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HAUNTED BY THE SELF: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ECHOES IN THE
SELECT FICTION OF HILARY MANTEL

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Identity,
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Pain.

Abstract

This research paper explores the autobiographical perspectives in the novel of Hilary Mantel. Hilary Mantel considered the most acclaimed British author of contemporary fiction. She remains unnoticed after the publication of her trilogy on Thomas Cromwell's life. The present article is an attempt to show autobiographical elements in her novels that Mantels focused on her family life, alienation, feminism, religion, power, politics and childhood. Hilary Mantel was suffering from Endometriosis, which causes her many pain and infertility. Her life was fairly lonely and austere. Though Mantel's novels historical in content but in some context it contains autobiographical elements and intimate details of her life especially Every Day is a Mother's Day (1985), Vacant Possession (1986), Eight Months on Gazzah Streets (1988), A change in climate (1994), An experiment in love (1995), a collection of short-stories Learning to Talk (2003), and a memoir Giving up the Ghost (2003). She deals with loss of dream, faith, children, childhood, religion, migration and roots.



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1.Introduction

Hilary Mantel is one of the greatest British generation novelists of the century. Her works includes personal memoirs, novels and short story. She had been seriously ill from the effect of serious disease endometriosis for her entire life. She is the winner of most prestigious Man Booker Prize for *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring up the Bodies* (2012). She never shy away from the mixing up his life with fiction. She is known as a master of handling of various themes. She won the most prestigious award twice for her two masterpieces. She represents the stories of human life compactly, precisely and intelligently. Her life is a journey of many trials and tribulation. This journey goes through her childhood, education, marriage, illness, stay abroad, divorce remarriage to the same man, social work, law, duties and loneliness taking writer as career and winning the greatest prize. Hilary Mantel fiction interlaced personal history with inventive reworking of historical and contemporary life. Mental live through a disquieting childhood mark by her illnesses , pain, gap and religious upheaval that she later transfigure into her writing. Mantel often takes some personal fragment and converts out of it a strange fiction. Her writing is often driven by memory of her childhood and past. Her writings are rich and versatile indeed: she has written historical novels, dealt with postcolonial and feminist issues. This would be an injustice to classify her in main literary trend on genre. There is an impact of her personal life in her work it cannot be denied completely,

“I am not writing to solicit any special sympathy. People survive much worse and never but pen to paper. I am writing in order to take charge of childhood and any childlessness, and in order to locate myself, if not within a body; then in a narrow space between one letter and the next, between the lines where the ghosts of meaning are. (GUG 222)”

Hilary Mantels literary career started with the publication of his first full novel, *Every Day is a Mother's Day* (1985). Many critics criticize this novel for its general theme. *Every Day is a Mother's Day* and its sequel *Vacant Possession* (1986), deals with the theme of displacement, illness, unstable home life. In novel there is a mother named Evelyn and her mentally disturbed daughter Muriel. Muriel was engaged in love affair of a married man named Collins and a social worker Isabel. The story falls in the category of dark comedy. Muriel gave birth to a baby and Evelyn faces all the difficulty alone. They want to drop that infant in a river. She tells Muriel before putting the box with the child in the river:

“Well now, Muriel, are you ready?” she asked, going downstairs.” It will be dark before long. You carry the box. Sink or swim, we will have to see. We all take our chances in this world.”

“All right,” Muriel said. (EDMD190)

Here, there is a clear reflection of Mental longing for a child as Muriel is alone, mentally retorted and dependent so she sent to a rescue centre. This novel provides a picture of the impact of family



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on an individual and longing for child. It is a picture of a child's attitude towards her own body. The aim of this paper is to study, how most of these novel are linked with Mantel's life in some way, as well as to explore how its effects the characters.

