



**HILARY MANTEL'S *WOLF HALL TRILOGY* IN THE
SENSE OF NEW HISTORICISM AND
POSTMODERNISM**

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**Ph. D. Dissertation
English Language and Literature Department
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T.C
ATATURK UNIVERSITY
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PH. D. DISSERTATION

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SOSYAL BİLİMLERİ ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ'NE

Atatürk Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim-Öğretim ve Sınav Yönetmeliğine göre hazırlamış olduğum “Hilary Mantel’ın *Wolf Hall* Üçlemesine Yeni Tarihselci ve Postmodern Bir Yaklaşım” adlı tezin tamamen kendi çalışmam olduğunu ve her alıntıya kaynak gösterdiğimi taahhüt eder, tezimin basılı ve elektronik kopyalarının Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü arşivlerinde aşağıda belirttiğim koşullarda saklanmasına izin verdiğimi onaylarım.

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ÖZET

DOKTORA TEZİ

HILARY MANTEL'IN *WOLF HALL* ÜÇLEMESİNE YENİ TARİHSELÇİ VE
POSTMODERN BİR YAKLAŞIM

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Bu tez, Hilary Mantel'in uluslararası alanda büyük övgü alan *Wolf Hall Üçlemesini*, tarihi söylemin nesnelliğini sorgulayan ve metinlerin yorumlanmasında politika, güç ve toplumsal rollerin etkileşimini vurgulayan iki teorik çerçeve olan Yeni Tarihçilik ve postmodernizm perspektiflerinden analiz etmektedir. Stephen Greenblatt'ın öncülük ettiği Yeni Tarihçilik, metin merkezli eleştiriyi, tarihi bağlamın önemini vurgulayarak sorgularken, postmodernizm de benzer şekilde tarihin objektif bir şekilde kaydedilen tek bir anlatı değil, çeşitli anlatılardan oluştuğunu ve bu anlatıların şekillendirildiğini savunur. Her iki teori de tek bir tarihsel gerçeğin varlığını reddeder; her tarihinin, geçmişi anlatırken kaçınılmaz olarak bir hikâye anlatıcısı olduğunu ve her tarihsel anlatının öznel bir bakış açısına sahip olduğunu kabul eder. Bu teorik yaklaşımlardan hareketle, tez, Mantel'in kurgunun ve tarihi belgelemenin sınırlarını nasıl bulanıklaştırdığını ve tarihin anlatısal niteliklerini nasıl açığa çıkardığını incelemektedir. Bu, tarih yazımı, meta-tarih ve tarihyazımsal üstkurgu üzerine tartışmaların merkezine yerleşerek, "metnin tarihselliği"ni üç temel boyutta—dini, politik ve ekonomik—inceler. Ayrıca, Thomas Cromwell, Thomas More ve Anne Boleyn'in somutlaştırdığı "tarihin metinselliği" ile bu boyutları birlikte ele alır. Çalışmanın odak noktalarından biri, Greenblatt'ın gücün alt edilmesi ve sınırlanması kavramını üç ana perspektiften incelemektir: toplumsal hiyerarşinin istikrarsızlaştırılması, ataerkil yapılarının sorgulanması ve yaşayanlarla ölümler arasındaki sınırları bulanıklaştıran toplumsal korkuların alt edilmesi. Gerçek ile kurgunun iç içe geçtiği bir yapı ortaya koyarak, Mantel'in üçlemesi, tarihsel anlatıların sürekli olarak güç ilişkileri, öznel bakış açıları ve kültürel bağlamlar tarafından yeniden şekillendirildiğini gösterir ve nihayetinde istikrarlı ve birleşik bir Tudor tarihi varsayımını sorgular.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yeni Tarihçilik, Postmodern Tarih, Tarihyazımsal Üstkurgu, Greenblatt, *Wolf Hall Üçlemesi*.

ABSTRACT**Ph.D. DISSERTATION****HILARY MANTEL’S *WOLF HALL TRILOGY* IN THE SENSE OF NEW
HISTORICISM AND POSTMODERNISM****Ahmet Yusuf AKYÜZ****Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. İsmail AVCU****2024, Page: 171****Jury: Assoc. Prof. Dr. İsmail AVCU
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This thesis analyzes Hilary Mantel’s internationally acclaimed *Wolf Hall Trilogy* through the combined approaches of New Historicism and Postmodernism, two theoretical frameworks that question the objectivity of historical discourse and emphasize the interplay of politics, power, and social roles in the interpretation of texts. While New Historicism—pioneered by Stephen Greenblatt—challenges text-centered criticism by underscoring the importance of historical context, postmodernism similarly contends that history consists of multiple narratives that are shaped and constructed rather than objectively recorded. Both theories reject the notion of a singular historical truth, holding that every historian inevitably acts as a storyteller, with subjectivity woven into every account of the past. Building upon these insights, the thesis explores how Mantel blurs the boundaries between fiction and historical documentation, revealing history’s narrative qualities. It discusses the core debates surrounding historiography, metahistory, and historiographic metafiction, and examines the “historicity of text” in three key dimensions—religious, political, and economic—alongside the “textuality of history” embodied by Thomas Cromwell, Thomas More, and Anne Boleyn. Central to this study is an investigation of Greenblatt’s concept of subversion and containment of power, approached here from three angles: the destabilization of social hierarchy, the questioning of patriarchal structures, and the subversion of collective fears that blur the line between the living and the dead. By foregrounding the entanglement of fact and fiction, Mantel’s trilogy exposes how historical narratives are continuously reshaped by power relations, subjective viewpoints, and cultural contexts, ultimately challenging any assumption of a stable, unified Tudor history.

Keywords: New historicism, Postmodern History, Historiographic Metafiction, Greenblatt, *Wolf Hall Trilogy*.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my advisor, Assoc. Prof. İsmail AVCU, whose unwavering belief in me and steadfast support have been invaluable from the very beginning. His generous dedication of time and his unique insights have provided me with knowledge and guidance that I could not have gained elsewhere.



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Ahmet Yusuf AKYÜZ

INTRODUCTION

I. INTRODUCING *THE WOLF HALL TRILOGY*

Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall Trilogy* chronicles the life of Thomas Cromwell, detailing his transformation from impoverished beginnings to his rise within the court, ultimately becoming the chief advisor to King Henry VIII. This historical saga elucidates the crucial role of Thomas Cromwell in assisting Henry VIII with his divorce from Queen Catherine of Aragon and subsequent marriage to Anne Boleyn by enacting a parliamentary regulation that severed connections with the Catholic Church and designated Henry as the head of the Church in England. Cromwell orchestrated the king's second, third, and fourth marriages to Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, and Anne of Cleves, respectively. During these events, there are a lot of details about the private life of Thomas Cromwell and the king's yearning to have a male heir for his country. In addition to the tension between King Henry VIII and Emperor Charles V, Queen Catherine's nephew, and the tension between the king and Lord Chancellor Cardinal Wolsey. The *Trilogy* reveals the misuse of power through mainly two characters Thomas More and King Henry VIII. It also divulges the influence of politics on religious decisions and vice versa, even among the most senior clerics, such as the cardinal and the Pope. Furthermore, Mantel addresses concepts like dogmatism vs open-mindedness through Thomas More vs Thomas Cromwell and conceptions of ambition and fatal flaws through various characters in the novel particularly Thomas Cromwell and Anne Boleyn.

Wolf Hall Trilogy illustrates one of the most notable English royal families which is the Tudor dynasty; five sovereigns from this family ruled England: Henry VII, then his son Henry VIII; followed by Henry VIII's three children, Edward VI, Mary I (bloody Mary), and Elizabeth I (Virgin Queen). This research primarily examines the reign of King Henry VIII (1509-1547), a prominent monarch renowned for his six marriages and the sexual scandals that transpired at his court; his reign is regarded as the most significant in English history. He initiated the English Reformation, separating the Church of England from papal authority. King Henry VIII appointed himself Chief Head of the Church of England and dissolved the abbeys and monasteries. His decisions affected the

history of England and Western Europe, as he transformed England from Catholicism to Protestantism.

The titles of the novels are appealing and expertly chosen; the *Trilogy* is occasionally referred to as the *Thomas Cromwell Trilogy*, though it formally holds the name of the first novel. Mantel typically defers her rationale for selecting titles until the conclusion of her novels, revealing the secret in the final pages of all three works. Starting with *Wolf Hall*, the title refers to the residence of the Seymours. When Sarah O'Reilly enquired about the title, Hilary Mantel replied, "I chose it primarily for its metaphorical resonance: who could resist it? The whole of Henry's court is Wolf Hall" (2010; para. 5). Mantel parallels the Tudor court with a predatory wolf hall, as she asserts, "man is wolf to man" (2010: 572). The title *Bring Up The Bodies* originates from the command, "Bring up the bodies. Deliver, that is, the accused men, by name Weston, Brereton, Smeaton and Norris, to Westminster Hall for trial" (Mantel, 2013: 432). This indicates that the four condemned men are referred to as bodies, as Mantel implies their imminent execution. The title of the last novel *The Mirror And The Light* can allude to either Henry or Cromwell; once Cromwell tells Henry: "What should I want with the Emperor, were he emperor of all the world? Your Majesty is the only prince. The mirror and the light of other kings" (Mantel, 2021: 544). Subsequently, as Cromwell composed his book, the silver plate mirrored his visage, prompting him to exalt himself as "the mirror and light of all councilors that are in Christendom" (Mantel, 2021: 616). Mantel characterized both individuals as the mirror and the light, likely alluding to both men.

The novels are extensive and abundant, with several characters; nonetheless, they include a character list categorized by family. Each character possesses three names or more; Mantel calls her characters by their first names, nicknames, cursing names, and last names as well as by their official titles and cities. Additionally, she alternates between current and former surnames for widows. Thomas Cromwell has more than ten names, while Mary Boleyn is identified by at least five, prompting the reader to frequently go back to the cast of characters in *Wolf Hall*. In *Bring Up The Bodies* and *The Mirror And The Light*, the reader acclimates to the names and styles, resulting in a more efficient and expedited reading experience. The estimated total of characters is 157, all of whom are real, with the sole exception of the fictional character Jenneke, Cromwell's daughter, as noted in the cast of characters in the third novel (Mantel, 2021: xiv). In conclusion, the

three novels end with the death of a central character: *Wolf Hall* closes with Thomas More's death, *Bring Up The Bodies* with the execution of Anne Boleyn, and *The Mirror And The Light* with the death of Thomas Cromwell.

II. WHY THIS TRILOGY

Christopher Tayler in his review states that "*Wolf Hall* succeeds on its own terms and then some, both as a non-frothy historical novel and as a display of Mantel's extraordinary talent" (Tayler, 2009, para.8). Afterwards, he says "lyrically yet cleanly and tightly written, solidly imagined yet filled with spooky resonances, and very funny at times, it's not like much else in contemporary British fiction" (para. 8). Mantel's proficiency is evident to all; 'non-frothy' encapsulates the essence of her work. Readers familiar with England's history recognize the meticulous construction of these novels and their distinctiveness compared to contemporary historical fiction.

This thesis elucidates how Mantel deals with historical facts and events and incorporates them into her fiction. Another purpose is to illustrate the evolution of historical writing within contemporary fiction. Mantel's historiographic metafiction in the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* covers significant issues and concerns of the 16th century. The initial half of that century observed the schism with Rome and Catholicism, the disbandment of monasteries, the establishment of the Church of England, and the translation of the Bible into English. Furthermore, this era witnessed Henry VIII declaring himself as the Head of the Anglican Church, thereby rendering the Pope of Rome and the Vatican powerless in England through a parliamentary act known as the Act of Supremacy. Soon later, numerous Western European nations emulated England by severing ties with the Roman Catholic Church and founding the Western Protestant Church.

Greenblatt praises *Wolf Hall* underscoring that "Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* is a startling achievement, a brilliant historical novel focused on the rise to power of a figure exceedingly unlikely" (2009, part. 1), and then he adds that Mantel "offers aficionados of the period quiet pleasures" (part. 1). Crompton remarks on *Bring Up The Bodies* that "this ongoing story of Henry VIII's right-hand man is the finest piece of historical fiction I have ever read. Its literary quality is unquestionable. Mantel has a way with sentences; they unfold so beautifully on the page" (Mantel, 2013: I). Enticingly, Andrew Motion

praises *Bring Up The Bodies* as “a richly self-sufficient pleasure ... [Mantel] makes us feel we are a part of their lives” (Mantel, 2013: I). Likewise, Thomas-Corr declares that Mantel’s fiction made 99 percent of contemporaneous fiction look faint and bloodless if you compare them, and then Thomas-Corr points out that “after a few sentences of *The Mirror And The Light* - a few words even- you are thinking yes this is how it should be done. ... Mantel has taken us to the dark heart of history” (Mantel, 2021: I). Anderson on her side believes that “the final installment of Mantel’s *Trilogy* is a cracker: powerful, propulsive and amply worth the eight-year wait. It’s the crowning glory of a towering achievement” (Mantel, 2021: II). At last, Caitlin Moran in commenting on the book of the year claims that *The Mirror And The Light* is one of the humans’ utmost accomplishments.

Hilary Mantel is the first woman and the first British author to win the Booker Prize twice, as well as the first individual to receive the award for two novels within a trilogy. Her novel *Wolf Hall* won the Booker Prize in 2009, and *Bring Up The Bodies* in 2012. The awards for the novels in this project signify their esteemed reputation, weight, and high value. All these major reasons urged us to choose this *Trilogy* over many others in the domain.

III. THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

These three novels are historical works that scrutinize a crucial period in British history during the reign of King Henry VIII. This thesis examines the history of England from 1500 to 1540, focusing on the ascent and subsequent decline of the notable Thomas Cromwell. Mantel abandons the stereotypes of Cromwell; she reshapes a fresh new image of him as the man who changed the face of England forever. This dissertation raises and discusses numerous significant questions: How do postmodern and new historicist theories of historiography destabilize the notion of a single, objective “truth,” and in what ways does Mantel’s portrayal of sixteenth-century England exemplify this tension between fact and fiction? To what extent does the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* suggest that beneath every “official” account of Tudor history lies an alternate narrative, and how does this idea question conventional distinctions between literary and non-literary historical records? In light of postmodern skepticism about absolute truth, how does Mantel’s method of weaving documented events with fictional elements redefine the boundary

between historical authenticity and invention? Can novelists legitimately challenge or contradict chroniclers and historians, and how does Mantel's fictional approach to Thomas Cromwell and Henry VIII expose the limits of "traditional" historical accounts? What narrative strategies does Mantel employ to present Cromwell both as a cunning political figure and a forward-thinking reformer, and how does this dual portrayal reveal broader biases embedded in Tudor historiography? By depicting Henry VIII's personal vulnerabilities alongside his authoritarian tendencies, how does Mantel's *Trilogy* complicate the monarch's historical image and challenge a monolithic interpretation of his reign? In what ways do Mantel's descriptions of religious, political, and economic spheres illustrate the new historicist notions of the "textuality of history" and the "historicity of text," thereby blurring the line between documented fact and imaginative narrative? How does Mantel dramatize Stephen Greenblatt's concept of subversion and containment in the *Trilogy*—particularly with regard to social hierarchy, patriarchal norms, and the obsessive quest for a male heir—and what does this reveal about the perils of rising ambition in a tightly controlled court culture? Drawing on Mantel's stylistic and thematic choices, how does *Wolf Hall Trilogy* exemplify a new historicist and postmodern approach to reconstructing the past, and what broader questions does it raise about the feasibility—or impossibility—of ever truly "knowing" historical events and characters?

