of the socio-psychology of the Roman citizens of the era brought by the historical conversion. As the society was going through drastic changes in areas of culture, religion, politics, economic and so on they also had affected the psychology of the citizens. Feelings of horror, insecurity, new hopes and new ambitions were deeply rooted in the psychic of the citizens and of the Emperors (Jones 90). The surprising growth in the numbers of the followers of the Christianity, the unstable political situation in the Empire and short-sightedness of its previous Emperors were the main causes behind the formation of such socio-psychology in the citizens. Historian H. A. Davis writes:

Christianity made a great appeal to those of lowly circumstances and to those whom fortune had not favored, and so it is natural to find that many of its disciples were slaves, who got some compensation for the misery of their earthly lives in the confident expectation of a happy life beyond the grave. But it was by no means confined to the down-trodden- and the Emperor Diocletian (284-305) was so alarmed at the number of Christians in his

dominions and the spread of their beliefs that he instituted one of the most ruthless persecution in the history of the Church. (211)

Davis explains that the cause for growing popularity of Christianity was due to the miserable life condition of slaves, farmers and other marginalized people in the society. According to him the Christianity took roots in the life of such socially marginalized people of the Roman society in the beginning. But the Christianity developed rapidly in the Empire that even the Emperor Diocletian also afraid of their growth. He started the great persecution in 297AD that lasted till 306 AD in the reign of Galerius. This persecution reopened again in 309AD under the rule of Maxentius and lasted till the Constantine's victory over the West (Jones 103-109). It shows that the short-sightedness of the Emperors, before Constantine, could not assimilate the new wave of people's religious faith. Even the successful Emperors like Domitian and Diocletian failed to comprehend the new social changes.

The series of persecutions which was resulted from the changes in the throne and the short-sightedness of the Emperors had long and deep psychological impacts in the social life of Roman citizens. Even during the time of Constantine's rule the legacy of horror, terror, and doubts were prevailing in the social life. *Murder Imperial* includes these socio-psychological aspects of the Roman society in the form of an artistic work. Many characters express their feeling of horror and mutual disbelief towards the Constantine's changed policy towards religious matters. Sylvester, the representative character of the Church, informs Claudia about the possible danger and the doubt against the faith of the Emperor. In their secret meeting, inside the catacombs, they talk:

‘Why here?’ She began. ‘I hate these places. You’ve got nothing to fear.’

‘We have everything to fear,’ ‘Constantine has promised us the earth, but will he keep his words? You shouldn’t fear the dead, Claudia. They are with God. It’s the living who poses the threat. . . .’ (75-76)

Sylvester’s expression represents the doubts of Christians towards the state. It shows that the fear and the terror or the previous persecutions were still haunting the psychic of the Christians. Though the Emperor had already promised them with the shelter and protection for their religious faith they were still caught into the psychology of disbelief and fear towards the Constantine. Still the environment was not to be trusted fully because the history had taught them that the persecution and torture were depended on the mood of the Emperors.

Murder Imperial also reflects the new hope and optimism in the Christianity along with the rise of Constantine as a sole Emperor of the West. Sylvester expresses:

‘This is the beginning of a new era, Claudia, for the Christian Church. There will be no more persecution, proscription, violent deaths in the amphitheatre. In the East, Licinius squats in Nicodemea and plots; all the world watches. There is unfinished business. Constantine or Licinius will emerge as the master of the Roman world. We pray Constantine wins. He is favourably disposed to us. We regard his mother as one of our most powerful friends.’ (77)

In this expression of Sylvester, we find psychological impact of the Constantine’s favor for the Christian faith and upon the Christian people. Along with the Constantine’s “edict of toleration” and withdrawal of “all edicts against the Christian faith” in 313AD, a new beam of hope and optimism had appeared in the socio-psychology of the Christian people (13).

But there was the higher possibility of the war between Constantine and Licinius. Sylvester and the whole Christianity had a wish for the victory of Constantine because they had a belief that Constantine's victory would secure their faith of Christianity and their bright future. In the novel Helena has been presented as the strong supporter of the Christianity that's why Sylvester and the whole Christian community had good wishes for the Constantine's West. In this expression we also find the haunting memories of the persecutions that the Christians suffered under the rule of previous Emperors. They were persecuted, tortured and thrown to the tigers and lions in the amphitheatre (Gibbon 436). Such terrible experiences of the past were deeply rooted in the psychic of the Roman citizens during the transitional phase of the conversion.

