

Journal of Higher Education and Research Society:
A Refereed International

VOL- 11 / ISSUE- 1

www. herso. org



ISSN- 2349 0209

Online Peer Reviewed Journal
Indexed by Advance Science Indexing, Europe

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POSTMODERN COUNTER-NARRATIVE: REMAPPING HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES IN HILARY MANTEL'S OEUVRE

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Abstract

A prominent postmodern writer whose brilliance and literary ingenuity are truly unparalleled. One could say Hilary Mantel is a whip hand when it comes to her narrative prowess. She has effectively reset the course of historical discourse through her historical fiction. The conventional postmodern paradigm has found an innovative perspective in her novels. Hilary Mantel's novels are a supplement to Linda Hutcheon's ideas of historiographic metafiction which enunciates an entirely original contemporary narrative. Through the characters, incidents, events and idiosyncratic techniques, the author has achieved great panache which seems to be immersed deep into the postmodern historicity of the text. The aim of the present paper is to study Hilary Mantel's novels more specifically her Wolf Hall Trilogy in line with Linda Hutcheon's construct of historiographic meta-fiction and intertextuality.

Keywords: Postmodern, Counter-narrative, Historiographic meta-fiction, Intertextuality

POSTMODERN COUNTER-NARRATIVE: REMAPPING HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES IN HILARY MANTEL'S OEUVRE

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Despite the fact that postmodern fiction has always been an exclusive genre that has captured the attention of contemporary writers, the course of history has changed gradually over the years. It has emerged from postmodern perceptions that the novelness of the typical narrative is becoming a topic of discussion. This period seems to be influenced by contemporary writers' different ways of writing fiction. Those who were associated with the late modern domain of fiction seem to be under the influence of postmodern theorists. Since then, the postmodern has been a boon for contemporary writers. With a fine touch of history, postmodern literature has been heavily experimented with, altered and subverted. The fiction of the postmodern period could be identified as a counter-narrative to postmodern narrative capability because the way it was produced sparked a totally new narrative of history.

The author Hilary Mantel to a significant extent endorses the counter-narrative. That being so case, she has certainly had the ability to fragment and reshape the narrative structure and give an absolutely new alternative to the story. A distinct narrative or somewhat alternative intertextual occurrence could be found throughout her novels. *I would rather discover Hilary Mantel as an author who is more inclined towards 'demythologizing business'* (1) which is said to be attributed to the author Angela Carter. Hilary Mantel's novels have the ability to demythologize that subtlety. Therefore the era of alternative narrative has been exponentially influenced by postmodern practitioners, who have provided ample ways of interpreting literary texts. The history of the past literary ethos can be reimagined in postmodern perspectives, which is where postmodern contemporary theory steps in. To be mentioned few postmodern critics which would definitely seem to have been reflected through postmodern novels, needless to say, Jacques

Derrida's theory of deconstruction, his ideas behind this theory is to provide an alternative interpretation, however, later it has been extensively redefined by postmodern novelists like Hilary Mantel, Don De Lillo, Julian Barnes, Salman Rushdie and Michel Ondaatje in their novels. Those novels have 'the specific textual strategies that historiographic genres—such as the postmodern novel, the Canadian long poem, the short story and to some extent, the film genre—use to present their self-reflexive interaction between history and fiction.'(2). Being historical fiction, Hilary Mantel's novels might fix themselves somewhere in the relevant past. History seems to be very adjacent to Hilary Mantel, which could be visible across the plethora of her novels. In an interview, she rightly puts *I only became a novelist because I thought I had missed my chance to become a historian* (3). Her statement to become a historian makes it more valid that an influence of postmodern historical compulsiveness and textual references is probably visible in her novels. Those postmodern novelists would by default find meaning in already established stories by subverting and moulding them in a postmodern aura. Indeed, Hilary Mantel could carry through postmodern ethos in many possible ways, it would not go in vain to say, she has the ability to reassess the past and fabricate it uniquely because of postmodern fiction, according to Foucault *They did not have a predetermined starting point and destination. They were merely lines laid down for you to pursue or to divert elsewhere, for me to extend upon or re-design as the case might be. They are, in the final analysis, just fragments, and it is up to you or me to see what we can make of them.* (4). Certainly, Hilary Mantel held that capacity to recalibrate established narrative. For instance, whether her novel *Bring up the Bodies* or *Wolf Hall* or the later part of her trilogy, all have meticulously dealt with the past in order to render a new historical account. Nevertheless, it has also to be noted that Hilary Mantel's novels *do not surrender their autonomy as fiction* (5), a sturdy finesse in dealing with past stories might have been obtained by Hilary Mantel; that expertise of her will no longer leave any setback in her fictional work. She could bring back Cromwell into a new life, where history seems very relevant and thematic, a reader, while going through the narrative aura, will surely get a feeling of hyper-aware how perfect a blend of history and fiction can be redefined in postmodern novels like *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* which stand as a prototype of Historiographic Metafiction.