IV. METHODOLOGY

To answer these inquiries this research will use the Qualitative Research Method for analyzing purposes. Mantel does not follow the traditional way of writing history. Instead, she is more concerned with the submerged or marginalized histories of unimportant people. She uses a new hypothesis and a new perspective; therefore, the analysis will be from the perspective of a postmodern and new historicist approach to history. *Wolf Hall Trilogy* will be studied according to the new criteria of Stephen Greenblatt and Louis Montrose following the new methodology of analyzing historical novels.

The introduction chapter defines the *Trilogy*, states the reasons for choosing the topic of this research and the problems that addresses, and indicates the research questions, the methodology, and the narrative style of the *Trilogy*. The first chapter explores the nature of history and scrutinizes the historical novel, encompassing its

definition and evolution from Walter Scott to postmodernism. It also presents concepts such as metahistory, historiography, and historiographic metafiction, as well as the new historicism theory and its interplay between cultural materialism, and Marxist historiography; alongside a comparison of new historicism and traditional historicism. Ultimately, the chapter delineates the postmodern philosophy of history and historical fiction. The second chapter provides a critical biography of Hilary Mantel and brief summaries of the novels. It also elucidates Mantel's new historicist perspectives and postmodern interpretations in the *Wolf Hall Trilogy*, alongside her critique of gender bias and patriarchy, as well as her interrogation of the singularity of historical narratives.

The third and the fourth chapters argue Louis Montrose's new historicist concepts of textuality of history and the historicity of text in the *Wolf Hall Trilogy*. The textuality of history in the *Trilogy* is addressed through three chief characters: Thomas Cromwell, Thomas More, and Anne Boleyn; while the concept of historicity of text is portrayed through three major parameters: religious, political, and economic scopes. The fifth chapter analyzes Greenblatt's concept of subversion and containment of power in the *Trilogy*, as well as the subversion and containment of hierarchy, patriarchy, and the subversion of the dead-alive fright. Furthermore, the chapter discusses additional notions associated with power, like the preoccupation of having a male heir to attain power, the challenges of ambition and the quest for power, and Cromwell's oscillation in power: repressed, empowered, then repressed again. The discussion ultimately shifts to Mantel's portrayal of King Henry VIII in her narrative as either a just ruler or a tyrant. The conclusion chapter gives an overall outline of the thesis, a gist of new historicism and postmodernism, and a brief glimpse at the brilliance, success, and popularity of the *Wolf Hall trilogy*. Finally, it illuminates the changes Mantel has caused through her trilogy, and how her novels have influenced public perception of certain historical subjects and figures.

V. NARRATIVE STYLE

Hilary Mantel uses a peculiar and unusual narrative style in her *Trilogy*; her present tense usage for telling past events makes it captivating. Since historical novels retrace past events, it is envisaged that the tense will be in the past; nevertheless, the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* does not follow the trace. The present tense gives the feeling of immediacy, and

nearness rather than the feeling of events and people lived five centuries ago. Gebauer in *Making Time: World Construction in the Present-Tense Novel* argues that “while some critics prefer the past tense, the default in narrative fiction, others quite like present tense narration” (2021: 151). Greenblatt (2009) comments on the present tense usage in *Wolf Hall* that “through the whole of the novel—which is narrated entirely in the present tense—we simultaneously find ourselves inside Cromwell’s head, seeing the world through his eyes, and also outside him, taking his measure” (part. 3). Writing about history in the past tense gives the impression of being documental and out of date, Mantel avoided this by using the present tense delicately.

The narrator of *Wolf Hall Trilogy* alternates between being omniscient and being in the first person, in other words, between Cromwell and the third person. Sometimes, though, it is difficult for the reader to tell them apart, there are two Godlike omniscient narrators one is Cromwell and another is unknown or Mantel herself. Cromwell, now and then, narrates from the ‘I’ perspective and every so often from the ‘he’ perspective. The narrative structure exceedingly looks like a long interior monologue even though the dominant narrator is a third-person narrator, not the first-person narrator, which is more expected for interior monologues. Renate Brosch solves the suspicion craftily through her description of *Wolf Hall* as “a book-length interior monologue in the third person” (2017: 175). Mantel’s sensual fiction transports the reader into the character’s world, brain, and psyche, so the reader can see how and why this character is behaving that way.

Niederhoff explains Lubbock’s eight narration points of view: (1) junior first-person narrator, who is a character in the story (2) senior first-person narrator, who is a protagonist in the story (3) third-person narrator who is an interfering narrator ‘editorial omniscient’ (4) third-person narrator who is much less interfering narrator or without interfering at all ‘neutral omniscient’ (5) third-person narrators from the opinion of numerous characters ‘multiple selective omniscient’ (6) third-person narrator from the opinion of one character ‘selective omniscient’ (7) third-person narrator who is a pictorial narrator without interior opinions ‘dramatic mode’ (8) third-person narrator who is the same like the previous one but in a ‘camera mode’ (Niederhoff, 2009: 387). According to the preceding classification, the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* can be classified in the second, third, and sixth narration modes.

The usage of ambiguous ‘he’ without antecedent in the novels is exceptional; Hilary Mantel refers frequently to Thomas Cromwell as ‘he’ without a direct referent which makes it difficult to know who she intends. This recurrent use of ‘he’ builds partially objective impressions. It is truly bewildering to know who is ‘he’ in the first chapters of *Wolf Hall*; but as we move onward in the novel, the readers get used to this narrative technique. It appears that Mantel has received criticism for overusing unidentifiable pronouns and for applying this perplexing ‘he’; which is why the narrative style changes in *Wolf Hall*’s sequel novels. In *Bring Up The Bodies* Mantel lessens the frequent employ of unclear pronouns and instead, she uses proper names. Furthermore, she settles the issue of puzzling ‘he’ by implementing the following form “he, Cromwell” many times. In the third installment of the *Trilogy*, *The Mirror And The Light*, the narrative style becomes familiar to the readers, and the burden of the immense number of characters becomes lighter having been repeated in the first two novels.

Alongside the prevalent use of “he,” the language of the novels is rich in deixis, which refers to the use of deictic words and expressions whose meanings are contingent upon the context of their use. The deictic language of Mantel serves to give the text multiple possibilities of meanings, and it adds suspense to apprehend the wanted point until further notice. The historical facts flash through the progress of characters; there are no specific pages to explain them, but they pervade in the individuals’ doings, gossip, opinions, and discussions.

Hilary Mantel skillfully creates black comedy by fusing hilarious comedy with dark tragedy. She uses an ironic attitude to alleviate the brutal happenings in that period. Kubilay Geçikli (2015) in his “An ‘Occult’ History of Tudor England: Hilary Mantel’s *Wolf Hall*” eulogizes Mantel’s narrative manner and ascertains that Mantel “writes like a person who really lived and personally witnessed the events she has been narrating, which is evident in the comfort she has in the descriptions” (83). Mantel uses an analogous narrative structure in the three novels, in each part of the novels there are three chapters, but what is more remarkable regarding the form is that there is a parallel between *Wolf Hall* and *The Mirror And The Light*, both of them has six parts and in each part, there are three chapters.

Wolf Hall Trilogy uses a nonlinear narrative style, the story begins in 1500 when Cromwell was a teenager, and then the narrator tells us about events and things that will happen decades later. In the second chapter, *Paternity*, we recognize the forty-year-old Thomas Cromwell in the year 1527; that is to say, there are about 27 years of a narrative jump. Otherwise stated, between the Cromwell that we see at the beginning of the novel and the Cromwell as a servant to the cardinal, there is a narrative leap, and we learn about these years in batches, through Cromwell's memory betweenwhiles. After that, the narrative goes forward and backward discovering Cromwell's life and adventures between the years 1500-1540. The narration starts when Henry is willing to divorce Catherine, so Mantel uses this non-chronological narration technique to elucidate Henry's and Catherine's earlier life as well. The beginning of the *Trilogy* has a very fast-paced telling rhythm; for example, in the chapter 'An Occult History of Britain', Mantel furnishes a cycle of plenty of events from 1521 to 1529. From there, as the story progresses toward the end of the *Trilogy*, the pace of narration slows down, and the plot and story frame becomes more linear and straight.

Mantel employs other literary narrative techniques which are analepsis and prolepsis. Analepsis is a narrative mode in which it interrupts the sequential narrative and the order of events to tell about previous matters that happened earlier. Commonly, it is called by most people 'flashback' and the three novels are abundantly full of flashbacks. Prolepsis is another narrative mode in which the narrator tells us about upcoming events and matters that will happen in the future but in the present time and as if we are living these happenings now; better known as 'flashforward'. Mantel uses this technique amply, especially in the first chapters of each novel in the *Trilogy*.

The narrator addresses the reader directly, for example: "But what do you know?" (Mantel, 2010: 391); this 'you' is the reader. Mantel's narrator makes things common narrators cannot do. Mantel deliberately suggests the existence of an alternative truth or narrative underlying the narrator's account; consequently, readers of the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* perceive the narrator as unreliable, with events recounted from a subjective viewpoint. Through the unreliable narrator, Mantel subverts many historical postulates; she reimagines conventional histories and re-narrates them from a new historicist point of view.

CHAPTER ONE

NEW HISTORICISM THEORY AND POSTMODERN PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

1.1. HISTORICAL FICTION

1.1.1. The Definition of the Historical Novel

Historical novels present and propose a particular length of time, some decades before writing the novel concentrating on real individuals or real events. Wyatt and Saricks detect that historical novels “are set in the past, before the author’s lifetime or experience ... a novel about World War II might be considered Historical Fiction if the author were born after the war ended” (2018: 169-170). To put it differently, writing about real characters and circumstances that are synchronous with the writer cannot be considered a historical novel. Birx states that “the historical novel is a genre of literature whose story is set during a period that predates the author’s own time, often by a significant number of years” (2009: 928). Adamson (1998), however, stipulates at least 25 years following the incident. Some think that fifty years should pass before writing about a certain event, character, war, etc. in order to qualify the novel as historical.

Jerome De Groot (2009) remarks that the historical novel is a fashionable literary genre, and it “is a genre that is increasingly studied on university curricula and discussed at research level; it is also an immensely popular form, with global audience reach” (2). To him, the historical novel underlines the subjectivity in narrating history, it ignores the historiographical conventions and attacks the idea of one history and one truth. The historical novel is more modulated than the other sorts of novels as regards that the reader is more conscious of the artificiality and fictionality of narrating something from the past in the contemporary moment. Yet, “the historical novel, then, is similar to other forms of novel-writing in that it shares a concern with realism, development of character, authenticity” (Groot, 2009: 4). Hutcheon outlines the historical novel as a combination of history and fiction, and assumes that “in the postmodern novel the conventions of both fiction and historiography are simultaneously used and abused, installed and subverted, asserted and denied” (1989: 5). Furthermore, Robinson delineates that the “historical

fiction as a form of history in its own right, which confronts similar cognitive and imaginative challenges to those faced by historians” (2011: x). To summarize, the historical novel is a genre of literature that constructs an imaginative plot of past events. It improves our knowledge of past identities, cultures, societies, civilizations, facts, and occasions.

1.1.2. The Emergence of the Historical Novel

Literary critics have always had the propensity to classify literature, this tendency goes back to Aristotle, who said: “I propose to treat of Poetry in itself and of its various kinds, noting the essential quality of each” (para. 1).¹ According to Encyclopedia Britannica, the first historical novel was *Waverley* by the Scottish historical novelist and historian Sir Walter Scott:

Historical novel, a novel that has as its setting a period of history and that attempts to convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions of a past age. ... More often it attempts to portray a broader view of a past society in which great events are reflected by their impact on the private lives of fictional individuals. Since the appearance of the first historical novel, Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley* (1814), this type of fiction has remained popular. (par1)²

The *Waverley* novels accomplished enormous and global success as they inaugurated a new genre of novels ‘the historical novel’. The first novel was published in (1814) anonymously under the name of *Waverley*; the second novel was *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Antiquarian* (1816), *Rob Roy* (1817), *Heart of Midlothian* (1818), and *Ivanhoe* (1819). These novels are frequently considered to be the point of generating the historical novel as a form and as a new writing type. From Lukács’s perspective, Scott’s novels are distinguished because of their capability to depict history via individuals and because of their superb portrayal of historical movements. To Lukács, “Scott’s greatness lies in his capacity to give living human embodiment to historical-social type” (1983: 35). Lukács admires Scott’s realism and his emphasis on details and low characters:

By renewing the old laws of epic poetry in his original way Scott discovers the only possible means whereby the historical novel can reflect historical reality adequately, without either romantically monumentalizing the important figures of history or dragging them down to the level of private, psychological trivia. Thus Scott humanizes his historical heroes, while avoiding what Hegel calls the psychology of

¹ <https://home.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/361r12.html>

² <https://www.britannica.com/art/historical-novel>

the valet, namely the detailed analysis of small, human peculiarities which have nothing to do with the historical mission of the person concerned. (1983: 47)

The last feature of Scott's historical novels is the necessary anachronism; Lukács confirms that "Scott's necessary anachronism consists, therefore, simply in allowing his characters to express feelings and thoughts about real, historical relationships in a much clearer way than the actual men and women of the time could have done" (1983: 63). Then Lukács continues by saying that "the content of these feelings and thoughts, their relation to their real object is always historically and socially correct" (63). Necessary anachronism means to create a fictitious story outside of reality and to add some fictional elements to the real line of the occasion; in other words, it is like adding seasoning to the main course of a meal.

Lukács (1983) remarks that there were historical novels before Scott's *Waverley* in the 17th and 18th centuries, but they lacked the characteristics of the historical novel and the specialty in history. Lukács's observation is that Scott's historical novel is a straight continuation of the realistic social novel of the 18th century. Jerome De Groot in his work *The Historical Novel* (2009) regards *The Princess De Cleves*, a historical novel by Madame de La Fayette (1678), as the first historical fiction book that could be deemed as a novel. Maxwell in his work *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period* (2008) mentions *Princess De Cleves* as the first historical novel as well.

Another important historical fiction work that should be mentioned here is *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes. This work is full of picaresque historical romantic prose. Cruz in her article "Don Quixote, the Picaresque, and the Rise of the Modern Novel" takes into consideration that the weight of *Don Quixote* comes from its role in popularizing prose fiction in Europe, and this prose gradually developed to create and generate what we call now a novel. Groot (2009) believes that the rise of the novel was problematic and accompanied by some suspicion; moreover, the growth of the historical novel was Eurocentric. Scott's influence was widespread in the 19th century, and that concealed and obscured the other historical works, especially the non-European ones. Groot (2009) draws our attention to *Three Kingdoms* (1522), a historical fiction of the Chinese writer Luo Guanzhong, which talks about the dynasty of Han, the second imperial dynasty of China between 206 B.C. to 220. *Three Kingdoms* is noteworthy in Chinese literature but the West did not give it any attention.

The historical novel continued to develop in the 19th century and Scott's mastery continued as well. His impact was not only on fiction writers but also on history writers; more than that, his influence reached the realist fiction of some writers like Pushkin, Dickens, Balzac, and Tolstoy. Owing to novels including *Middlemarch* by George Eliot, which has several plot lines and realistic psychological descriptions, historical novels developed. The notable historical novels in the 19th century from British literature are those of Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859); and those of George Eliot, *Romola* (1853), *Felix Holt* (1866), and *Middlemarch* (1871). From Europe, eminent authors wrote historical novels like Gustave Flaubert's *Salammbô* (1862), and Victor Hugo's *The Miserables* (1862), but perhaps the most spectacular in the century was Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1865). A concluding note on the historical novel in the 19th century is that it was not separated from the general novel genre but it was a part of it.