Murder Imperial not only presents the psychological conditions of the Christians but also presents the socio-psychology of the people who were still following the old religions. As the Constantine's growing faith in the Christianity was causing the decline of the old religions and its cultural practices, people's dissatisfactions towards the Emperor and his policy to adopt Christianity were also the facts of the Roman history. In the novel the "assassin" represents this psychology of the people who were still following the old religion and wanted to revive their declining supremacy once more in the society. The assassin's killings of the royal courtesans whom Constantine frequently visits, shows the anger, dissatisfaction and warning for the Emperor (40). Doherty writes:

A picture of the Christian symbol, the cross, and beneath it the scrawl: 'In hoc signo occides', 'In this sign you will kill.' A mockery of his [Constantine's] great vision before the battle of the Milvian Bridge. Three

courtesans dead! The Christian sign carved on their forehead and cheeks.

But why? Why? (29-30)

From this description of the author about the nature of the murders, we can find out the psychology of the assassin. It is clear that the assassin is angry and dissatisfied with the Emperor's growing faith in the Christianity. It also shows that he is not only against the Emperor but he is also against the new religion. So, the assassin represents the psychological state of the people who longed for their supremacy of the past and wanted to reestablish their supremacy in the Empire once again. But the Constantine's rise and his new policy in the religious matter had created an obstacle in their way and due to this they had the growing dissatisfaction, anger, and fierce hatred for both Constantine and the Christianity. Doherty dramatizes these socio-psychologies of the people from the Old religion in *Murder Imperial* through the activities of the assassin. How much hatred and anger people, of the Old religion, had is also clear from the solemn curse that the assassin had left under the pillow of the murdered courtesan, Sabina. It goes:

'May burning fever seize all his limbs,

Kill his soul and choke his heart.

Oh, demons of the darkness,

Break and smash his bones,

Choke off his breath.

Let his body be twisted and shattered.

This curse has been distilled in the intestines of

Frogs, the feathers of owls, the bones of snakes,

Herbs from tombs and powerful poisons.' (41-42)

From all of these we can conclude that the assassin is from the older cult of Paganism who dislikes the new Emperor, new religion and his new policy.

Doherty also reflects the psychology of the people which was caused by the violence, murder, rape and economic crisis, which had spread all over the Empire during the transitional phase. These social problems had the deep effects in the psychology of the citizens and had developed the sense of insecurity, absurdity and meaninglessness of the life which is found rooted in the psychology of various characters in the novel (Jones 207). In the dialogue between Domatilla and Claudia, Doherty puts:

‘Will I be next?’ . . . ‘Will my corpse be found in the dark beneath some olive tree?’

‘You have nothing to fear,’ Claudia reassured her. ‘This assassin will soon be caught.’ . . . ‘You are well guarded. Do not leave the villa and you’ll be safe.’

‘That is right.’ . . . ‘I’ll hire more guards, bully-boys. At the banquet tonight the Divine Augusta has already insisted that all food and wine be tested.’

(225)

It shows that the fear of insecurity is deeply rooted in both public and Emperors’ psychic. In the novel these feelings of the characters are the result of the series of gruesome murders of the courtesans by the assassin. In its deeper level we find the state of transition of the society as the main cause for the rises of the feeling of insecurity in the people’s psychology because the assassin’s activities are itself the result of the social changes that the Roman society had passed through in the early fourth-century. Domatilla’s fear and sense of insecurity represents the fearful experiences of the higher class people who had

the good relations with the Emperors. Similarly, Helena's orders for all foods and drinks to be tested before they are served, shows the fear of insecurity rooted in the psychology of the rulers. From Helena's fear of insecurity it becomes clear that even the palace was not feeling secured, how the public could? Doherty reflects these facts of socio-psychology of the Roman society in the fourth-century in the *Murder Imperial*.

Similarly, the people's sense of absurdity, caused by the prevailing violence, murders, rape and bloodshed, are expressed through the speech of many characters. Domatilla calls to herself, other courtesans and spies "are all animals, . . . and the powerful feed on the weak" (229). Working many years for the powerful Emperors, she comes to realize the absurdity and the meaninglessness of her life. She calls herself "a whore" and blames the society for making women "whores". She was also raped and abused like Claudia (229). Now, she realizes the worthlessness of her life and her realization represents the women's experiences and psychology of the early fourth-century Rome.

Another example that we find about the absurdity of social practices of the Ancient Rome is in expression of the gladiator, Murranus. He fights for money, for the pleasure of the high class people and for the pleasure of the Emperors. After the victory of his recent fight in the amphitheatre, where he kills a Samnit, another gladiator, Murranus expresses his feeling of anger towards such a nonsense social practice like "gladiator fighting". He says, "Do you know, Claudia, there are times when I hear the crowd bay; when I see those fat bitches and their husbands screaming for a gladiator's life, and I wish the mob had one throat so I could cut it with my sword" (176).

Murranus' anger for the absurdity of the social practice like "gladiators fight" represents the futility of the gladiators' life and their psychology about the game.

According to him such tradition should be stopped and people should involve in some other creative activities which will develop the true sense of fraternity and perpetual love (113).