Eight months on Gazzah Street was published in (1988). The novel contains autobiographical details that presents the protagonists who are outsiders alienated from the society's mainstream. This novel is a clear story of gender discrimination restlessness, diaspora and marginalized. It depicts the story of a British couple, Frances and Andrew Shore in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. They both came here for a job. Frances finds gender discrimination at the core of the society. She explores the different culture in Saudi Arabia and finds a thought of struggle between two cultures Middle East and Western as well as a gap in men and women. Throughout the novel, she remains single narrator and moves between transition of culture, urban environment, city escape margin and International countries and territories.

Eight Months on Gazzah Street, is described by Nick Rennison as Mantel's "most overtly political novel," as it is "filled with a sense of outrage at the Saudi social system and Western willingness, for financial reason, to turn a blind eye to its human rights abuses." (98) This novel is a clear record of the downfall of its protagonist. Thus, Mantel time spend in both England and Saudi Arabia has depend her inside into various social and political matters related to Arab and their her interview with Arias Rosario, she maintain that Eight Month on Gazzah Street is a "true record", a "true accurate account" and a "form of recovered memory" that has "the texture of lived experience". (286) Frances experiences profound isolation in her new residence, which is an apartment, devoid of a telephone accompanied by unfamiliar noises emanating from what is assumed to be an unoccupied adjoining unit. She is mentally unmoored and entirely consumed by Paranoia as overwhelming sensations of suspicions and alienation pervade her surroundings.

"When she goes out into the hallway she is watchful ; she listens ; she casts a glance over her shoulder and up the stairs .If she hears a door open , her heart leaps . There is a feeling that something is going on, just outside her range of vision." (126)

Through Frances Mantel's reflects her past by trapped in multiple ways: within the building that she live in, by cultural and religious attitudes she despises, and ultimately in a country that she longs to leave as soon as possible. Further she builds a sense of Disorientation, Claustrophobia and paranoia I presenting the bleak everyday life of her protagonist, she struggles to adjust to her surroundings. Mantel's feeling of being alone and disconnected truly becomes clear through the portrayal of her ending days filled with emptiness, as she opts to remain in a vacant apartment inhaling the stale air. For Frances says,



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“On this map a vacant lot [...] we don’t exist. In our mind each of us draw a line between homeland and exile. Our identity depends on how we locate ourselves in time and space, along this love.” (EMOGS.p.81-94)

Thus Mantel’s investigation into the intricacies of “Cultural Conflict “and the foresight and susceptibility of those on the outside is far from and quite pressing.

Mantel grew up in a strict Catholic environment which is mirrored in the setting of Fludd. Mantel’s novel often fill the gap of personal touch by presenting or elaborating the theme of religious upbringing and loss. Since her childhood she was a Catholic, and attended Convent school that shaped her outlook toward religion. In the novel Fludd (1989) she exposes the religious loss. She found herself disillusioned and displace. Fludd (1989) is a totally different novel. This novel explores the themes of displacement loss in faith in religious. All the characters of this novel undergo a transformation. An imaginary village of North England called Fetherhoughton there the main character Father Angwin has lost his faith in God. Father Angwin confesses his loss of faith in God and religion but he sermon and perform his duties for the parish people. “Faith is dead”, Father Angwin said, “Its time is up. And faith being dead. If we are not to become automatons we must hang on to our superstition as hard as we may.” (FD p.27.)

The novel reveals the theme of rigidity repression and hypocrisy with in institutional religion that Mantel experienced during her upbringing, Her portrayal of landscape, weather, and working class life is deeply personal and emotionally charged. The oppressive authoritative presence in Fludd, particularly from the Church, reflects Mantel’s own unfavorable encounters with institutional power especially in the context of religion and education during her formative years. She possesses empathy for individuals constrained by societal for religious expectations. In Fludd, figures such as both spiritual and emotional renewal paralleling Mantel’s personal quest for liberation and intellectual growth, Nice Gerrard view might properly end the discussion as she calls.