In the first half of the 20th century, the historical novel was faintly undermined, marginalized, and became a kind of sub-genre, above all this, arguments loomed that the historical novel and the literary novel have been divorced from each other. Alfred Sheppard (1930) indicates that World War I obliged the historical novel to take a break. Indeed, nobody said it more beautifully than B. J. Whiting about this matter: "Something has clearly given the historical novel a shot in the arm but just as clearly the stimulus has affected *quantity* rather than *quality*" (1951: 337). Even though there were worthy historical novels like *Kristin Lavransdatter* (1920) by the Nobel laureate Sigrid Undset, and *I, Claudius* (1934) by Robert Graves. It is worth mentioning that the abundance of novel readership was from women in the 20th century. Wallace asserts that "the historical novel has been one of the most important forms of women's reading and writing during the twentieth century" (2004: ix). Goodman (2005) also affirms that the largest share of the historical novel readership is from women.

After all, we can debate that the British novel, in general, began to appear in the first part of the 18th century and the historical novel in the first part of the next century by the works of Daniel Defoe, Thomas Leland, Madame de La Fayette, Henry Fielding, Sir Walter Scott, and others. So the novel is a hybrid genre developed out by accretion from other genres like prose romance, epic, and biography. In this place, it should be noted that the readers of novels at that time were considered lesser and second-rate to poetry readers.

The historical novel has become a popular genre in recent years; Danytė thinks that the historical novel became popular in the postmodernism epoch, especially after World War II; to him “it is only after the second world war and the rise of post-modernism that the historical novel again attracts the attention of major writers” (2007: 35). Furthermore, Keen in her “The Historical Turn in British Fiction” affirms that historical fiction became intellectual, respectable, and dominant in British literature, and the “recent British and anglophone fiction has taken a historical turn has become an axiom of critical commentary on the contemporary British literary scene” (2006: 167). Perhaps the turn to historical fiction in English literature is in fact a return because there was already interest in historical fiction and a large number of British historical novels is proof of that:

In recent years, the form [the historical novel] has been incorporated into the literary mainstream. And why not? It employs all the techniques of other types of fiction and exists at all levels of ambition. You can judge any individual example as good or bad; what you can't do, legitimately, is to place it in a separate category, or generalize about the type of reader it attracts. It's become an enticingly unpredictable way of describing human experience. (Attar, 2022: para. 1)

The historical novel has all the ingredients to be successful and popular in the last few years. Further, the genre can intrigue the readers' appetite because of its ability to portray historical characters unconventionally.

1.1.3. Historical Fiction as a Literary Genre in the Contemporary Fiction

Literary critics highlight the increasing interest in history in the works of contemporary novelists like Julian Barnes, John Fowles, Hilary Mantel, Salman Rushdie, Jeanette Winterson, and many more. Bradbury notes that the trend in British fiction in the eighties and the nineties of the last century was the historical novel, and he states that “certainly exploring past and recent history ... did become a central theme of Eighties fiction” (1993: 432). He considers that composing history is like composing fiction and he resembles the historian with the novelist since it is the historian who gives the historical events the form of a story and narrates them just like the novelist does. Furthermore, Bradbury verifies that “it has also increasingly been observed that writing history is more like writing novels than we often choose to think” (1993: 432). Byatt discerns that the existing conditions in the period after the war were a reason for the historical novel to prosper; she also thinks that “it is worth looking at the sudden flowering of the historical

novel in Britain, the variety of its forms and subjects, the literary energy and real inventiveness that has gone into it" (2001: 9). Jackson avers that history has thrived in the recent few decades as a pivotal component in British prose fiction. He alleges assuredly that "the turn to history as a theme may be the definitive element in British fiction in the last three decades" (quoted in Boccardi, 2009: 1). While Janik in his work *No End of History* (1995) thinks that there is a sharp focus on history in contemporaneous English fiction as a refute to the poststructuralist and postmodern belief in the end of history. Relevantly, Groot speaks: "The historical novel is in robust health, critically, formally and economically. In particular, the last few decades have seen an explosion in the sales and popularity of novels set in the past" (2009: 1). It comes as no surprise that Boccardi (2009) considers the genre's bestselling records as evidence of the popularity and publicity of the historical novel among both writers and readers.

The historical novel has been employed as a weapon against the prevailing oppressive narratives, for example, it has been used by gay and lesbian writers to regain excluded identities; by postcolonial writers to write back; and by political writers to put new ideological perspectives. In the end, Manzoni in his *On the Historical Novel* (1996) uses a metaphorical image to suggest that historical novelists should not only bring to us the naked bones of history but they should return the flesh to the skeleton and that is history.

1.1.4. History and Metahistory

Throughout history, people have sought to understand their past, often as a means to make sense of the present. This pursuit is grounded in the belief that failing to learn from historical mistakes and neglecting to acknowledge its shortcomings inevitably condemns societies to repeat them. Such an approach underscores the enduring relevance of historical inquiry in shaping contemporary understanding and guiding future actions. Yet understanding the past from texts can be varied from one person to another or from one society to another and understanding a text hermeneutically can generate more explanations. These issues prompt us to question whether historians are capable of interpreting texts according to their original intentions and what they were written for or if they can uncover the true meanings of the texts.

Etymologically, history has its roots in ancient Greece, and it is a word of Greek derivation, which means eyewitness, finding out, judgment, and narrative (Cartledge, 2006). History, as an academic discipline, is a field of studying past events or any written or spoken piece that describes events that happened in the past. According to Greek philosophers like Aristotle, history is far from poetry, and philosophers tried to distinguish between fiction and history from antiquity, as Hamilton put it: “From ancient times, philosophers have been eager to separate history from fiction” (2003: 7). For Aristotle history is connected to what happened to specific people in a specific place and specific time, while poetry is what may occur anywhere. By the same token, the difference between a historian and a poet is that the former deals with what happened, and the latter deals with what to happen (Lucas, 1968). Another prominent distinction between history and fiction is that history is judged according to its authenticity; however, fiction is judged according to the pleasure that it gives. Yet all these will be changed considerably in new historicism as we will see later.

In the 1960s, history irreversibly fragmented into numerous specialized subfields, including social, economic, religious, cultural, and intellectual history, as well as the emerging field of women’s history. Bently (2002) regards that metanarrative surrendered its position to profound analytical structures and to the new-isms movements like feminism, comparativism, and more of the same followed; by way of illustrating, the attitudes of empiricism and Marxism toward history.

Keith Jenkins (2004) in his *Rethinking History* declares that “history is basically a contested discourse, an embattled terrain wherein people(s), classes and groups autobiographically construct interpretations of the past literally to please themselves” (23). Jenkins views history as a sequence of discourses on the world. He differentiates between history and the past and he considers them far miles and ages from each other. In the same meaning, Selden adds that “past is something we construct from already written texts of all kinds which we construe in line with our particular historical concerns” (1997: 188). Erisman (2014) posits that history is teleological, while Jenkins and Selden contend that our interpretation of the past is driven by personal gratification. Jenkins after a long examination and discussion about history in theory and practice comes to a final definition of history:

History is a shifting, problematic discourse, ostensibly about an aspect of the world, the past, that is produced by a group of present-minded workers (salaried historians) ... whose products, once in circulation, are subject to a series of uses and abuses that are logically infinite but which in actuality generally correspond to a range of power bases that exist at any given moment and which structure and distribute the meanings of histories along a dominant-marginal spectrum. (2004: 31-2)

Collingwood in his book *The Idea of History* mentions that if the past does not exist anymore this does not necessarily imply that it is unreal. The fundamental quality of the past is its 'pastness', which prohibits us from witnessing it immediately. History differs from memory in that memories are not static but alive; they shape our identities as human beings, serving as our indirect yet deeply personal connections to the past. Yet, they are still fallible and unreliable and their trustworthiness is moot; therefore, the concept of testimony was used to create our knowledge of the past. Collingwood (2005) talks about two attitudes toward history: skeptical and critical. The first remains unyielding and unresponsive, while the second is receptive and open to acceptance or rejection; therefore, a skeptical disposition must be replaced with a critical one to facilitate historical advancement.

Collingwood analyzes history from a philosophical perspective; he argues that history can be understood only through the present and that it happens in the mind of the historian by reliving that past, rethinking and re-enacting it in the interior of the context and the framework of one's own experience. To him, history is both accumulative and a form of self-knowledge; it progresses from one point to the next, yet it ultimately culminates in the present. His philosophical viewpoint is that history is a 'thought' in the mind of the historian; it is a reconstruction and a re-imagination of past thoughts, not events since the past does not exist anymore. History is a "thought, and therefore all history is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind" (2005: 215). He claims that history and philosophy are identical insofar as they are both products of the human mind, asserting that "they are and must be the same" (422). Moreover, he states that "history is one of the necessary and transcendental modes of the mind's activity, and the common property of all minds" (422).

As a British idealist, Collingwood believes that metaphysical history is a union of the ideal past and ideal future to create the real present, in other epistemological words, two ideals make one real. To him the past is necessary and the future is feasible while the

present is solely actual. Furthermore, Bran Nicol (2009) does not deem history as past but rather a narrative founded on records, documents, and other fabrics made in the past. Finally, Hamilton postulates that “historicism remains the secular record of changes in historiography, not the rainbow promising a new heaven and a new earth” (2003: 209). Hamilton summarizes that history’s task is to inform us of past changes and historical events nothing more.

Metahistory, a subset of the broader field of historiography, focuses on analyzing the structure and narrative framework of historical accounts. The term gained prominence with Hayden White’s seminal and contentious work, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973), which has sparked significant debate within the field of history. White points out that the expression ‘metahistory’ was scrounged from a Canadian thinker, Northrop Frye. Herman Paul has expounded upon this book and this term in numerous articles and believes that no other historical text has attained this level of significance since Collingwood’s *The Idea of History* (1946). According to Paul, metahistory “has gained influence mainly because of its so-called ‘tropology’: a historiographical classification system that distinguished between tropes, plots, explanatory modes, and ideological substructures in historical writing, while providing a typology of archetypical forms for each of these dimensions” (2015: 21). In his *Metahistory* (2014), White gives three scopes for any historical piece: moral, epistemological, and aesthetic. Unlike the other historians, he categorizes three types of approaches that historicists can use to obtain different explanations of historical works. The first is the explanation by formal argument and inside this approach, there are four styles: contextualism, formism, mechanism, and organicism. The second approach is the explanation by emplotment, White also classifies it into four groups: comedy, tragedy, romance, and satire. The third one is the explanation by ideological implication, by the same token, he sorts out four schemes: radicalism, anarchism, liberalism, and conservatism.

Hayden White, through these classifications, illustrates how metahistory aids historians in understanding history and enhancing its interpretation. In the preface, he describes metahistory as a “pre-critically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively historical explanation should be” (2014, ix). Consequently, metahistory serves as a methodological approach within historiography, focusing on the nature of history, causal

relationships, the consequences of historical changes, and the ways in which history should be interpreted. In essence, metahistory is the study of history itself—a synthesis and framework designed to guide historians toward more effective methods of analyzing, narrating, and presenting historical events.

Herman Paul (2015) identifies metahistory as a range of questions about the agency, the forms, the intentions, the structures, and the ideologies that historians do not accentuate explicitly but implicitly. In addition to that, the preconceptions, conceptualizations, prejudices, partialities, mindsets, hidden hypotheses, the cause and effect relationships, the historians' imaginations, and biases historians might be influenced by when they write about the past intentionally or unintentionally. Metahistory can also be seen as a quest that goes beyond the scope of a historian's competence. So, therefore, White considers all these things when it comes to history.

Christopher Dawson in his article "The Problem of Metahistory" (1951) and his book *The Dynamics of World History* (1957) opines that "metahistory is concerned with the nature of history, the meaning of history and the cause and significance of historical change" (1957: 281). In addition, he posits that historians are incapable of evading the leverage of metahistorical concepts. On the contrary, they lack sufficient knowledge and require metahistory to fully understand and explain historical events, as their analysis assumes a prior understanding of historical subjects, the nature of historical change, and the reality of history. Dawson excels in elaborating that:

If you believe in the theory of progress, for instance, you will see history as the story of progress and you will tend to study that aspect of progress which seems to you the most important, as Lord Acton studied the history of the idea of freedom. And if you are a good historian, as Acton was, your preconceived metahistorical idea will not destroy the value of the historical research which has been motivated by it. (1957: 282)

We can conclude that both White and Dawson emphasize the historians' pre-critical presuppositions or what White refers to as 'prefiguration'. They both see that these metahistorical hypotheses are legitimate just like the other traditional historiographical approaches. Furthermore, White gives the freedom and the right to conceive and interpret the past from a personal standpoint of life. White can be esteemed as a staunch supporter of what is called 'moral commitment' in the historical realm. Thus, metahistory frames

metahistorical scholarship as a contested arena, serving as a critical battleground for initiating paradigm shifts.

1.1.5. Historiography and Historiographic Metafiction

In a broad sense, historiography refers to the study of history and historians, the canon of written historical accounts, and the rules, concepts, and procedures for composing such accounts in light of rigorous critical analysis. Historiography investigates and scrutinizes authentic materials of the resources used by historians to write history. All people and cultures used to tell stories of the past, war, heroes, plagues, animals, ancestors' acts, etc. Oral tradition, drawing, etching, engraving on stone, and inscribing on bones or metals were all used before writing was invented. The first discovered historical records are from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China around the 3rd millennium BC yet the chronicles of the Greek historian Herodotus, the father of historiography, are considered to be the beginning of historiography in the 5th century BC.

Michel de Certeau in the preface of his *The Writing of History* (1988) inquires about the alliance between history and writing and to him historiography is a combination of 'history' and 'writing' which are paradoxical elements, one is actual and the other is speech or in other words, one is real and the second is discourse. In de Certeau's view, it is the responsibility of historiography to connect them and join them when it seems that there is no link between them.

History refers to the study of past events, while historiography focuses on the interpretation of those events, the sources used, and the methods by which they are recorded—essentially, it is the study of the history of history. Alternatively stated, "history is the event, and historiography is how to study it and make sense of it" (Garcia-Bullé, 2021: para. 1). Georg Iggers in his book *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* examines the theoretical changes in writing history, assuring that "the transformation of the kind of narrative, event-oriented history characteristic of professional historiography in the nineteenth century into social science-oriented forms of historical research and writing in the twentieth century" (2005: 3). So there was a transmutation in historiography from the events-narrative-centered theory to the social-science-centered theory. This is because

classic historiography was scientifically inadequate; furthermore, some parts of the societies like women and ethnic minorities were left out of the historical narrative. Conclusively, there was a reorientation from macrohistory, which means the grand narrative and a big scale of the whole of humanity that deals with a wide population over long periods, to microhistory which means the local narrative and a small scale that deals with a single historical event or a single historical figure.

Moving to the next literary genre historiographic metafiction, a concept coined by Canadian literary critic and theorist Linda Hutcheon, this genre combines characteristics and components from both historical fiction and metafiction. It principally consists of three central fields: history, theory, and fiction. This postmodernist narrative genre is tightly connected to novels and it frequently uses allusions to other literary and historical works i.e. intertextuality. Hutcheon in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism* says “historiographic metafiction. By this I mean those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages: *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, *Midnight’s Children*, *Ragtime*, *Legs, G.*, *Famous Last Words*” (2002: 5). In her article “Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History” she adds to the previous list: *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Name of the Rose*.