These examples from the novel represents the psychology of women, men, common individual, priest and the Emperors of the early fourth-century Rome. From the dialogues and activities of these representative characters Doherty reflects and dramatizes the socio-psychology of the transitional era of Roman history in *Murder Imperial*, and he seems faithful and trustworthy in his representation. But the novel shows the resolution of all above mentioned psychological conflicts and complexities and shows a beginning of a new era with the new hope and optimism along with the defeat of the assassin who represents the old social value and who represents the enemies of the Christianity (296). It shows that Claudia, a common individual, overcomes the problem by finding and killing the assassin, Paris. Paris' activities were the main cause of the psychological fears, sense of insecurity and absurdity in the society. But Claudia, with the help of Helena, Sylvester and Murranus, gets victory over Paris. Further possible degradation of the socio-psychology in the Empire is brought to an end with this victory and a there starts the new era of prosperity in the history of Rome. It shows that the cooperation among the citizens, rulers and the religious institution is required to uplift the degrading socio-psychology of any society, state or civilization in any time of the history. So, *Murder Imperial* gives a lesson to the modern readers with the dramatization of the troublesome but glorious past of the Roman history.

What is the use of the lesson that *Murder Imperial* carries for it readers? Is it significant in the present context? The answer is 'yes'. To reach in this conclusion it

requires an observation of the socio-psychology of our own time in which the novel was produced. Thus, a glimpse on the socio-psychological development of the early twenty-first-century is needed.

In the beginning of the twenty-first-century the Western civilization got the most horrifying experience by the terrorist attack of the Sep. 11, 2001. The horror is more increased by the other hideous terrorist attacks like Anthrax attack, suicide bombings and threat of more terrorist attacks. These events had created the sense of insecurity, horror of violence, bloodshed and the fear of the communal clash which were deeply rooted in the socio-psychology of all community and society of the world. It raised a question that, even the supreme power, US, was not secure and than which part of the world could be? Then there were other events such as Iraq War, Afghan War, bomb attack in the office of BBC Television in London and so on. These experiences of violence and bloodshed had developed the new socio-psychology in both Westerners and the Islamic extremist. The horror of the communal clash, which was already planted inside the psychic of the people across the world by Samuel P. Huntington, was appearing to be true along with the increasing violence and bloodshed in the early twenty-first-century. These caused the development of the sense of insecurity, absurdity and futility in the psychology of the people. It also raised the sense of communal unity, integration and solidarity in many religious communities. The communal hostility between the Western civilization and the Muslim Extremism became more intense. So, a new threat of communal clash started haunting the psychic of people and brought the sense of horror, insecurity absurdity and mutual disbelief among the people. Nasheet Jaffer, both a literary critic and a political analyst from United Arab Emirates, writes:

Our Muslim brothers, sisters and children are suffering cruelties by Americans and other Westerners in many parts of the world. They want to dominate us, suppress our religious sentiments, and control our every activity only because they are afraid of our increasing power of population, economic, language and culture. They want to possess our rich land and to weaken our growing solidarity. History stands as proof that Islam and Christianity have centuries of animosity and in our own time it has reappeared once again in the name of ‘War Against Global Terrorism’. (23)

Jaffers’ expressions show that the Muslim community was going through the psychological disturbance due to the violence caused by the Western mission of uprooting global terrorism. Moreover he claims that the violence is caused by the communal animosity between Christianity and Islam. To sum up, this view of Jeffers reflects the psychology of Muslim community which was resulted by the series of violence that occurred in the early twenty-first-century.

In the same way the Westerners were also going through the horrible experiences of the violence and bloodshed. The Sep. 11 attack and other series of terrorist attacks from the Muslim insurgents had deeply rooted in their psychic. The meeting of the member countries of NATO started in Belgium in Sep. 26 which declared to help the “War Against Global Terrorism” for the first time along with the motto “All for one and one for all!” (*International Forum* 14). It shows that the Westerners had also the fear of communal conflict and had realized the new threats and challenges upon their religious, cultural and political supremacy.

All these prove that the socio-psychology of the early twenty-first-century was shaped with the horror, terror, feeling of insecurity, mutual hatred and disbelief. *Murder Imperial* dramatizes these socio-psychological conditions of the early twenty-first-century along with the socio-psychology of the early fourth-century of the Roman Empire. So, we find remarkable similarities in the socio-psychology of these two different periods which *Murder Imperial* reflects and dramatizes. It proves the new historicists' claim that any text is the product of the socio-cultural phenomena. Summarizing the ideas of the new historicists' views towards a text, Abrams writes:

Literature does not occupy a “trans-historical” *aesthetic* realm which is independent of the economic, social, and political conditions specific to an era, nor is literature subject to timeless criteria of artistic value. Instead, a literary text is simply one of many kinds of texts- religious, philosophical, legal, scientific, and so on- and all of which are formed and structured by the particular conditions of a time and place, and among which the literary text has neither unique status nor special privilege. (192)

In this regard of the new historicists' views about a literary text *Murder Imperial* seems only as the product of its larger context of social phenomena. The similarities between its presentation of the issue of the socio-psychology of the fourth-century and the context of early twenty-first-century supports the claim of new historicists', that is , a text is never a “trans-historical” entity rather it is “conditioned” by many social factors of its time and place of production.