The objectivity of fiction has been confronted in the postmodern era. It may be due to the extensive emergence of multiple narrative structures, avant-garde methods of writing fiction and probably postmodern artistry have long been utilized and mobilized to leverage their narrative procedures. This certainly enables contemporary writers to come up with different perspectives on writing fiction, being a part of that transitional shift, those writers to some extent could succeed in challenging the long-established notion of bringing meaning to a text. The novels of Hilary Mantel would perhaps manifest the long-accepted notion of postmodern assessment of the past. History in fiction is crucially delineated, somewhat altered, because the scope in the postmodern period has widened its horizon, from postmodern theorists to postmodern novelists. The era inclined towards hands-on experimentation with a history that's how it has become a subject of discussion by those writers. Certainly, postmodern fiction has been through constructive discontinuities when it comes to its narratology those narrative structures procured in contemporary fiction, are hyper-visible in postmodern novelists like Hilary Mantel and others. Alun Munslow rightly puts this in his important work 'Deconstructing history' that *history cannot exist for the reader until the historian writes in its obligatory Form: narrative* (6). Hilary Mantel did not leave any chance to become a historian in her novels, however, she employed all the calibre to narrate a history as real history and to some extent, characters, events and dialogues from her novels seem to be made fictional. A perfect assimilation of history and fiction can a reader observe while reading *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*.

Hilary Mantel could go into the past through her novels and observe the characters, incidents, events and their dialogues. Many times, some postmodern novelists incorporate real places and some employ fictional ones. Here in novels like *Wolf* and *Bring up the Bodies*, she used postmodern narrative techniques, a reader could feel themselves going backwards in the past, seeing real places and coming forth to the fictional autonomy of a novel. The novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* are set up and appeared at many different locations. Some seem to be fictional and others are real places from the past. Hilary Mantel used many historical characters and places throughout her novel to bring the stories of Henry VIII, Anne Boylen and certainly Thomas Cromwell close to the readers. Places like Wiltshire, London, At court and Northamben land are seen in *Wolf Hall* and

Bring up the Bodies. The author tried to recreate the stories of historical characters like King Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn, his second wife, Jane Seymour and the world of the Tudor Dynasty. She unfolds the stories from the eyes of a flagship character of her trilogy Thomas Cromwell who is at the core of the storyline. History can be changed without changing its historical complexion, as a novelist, she deliberately used historical events of real people with adequate fictive attributes. The vivid description of a character gives an absolutely comprehensive picture of the historical liveliness she brings to the reader. A statement from the novel *Bring up the Bodies* is evidence where she puts, *Thomas Cromwell is now about fifty years old. He has a labourer's body, stocky, useful, and running to fat. He has black hair greying now, and because of his pale impermeable skin which seems designed to resist rain as well as the sun.* (7)

Cromwell, one of the lead characters from her trilogy, the author seems to be narrating him as if she was actually present in that vicinity. This convinces the reader that historical facts are well embedded with minutes imaginary and how carefully it was handled by Hilary Mantel. Linda Hutcheon's *Historiographic Metafiction* has been laboriously concentrated in both novels. Hilary Mantel does stimulate these ideas as she was hyper-aware about the equivocal nature of the texts because postmodern fiction is extremely *the artificiality of historical representation, or to the narrative devices that give shape to historical material*'.(8) A novel's fictive niceties and its historical imperative both have keenly operated with sheer brilliance by Hilary Mantel. In her first part of a trilogy, *Wolf hall* Hilary Mantel opens up the vividness that the reader could feel visiting the past. She gives minutes details of the atmosphere, which takes the reader directly into the past through the description given in the novel, *It was snowing at dawn on the day of the raid on Lion's Quay, but soon a wintery sun was up, scouring windowpanes and casting the panelled rooms of city houses into sharp relief, ravines of shadows and cold floods of light.* (9)