From Hutcheon’s definition, we can infer that historiographic metafictional novels encourage readers to remain self-aware of the fictional nature of the narrative, even when it incorporates historical characters and events. Self-reflexivity, self-consciousness, parodic intertextuality, subversiveness, contradiction, and contrariness are indispensable tools in historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon, 1989 & 2002). Marshall (1992) simplifies historiographic metafiction by saying:

Historiographic metafiction does not tell us how to think about a certain event; rather, it says: that’s one way of looking at things, now here’s another, and another, and another. It suggests to the reader that since she is complicit in her readings, it is crucial to recognize her own position of participation in discourse. (156)

Historiographic metafiction is a zone in a bigger region which is postmodernism; therefore, it also problematizes history and inquires about what constructs historical knowledge. Hutcheon (1989) continues her argument that historiographic metafiction subverts and problematizes historical and non-historical texts not by rejection but by

parody and irony. Historiographic metafiction vocalizes the repressed classes and the subalterns by problematizing and subverting the prevailed explication of texts and it decentralizes them and then highlights a new interpretation that strengthens the voice of the silent version of history. This postmodernist technique is not merely used in postmodernist historical literature but in postmodernist feminist literature as well to give a voice to women in patriarchal history and to stand against phallocentrism in history. Moreover, it is used in postcolonial literature to reduce the authoritarian tone of the colonizer and gives the colonized the right of speech in a history that was written from the perspective of the winner and the strong.

One of the primary goals of historiographic metafiction is to focus on historical figures and events that have been overlooked or marginalized by traditional historical narratives. These novels revisit such excluded occurrences, offering alternative histories and, as a result, contributing to the multiplicity of historical perspectives characteristic of postmodernism. Hutcheon clears up the history-fiction relationship: “The postmodern relationship between fiction and history is an even more complex one of interaction and mutual implication. Historiographic metafiction works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction” (1989: 4). Furthermore, she keeps addressing the problematic character of the past as a source of knowledge for us today, then she carries on clarifying the reason for naming the historiographic metafiction with this name, as indicated beneath:

The past really did exist. The question is: how can we know that past today—and what can we know of it? The overt metafictionality of novels like *Shame* or *Star Turn* acknowledges their own constructing, ordering, and selecting processes, but these are always shown to be historically determined acts. It puts into question, at the same time as it exploits, the grounding of historical knowledge in the past real. This is why I have been calling this historiographic metafiction. (2002: 92)

Since this kind of narrative incorporates historical elements from the past, and retrieving these elements needs the inclusion of fictionalized accounts; Hutcheon calls it historiographic metafiction. Bran Nicol (2009) looks at historiographic metafiction as fiction that employs metafiction procedures and styles to awaken us that history is a production, not a natural entity that equalizes the past. He also reviews historiographic metafiction as didactic; educating us about history while also allowing us to inquire, interpret, analyze, and even co-write its narrative. Nicol declares that

historiographic metafiction admits that language is unable to point out the real world but to a hypothetical and conjectural variety of it.

1.2. THE LITERARY THEORY OF NEW HISTORICISM

1.2.1. Introducing the Terminology of New Historicism

Stephen Greenblatt (1989) explains in his essay “Towards a Poetics of Culture” how ‘new historicism’ stuck more than the other terms that he invented carefully. Greenblatt (1989) asserts that new historicism is a practice rather than a doctrine. Then he adds that Michel Foucault’s ideas in addition to some other anthropologists and social theorists, especially the French thinkers, helped him to shape his literary-critical practice. So new historicism is a contemporary critical theory that was inaugurated in the 1980s and followed by some prominent theorists like Louis Montrose, Stephen Orgel, Harold Aram Veaser, Catherine Gallagher, Alan Sinfield, Jonathan Dollimore, and Hayden White. New historicism is analogous to Marxism and post-structuralism in some ideas and differs from them in others. New historicism does not look just at the text but looks at its culture, social, and historical context. New historicism keeps away from the text-centered approaches and schools of criticism that believe that a text can stand alone, even without looking at its author and its context such as formalism, new criticism, and structuralism, instead, it believes in the co-text.

Clifford Geertz, one of the most influential cultural anthropologists, says that “there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture” (1973: 49). Culture should not be perceived only as a collection of tangible patterns of conduct, practices, norms, and habitual clusters—as has predominantly been the perspective thus far. But it should be sensed “as a set of control mechanisms-plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call programs) for the governing of behavior” (1973: 45). Greenblatt talks about Geertz’s control mechanisms and illustrates the three functions of literature in new historicism as follows:

Self-fashioning is in effect the Renaissance version of these control mechanisms, the cultural system of meanings that creates specific individuals by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment. Literature functions within this system in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by

which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes. The interpretive practice that I have attempted to exemplify in the essays that follow must concern itself with all three of these functions. (1980: 3-4)

New historicists refuse the new criticism's underlying principles about the text being an autonomous artifact and refuse the liberal humanism's main tenets about the text being dateless and having immortal importance. New criticism does not think that the meaning of the text is related to the intention of the author or his cultural, political, and biographical background but by the close reading of the text itself and the connection and the relationship among the words of the text. New historicism opposes that strictly and tries to reshape and reproduce the text in different words; above that, new historicism seeks to find different understandings and different meanings from the traditional ones. In his discussion of the "textuality of history and the historicity of texts" (Montrose, 1997: 242), he implies that history has been constructed and fictionalized, that texts should be examined in light of their social specificity and cultural embedding, and that we are unable to reach or produce an entirely true and authentic history.

New historicism agrees with the poststructuralist view that reality and authenticity are produced, constructed, and diverse; it also agrees with Michel Foucault's views about the ability of power to generate knowledge. According to Foucault, "we are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (1980: 93), and "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (1978: 93). Literature, according to a new historian, is not a production of an individual mind, but rather a culmination of a specific cultural period. New historicism considers literature in conjunction with other cultural and social items of a specific authentic period to demonstrate how concepts, creeds, convictions, states of mind, and philosophies worked over a broader social range that is not solely literary. In substance, new historicism tries to comprehend academic history through literature and tries to comprehend literature through the historical context and cultural settings of that piece of literature. It takes into consideration that any work of literature has a place, a time, and a backdrop; therefore, new historicism does not separate text from these crucial components when it comes to analyzing and deciphering it.

New historicism came into being with the reanalyzing of some of Shakespeare's plays from the Renaissance era, in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) Greenblatt built the foundations of new historicism. New historicism is a multidisciplinary concept and it turns down totalizing theories in furtherance of methodological pluralism. And because of the new historicists' restraint to theorizing and totalizing theories, they have received occasional criticism (Erisman, 2014). To sum up, we infer that new historicism can be considered an amalgamation of postmodern historiography, literary criticism, and power-discourse analysis.

New historicism's perspective on literature is elaborated upon by Greenblatt in the following manner:

If interpretation limits itself to the behavior of the author, it becomes literary biography ... and risks losing a sense of the larger networks of meaning in which both the author and his works participate. If alternatively, literature is viewed exclusively as the expression of social rules and instructions, it risks being absorbed entirely into an ideological superstructure ... Finally, if literature is seen only as a detached reflection upon the prevailing behavioral codes, a view from a safe distance, we drastically diminish our grasp of art's concrete functions in relation to individuals and to institutions, both of which shrink into an obligatory 'historical background' that adds little to our understanding. We drift back toward a conception of art as addressed to a timeless, cultureless, universal human essence or, alternatively as a self-regarding, autonomous, closed system—in either case, art as opposed to social life. (1980: 4)

New historicism does not put a vast difference between history and literature, it sees the relationship between history and literature as the relation between the text and the context, and more essentially it tries to locate literature in history. Brannigan reckons that "literature is not, however, simply a medium for the expression of historical knowledge. It is an active part of a particular historical moment" (1998: 3). Identically, Howard (1986) thinks that literature is a factor in telling the truth about the past, and he supposes that "literature is an agent in constructing a culture's sense of reality" (25). New historicism takes into account that literature is an intrinsic and inextricable part of making history and a "part of a process of historical change" (Brannigan, 1998: 203). Historical literary criticism and formalist literary criticism presume that literature is the greatest form of human discourse and a self-immortalized form. On the other hand, Raymond Williams believes that "we cannot separate literature and art from other kinds of social practice ... They may have quite specific features as practices, but they cannot be separated from the general social process" (1980: 44). In this respect Barry states:

New historicism refuses at least ostensibly to privilege the literary text ... it envisages and practices a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other. ... it is an approach to literature in which there is no privileging of the literary. (2017: 146)

So new historicists assume that literature is one of many other human creations like art, philosophy, architecture, and a bunch of others. All of them are prerequisites to interpreting the political, social, and cultural framework of the past.

1.2.2. New Historicism and Cultural Materialism

New historicism and cultural materialism share similarities in their respective approaches to textual analysis. While new historicism primarily concerns itself with the examination of texts and their historical contexts, cultural materialism primarily centers around the exploration of the interplay between texts and culture. In addition, cultural materialism emphasizes the efforts of both men and women in shaping their own history, while new historicism emphasizes the influence of ideology and social factors on this process. This is why according to Barry (2017), cultural materialism is characterized by ‘political optimism’, while new historicism is associated with ‘political pessimism’.

New historicism is a movement theorized by American critics started mainly by the publication of Stephen Greenblatt’s works in the 1980s, specifically, in Berkeley California. Cultural materialism is mainly a British movement that emerged with the publication of Jonathan Dollimore’s work *Radical Tragedy* (1984), and *Political Shakespeare*, a combination of essays edited by him and Alan Sinfield (1985). Bressler (2006) delineates:

Cultural Poetics — often called new historicism in America and cultural materialism in Great Britain — declares that all history is subjective, written by people whose personal biases affect their interpretation of the past. History ... can never provide us with the objective truth or give us a totally accurate picture of past events, persons, or eras nor the worldview of a group of people. (183)

Even though Bressler considers new historicism and cultural materialism as one under the name of cultural poetics, they are distinct. Parvini (2018) puts forward that new historicism and cultural materialism came to prominence simultaneously and almost in the same field of knowledge; therefore, they have been juxtaposed and considered as two sides of the same coin though they differ in many notions.

New historicism spread expeditiously and effectively to replace new criticism. Though it was criticized by feminism, cultural materialism, and some other scholars it prevailed in the realm in the 1980s and 1990s. Some call it ‘new new historicism’ or the ‘new materialism’ (Liu, 1989; McGann, 1985). The linkage between new historicism and cultural materialism comes from the idea that both new historicists and cultural materialists consider history as a political outcome and a cultural production.

In the initial stages, “new historicism was primarily a method of power analysis strongly influenced by the anthropological studies of Clifford Geertz, modes of torture and punishment described by Michel Foucault, and methods of ideological control outlined by Louis Althusser” (Parvini, 2018: 239). Greenblatt (1988) presents in his renowned essay “Invisible Bullets”, one of the literary criticism concepts ‘subversion and containment’. The concept has been used much in new historicism and cultural materialism and, further, by the literary critic Louis Montrose. Greenblatt (1988) contends that authority creates its subversive factors to contain them, as a result, what seems to be subversion is indeed the final triumph of containment. Ashcroft in *The Empire Writes Back* (2002) and Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (2007) mention the same idea in the post-colonial theory, where the empire creates its enemy, thereby it can define itself; in other words, opponents must occur.

Cultural materialism is influenced to a great extent by Raymond Williams, Louis Althusser, and the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci; therefore, cultural materialism is related to Marxism. As a result, cultural materialism has a more confrontational and political tone than new historicism. Graham Holderness looks at Cultural materialism as “a politicised form of historiography” (1988: 18). Cultural materialism also supposes that ideologies and culture exist in material sorts like universities, schools, mosques, churches, theaters, et cetera and they are not outside the political realm. Dollimore and Sinfield (1990) enlighten that cultural materialists do not look at literary works as productions of their time but as productions of every time. For example, Shakespeare’s plays are not cultural productions of the Elizabethan era only, but they can be reconstituted, renovated, and remodeled all the time throughout various cultural material institutes, and their meanings and significance depend on the cultural scope that they are situated in. According to Dollimore and Sinfield, “a cultural history must address not only texts, but the institutions and formations that organize, and

organized by, textualities, inscribing in and through them the contests of ideologies, of subjectivities” (1990: 98-9). Barry (2017) summarizes cultural materialism with four characteristics: “historical context, theoretical method, political commitment, and textual analysis” (153). Barry opines that in the context of cultural materialism, ‘culture’ encompasses various forms such as music, TV formats, social standards, literature, costumes, and any tangible manifestations. Additionally, materialism is considered to be the antithesis of idealism.

Both new historicism and cultural materialism focus on the power relations and social roles in explaining the texts and share some similar comprehensions of the literature-history relationship. However, the distinction between them is that new historicism considers the power relations in the past context while cultural materialism considers the power relations in the contemporary context. Sinfield in *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (1992) demonstrates how the Royal Ordnance, a British company that produces weapons, utilizes Shakespeare for promotional purposes, proudly asserting that their influence is as widespread as Shakespeare’s plays in the international theatre. Therefore, cultural materialism’s stance is that literary texts have contemporary material, political, and social functions. Moreover, according to Sinfield, canonical literary works and writers, from the viewpoint of cultural materialists, can be utilized to support contemporaneous political and cultural practice. In this regard, Barry ratifies that “the new historicist situates the literary text in the political situation of its own day, while the cultural materialist situates it within that of ours” (2017: 155). Mureşan (2023) adds that “new historicism too distances itself from the official canon, focusing on less known texts whose marginalization is seen as the policy of networks of power” (279). Additionally, new historicists and cultural materialists do not differentiate between text and context on one hand and between literature and politics on the other.

Each of the two movements, new historicism and cultural materialism, looks at history as a subjective knowledge that can be nominated to interpret literature as mentioned above by Bressler (2006). Moreover, the two movements assert that literature and history have reciprocal potent effects on each other. Also, Brannigan (1998) investigates that new historicists and cultural materialists argue that literature may have positive sides and negative sides on social, political, and cultural behaviors. Literature

can curb or boost subversion, thus, some societies impose publication censorship because they are concerned that literature might incite illegal or undesirable acts. In conclusion, new historicism and cultural materialism have proven their incredible benefit to literary theory in examining the connections between literature and history.

1.2.3. New Historicism and Historical Materialism (Marxist Historiography)

Marx's theory of history is usually called interchangeably between these two terms 'historical materialism' and 'Marxist historiography'. Commonly, Marxist historiography focuses on the crucial role of the economic factor, economic determinants, relation of productions, and the seriousness of the class struggle in writing history. Marx and Engels look at people as personifications of economic classification, productive forces, and holders of interests and class relationships. Marxist historiography foregrounds material production and considers it basic to cover livelihood needs (Rigby, 1998). Marx took from Hegel that history is in constant change, and he attributes this to the opposition and class struggles. Correspondingly, Althusser (1984), the French Marxist philosopher, debates that literature is one of the foundations that contributes to establishing the state's ideologies. Properly speaking, new historicism is in conformity with Althusser; literature mirrors the dominant's values and norms and it can be exploited as an ideological weapon that uses persuasion rather than coercion. Undoubtedly, Althusser has been influenced by his Marxist predecessor, Antonio Gramsci, and his philosophy of cultural hegemony.

Another aspect of new historicism is its endorsement of Marxist historiography's principles concerning the significant influence of economic conditions and the interplay between social classes in the composition and interpretation of history. Conversely, new historicism rejects several of Marxism's concepts such as superstructure and the assumed class consciousness. Gallagher and Greenblatt, in order to separate themselves from Marxism, write: "We were from the beginning uncomfortable with such key concepts as superstructure and base or imputed class consciousness" (2000: 9). New historicism makes an effort to discover the historical contexts in which literature merged without neglecting to pay attention to the power forms. New historicists like Greenblatt and Sinfield regard literature as a vehicle of power that can have the potential and capabilities of power in society. Therefore, we can understand from the above, that new historicism does not strip out the field of literature from the political world.