It is clear that though *Murder Imperial* appears to be a purely historical novel set in the remote distance of the past, it embodies the issue of its own time of production in the

deeper level. In other words the socio-political conditions of the early twenty-first-century are the determining factors of the novel's production. Doherty is, thus, dramatizing the present along with the past. Moreover, Doherty is also passing a message, a lesson to its intended readers that any socio-psychological problem, crisis and complexity can be solved and a new prosperous beginning can be brought with the mutual help and cooperation among individuals, state authority and the religious institution as it is shown in the novel. As it is the present socio-psychology of our own time that the author is dramatizing, it is certainly significant and relevant in the present time. In the twentieth and early twenty-first-century religious sense and faith was declining, especially in the Christian community, due to the people's tilt towards the idea of secularism. Doherty, a catholic scholar of theology and history, shows that the religious faith is also important as the state authority to face any social problem in the society. He makes an appeal to the Christian community that they should learn a lesson from their glorious past which always demands the religious unity, integration and solidarity to maintain its supremacy. Thus, the novel's revitalizing effects of the Christian faith is also found in its presentation of the socio-psychological issues.

2.5 State, Religion and Citizens

The early fourth-century was the period of great conversion of the Roman Empire from Paganism to Christianity. Official recognition of the Christianity, establishment of the interdependent relationship between the state and the Church, the unification of the Western and Eastern Empire and the Constantine's longest rule in peace, harmony and prosperity in the Roman history from 306 AD to 337 AD were the great achievement of this period (Davis 213). Among these achievements the official recognition of the

Christianity and the establishment of the interdependent relationship between Church and State are generally regarded as the landmark of the new dimension of the Roman Empire and of the whole Europe (Jones 93). Latter the Christianity became the official creed of the Empire under the rule of Theodosius the Great (379-395) (Davis 231). Regarding the great achievement of the Roman history Edward Gibbon writes:

A candid but rational inquiry into the progress and establishment of Christianity may be considered as a very essential part of the history of the Roman Empire. While the great body was invaded by open violence or undermined by slow decay, a pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself in to the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigor from opposition, and finally erected the triumphant banner of the cross on the ruins of the capital. Nor was the influence of Christianity confined to the period or to the limits of the Roman Empire. (260)

Gibbon claims that the great conversion of the fourth-century is very essential part, not only of the Roman Empire but also of the whole European and Christian history.

Christianity, before this, was suppressed and dominated with the terrible violence in the Empire. But it gradually developed as the humble religion in the Empire and finally derived its recognition as the official religion with its symbol of the cross.

Constantine's growing interest in the Christian faith and his conversion are generally regarded as the result of the vision that he had seen in his critical moment of life that is before the great victory in the battle of Milvian Bridge. Historians have different perspectives and analysis of the conversion of the Constantine. For H. A. Davis "It is far more probable that it was a political move" (211). *Murder Imperial* dramatizes the

effecting factors of the contemporary Roman society which were the possible causes behind the Constantine's conversion. The growing power of the Christianity in the Empire and its growing popularity among the citizens are the causes that the novel hints at as the Constantine's conversion to Christianity. Helena claims, "Most of Rome is Christian, as are many officers in army – at least secretly so" (17). It shows that Doherty is critical towards the great conversion of the Constantine. Presenting such critical view of the conversion, Doherty proceeds to show the developing interdependent relationship between the State and the Church. He shows the growing closeness and the relations through the activities of the Constantine, Helena, Sylvester and Claudia. Helena expresses her views towards her son's growing fascination towards Christianity which comes closer to the Davis views and also presents Constantine's growing relationship with the Christianity. Helena says, "But we are back in the amphitheatre, Claudia. One of them [Constantine and Licinius] must die. It must be Licinius. To do that, my son intends to revoke all edicts against the Christian faith" (16). It makes clear that Constantine could achieve his ambitions to become the sole Emperor of the whole Roman Empire only with the help of Christianity and its powerful Churches.