Hilary Mantel actually experienced the past with her postmodern narrative techniques, she could present a real picture of history and then made the reader realize the fictional status of a text. Her description of characters, multiple events and incidents their dialogues, and liveliness of those historical figures seem very relevant and quintessential,

rather most post-modernic in nature. To understand Historiographic Metafiction she has meticulously incorporated her narrative skills throughout the novels. She was more into fragmenting a plot rather simply following the traditional narrative structures, where authors used a straight and clear linear storyline. The postmodern novelists felt a need for fragmented narrative procedures. Where the author would take full liberty with narrative techniques and could reassess the past with fictional elements. Because postmodern novels have had that scope of story-telling from history, assembling multiple stories having historical implications is well incorporated by postmodern authors. This has appropriately echoed in Hilary Mantel's novels. Frank Kermode says in his essay 'Novel, History and Types' that *there are some obvious ways in which a novel resembles a historical narrative. A narrative is a structure imposed upon events* (10). Hilary Mantel's novels are themselves historical in nature as they extensively demonstrate historical events. Alongside, she has the ability to reassemble historical narrative as it is clearly visible in her *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*. Even so, letters were used in novels which also make historical events more valid and reliable. Such narrative techniques take a reader close to those characters, incidents and events and extract meaning from their perspectives.

There is a structured narrative that could be identified in Hilary Mantel's novels. She has very well incorporated fictive elements in dialogues as well. Those characters engaged in conversation somewhat present in the novel as Hilary Mantel actually lived with them. Her depiction of history is magnificent and certainly distinct from any other postmodern novelist because she was well-versed in handling the past without surrendering a text as fiction. The elements of Historiographic Metafictional are everywhere in her novel. A description of the conversation in *Bring up the Bodies* gives a comprehensive understanding of its history and fiction in postmodern contexts. A dialogue goes

Sometimes the king departs a place with just his riding household, the queen left behind with her ladies and musicians, as Henry and his favoured few hunt hard across the country. And that is how they come to Wolf Hall, where old Sir John Seymour is waiting to welcome them, in the midst of his flourishing family.

I don't know, Cromwell, old Sir John says. He takes his arm, genial 'All these falcons named for dead women... don't they dishearten you?'

'I' m never disheartened, Sir John. The word is too good to me.

'You should marry again, and have another family. Perhaps you will find a bright while you are with us. In the forest of Savernake there are many fresh young women"(12)

The conversation seems to be in the presence of Hilary Mantel as she provides a reader with multiple interpretations, and her depiction has the ability to balance history and fiction which can be observed in the conversations from the novels. Hilary Mantel represents true Historical characters like Thomas Cromwell and Anne Boleyn, however, she employed some fragmented narrative techniques in describing how history can be narrated by the choices made by Hilary Mantel where she has shown the fictional status of the characters, events and incidents which substantiate elements of Historiographic Metafiction.

History has been a very significant phenomenon over the years. It opens up multiple interpretations of a given proposition. No matter how small or large the effect of the past is, it cannot disappear. It is deeply ingrained in the thought and discourse of philosophers and theorists. As part of the postmodern period of intellectual inquiry, postmodern novelists were said to alter and subvert history. Postmodern discourse has certainly brought with it a sway of narrative techniques that enable contemporary novelists to experiment with history. Here, needless to say, Linda Hutcheon's construct of Historiographic Metafiction has to a substantial extent influenced postmodern novelists like Hilary Mantel, Don De Lillo, and Julian Barnes, Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje and many others. Readers can sense the double-edged balance of history and fiction as they read postmodern novels. Therefore, Hilary Mantel's novels succeed in providing an alternative version of history. Her development of counter-narrative is also as magnificent as any other postmodern novel. Because she throughout believed in the fragmented narrative, her novels do not endorse linear stories which certainly makes them stand alone. With these all historical

perspectives, Hilary Mantel's novels demonstrate the elements of historiographic metafiction.

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