“Fludd is a quiet lovely novel, thick with images and angry jubilant characters who defy the authority of a finger-wagging God and his “pork-Butcher.” Bishop and choose mystery and wholly expectations .It doesn’t only believe in miracle; it believes in happy endings.(“more than Just Making Do,” in New Statesman & Society, Vol.85, September 15, 1989:34)

Hilary Mantel is a versatile writer indeed: she has written many issues such as complexities of life, historical novels and social novels. Her own life has been very critical and tough. A Change of Climate was first published in 1994, which can recognize as a work that encompasses numerous autobiographical elements, alongside a diverse range of subjects. Mantel expresses more concerns in her narrative. This book explores themes surrounding the essence of good verses evil, and it is likely due to the manner in which Mantel tackles these complex topics that is received substantial acclaim and recognition from critics. A Change of Climate narrates the experiences of Eldred family at two



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distinct phases of their existence: their time as missionaries in South Africa and their lives Norfolk, England, twenty years later, during the 1980's where they continue to engage in charitable activities for their community. When Raphael is compelled to abandon his aspirations of becoming a geologist, taking a stand against his father views, which he perceives as contrary to God and faith relocate to South Africa with his wife Anna, shortly after their wedding. There they face the horrors and injustice of Apartheid, dedicating them to assisting as much as possible. However, it is unavoidable for them to disregard the circumstances that the Black South Africans endeavored, and when they speak out against it, they face imprisonment. In this new location, they experience one of the most tragic incidents of their existence – the loss of a child .Following this heartbreaking events, they returned to England, choosing to remain silent. After this event their lives will change completely. Both Ralph and Anna lost their faith in God like most of the characters of Mantel, Ralph tells his uncle:

“I wish we had never left England. I do believe that any good we have done here can compensate for a hundredth part of what we have suffered, and for what we will suffer as our lives go on (...).Don't advise me to pray ,because I don't feel that prayers meet the case.” (COC 244-245)

Regarding the autobiographical aspects, despite any potential influence Hilary Mantel may have drawn from other authors. It seems likely that her own life has exerted the most significant impact on her writing. Her novels are not completely autobiographical, but they are clearly shaped by her personal experiences. In the case in *A Change of Climate*, numerous autobiographical elements can be identified as she spent five years in Botswana during the late 1970's due to her husband's career as a geologist, a profession Ralph aspired to pursue. As she has noted her time Africa profoundly influenced her, as she elaborates “What I date do was changing quite a lot as a person, changed the way I thought about things, and therefore by an indirect root it made me into a different kind of a writer from the one I would have been.” (Arias to 86).

This is an aspect that significantly influenced her existence and played a role in her literary creations. The narrative grapples the spiritual dilemmas, intertwine with sentiments of grief and the vanishing of a child, along with the issues of identity crises. These themes are essential not just in this work but are also pivotal in her overall body of literary work.

Mantel's ‘*An Experiment in Love* (1995), is a novel contains many personal details as drawn from Mantel's own experiences. Mantel reshaped her fiction to explore the themes of identity, class memory and the female characters. The novels depict the rival relationship between two poor girls, named Carmel and Karina.” Carmel is the only daughter of her parents who come from Colton producing town in a declining religion. Her dad works as a clerk, while her mom is quite strict and clever. They often used to argue about places they might have been to work. *An Experiment in Love* (1925) this books deals with issues of gender, sex discrimination, friend, love, betrayal, gender roles and abortion. In this novel Mental portrayed the themes from her childhood experiences. This novel



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won the Hawthorn Prize in 1996. Written in first narrative, it tells the story of Carmel MacBain who comes from a poor Catholic family in Northern England- like Mantel. Carmel is being pushed into academic success by her mother and forced to study law. In the words of Carmel herself-

“My mother snorted.”Sister Basil? that old nanny goat? What does he know? If you can pass your scholarship you can go. Why shouldn't you? But you have to take their entrance exam as well?” (EIL.62)

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