The motives of Constantine, behind adopting Christianity and developing a good relationship with the Church and its community, are clearer in the conversation between Helena and Claudia. They talk:

‘Your son the Divine Emperor will not only unite the Empire in the West but have a path into Licinius’ Empire in the East. Licinius is still hostile to Christianity,’ Claudia continued, ‘but the church in Asia is very strong,’
Helena replies:

‘. . . Constantine will dig away at the edifice Licinius has built. While that fool gilds and paints the top storeys, Constantine will be weakening the cellars and the foundations. My son will correspond with the Christian Church in Asia, gently tapping at those officers in Licinius’ army who are sympathetic to the new faith.’ (18)

It shows that Constantine wanted to conquer Licinius, the Emperor of the East, and wanted to be the sole Emperor of the whole Empire uniting the West and the East. To do this, Doherty claims, Constantine had needed the support of the Christians church in the East which was also powerful. But Licinius was still hostile to the Christianity in his Empire. So, it could be an advantage for Constantine to develop a good relationship of mutual help and cooperation with the Christian community within both parts of the Empire. Helena says that Constantine will weakens Licinius from within, establishing a good relationship with the church elders and gaining consent against Licinius in his own Empire. According to her, Constantine will weaken “the cellars and the foundations” of the Licinius’ Empire by gaining Christians’ help against him. Here, Doherty opines that the religion is “cellar” and “foundation” of the any society or of the state and to have a control over the religion is the surest way of victory in the battle between two societies or states.

It shows that Doherty is critical towards the conversion of Constantine, but he is also indicating the possible advantages of the good relation between the state and the religion. His perspectives towards the cause and motive behind Constantine’s conversion seem more reliable. Davis also puts similar remarks towards the conversion. He writes:

It is far more probable that it was a political move. The Christian religion had made such progress among the subjects that it occurred to the keen

mind of Constantine that it might be used as a means of maintaining unity and solidarity in the Empire. (211-212)

The similarities between Davis' views and the Doherty's presentations of the characters' views show that the Constantine's conversion was the demand of the time that would support Constantine to achieve his objectives. He had a realization that unless he could win the consent of the Christians and their powerful helps he would never achieve his aim of becoming the Emperor of the West and of the whole Empire. And for this he had established a good relationship with the growing Christian community by giving Christianity an official recognition, revoking all edicts, given by the previous Emperors, against the Christianity and adopting the Christian symbol, the cross, as the symbol of Imperial Force and finally conversing himself to the Christianity.

Murder Imperial presents not only the cause of Constantine conversion but also the causes of Christianity's growing favors for the Emperor Constantine. It shows the conditions in which Christianity had also needed to develop the good relationship with the State and with its rulers. The socio-political situations were so complex in the early fourth century that Christianity was also in the need of some patrons from the side of the State. Before Constantine's rule, Christianity had suffered the cruelty of the state through reoccurring persecutions. The great persecution started in 297AD and reopened many times latter on. It was very difficult for Christianity to progress in the society and to trust any Emperor completely (Jones 103-109). So, Christianity was also seeking a powerful Emperor of their favor who could be trusted and with whom a good relationship of mutual help and cooperation could be established. They were in the search of an Emperor who could guarantee their position in the Empire. In such condition Constantine had raised into

the power and had shown his favors for Christianity by many grants as mentioned in the previous paragraph. Along with the Constantine's goodwill for Christianity, Christianity had also started to develop a good relationship with the Constantine (Jones 111). In *Murder Imperial*, Doherty dramatizes this growing favors of the Christian church through the representative of characters like Sylvester, Helena, Claudia and Constantine.

In chapter II, Doherty presents the church's view towards the new Emperor, Constantine, of the West. In the banquet, organized for the Imperial Honor of the Sylvester, the Miltiades' assistant and the principal priest in the Christian community, Doherty expresses his critical views regarding the church's growing favor for Constantine. The envoy and the spokesman for the Bishop of Rome, Sylvester says:

‘Your Excellency,’ . . . ‘you do great honor to me and my father in Christ, as well as the Church of Rome. We thank God daily for your great victory. We offer constant supplication for your safety and well being. No one in Rome, apart from present company,’ . . . ‘is a more loyal supporter of you, Augustus, than Miltiades and the Christian community. We thank for the edict of toleration.’ (32)

Sylvester's expressions indicate that Christianity was also eager to develop the strong relationship with the new Emperor Constantine. It also shows that the Christian community was one of the most loyal supporter of the Emperor and ever ready to support him in the time of need. Christian community was grateful to the Emperor for his deliverance of the edict of toleration and had expected similar types of favors from the Emperor forever as the returns of their help for him. So, these expressions of Sylvester present the developing

sense of co-existence, interdependency, mutual help and cooperation between state and religion in the early fourth-century Rome.