1.2.4. New Historicism versus Traditional Historicism

In line with the innovations and the latest changes in history and fiction, the historical novel set up a new formula. The conventional methods of historiography are not valid anymore in postmodernism, the texts and the works of literature which take history as a theme reflect the new historicist approaches. The way that historical characters and events are used in postmodernist novels differs greatly from how they are used in classic novels from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Classic historical novels that deal with history as a topic for writing novels use historical events, and personalities in a way, however, does not conflict with the official historical records. Brian McHale (2003) adds that traditional historical novelists can only feel free in the historical gaps and blanks where there are no official documents which he calls 'dark areas'. While traditional historical fiction adheres to established conventions, postmodernist historical fiction defies these rules, transgressing the ontological boundaries between reality and fiction. The variance between the two approaches is that the traditional approach evades inconsistency with formal history while the contemporary approach seems to do that self-consciously. Along with that, postmodernist writers blur the historical and the fictional elements:

The postmodernist historical novel is revisionist in two senses. First, it revises the content of the historical record, reinterpreting the historical record, often demystifying or debunking the orthodox version of the past. Secondly, it revises, indeed transforms, the conventions and norms of historical fiction itself. (McHale, 2004: 90)

Readers notice a significant distinction betwixt historical fiction written by authors like Maria Edgeworth, Walter Scott, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, Charles Dickens, Mary Ann Evans, Leo Tolstoy, and Robert Graves by one party and the novels of authors like William Golding, Mary Renault, Salman Rushdie, Penelope Fitzgerald, Julian Barnes, Pat Barker, Philippa Gregory, Hilary Mantel, David Mitchell and the like by the other party.

Relatedly, in her work, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, Hutcheon notes that albeit it is problematical, novels of historiographic metafiction camouflage between fact and fiction, but the technique "suggests the continuing relevance of such an opposition, even if it be a problematic one. Such novels both install and then

blur the line between fiction and history” (2004: 113). Another notable point is that new historicists put themselves away from the upper class, royal members, and the other aristocratic social groups and focus on the lower classes. New historicism features “the experiences, struggles and contributions of the minorities, the weak, the suppressed, or the invisible social groups in history” (Sayar, 2024: 1234). Stones (1979) comprehensively elucidates five distinctions between new historicism and traditional historicism:

There are, however five differences between [new historians’ stories] and those of the traditional narrative historians. First, they are almost without exception concerned with the lives and feelings and behaviour of the poor and obscure rather than the great and powerful. Secondly, analysis remains as essential to their methodology as description, so that their books tend to switch, a little awkwardly, from one mode to the other. Thirdly, they are opening up new sources ... Fourthly, they often tell their stories in a different way from that of Homer, or Dickens, or Balzac. Under the influence of the modern novel and of Freudian ideas, they gingerly explore the subconscious rather than sticking to the plain facts. And under the influence of the anthropologists, they try to use behaviour to reveal symbolic meaning. Fifthly, they tell the story of a person, a trial or a dramatic episode, not for its own sake, but in order to throw light upon the internal workings of a past culture and society. (18-9)

In addition to these five dissimilarities by Stones, Barry asserts that the primary criterion for differentiating between new historicism and old historicism lies in the relative significance assigned to literary texts compared to non-literary texts. He argues that “the practice of giving equal weighting to literary and non-literary material is the first and major difference between the new and the old historicism” (2017: 147). Traditional historicism assigns a greater importance to literary texts compared to non-literary texts, whereas new historicism places equal significance on both literary and non-literary texts. Moreover, unlike the old historicism, the new historicism does not recognize any work or text as canonical or sacred texts. Alternatively stated, old historicism embraces canonical works, whereas new historicism rejects the notion of the existence of canonical texts. This topic will be explored in greater detail at a later stage. For Barry ‘the archival continuum’ is another difference between the new and the old historicism, which means that new historicism is a historicist movement, not a historical movement. The original intentions and thoughts of a writer cannot be returned; therefore, new historicism demands a thorough analysis of the text to find new thoughts, opinions, and meanings since “the aim is not to represent the past as it really was, but to present a new reality by re-situating it”

(Barry, 2017: 148). Old historicism favors a linear narrative when writing history, while new historicism seeks out the discontinuities, fractures, and gaps in historical narrative. This is because it rejects the notion that history follows a linear progression. Further, new historicists have a strong desire to resurrect lost histories; the traditional historicists do not have that desire. Moreover, new historicists give great value to cultural events and believe that they are indispensable for the analysis of history. Bressler (2006) upholds that:

Unlike the old historicism, this new historicism, or Cultural Poetics, asserts that an intricate connection exists between an aesthetic object — a text or any work of art — and society, while denying that a text can be evaluated in isolation from its cultural context. We must know, it declares, the societal concerns of the author, of the historical times evidenced in the work, and of other cultural elements exhibited in the text before we can devise a valid interpretation. This approach to textual analysis questions the very act of how we can arrive at a meaning for any human activity, whether it is a text, a social event, a long-held tradition, or a political act. (219)

Bressler outlines the connection between any piece of work to its society and delineates the value of cultural context in new historicism. Analyzing any book devoid of its historical context is detrimental to understanding. More than that, to give a healthy interpretation of a text, there should be a knowledge of its author's concerns and all the issues related to it. Conventional historicism typically embraces a single narrative, especially from the canonical works, recognizes the validity of one account of the historical process, and regards it as an all-encompassing and comprehensive representation of the past. Lindenberger declares that "traditional literary historians viewed themselves in a relatively subservient role. They were essentially guardians of tradition, glorified custodians whose task was to preserve and transmit what had long since passed as sanctified" (1984: 16). In new historicism there is no sacred discourse and no need for guardians to protect it. New historicists examine the past through different perspectives, including cultural, social, political, and literary aspects. They acknowledge the diversity of perspectives and interpretations of history. Ultimately, new historicists attempt to understand literature through history and history through literature.

1.3. THE POSTMODERNIST THEORY OF HISTORY AND HISTORICAL FICTION

The postmodernist perspective on history is characterized by denial and rejection, with some postmodernists asserting that accurate history is unattainable in the postmodern era and holds no definitive place within it. Furthermore, they deny that history is objective and genuine; instead, the postmodernists correlate with the poststructuralists concerning that historical events were constructed ideologically by the prevailing discourse and there is no absolute truth but there are multiple truths; thus they consider history as subjective. Hutcheon indicates that “Doctorow does not share his predecessor’s trust in the objective presentation of history, and it is his ironic intermingling of the factual and the fictive and his deliberate anachronisms that underline this mistrust” (2004: 136-7). Doctorow is a renowned postmodernist novelist known for his historiographic metafiction, which embodies the postmodern perspective on objectivity. Aldridge (1983) asserts that the notions of authenticity and credibility have been supplanted in postmodernism by skepticism and deviation as highlighted below:

In the fiction of [postmodernist novelists] virtually everything and everyone exists in such a radical state of distortion and aberration that there is no way of determining from which conditions in the real world they have been derived or from what standard of sanity they may be said to depart. *The conventions of verisimilitude and sanity have been nullified* [emphasis added]. Characters inhabit a dimension of structureless being in which their behavior becomes inexplicably arbitrary and unjudgeable because the fiction itself stands as a metaphor of a derangement that is seemingly without provocation and beyond measurement. (140)

In postmodernism, the norms of fiction, literature, and knowledge have been updated. Considering literature as a branch of knowledge, Lyotard especially in his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) bases his argument on the idea that knowledge has been commodified and industrialized and everything is subject to change, and knowledge is not an exception. Moreover, he thinks that there is no one knowledge or metaknowledge in this computerized and globalized world, instead, knowledge passes through small and narrow channels. In addition to that, Lyotard debates that knowledge is not innocent anymore and it is under the control of governments, wherefore they decide what kind of knowledge and how much knowledge the public can access; that is to say, knowledge has been once again elitized. There is an ideology

behind the production and commodification of knowledge and the purpose of this ideology is to convince people of the authorities' agendas.

Steven Connor (2004) claims that literature is one of the most preeminent domains in postmodernism and narrative fiction is the foremost domain in postmodernist literature. Then he adds that the movement from modernism to postmodernism includes the movement from poetry to fiction. Even in modernism, there was a shift from focusing on poets like Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens to novelists like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, Dorothy Richardson, and E. M. Forster. The orientation from poetry to fiction conveys the idea of the increased significance of narrative fiction in the postmodern period. The growth of poststructuralism in the 60s and 70s helped to create 'narratology' which was a kind of triumph for the nonpoetic literature forms. This interest in narrative fiction was continued by postmodernist thinkers like Linda Hutcheon, Brian McHale, and Fredric Jameson.

Historical fiction in postmodernism has been reshaped and modified according to the postmodernist positions and viewpoints towards history, like those novels of Hilary Mantel (*Wolf Hall Trilogy*), Markus Zusak (*The Book Thief*), John Fowles (*The French Lieutenant's Woman*), Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children*) and Jeanette Winterson (*Sexing the Cherry*). The historical novels in postmodernist literature query the distinction between fiction and history. Greenblatt and Gallagher (2000) observe that due to the requirements of the postmodernist situation, literature has become noticeably more historicized and history has become much more literary. Consequently, history has a great challenge to approve its ability to elucidate truth outside the text and the precious value of historical epistemology.

In his work, *The Post-Modern Aura*, Charles Newman describes postmodernist literature as a "commentary on the aesthetic history of whatever genre it adopts" (1985: 44). And Gertrude Himmelfarb (1999) debates that postmodernity has influenced many fields of study and history is involved, and since postmodernism disproves the fixity of truth, language, text, and the past; this influence has led the new historians to refute what postmodernists refute. The historical narratives in postmodernist writings "self-consciously distort history" (Lewis, 2011: 171). Therefore, postmodernist historical

fiction tries to place history into fiction to distort the historical facts then revise them and rewrite them from a different point of view.

Postmodernist historical novelists can give a voice to the suppressed groups in the past and to the silent subalterns or highlight the marginalized social classes. Hutcheon (2004) contends that “postmodernist discourses ... make the margin into a center” (65). Also, postmodern historical novelists can call attention to the ethnic minority in history (Heilmann & Llewellyn, 2004). In this respect, Fox-Genovese supposes that “to meet the standards of gender, race, and class, history must focus upon those who qualify as ‘marginalized,’ ‘disempowered,’ or ‘victimized’” (1999: 45). She also praises postmodernist history as the domain that does not neglect the suppressed. Gallagher as well emphasizes that:

The traditionally important economic and political agents and events have been displaced or supplemented by people and phenomena that once seemed wholly insignificant, indeed outside of history: women, criminals, the insane, sexual practices and discourses, fairs, festivals, plays of all kinds. Just as in the sixties, the effort in the eighties has been to question and destabilize the distinctions between sign systems and things, the representation and the represented, history and text. (1989: 43)

New historicism and postmodernism redirect attention from significant historical events to inconsequential historical agents. Furthermore, dismantle the distinctions between systems of signs and objects, the depiction and the depicted, as well as history and text. As a result, postmodernists liberate history from the impact of predominant authoritarian and patriarchal ideologies, and they celebrate a diversity of histories. To put it differently, the historical novel in the postmodernist era could be seen as an emancipating device to liberate the neglected groups through history and emphasize lower-ranking social strata.

To understand the thought processes of postmodernist historical novelists, we should consider how Hilary Mantel replied to a question by the interviewer of *History Extra*; when the interviewer asked her: “Does historical fiction need to be grounded in fact? If so, what room is there for the imagination?” She answered:

Different types of historical novels require different kinds of preparatory work, all of them intensive. Even if you simply use the past as a backdrop, you need to be grounded in the culture; you need to know about everyday life, how people think ... you must know as much about them as a biographer would, and then add value by taking the story where the historian and biographer can’t go: into the private aspect of the individual, the unshown and unshowable. However much you learn, factually, there is plenty of scope for imagination. You are allowed to speculate and to fill gaps,

as long as you do it plausibly. If you don't want to pay attention to plausibility, it is more honest to write some other kind of novel. The facts are not a constraint; they are your raw material and your source of inspiration. (Attar, 2022: para. 3)³

Mantel discusses that historical novelists can add worth and value to their fiction and take the story beyond where a historian and a biographer can reach, i.e. the novelist has the right to what no one else has. The historical novelist can enter inside the monologue, and soliloquy and can enter rooms of imagination that are forbidden to someone else. Most significant is her last sentence, “the facts are not a constraint; they are your raw material and your source of inspiration”; to Mantel, historical facts are bare bones, and it is the novelist's mission to give them required addition. Federman (1981) postulates that “the writer simply materializes (renders concrete) fiction into words. And as such, there are no limits to the material of fiction — no limits beyond the writer's power of imagination, and beyond the possibilities of language” (12). The material of fiction is limitless, and the possibilities of language and the writer's imagination are also boundless. Lukács elevates the historical narrative beyond mere imagination, focusing on the writer's ability to enable readers to relive, re-feel, and re-perceive historical events, as elucidated below:

What matters therefore in the historical novel [in the postmodern literature] is not the retelling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality. (1989: 42)

Historical fiction can bring up vital queries about issues like identity, history, previous culture, facts, and literary concepts. Historical novelists can use their fiction to discuss current issues in the expectation of overcoming the present's problems; they can use the past to represent the current situation. Their fiction looks at how people shape the political landscape, as well as how history shapes people.

In the postmodernist approach of historical fiction, there are no fixed facts and there is no one true history. It is conceivable that this aligns with Fukuyama's assertions in *The End of History and the Last Man* (2006), wherein he posits that history has reached its conclusion or that there is no history anymore. There are some events and facts that are

³<https://www.historyextra.com/membership/hilary-mantel-interview-challenges-historical-fiction-thomas-cromwell-wolf-hall-mirror-light/>

raw materials and the writers can use them with little addition or omission, promotion, or demotion. In this sense, White says:

The events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like-in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play. (2001: 223)

White emphasizes that writing history is like writing a novel, where it is the writer who decides to accentuate some events and alleviate some others. For postmodernist novelists to write such kind of genre, they need to be familiar with the period they write about. The novelists must be knowledgeable about daily life, social norms, historical and cultural facts of the period or the character, otherwise, they will not be able to write. A large part of history has not been recorded, therefore, there is a large spot for imagination and invention. The novelist is free to fill these gaps, add, originate, and enter ranges forbidden to others.

Mantel has been asked if historical fiction must be founded on facts or not, and whether novelists should be fair or neutral toward their subjects. She replied: “You must be fair – yes. Neutral – no” (Attar, 2022: para. 4). Neutrality is the profession of historians but novelists cannot be neutral otherwise they will “lack the ferocity of imagination required to keep your reader entertained” (Attar, 2022: para. 4). In postmodernist historical fiction, there are places for fiction and there are places for reality; however, the readers are cognizant of that, as far as they are reading a historical fiction book, not a formal historical non-fiction book or a primary source. Related to fairness and honesty, obviously, the historical novelist should be just and fair, yet the look at history has changed dramatically through time. The conventional novelists who wrote historical novels were keen to follow the unquestionable historical facts and were keen also to not oppose the historians and biographers. This tendency continued until the emergence of postmodernism and new historicism. Postmodernist historical novelists often challenge historical facts and the perspectives of historians, arguing that multiple versions of reality always exist. They question the authenticity of formal history, viewing it as subjective rather than objective. Consequently, they grant themselves the freedom to reinterpret and reimagine the past from their own perspectives.

Postmodern theorists like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Félix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean-François Lyotard have influenced postmodern writers in their refusal of the metanarrative. They focus on the local narrative, the local and autonomous struggles, the micro-politics of power, and the fragmentary interpretations. Regarding this, Lyotard says: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives” (1984: xxiv). Consequently, postmodernist authors think differently from the previous authors, as a result, there is a long list of literary and non-literary works that start with rereading and rethinking: *Rethinking Literature*, *History*, *Shakespeare*, *Knowledge*, *Life Meaning*, *Life and Death*, *Engineering*, *Leadership*, *Architecture*, *Capitalism*, *Future*, *Globalization*, *Economics*, *Humanity*, *Feminism*, *Marxism*, *Law*, *Psychiatry*, *Socialism*, *Sexism and Gender*, *Values and Ethics*, and *Rethinking Sociology*, etc. All these are postmodernist books and from their titles, they reflect their postmodernist avant-garde propensity.

