

Epistemic Silencing of Women in Hilary Mantel's Wolf Hall.

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ABSTRACT

Hilary Mantel, a versatile writer hailing from England, is known for the narrative vigour and for her utmost realistic presentation of history in her fiction. A writer who specifically employs her narrative style in the portrayal of Tudor England in her historical trilogy, the Wolf Hall trilogy, which consists of novels like Wolf Hall, Bring Up the Bodies and The Mirror and the Light. It is through her publication of this trilogy that earned her two Booker prizes in the year 2009 for Wolf Hall and in 2012 for her Bring Up the Bodies. She is one of the writers in the British domain who redefined the conventions of writing Historical fiction by blending facts from history with the revisionist perspective of the past. Though Mantel's Wolf Hall Trilogy centres on phallogentric Tudor England, it also offers a feminist re-reading of the age. The present article focuses on how Mantel challenges phallogentric patriarchy by recentering the experiences of women in the Tudor Society. Mantel also questions the gendered power structure, with the limitations imposed on female sections. In the male-dominated sphere, the paper has also focused on the inner turmoil induced in women by the injurious deeds caused by men of the court. Key Words: Ecriture-feminism, Historical fiction, Gendered power structure, Psychological Turmoil, Gender Politics.

"... defining the word 'woman' as resting on the word 'man' is a reactionary position; should I not carve out an independent definition for myself as a woman?" - Gayatri Spivak.

Hilary Mantel, a British writer who is well known for being the recipient of two Booker prizes. Novels of Mantel are not restricted to a common theme or context. She has written more than twelve novels, all those novels deal with a variety of themes like motherhood, black humour, psychological disturbances, elements of autobiography, religious prejudices, Socio-political issues or cultural issues set in a historical milieu. Her specialisation lies in intermingling reality with fiction and history with fiction. Intermingling of reality and fiction is evident in *The Giant O'Brien* (1998), where she describes the true account of life of Charles O'Brien and about the anatomist Hunter, who is willing to have Charles body to examine. The assortment of history with fiction is given by her through *The Wolf Hall Trilogy*, which includes *Wolf Hall* (2009), *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012), *The Mirror and the Light* (2020).

Mantel's Wolf Hall Trilogy comprises Wolf Hall (2009), Bring Up the Bodies (2010), and The Mirror and the Light (2020). The focus of all three novels predominantly talks about the physical and psychological growth and development of Thomas Cromwell in the Tudor Dynasty. Mantel, as a famous historical fiction writer, has done justice to her central character, but also highlights the darkest, undesirable circumstances under which Tudor women lived

their lives. Even their social status or their economic background couldn't spare them from the respect they deserved. The *Wolf Hall* revolves around the childhood of Thomas Cromwell at the age of seven, how he was badly treated by his own father, who would beat him every day over nothing and even scare him to death.

Thomas Cromwell escapes from his father with the help of his sister, Kat and her husband. He does all sorts of jobs; goes on errands, and does all odd jobs. He works as an apprentice to a butcher, and he works on a ship to transport cargo and weapons. Cromwell also worked under his uncle, who was a cook at Thomas More's household. He was also an ardent soldier who actively participated in the Hundred Years' War on the side of France; thus, he began his journey from France to England, where he first met Sir Cardinal Wolsey, and then he rose to a position as the Lord Chancellor of Tudor England after the downfall of his master, Cardinal Wolsey. Soon, because of his position, he was told to annul the marriage between Katherine of Aragon and himself, while Katherine of Aragon was lawfully wedded to King Henry VIII. He immediately wanted to get rid of Queen Katherine because he was already waiting to marry Lady Anne Boleyn, who was a lady-in-waiting to the queen.

Henry VIII is obsessed with the male heir; when he begets a female child from Queen Katherine, he places this as a major allegation for the annulment of his marriage with her. He considers begetting a female heir as a curse or an ill deed, "Why have I been left after twenty years with one frail daughter, whom any vagrant wind may destroy" (81 *Wolf Hall*). Thus immediately it is followed by the annulment of marriage. Henry VIII forces Queen Katherine to accept this annulment of marriage through Cardinal Campeggio, "Cardinal Campeggio has implored Katherine to bow to the king's will to accept that her marriage is invalid and to retire to a convent" (144, *Wolf Hall*).

The reason for the marriage to happen between King Henry VIII and Queen Katherine was solely to produce a legal heir to the throne of England that too only a son, because they believed that the scriptures stated that a woman to rule the country is considered to be odd Cardinal justifies that, "But I think it is generally understood, in the Scriptures, that "children" means "sons"."(24, *Wolf Hall*).

Women in the *Wolf Hall* are often found to be the subjects of their husbands, who are kept docile by the patriarchal standards it is not the woman who decides what to do but it is the man in the family who decides what she ought to do, it is set like "a compact between the ruler and the ruled, and that between husband and wife. Both these arrangements rest on a sedulous devotion, the one to the interests of others. The master and husband protect and provide; the wife and servant obey"(338, *Wolf Hall*). Women belonging to the Royal household also face the same fate as that of a servant.

Queen Katherine, for instance, was married based on the decisions made by Henry VII, father of King Arthur and Henry VIII. She was married to King Arthur the brother of Henry VIII, but as Arthur died on the battlefield, she was forcefully married to her own brother-in-law as the father-in-law was much concerned about the legacy to sustain in his Kingdom. Katherine was handled as a puppet in the hands of the dominant patriarchal society, which later led to her eventual death :

I was first addressed as Princess of Wales when I was three years old. I was sixteen when I came here to marry my lord Arthur. I was a virgin and seventeen when he died. I was twenty-four years old when I became Queen of England, and I will say for the avoidance of doubt that I am at present aged forty-six, and still queen, and by now, I believe, a sort of Englishwoman (288, *Wolf Hall*).

Mantel then shifts her focus to Mary Tudor, who is the first legal heir of the Tudor family, but, unfortunately, being born a woman, she is not only denied the throne of England but also considered to be an illegitimate child of Henry VIII after the annulment of the marriage of Queen Katherine. Though being a noble woman she is denied of her right and her status, she is reduced to being a nanny-sitter to the daughter of Anne Boleyn and in the novel Mary Tudor is often shown as a very meek and a subtle character and she remains mute, “with the reasonable risk of being misunderstood or misapplied by the audience”, this formulation by Krite Doston is called ‘testimonial smothering’ (*Full Article: Epistemic Paternalism and Protective Authority in a Non-Ideal World*), hence it is clearly visible that Mary Tudor and her mother Lady Katherine is Epistemically silenced by the male aristocratic monarchy.

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