As the new Emperor was the main source of the shelter and protection for Christians in the Empire, the Emperor's well being, safety and victories were also the subject of concern of the Christians elders. *Murder Imperial* presents this issue with the dramatization of the series of gruesome murders of the royal courtesans whom Constantine frequently visits. These murders of the courtesans raise the question of the Emperor's and Christianity's faithfulness. The murders take place in the Palatine Palace so, it becomes the issue of great concern for the Constantine and as the "cross" was carved on the forehead and each cheek of the dead courtesans, it also becomes the subject of great concern for Sylvester. Similarly it becomes the subject of concern for Claudia also as she is the spy in the Agents in Rebus. Those murdered courtesans were also the spy in the Agents in Rebus similar to Claudia. She was taking the place of Sabina, the recently murdered courtesan. So, she might be the assassin's next victim. Claudia feels the threat of danger of her life when she gets followed and threatened by the assassin inside the catacomb in chapter V. In chapter VIII, too, she becomes trapped inside the animals' den under the Colosseum with the trick of the assassin but Murranus comes and saves her. So, the search of the unidentified assassin becomes more important for Helena, Sylvester and Claudia to settle the growing problem in the Empire. Claudia is already in her mission of finding the man with the "chalice tattooed left wrist" and now Helena and Sylvester also request her to find the true identity of the assassin. Sylvester and Claudia talk:

‘That you must find out,’ . . . ‘we want these murders to end, the perpetrator to be unmasked. If you do that, Claudia,’ . . . ‘you’d not only have the

support of the Emperor and his august mother, but the personal patronage of the Bishop of Rome.’

‘And the man with the chalice on his wrist?’

‘If you do that, Claudia, there’ll be no hiding place for him. If he is alive, you will have both justice and vengeance. . . .’ (85-86)

It shows the development of the correlation, mutual help and cooperation among state, religion and citizens to settle their common problems unitedly. Finally this united effort gives them victory as Claudia finds out the assassin, Paris, and kills him by poisoning.

Thus, Doherty presents the idea of the coexistence of the religion and politic. *Murder Imperial* shows that each of them should depend on each other for their existence in the society. It also presents the idea that the betterment of any society depends upon the cooperation, mutual help and interrelationship among the state, religious institution and the society. This unity, as the novel shows, is needed to overcome the social, national and communal problems, prevailing in any society or civilization. Doherty shows that the Emperor, the Church Elders and Roman citizens of the early fourth-century had realization and understanding of the need of such unity in the state, which led them towards the new direction of prosperity.

Socio-political phenomena of the early twenty-first-century were also marked by the problems of terrorism, communal violence and social crimes. Western countries were facing the violence and bloodshed caused by the terrorism and counter terrorism wars. People viewed these growing problems of violence and bloodshed from the perspective of religious hostility as the novel presents the problem of religious clash that the Roman society had during its conversional era. Similar to the views of Nasheet Jaffer, the views of

Ali E. Hillal Dessouki also presents the perspective of communal clash to understand the global socio-political events of the first decade of the twenty-first-century. He writes:

The West is against us. Our communal unity, integration, and religious sentiments are being undermined under the mask of so called ‘War Against Terrorism’. The West wants to pollute our sacred religion and wants to extend its own Christendom in our sacred land of Islam. Their war against terrorism is just a war against the whole Islam. They are against us because they are Christian who cannot integrate with us as we cannot with them.

(23)

Dessouki claims that the Westerner’s motto and mission of “War Against Terrorism” is merely the Westerners’ attempt to suppress and to have the control over Islam. Iraq War and Afghan War are only the new form of the old communal conflict. He views that the Westerners want to maintain its religious, cultural and political supremacy in the world by extending its hegemony even in the Muslim’s land like Iraq and Afghanistan. We find the Dessouki’s request for developing the sense of religious unity to face the West in his expression. It shows that the Huntington’s prediction about the clash of civilization was coming to be true in the perspective of the Muslims scholars like Nasheet Jaffer and Ali E. Hillal. Charles Townshand also claims that the “revival of religious fundamentalism” was the main cause of violence and bloodshed that marked the end of twentieth-century and the beginning of the twenty-first-century (96).

Murder Imperial was written in the troublesome time of early twenty-first-century. Doherty was rewriting the history of Christianity’s glorious past and of the Western civilization in the period in which the world was going through religious, communal and