Postmodernism spotlights fragmentation and prefers disparity over unity and this is applied to its thought about history. Lewis (2011) makes sure that “the postmodernist writer *distrusted the wholeness* [emphasis added] and completion associated with traditional stories and preferred to deal with other ways of structuring narrative” (174). Hutcheon (2004) also supposes that “the search for unity (narrative, historical, subjective) is constantly frustrated” (162) because postmodernists do not believe in the coherence of historical events. They interpret them differently from conventional historical interpretations and even fictionalize and rewrite history. Anthony Giddens describes the look of post-modernity to history as follows:

Post-modernity has been associated not only with the end of foundationalism but with the end of history. History has no intrinsic form and no overall teleology. A plurality of histories can be written, and they cannot be anchored by reference to an Archimedean point (such as the idea that history has an evolutionary direction). History must not be equated with historicity, since the second of these is distinctively bound up with the institutions of modernity. Marx’s historical materialism mistakenly identifies the one with the other and thereby not only attributes a false unity to historical development but also fails adequately to discern the special qualities of modernity. (1990: 50)

Giddens questions how a pluralistic, diverse, and fractured society can have a cohesive history. Instead of a cohesive history, there are multiple fragmented histories. The importance of history to postmodern society is denied by all postmodernists.

White believes that historians can record and archive past events but they never can attain the contexts of the historical events. Accordingly, they are compelled to innovate contexts so the past events would have meaning and sense. Thus, Hayden White (2001) sees that the milieu of the documented and archived historical occurrences is not attainable, and since the case is like that, the milieu is invented. E. H. Carr (2018) seems to agree with White that it is the historian who decides to give a particular accident in the past a frame and significance. Furthermore, Carr cites the crossing of the Rubicon as an illustrative example. Historians are responsible for popularizing the phrase ‘Crossing the Rubicon’ to signify a decisive point of no return, specifically referring to Julius Caesar’s crossing of the river:

Facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context. It was, I think, one of Pirandello’s characters who said that a fact is like a sack – it won’t stand up till you’ve put something in it. The only reason why we are interested to know that the battle was fought at Hastings in 1066 is that historians regard it as a major historical event. It is the historian who has decided for his own reasons that Caesar’s crossing of that petty stream, the Rubicon, is a fact of history, whereas the crossing of the Rubicon by millions of other people before or since interests nobody at all. (Carr, 2018: 55)

As implied above, historians are the ones who determine the historical significance of an event, battle, or individual. If historians and novelists did not embellish and enrich the majority of historical events, they would remain forgotten and unnoticed, much like a plastic bag that collapses if it is not filled with objects. Hutcheon (2004) contends that the portrayal of postmodernism as diminishing the significance of history to a repository of outdated information and the notion that history only exists as a textual construct is unequivocally erroneous. No one elucidates writing in contemporary thought more effectively than Federman when he asserts that in postmodernism

everything can be said, and must be said, in any possible way. ... writing means now filling a space (the pages), in those spaces where there is nothing to write, the fiction writer can, at any time, introduce material (quotations, pictures, diagrams, charts, designs, pieces of other discourses, doodles, etc.) totally unrelated to the story he is in the process of telling; or else, he can simply leave those spaces blank, because fiction is as much what is said as what is not said, since what is said is not necessarily true, and since what is said can always be said another way. (1981: 12)

According to Federman, postmodernist authors may incorporate their emotions and perceptions into their writing, regardless of their relevance to the subject matter. That is because fiction encompasses both the articulated and the unarticulated, as the written

word is not inherently truthful, and can invariably be expressed in alternative manners. Finally, history has never been considered obsolete but it has been rethought as a human construct. Stating that there is no history anymore except as a text, does not mean that the past did not exist, but it means that we cannot reach the past unless with its documents, archives, chronicles, and texts, in other words by textuality.



CHAPTER TWO

INTERPRETING THE *WOLF HALL TRILOGY* THROUGH NEW HISTORICISM AND POSTMODERNISM

2.1. CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY OF HILARY MANTEL

Dame Hilary Mantel, the acclaimed British novelist, was born in England in 1952 and passed away there in 2022. During the years in between, she spent nearly a decade living in Botswana and Saudi Arabia. Mantel completed her studies in 1973 and started working as a social worker and then as a sales clerk before moving abroad with her husband. Her stay in Africa and Asia and her experience of different cultures inspired her to write fiction. She released her first novel, *Every Day Is Mother's Day*, in Saudi Arabia in 1985. After a year, she published *Vacant Possession*, then *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* (1988), *An Experiment in Love* (1996), *The Giant, O'Brien* (1998), and *Giving Up the Ghost* (2003). However, according to Cunningham (2024), she achieved universal fame after her *Wolf Hall Trilogy*: *Wolf Hall* (2009), *Bring Up The Bodies* (2012), and *The Mirror And The Light* (2020). Mantel is famous for grimly comic and socially characterized novels set in contemporaneous and historical backgrounds.

John Burnside praises Mantel's fiction and asserts that "Mantel is an astonishing writer: a prose stylist who combines absolute precision with a compelling sense of flow, and a marvelously subtle observer of character. *Wolf Hall* casts a spell" (Mantel, 2010: II). The Man Booker chairman, Peter Stothard, applauds that Mantel is "the greatest modern English prose writer working today" (Mantel, 2010: I). The Observer commented on Mantel after publishing *Wolf Hall* stating that "Hilary Mantel is one of our bravest as well as most brilliant writers" (Mantel, 2010: VI). Greenblatt (2009) responded to *Wolf Hall* by flaunting that: "Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* provides a powerful hallucination of presence, the vivid sensation of lived life. They set the dead in motion and make them speak: I am not a stick figure in a textbook; I was once alive" (part. 2).

Mantel is a historical novelist with a flavour of a historian, she has a vast knowledge of history. In her interview with Mona Simpson, Mantel said: "I only became a novelist because I thought I had missed my chance to become a historian" (Simpson, 2015: para.

2). So Mantel is not only a historical novelist, she is also a semi-historian. She also noted that “when the people are real, though dead, I have a different feeling toward them. I consider them my responsibility” (para. 41); this shows her seriousness in writing about history and real characters. Furthermore, she asserts that writing about history needs a lot of effort, preparation, and a colossal acquaintance.

Mantel holds a different and new historicist perspective on history as we will see in *Wolf Hall Trilogy*. She “gave history its beautiful due. In doing so, she deployed breathtaking resources of literary skill, and helped us know ourselves as a nation” (Atwood et al., 2022, para. 6).⁴ Mantel made a lasting literary impact on postmodern literature and engraved her name in stone and became the undisputed mother of the historical novel in the postmodern era. She has revolutionized the contemporary historical novel with her unwavering courage in addressing historical subjects. She became a benchmark and the reference for contemporary novelists and writers interested in history.

2.2. CONCISE SUMMARY OF THE NOVELS

Wolf Hall’s opening sentence, “so now get up” foreshadows Thomas Cromwell’s future and rise. In 1500, 15-year-old Thomas was the son of cruel blacksmith Walter Cromwell. His father beat Thomas daily for trivial things, making his childhood miserable. He never returned home after his father told him to get up. To join the war, Thomas went to France. He became a ship boy on the way to Calais and learned languages, loading carts to ships, calming edgy horses, three card tricks, and solving complex problems, which earned him money and respect.

At 40, Thomas Cromwell was a banker, lawyer, and most importantly, Cardinal Wolsey’s assistant. During his time in Cardinal Wolsey’s household, Cromwell gained knowledge and skills; he memorized “by heart the entire New Testament in Latin ... his manner assured ... He can draft a contract, train a falcon, draw a map, stop a street fight, furnish a house and fix a jury” (Mantel, 2010, 31). Upon Cardinal Wolsey’s failure to secure the annulment, King Henry VIII dismissed him from his offices and confiscated all his possessions, including his garments. Nonetheless, Cromwell remained loyal to his

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/sep/23/hilary-mantel-remembered-she-was-the-queen-of-literature>

superior, the Cardinal, and endeavored to assist him. Cromwell commenced his career in the king's court as a legal practitioner. His wife Liz, along with his two daughters Anne and Grace, succumbed to sweating sickness.

King Henry was astonished by Cromwell's proficiency in arithmetic and questioned how a mercenary soldier could possess such skills. Cromwell responded that he had been educated in the banks of Florence and Venice. Cromwell won the king's favor and met with him regularly, receiving important tasks. Cromwell negotiated with Queen Catherine about her divorce from the King, but she refused. Thomas More, the Lord Chancellor after Wolsey, followed those who smuggled Tyndale's books, tortured them, and burned them for heresy. Cromwell set up a mutual union with Anne Boleyn and he requested from her a formal post in the Jewellery House or the Exchequer. As Anne was favored in the meanwhile, the king designated him in April 1532 as Keeper of the Jewel House and told his councilors what is the problem to "employ the son of an honest blacksmith?" (Mantel, 2010: 359). In return for the favor, Cromwell cleared the way in front of Anne to become the Queen of England by convincing Harry Percy to swear on the Bible that there was no pre-contract or carnal knowledge between him and Anne Boleyn. Thomas More collected heretics and burned them with iron, but later, he found himself stripped of his post as Lord Chancellor after he refused to accept the new church legislation. In September of the same year, the king afforded Anne the Marquess of Pembroke title.

In 1533, the king married Anne without celebration, and rumors spread all over Europe that Anne was pregnant. When Cromwell succeeded in passing a bill from the parliament to accept Anne as an Anna Regina, the king made him Chancellor of the Exchequer. After Anne's coronation, the Pope warned Henry that if he did not go back to Queen Catherine, he would be excommunicated. Nevertheless, Henry VIII did not listen to the Pope. After a period of time, Anne gave birth to a girl and Henry was disappointed and called her Elizabeth.

Cromwell had reformist ideas, he discussed with the king that Christ did not grant the church and the priests the power and the right to levy taxes. Cromwell encouraged Henry to get rid of the church's authority over them and confiscate the church's wealth which was more than the third of England. Anne was preferable again inasmuch as she was pregnant again and Henry did whatever she wanted. Cromwell prepared a bill to

convict The Maid, who warned the king that if he married Anne he would die after six months and would never have a male heir, and the abettors including Thomas More and Bishop Fisher under the command of Anne Boleyn.

The Pope refused the divorce of Henry from Catherine and considered their marriage valid. Mary Tudor supported her mother and the Pope and stood against her father. Thomas More was of the same opinion but he did not declare that and decided to not swear on the Act of Succession nor to utter against it. Cromwell and the others tried to convince More that would be killed; moreover, he might give the chance to the enemies especially the Emperor to attack England. Notwithstanding, More refused to take the oath and insisted that if he did so, it would be against his conscience. Cromwell got another promotion and became the Master Secretary.

In England, people started to call the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, since they did not recognize the post of the Pope anymore. Thomas Cromwell continued to elevate and he received the position of Master of The Rolls. Meanwhile, there were still some people who advocated for Queen Catherine and demanded to bring her back, therefore, King Henry was afraid that she would raise an army with the help of the emperor, her nephew. Thomas More was still obstinate in prison and refused to accept The Act of Supremacy which stated that the king is the church's supreme leader. When King Henry became the head of the church, he nominated Thomas Cromwell as his vice; moreover, he bestowed upon Cromwell a title never before held by anyone: Vicegerent in Spirituals. Ultimately, unable to tolerate any opposition, the king executed four friars for refusing to swear allegiance to him as head of the church. In 1535, More was finally put to death. With five days to spare, Cromwell planned to spend them at Wolf Hall, the Seymours family home.

Bring Up The Bodies is the second and the shortest novel in the *Trilogy*. At the age of 45, Cromwell confounded people with his remarkable achievements despite his humble origins. King Henry grew disenchanted with Queen Anne and began to admire Jane Seymour. Following their creation of each other, Thomas Cromwell and Anne Boleyn's relationship began to deteriorate; indeed "he has made her queen, she has made him minister" (Mantel, 2013: 44). Judiciously, Cromwell started to orchestrate the devaluation of Anne and replace her with Jane. Cromwell met frequently with Eustache Chapuys, the ambassador of Emperor Charles V. The ambassador was a supporter of the previous

Queen Catherine and her daughter Mary; moreover, he was a prudent observer who provided the emperor and the whole of Europe with any tiny details of England.

Anne was once more pregnant; thus, it was her final opportunity to restore the king's favor. The tension between Anne and Cromwell turned severe and they threatened each other. Master Cromwell commenced to collect indictments against Anne Boleyn from ladies-in-waiting and those who were around her. One of the allegations was that Anne was pregnant by a man other than the king. Catherine, the former queen, died in 1536. The king exhaled in relief, as the Emperor would not contend for a deceased woman, paving the way for a new chapter in England and the formation of new alliances.

The king became a lover of Jane Seymour. Cromwell and Edward Seymour told Jane to not be seduced by the king's honeyed words and not to let him touch her until they were officially married because when men get what they want from women they disregard them quickly. The king invited Cromwell to accompany him on a walk, telling him that he trusted his judgment to give him Jane Seymour and get rid of Anne Boleyn—especially after her second miscarriage.

Initially, Master Cromwell tried to settle the divorce with the Boleyns, and when they refused to deal with him except Anne's father; Cromwell gathered witnesses to bear witness against Anne in the trial. He agreed with Lady Worcester, a lady-in-waiting to Anne Boleyn, to testify that Anne stays alone with Mark Smeaton, a handsome musician often behind closed doors, in return he will pay her creditors. He also agreed with Mary Shelton, the queen's cousin, to swear that Anne and Henry Norris, chief of the king's privy chamber, are in love. Certainly, the most notable witness was Jane, George Boleyn's wife, who claimed that there was an incestuous relationship between Anne and her brother George. During an interrogation by Cromwell, Mark admitted his love for Anne and that she was in love with him as well. In addition, he revealed the identities of two other gentlemen, Henry Norris and Francis Weston, who were envious of him and in love with the queen. Cromwell incarcerated Anne and her lovers, George Boleyn, Henry Norris, William Brereton, Francis Weston, and Mark Smeaton, and interrogated them severally. After the trial, the men were executed together on 17 May 1536 for treason and adultery. After two days on 19 May 1536, Queen Anne Boleyn was decapitated for adultery. As of now, the revenge of Cromwell's master Cardinal Wolsey was completed.

The Mirror And The Light is the last and most extensive installment of the *Trilogy*. The novel exhibits the repercussions of beheading the Queen of England that affected the whole country and many other calculations. The king's three children had turned into bastards; Henry Fitzroy, Mary, and Elizabeth. Another effect was that, since the king had no male heir, the old royal dynasties, the Poles and the Courtenays, banded together to support Mary as the heiress. At fifty years old, Thomas Cromwell—dubbed the second man in England by the masses—seemed to be primarily focused on finding the king new wives while discarding the old ones. The king married Jane Seymour and seemed satisfied with her virginity. Afterward, the king knighted Cromwell to become Sir Cromwell and remarked that Cromwell could accomplish the work of ten men, just like his master Cardinal Wolsey. This was a rewarding appointment that brought Cromwell another high position in the state, the Lord Privy Seal. At present, the Pope, the Emperor, and the old noble families supported Mary against her father; therefore, the king was ready to put her on trial but lord Cromwell promised to convince her and bring her to obedience. Successfully, Cromwell used ingenuity and menace to let her sign a document of submission without reading it; recognizing her father as the chief of the church under Christ and accepting her mother's marriage as incestuous and illicit.