the civilizational tensions as it is mentioned above. Doherty, a Westerner, Christian-Catholic, a scholar of theology and history, now seems to be, rewriting the history of Christians' glorious past in the form of historical mystery with the issue of religious faith which is relevant to his own time. His invocation of the spirit of the Christian faith, now, seems to be his attempt to revitalize the spirit of lost faith of Christianity, once again, in the Western civilization through the *Murder Imperial*. His presentation of the collaborative success of the historical characters possess the reawakening effect for the Western state leaders, Church Elders and the whole Westerners to learn the lesson from their glorious past and to develop similar sense of coexistence between religion and politics and to establish a correlation among state church and citizens to promote mutual help and cooperation. Doherty seems to be implicitly suggesting the way out for the problems of violence and bloodshed, which the West was facing at that time, and for maintaining its supremacy in the world forever. The western countries had developed and adopted the idea of secularism in the nineteenth and twentieth-century. It had developed the gap in the relationship between politics and religion. And Doherty seems to be suggesting for not to wide the gap but to fill it and reestablish the lost relationship of mutual help, cooperation, sense of interdependence and coexistence among the state, church and citizens. In Nietzsche's view, Doherty is monumentalizing the Christian's glorious past to suggest "that the greatness which once was there at all events was possible and therefore will really be possible once again" (Nietzsche 187). All these indicates that *Murder Imperial* has the revitalizing effect of the Christian faith and also possess a message to rebuild and revive the relationship among state, church and citizens, especially, in the Western civilization, to

face and settle the present problems of violence and bloodshed and to maintain Western supremacy in the world.

2.6 Ideology in *Murder Imperial*

The term “ideology” was first applied by Marxist thinkers like Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Georg Lukacs and Luis Althusser to refer to the product of any society’s economic structure and the resulting class-relations and class interests. But in the present time it is used to refer any “political idea” that a text embodies. Summarizing the concepts of Marxist and other poststructuralist thinkers, especially the ideas of new historicists like Foucault, Sinfield, Althusser and Louis Montrose, Abrams defines ideology as:

“Ideology” is used in a variety of non-Marxist ways, ranging from a derogatory name for any set of political ideas that are held dogmatically and applied rigorously, to a neutral name for ways of perceiving and thinking that are specific to an individual’s race, sex, nationality, education, or ethnic group. (155-156)

Ideology, according to Abrams, is used now days for any “political idea” which is held by any individual “dogmatically.” Such ideas guide the individuals’ “ways of perceiving and thinking” about any event or happening in a society. For Abrams such ideology is common to all individuals who belong to a certain group in the society such as “race, sex, nationality, education or ethnic group.”

Without the discussion of ideology the analysis of any text becomes incomplete in new historical interpretation. In the case of *Murder Imperial* also it becomes necessary to find the ideology to bring its political ideas out into the light. To do this it is important to observe the novel’s presentation of the issues such as the horror of violence and bloodshed,

communal conflict, religious conflict and political problems. *Murder Imperial* presents the conflict between Christianity and Paganism in the early fourth-century Roman Empire. Violence and bloodshed had made the citizens and rulers horrified. The growing popularity of Christianity and Constantine get terrible shock due to the murders of the royal courtesans. The unknown assassin leaves his identity only as an enemy of both Christianity and Constantine with the mark of carved cross on forehead and on each cheek of the murdered courtesans. The novel, moreover, makes the problem of religious clash even in the prologue in which Claudia's brother, Felix gets murdered and Claudia abused by an unidentified man. The "chalice tattooed on his left wrist" indicates that he is not a Christian but "possibly a priest of the Dionysiac rite" or of a "member of the Mithras cult" (263). The conflict creates the problem of Constantine's safety and credibility in religious faith, doubt in the faith of the Christianity and the problem of public safety. This conflict also raises the political problem between the Western and Eastern Empires. In the conversation between Sylvester and Claudia, Doherty writes:

‘He [the assassin] may,’ Sylvester explained, ‘have been working for an agent of Licinius, someone close to Constantine, who is trying to discredit the Emperor and us by these murders.’

‘So, Licinius is behind it all?’

‘Yes, Licinius and a traitor at Constantine’s court.’ (79)

This piece of conversation shows that the political interests are also merged with the communal conflict between Christianity and Paganism. The novel has a loose ending in which the Christianity, Constantine appear victorious along with Claudia's victory over the Paris, the Sicarius or the assassin. Claudia identifies him, gathers evidences and tricks him

to death by poisoning. The collaborative work of the Emperor, Sylvester, Claudia and Murranus brings this victory which ends the horror of bloodshed and disbelief among State, religion and citizens that was rooted in the socio-psychology of the people.

So, the novel presents the supremacy of the Christianity, of its Christian rulers and of the Christian community over the non-Christian community. This is the Christian ideology which provides its Christian readers with the historical sense of their glorious past and the sense of their supremacy in the world societies. “Ideology produces, makes plausible, concept and explain who we are, who the others are, how the world works” (Sinfield 806). The novel presents the dichotomy between Christian and non-Christian and forms the concept of supremacy in its Christian readers. It leads them to realize their historical belongingness and provides them with the religious and cultural perspective to analyze their own socio-political phenomena. It is the same in the case of critic Ben Witherington who have the realization of the supremacy of his religious, cultural and historical background. He is optimistic towards the Christian supremacy when he writes, “. . . , we learn about what happens when Christian gains power” (1). For Witherington *Murder Imperial* provides the idea that when Christianity gains supreme power any communal conflict can be solved with the collaborative work of Christian leaders, Christian rulers and the Christian citizens. Thus, the experience of Witherington fits exactly to the definition of ideology of Sinfield as cited above. Alan Sinfield further writes:

Ideology is produced everywhere and all the time in the social order, but some institutions- by definition, those that usually corroborate the prevailing power arrangement- are vastly more powerful than others. The stories they endorse are more difficult to challenge, even to disbelieve. Such

institutions, and the people in them, are also constituted in ideology; they are figures in its stories. At the same time, I would not want to lose a traditional sense of the power elite in the state exercising authority, through the ideological framework it both inhabits and maintains, over subordinate groups. (808)

According to Sinfield ideology is a common day to day activity in the society. Some institutions such as art and literature, politics and history are more effective in producing ideology in the society, because they “usually corroborate the prevailing power”. It is “difficult to challenge” such ideologies and also difficult to prove false. The characters in a discourse stand for certain ideology and their activities are also guided by such ideologies.

Murder Imperial, in this regard, presents the communal conflict of early twenty-first-century. The characters dramatize the Christian values such as religious faithfulness, bravery, kindness and mutual help among its members. Sylvester stands for faithfulness and clarity, Helena and Constantine stand for political supremacy Christians and finally Claudia and Murranus stand for bravery, kindness and intelligence. *Murder Imperial* intends to promote these values in the Christian readers by invoking the glory of their past. Its presentation of the Christianity as superior or victorious and anti-Christianity as inferior, thus, makes clearer the Christian ideology more visible throughout the novel.

To sum up, *Murder Imperial*, written by a Catholic-Christian scholar of history and theology, embodies the Christian ideology which circulates the concept of Christian supremacy in the world by presenting the evidence from its glorious past of Constantine time. This ideology creates a boundary between Christians and non-Christians and

suppresses or dominates the non-Christian by contributing the features like inferior, cruel, blood-thirsty, and irrational.

III. Politics of Rewriting History in *Murder Imperial*

Paul Doherty's *Murder Imperial* is a historical mystery that contains historically reliable information about the great conversion era of early fourth-century Rome. It presents the communal, religious and political conflicts of the period along with the horrors of violence and bloodshed that reflect the socio-psychology of the Roman conversion era. The novel brings out the violence and bloodshed which were the result of the transitional phase of Roman history and also of the religious and communal clash between Christianity and Paganism. Doherty's novel also explores the political, religious and social causes behind Constantine's conversion which are closer to objectivity and clarity. So, on the surface, the novel presents the knowledge of Christianity's glorious past and the early fourth-century Roman history along with the pleasure of historical and crime mystery.

Murder Imperial dramatizes the political supremacy of Constantine that equates to the religious supremacy of Christianity. It also presents the idea of coexistence, interdependent relationship between religion and state, and the mutual help among Church elders, state rulers and citizens to solve any problem in the society such as communal, religious, political, psychological, and so on. The similarities between the conflicts in the novel and the conflict in the global politics of early twenty-first-century prove that the novel is the production of Doherty's consciousness of both time periods; ancient Rome and the world of our own time. It also proves the new historicists' claim, that is, a literary text can never be a "trans historical" entity. Showing the similarities or reflecting the issues of early twenty-first-century the novel, implicitly, pleads the Westerner leaders and church authorities to face the new challenges and threats of

civilizational conflicts jointly as it is shown in the novel. The Christian forefathers and the Constantine had realized this fact and Doherty dramatizes their realizations to make aware church and states about the historical lesson.

In the period of communal violence and conflict, the early twenty-first-century, the novel circulates the Christian ideology in its contemporary Christian readers and forms the concept of their supremacy over other non-Christian community. By showing Christian community victorious, the novel imparts an optimistic vision for the Christian community of early twenty-first-century during which it was challenged and threatened by violence and bloodshed due to the terrorist attacks made by non-Christian communities.

When one puts the novel within its totality of the larger contexts, the revitalizing ideology of Christian faith becomes clear. In the year of early twenty-first-century, in which the religious faith was declining, Doherty brings the pride and honor of Christian's glorious past into the awareness of the Christian community. Implicitly, *Murder Imperial* pleads the Christian communities to unit and work collaboratively by developing the relationship of coexistence, interdependence and promoting cooperation, mutual help and self confidence among the state rulers, church authorities and the citizens to confront the new challenges and threats of contemporary society. The novel also shows that the Christianity is always superior and dominating throughout the history and will remain forever superior in the world. Thus, in *Murder Imperial*, Doherty creates a discourse and circulates the Christian ideology to revitalize its religious faith, rewriting the history of Christianity's glorious past in a form of a fictional wor

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