King Henry with Lord Cromwell inaugurated institutional modifications in the church and led the religious and economic reformist revolution. They confiscated the church's properties and lands and distributed them to the farmers. England was converted from Catholicism to Protestantism, the bible was translated from Latin to English, and William Tyndale's New Testament was published in England. In 1536, Robert Aske started a revolution in Yorkshire and Reginald Pole started to pose a threat to King Henry; therefore, the king ordered Cromwell to assassinate him but he failed. In the Spring of 1537, Cromwell was granted the title of Baron. In August, Gregory Cromwell married Elizabeth Seymour, and the blacksmith's grandson became the king's brother-in-law. In October 1537, the queen gave birth to Edward and died a few days later.

Cromwell orchestrated with the Duke of Cleves a marriage between Henry and Anne of Cleves, a diplomatic marriage and a political alliance. Henry was surprised by Cromwell's offer, yet he accepted because England needed allies badly. The problem was that there was no common language between her and the king. When Princess Anne arrived, the king was talking to her through translators. Henry disliked her; consequently,

he tried to disavow this marriage by making some pretexts related to pre-contracts, papers, and past promises.

King Henry planned to organize a political marriage for his daughter Mary to gain new allies, but Cromwell's enemies accused him of ruining all the proposals for Mary. Henry did not consummate the matrimony; correspondingly, he sounded like he blamed Cromwell for this union. In March 1540, the Earl of Essex died without an heir, and despite his resentment towards Cromwell, King Henry appointed him as the Earl of Essex. The Duke of Norfolk accused Earl Cromwell of receiving bribes to organize this match with Cleves. These were the signs of Cromwell's season changing and Wriothesley told Earl Cromwell that the king upgraded him only to destroy him. On 10 June, at three o'clock afternoon, a foreboding wind blew and took his hat, he tried to catch it but he failed, he left his knife at home, his heart was trembling, and his throat was parched. At four, his enemies Fitzwilliam, Gardiner, the Duke Of Norfolk, and Kingston came to tell him he had lost everything and arrested him.

The majority of his allies and those who showed them kindness turned on him and stabbed him in the back. Only his household remained loyal to him, his son Gregory, Rafe Sadler, his nephew Richard Cromwell, and the rest. Rafe visited him and conveyed the news, additionally informing him that Henry feared him due to his excessive growth. Cromwell contemplated that it was history repeating, and "Wolsey was broken not for his failures, but for his successes" (Mantel, 2021: 816). His charges were: His intention to marry Mary the king's daughter, taking bribery from the Emperor, and his intention to become a king as he was always saying 'if I were a king'. They accused him also that he had clandestine dealings with Queen Catherine, and once he said publically if the king relinquished the religious reforms he would have his sword in his hand. In addition to his failure to assassinate Reginald Pole. Moreover, his huge household consisted of three thousand workers, which was equal to a palace of a king or a prince, and some other charges.

In 1540, at the age of 55, Cromwell was expecting his demise at any time. He was supposed to die when he was 15 when his father told him 'so now get up'. The *Trilogy* commenced and concluded with identical scenes; in the opening of *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell was moribund, bloodied, and anticipating death, while in the final scene of *The Mirror*

And The Light, he was again awaiting death. However, between these two scenes, history was made.

2.3. NEW HISTORICIST PERSPECTIVES IN *WOLF HALL TRILOGY*

Wolf Hall Trilogy subverts and problematizes historical facts, reflecting contemporary perspectives on history. Mantel disassociates herself from the conventional fashions of writing about history since “new historians have distanced themselves from traditional historicism, and its conservative variety” (Hohendahl, 1992: 90). Hohendahl also avers that “the New Historians challenges the underlying notion both of subjectivity (following Althusser and Foucault) and of totality (following Foucault and Derrida)” (91). Mantel considers history as a mystery and no one can reach assured historical fact; therefore, “new men must forge themselves an ancient pedigree” (Mantel, 2010: 118). She used a new historicist attitude in *Wolf Hall Trilogy*, giving the audience an avant-garde and broader perception from which to perceive and evaluate the events taking place in the novel.

Postmodernist and new historical approaches problematize the very concept of historical awareness (Hutcheon, 2004). She writes that:

The postmodern, then, effects two simultaneous moves. It reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge. This is another of the paradoxes that characterize all postmodern discourses today. And the implication is that there can be no single, essentialized, transcendent concept of ‘genuine historicity’ as Fredric Jameson desires. (89)

Writing historical fiction is inherently subjective, as each author applies their own narrative standards to historical records. Objectivity in history is impossible, each author is affected by his own ideology and convictions consciously or unconsciously. One of the central premises in analyzing historical fiction is the recognition that “history remains inevitably a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian’s perspective as a narrator” (Jenkins, 2004: 14). This subjective view is especially pertinent when examining Hilary Mantel’s works, as her chapter “An Occult History of Britain” demonstrates a pronounced skepticism toward official historical records of English history. By highlighting how myths and folk tales have shaped national narratives, Mantel implicitly reveals that no historical account—whether sanctioned or unofficial—can ever

claim full objectivity. Such an approach aligns with the postmodern stance Linda Hutcheon articulates, whereby “postmodernist discourses ... need the very myths and conventions they contest and reduce,” questioning them “in terms of each other” without seeking “any total vision” (Hutcheon, 2004: 48). Mantel’s preference for storytelling based on lore rather than purely documented events exposes the porous boundary between history and fiction, suggesting that even so-called factual chronicles cannot fully escape the influences of myth and ideology.

This interplay between myth and historical record not only reinforces Mantel’s postmodern interrogation of truth claims but also resonates with her broader narrative strategies in the *Wolf Hall Trilogy*. By weaving everyday realities of Tudor life with imaginative flourishes and re-examining the motives of historical figures, Mantel illustrates Hutcheon’s idea that “the myths and conventions exist for a reason,” (2004: 48) and what postmodernism does is to “investigate that reason” (48). In portraying Thomas Cromwell’s ascent, for instance, she reframes commonly held perceptions of his character, thus foregrounding Jenkins’s proposition that every historian—or novelist—necessarily projects personal or cultural perspectives into the past. In this sense, Mantel’s approach does more than merely blend fact and fiction; it actively contests the viability of an unmediated historical truth, urging readers to see history as shaped by collective imagination, power structures, and narrative exigencies as much as by factual evidence.

New historicists and postmodernists scrutinize the rationales behind the presence of these myths in history, casting doubt upon them, and investigating the manner and purpose of their existence. Barry (2017) holds the view that “whatever is represented in a text is thereby *remade* [emphasis added]. New historicist essays always themselves constitute another remaking, another permutation of the past” (148) as the previous text “under discussion is juxtaposed with a chosen document, so that a new entity is formed” (148). Based on Barry’s standpoint, the interior of every text and everything that is depicted in a text is remade and a replica of genuineness rather than the authentic reality itself. Gregory, Thomas Cromwell’s son reads *The Golden Legend* which is a combination of hagiographies from medieval times, compiled by Jacobus de Voragine in the 13th century. This book stands as a historical text within a historical text in *Wolf Hall*. Gregory comments on *The Golden Legend*:

Our king takes his descent from this Arthur. He was never really dead but waited in the forest biding his time, or possibly in a lake. He is several centuries old. Merlin is a wizard. He comes later. You will see. There are twenty-one chapters. If it keeps on raining I mean to read them all. Some of these things are true and some of them lies. But they are all good stories. (Mantel, 2010: 222)

Gregory's viewpoint embodies the 21st-century interpretation of new historicism and historiography, suggesting an exploration of the essence of history and the potential for forgery.

The unique examination of issues related to both personal and communal identities is prominent in the *Trilogy*. Knox (2010) opines that Mantel is known for her distinctive exploration of matters pertaining to both individual and public identity like King Arthur. Teo (2011) says that some writers like Andre Gide and Tim O'Brien "problematis[e] identity and its relation to the past" (302). Gregory puts the legend of King Arthur's identity under the microscope, and by saying that King Arthur is immortal, he assumes that his character is not real but an invention. Gregory's analysis of *The Golden Legend* can be understood that every historical text contains certain facts but at the same time, it contains some uncertain fictionalities. In a similar vein, through the character of Merlin the Wizard, there is a query about the historical existence of sorcerers and their powers to change the fate of several historical figures.

New historicists accept the notion of considering "history (the past itself as well as the writing about past) as inevitably fictive" (Himmelfarb, 2006: 164). Mantel insinuates that the reader of the present century should be like Gregory Cromwell, aware of what he reads. Gregory continues deciphering the essence of historical chronicles; toward the last page of *Wolf Hall*, he says that "just this last year a scholar, a *foreigner* [emphasis added], has written a chronicle of Britain, which omits King Arthur on the ground that he never existed. A good ground, if he can sustain it" (Mantel, 2010: 650). Then the narrator clears up Gregory's sight: "But Gregory says, no, he is wrong. Because if he is right, what will happen to Avalon? What will happen to the sword in the stone?" (2010: 650). The last passage pertains to the notion that grappling with the intricacies and inconsistencies of history is a challenging endeavor. It also highlights the notion that the scholar in question, being a foreigner, may possess a more impartial perspective compared to a British scholar when it comes to the history of England. This foreign scholar may represent the new trend in narrating plausible past and factual history. Gregory sounds to have a conflicting policy

toward believing or not believing the existence of Arthur, he admits that “some of these things are true [and] some not” (Mantel, 2010: 221). Yet it is hard for him to omit the charming story of Arthur, the sword in the stone, and Avalon. What Gregory is assured of is that these stories are “good stories” whether they are true or fake.

Altering the view of history is challenging, particularly for narratives ingrained during childhood, which may elucidate Gregory’s ambivalence about his nation’s past. *Wolf Hall Trilogy* does not praise or sanctify the English national history and the national legends. This is supported by Danytè’s confirmation that “the new historical novel does not celebrate the national myths or the national heroes” (2007: 40). Instead, Mantel treats English national history with ease, humor, and a kind of sarcasm. Danytè (2007) also affirms that “postmodern historical fiction is not nostalgic about the national past and aims to undermine the accepted images of national heroes” (35). Mantel questions the veracity and existence of the King Arthur legend, and goes so far as to regard certain historical figures as mere myths and legends lacking any factual foundation.

The habit of celebrating the death of Becket in Canterbury is ridiculed in new historicism. Every year people re-enact the death of saint Thomas Becket (1118-1170), the Archbishop of Canterbury Cathedral in the reign of King Henry II. *The Mirror And The Light* derides the monotonous annual tradition and the spectators who assemble to witness the spectacle as if expecting a different rendition of the narrative. However, it remains unchanged, adhering solely to the monastic version, as no alternative historical account has been presented thus far. Prieto-Arranz (2022) states that “in her characterisation of Cromwell, therefore, Mantel evokes the invented traditions” (160). Prieto-Arranz characterizes the history of England as a collection of invented traditions. An allusion is made to two literary works, namely Geoffrey Chaucer’s long poem *The Canterbury Tales* and T. S. Eliot’s play *Murder in the Cathedral*. Both of these works depict the scene of the murder of St. Thomas Becket. This allusion together with many other parodic intertextualities in the *Trilogy* reinforces Hutcheon’s (1989) assertion that historiographic metafiction subverts and problematizes historical and non-historical texts not by rejection but by parody and irony.

The contemporary historicist approach prioritizes the reader’s authority over that of the writer; where “the power is in the hands of the reader, not the writer” (Mantel, 2021:

840). The last quotation matches with Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" from the perspective of shifting the focus from the author to the reader. New historicism contests several aspects of Barthes's theories, such as the detachment of the text from its author, era, and context; the separation between authority and authorship; and the text-centric methodology. However, it aligns with him regarding the reader's authority. Mantel encourages readers to cultivate a skeptical mindset towards the information they encounter, avoiding blind faith in its accuracy.

Fabricating facts is easier than we suppose, it needs only an intention to do it and a piece of paper; forgery and amending history "can be construed from any scrap of paper, if the will is there. A syllable will do it" (Mantel, 2021: 840). Mantel presents an inquiry to the readers: "Can you make a new England? You can write a new story. You can write new texts and destroy the old ones" (2021: 709). One may as well unravel Mantel's words as a corroboration of the new historicist trend in looking at historical texts. Mantel may also mean by 'new England', a new history of England. This allows for the possibility of disregarding the old history or revitalizing it with a new perspective. Replacing the old story of England with a new story of England is possible in postmodernist historical fiction.

Upon Dorothea's inquiry on the Holbein paintings adorning the walls, Cromwell informed her that they portray English princes. However, he clarified that these portraits are not real representations, but rather symbolic reminders of the transient nature of humanity, including even those in positions of power such as kings, who will eventually succumb to mortality and turn to dust. The phrases "we have invented them" (Mantel, 2021: 400), and the "ancient precedents" have been "invented these last months" (Mantel, 2010: 289-90) suggest that every document and everything we have in history perhaps is an invention by someone. The young men at Austin Friars used to act in some plays to have fun, and when they were playing the lion tale, the narrator remarked: "It is not that the boys don't believe the lion tale; it is just that they like to put their own words to it" (Mantel, 2010: 328). Mantel posits that even authentic historical facts are subject to augmentation and interpolation and that historically accurate narratives have been embellished. From such a perspective, Paul Lay debates that "history, by its nature, is a

very uncertain practice” (para. 6).⁵ The lion fable serves as an illustration; despite the boys’ belief in its authenticity, they have embellished it with their own words. In other words: “It is true. No text stays clean” (Mantel, 2021: 261). Some books and documents are untrustworthy and contain sham materials and some resources are fake and unreliable. Lowenthal (2015) in his *The Past is a Foreign Country*, posits that people yearn to retrieve the past; nevertheless, history is irretrievable. Consequently, historians emulate, replicate it, and rewrite it again to satisfy their desires and escape from their disappointing present. The aspiration to reclaim the past results in the alteration of history, regardless of its divergence from reality and accuracy, as exemplified by Lowenthal (2015) in the subsequent quote:

People are normally aware that the actual past is irrecoverable. Yet memory and history, relic and replica, leave impressions so concretely vivid that we feel nonetheless deprived. ... We feel the present alone inadequate, not least because it is continuously dislodged to further enlarge the past. Disenchantment with an ever-dismembered today impels yesterday’s recovery. That quest takes many forms: hallowing memories, cherishing tradition, devotion to relics, treasuring antiques and souvenirs, simply valuing what is old, rejecting change. These reactions lack the fantasy of time travel but reflect the same yearning for bygone times. (78)

It is impossible to recreate the past without the use of forgery, distortion, reduction, omission, addition, and augmentation. Trevor Roper (1979) presumes that “there is some danger in seeing the past through the present” (21) because this may result in the intentional or unintentional distortion of history. Fleishman (1971) considers that “history itself does not tell truths that are unambiguous or absolute; even the nature of historical fact is problematic” (4) and debatable.

These approaches are transparent in the *Wolf Hall Trilogy*, which acquaints readers with the notions of historical revisionism, rewriting history, fabricated history, and skeptical history, thereby habituating them to the discourse surrounding these concepts. When Cromwell persuaded Harry Percy to take an oath that Anne Boleyn was not his wife and his past with her was chaste and without carnal knowledge; the narrator informed us that Cromwell was altering Harry Percy’s personal history and “rewriting the history of his infatuation” (Mantel, 2013: 423). Furthermore, the narrator indicates that “Dorothea has rewritten his story” (Mantel, 2021: 290) after Dorothea shocks Cromwell

⁵ The *Wolf Hall* effect. (2010). *The Economist*. Retrieved September 21, 2024, from <https://www.economist.com/prospero/2010/09/01/the-wolf-hall-effect>

by accusing him of betraying her father. The fact that Cromwell states, “I don’t have a history, only a past” (Mantel, 2021: 102) suggests that he is unhappy with his history and avoids discussing it with others. He cannot retrieve his history so he escapes from it, and “he can’t fight history, so he runs, because what else can he do?” (Mantel, 2021: 569). History cannot be fought, but it can be rewritten and reworded.

New historicism criticizes the Catholic Church and its involvement in the falsification of history. The authors’ forgery in the “religious history” goes “back to their medieval origins,” and shows how “such falsifications were actually quite common and very often accepted as true, whether out of interest or genuine piety and devotion” (Olds, 2015: 219). Thomas More writes the history that pleases him and the Pope, he alters facts of the people who oppose his doctrine and makes them heretics. That is to justify his deeds if he were to be asked about the reason behind burning these people. The Catholic Church burned William Tyndale for translating the bible into English as Gail Fineberg (1997) explains below:

Tyndale was tied to a stake, strangled with a rope and torched outside a castle near Brussels on Oct. 6, 1536. His crime: Translating the scriptures from Greek and Hebrew into vernacular English so that commoners could read the Bible for themselves, rather than having to depend on the church hierarchy to interpret the official Latin Vulgate. (para. 6)

Cromwell in one of his conversations with King Henry about monks and priests insists that “for hundreds of years the monks have held the pen, and what they have written is what we take to be our history” (Mantel, 2010: 219). He then reiterates his belief that “they have suppressed the history they don’t like, and written one that is favourable to Rome” (Mantel, 2010: 219). Cromwell argues that for centuries, the monks and priests held the position of the educated elite in European societies. They are responsible for documenting the history of their communities, but their accounts are often biased and influenced by their own interests and ideologies. Cromwell says:

A lie is no less a lie because it is a thousand years old. Your undivided church has liked nothing better than persecuting its own members, burning them and hacking them apart when they stood by their own conscience, slashing their bellies open and feeding their guts to dogs. You call history to your aid, but what is history to you? It is a mirror that flatters Thomas More. But I have another mirror, I hold it up and it shows a vain and dangerous man, and when I turn it about it shows a killer. (Mantel, 2010: 566)

Cromwell accuses the clergymen of being history falsifiers; their mirror does not show them their ugly faces and hideous deeds. The church used fake history to attain power and used this power to collect the crowds' money and burn those who opposed it.

These monks exploited the illiteracy of the poor to counterfeit history and religion and to keep them under control. That explains why the priests were the first to resist the Reformation and the translation of the Bible to English. As Mantel emphasizes, they invoke history to their advantage, embellishing it with ornate decorations while concealing its unsightly aspects. Certain beliefs of the new historicists align with those of Nietzsche, as illustrated by the following excerpt:

These are the services which history can carry out for living. Every person and every people, according to its goals, forces, and needs, uses a certain knowledge of the past, sometimes as monumental history, sometimes as antiquarian history, and sometimes as critical history. (1998: 14)

Nietzsche argues that individuals manipulate history to align with their convictions, concepts, interests, and objectives. They selectively emphasize aspects that support their ideologies while disregarding or dismissing elements that challenge or contradict their beliefs. This perspective highlights the subjective and instrumental use of history in shaping narratives and justifying actions.

An additional prominent new historicist element of the *Trilogy* is Mantel's casting doubt on the deaths of some of the major characters. Greenblatt asserts that "the historical evidence is unreliable" (1988: 22); therefore, while most chronicles claim that Cardinal Wolsey passed away from depression prior to his trial, Mantel offers an alternative explanation when she asks, "Do you not think it was Anne Boleyn who poisoned my lord cardinal?" (2021: 86). Richmond argues that Wolsey's death was not natural but "it may be someone bribed his physicians" (Mantel, 2021: 86). A different account of Queen Catherine's death is presented in *Bring Up The Bodies*, wherein Rafe informs Cromwell of rumors suggesting "that the poison was introduced to her in some strong Welsh beer" (213). Christophe also reports to his master that people "are saying on the streets that Catherine was murdered. They are saying that the king locked her in a room and starved her to death. They are saying that he sent her almonds, and she ate, and was poisoned" (Mantel, 2013: 183). What is more, some believe that it was Cromwell who killed her, as Christophe states: "They are saying that you sent two murderers with knives, and that

they cut out her heart” (2013: 183). On an equal footing, the narrator of *The Mirror And The Light* presents an alternative variant of Jane Seymour’s death: “The rumor outside the gates is that the king had her cut open while she was alive. She could not be delivered of her child, so ‘Save my son!’ he ordered” (2021: 526). Gallagher and Greenblatt confirm that “new historicist readings are more often skeptical, wary, demystifying, critical, and even adversarial” (2000: 9). Mantel expresses skepticism regarding the veracity of the deaths of numerous individuals during King Henry VIII’s reign. These instances demonstrate Mantel’s mistrust of history and suggest the possibility of undiscovered facts and narratives concerning the deaths of these characters.

Neither Mantel nor her characters, including Dorothea, exhibit confidence in the reliability of written and documented testimonies. Dorothea suspects that Cromwell placed certain servants in her father’s residence to surveil him and manipulate him into actions contrary to the king’s interests. Thus, when Cromwell proposed to furnish her with written confirmations of her error regarding the issue, she responded that forgery is easily accomplished and that she doubts the authenticity of his evidence. Through Dorothea’s character, Mantel expresses her notions about chronicled histories and formal records. In the last example, Cromwell could simply forge some documents to support his position. Cromwell’s words to his daughter Jenneke: “I prefer the common history, he thinks: in my own life and times, certain themes must be elided” (Mantel, 2021: 400) can be interpreted as his tendency to change facts and realities from the past. Accordingly, “there can never be a whole comprehension of the past as there is no single reality but an altered one” (Yazıcı & Güven, 2022: 16). To reveal it differently, history and facts are subject to alteration; consequently, the narratives we encounter may have been revised to align with personal interests.

The universe depicted in texts and history is not the authentic reality; rather, there exists another realm beyond it, and “within every book there is another book, and within every letter on every page another volume constantly unfolding; but these volumes take no space on the desk. Suppose knowledge could be reduced to a quintessence” (Mantel, 2010: 482). Namely, there is a book behind each book, a letter behind each letter, a tale behind each tale, and a reality behind each reality. Nietzsche thinks that we should be “dragging the past before the court of justice, investigating it meticulously, and finally condemning it. That past is worthy of condemnation; for that is how it stands with human

things” (1998: 13). He dismisses the existence of any objective truth and emphasizes the importance of questioning before accepting something as true. Above all:

What is the nature of the border between truth and lies? It is permeable and blurred because it is planted thick with rumour, confabulation, misunderstandings and twisted tales. Truth can break the gates down, truth can howl in the street; unless truth is pleasing, personable and easy to like, she is condemned to stay whimpering at the back door. (Mantel, 2013: 190)

The narrator opens a window on the thin obscured line between genuineness and falsehood; this line is foggy and blurry. Truthfulness is always accompanied by some impurities and pollutants. Mureşan (2023) indicates that “history is no longer conceived of as the non-problematic and truthful record of past events; it has been deconstructed as an act of language, a narrative following no other rules than the generic ones” (275). If the truth pleases the dominant party, it can obliterate barriers, smash doors, devastate mountains, and function as a formidable force that clears all obstacles in its trajectory. Conversely, if the circumstances are inverted and the truth does not satisfy the strong group, it will remain restricted behind a diminutive barrier.

Neither historians nor biographers are sure about Catherine’s virginity, and “who took Catherine’s virginity, her first husband or her second? For all eternity we will never know” (Mantel, 2013: 213). Certain historical cases, such as the one mentioned earlier, you just cannot trust history about. Furthermore, the *Trilogy* puts Anne Boleyn’s infidelity under investigation, it is illogical to assume that a queen could engage in sexual intercourse with one hundred men. Consequently, the reader occasionally perceives that Mantel is convinced of Anne’s innocence. But in the case that Anne was really promiscuous, Richmond postulates that “Elizabeth is not even the queen’s child. They say she was smuggled into the bedchamber in a basket, and the queen’s dead child carried out” (Mantel, 2013: 381). It is impossible to determine with certainty whether Elizabeth is Henry’s daughter. In this vein, the narrator of *The Mirror And The Light* asserts that “there is a story beneath the story” (2021: 69).

Postmodern thinkers like Tong (1989) and Latting (1995) are acknowledged for their contribution in bringing attention to societal divisions and demonstrating the influence of literature, history, and language on gender-based inequalities in treatment. Another notable figure in this domain is Lennox, who believes that

new historicism has been and can be quite helpful for feminist scholars concerned with what Alice Jardine has termed ‘gynesis’, the putting-into-discourse of the category woman, the discursive deployment of categories of femininity. ... new historicism is well able to address the question of woman, a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures ... New Historicism can be exceptionally useful in understanding relationships within, between, and among texts, that term understood in its broadest sense. (1992: 160)

To Lennox, feminist activists can benefit from new historicism, which effectively addresses the concept of women and gender-based discrimination. Mantel in her new historicist fiction concerned about women, and depicted their situation in the 16th century in detail. She demonstrates the burdens and pressures on women along these lines:

If she dies, she will be lamented and forgotten. If the child dies, she will be blamed. If she lives, she must hide her wounds. Her injuries are secret, and her sisters talk about them behind the hand. It is Eve’s sin, the long continuing punishment it incurred. (2021: 507)

A new historicist narrative is employed by Mantel to articulate women’s historical circumstances during the Tudor period. In the *Trilogy*, Cromwell’s mother and Jane Seymour died following the birth of their children. Furthermore, Davis focuses on gender roles and gender groups to uncover fresh interpretations in historical texts, like this:

It seems to me that we should be interested in the history of both women and men, that we should not be working only on the subjected sex any more than a historian of class can focus entirely on peasants. Our goal is to understand the significance of the sexes, of gender groups in the historical past. Our goal is to discover the range in sex roles and in sexual symbolism in different societies and periods, to find out what meaning they had and how they functioned to maintain the social order or to promote its change. (1976: 90)

Davis believes that having a comprehensive perception of the importance of gender functions and gender categories throughout history is crucial.

There is a notable absence of women in conventional historical fiction, where their representation and discourse are markedly restricted (MacFarquhar, 2012). In MacFarquhar’s view, it is a flaw in historical fiction, and it “was always a problem with historical fiction, if you liked to stick closely to the record: there was very little information about women” (2012: para. 57).⁶ While searching and reading historical novels, MacFarquhar encountered only women who displayed an interest in herbs or were captivated by attractive men. Mantel changes this and gives women a great part of her

⁶ <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/10/15/the-dead-are-real>

postmodern historical prose. She discusses the daily lives of women in the 16th century, providing specific information about their clothing, thoughts, aspirations, abilities, vulnerabilities, purity, malevolence, hardships, and other various aspects. Mantel particularizes a full chapter 'Broken on the Body' in *The Mirror And The Light* to express her feminist ideas and to condole the death of Queen Jane Seymour. Who suffered immense blood loss while giving birth to Edward VI, at that point the narrator comments: "What is a woman's life?... she is not a man, she does not fight. The bedchamber is her tilting ground ... where she gives birth. She knows she may not come alive out of that bloody chamber" (Mantel, 2021: 507).

In *Wolf Hall Trilogy*, Mantel uses gender competently for analyzing history. She recognizes the significance of gender in comprehending English society and the Henrician court during the 16th century. Gordon and others hypothesize that

the writing of women into history necessarily involves redefining and enlarging traditional notions of historical significance, to encompass personal, subjective experience as well as public and political activities. It is not too much to suggest that however hesitant the actual beginnings, such a methodology implies not only a new history of women, but also a new history. (1976: 89)

To write about women in history, there should be rethinking and reconsidering the traditional ideas about history to include individual, biased perceptions as well as communal and governmental actions. In postmodern literature, writing about women and their issues can make new history. Mantel's historical novels highlight the distinctions between traditional historical fiction and postmodernist historical fiction concerning the shift from neglecting women to empowering them. Mantel proves that females deserve to be focused on in historical novels. She utilizes her historical fiction to condemn Henry's brutality in executing his wives and the repugnant practice of arranged marriages among European monarchs in the past. Finally, Mantel also confirms that postmodern historical fiction can have a pivotal impact in revealing women's history and can serve as an effective tool to combat gender bias and patriarchal systems.

These examples do more than simply align with new historicist perspectives; they actively advance Mantel's reimagining of Tudor history through a distinctly new historicist approach, subverting linear narratives and revealing history's deeply constructed and contested nature. In drawing things to a close, Mantel alters the glance on history as being indisputable, unprejudiced, and incontrovertible. History can be

disputable and doubtful in many cases. Contrarily, there could be lost histories and neglected chronicles and they need to be reconstructed.

2.4. WOLF HALL TRILOGY AS A POSTMODERN HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

In her narrative, Mantel presents her portrayal of the historical figure Thomas Cromwell in a postmodernist fashion. She depicts him as an admirable, devoted, intelligent, and self-made individual. However, in Shakespeare's play *Henry VIII*, Cromwell's character is depicted as discredited, corrupted, and deceitful. He conspires with Cardinal Wolsey to manipulate the king into divorcing his wife Catherine of Aragon, while also colluding with the Pope to aid Queen Catherine. Mantel, in her narrative, illuminates the possibility of multiple interpretations of historical reality, aligning with the postmodernist perspective on the relativity of truth. This is what Drozdovskyi (2019) intends when he says "post-postmodernistic reality is created in a special way and at the same time appears to be split and potentially multiple" (152). Hayden White debates that "one of the distinctive characteristics of contemporary literature is its underlying conviction that the historical consciousness must be obliterated if the writer is to examine with proper seriousness those strata of human experience" (1978: 31). White asserts that a significant characteristic of postmodern literature is the requirement for the author to eradicate historical bias to fully investigate various dimensions of human existence.

The *Trilogy* serves as a prime example of a postmodernist historical narrative, as the novels actively defy many conventional narrative techniques. In the realm of postmodern historical narrative, the historian or writer of historical fiction possesses the autonomy to determine how reality is interpreted and construct their own rendition of it, acknowledging the existence of multiple interpretations of historical facts. Drozdovskyi (2019) elucidates that

the perception of reality as a bifurcated phenomenon ... has been actualized. Besides, the constructed schizophrenic reality sometimes appears to be the last opportunity to protect from the truth, which person cannot perceive due to the biological limitation of his own analytical abilities. (152)

According to Drozdovskyi, the notion of truth in postmodernism is ultimately unattainable due to the biological constraints of humanity and because "there are no adequate tools for its ultimate knowledge (the motive 'all people lie')" (156). Batra (2023)

believes that postmodernist narrative is an “amalgamation of different genres, parody, irony self-reflexivity and historiographic metafiction” (40). Broadly speaking, postmodernism inherently encompasses the enhancement of various historical, psychoanalytical, transcendental, structural, and deconstructive approaches that prevail in the narrative framework of postmodernity. All of these critical approaches have sought their own criteria and methods for the depiction of artifacts generally.

Hilary Mantel’s historiographic metafiction in the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* embodies the postmodern characteristic of fragmentation, echoing what De Groot (2009) calls “stepping outside of conventional historicity by having characters out of time ... [which] begins the process of fiction’s unravelling of history” (40). In *Wolf Hall*, this “unravelling” is evident when Mantel abruptly shifts focus between Thomas Cromwell’s past as a blacksmith’s son and his present stature as the king’s trusted adviser—an unsettling, non-linear technique that mirrors postmodernism’s rejection of “linear time and space” (Polemics, 1994: 114). Cromwell’s memories regularly intrude upon the current storyline, making it unclear whether we are in the realm of his recollections, the actual unfolding of events, or his projections of future possibilities. Such disruptions recall Howard’s (1986) observation that new historicists seek splits, gaps, breaks in history, “rupture, tension, and contradiction. ... these narratives of discontinuity and contradiction are narratives which owe much to the way late twentieth-century man construes his own historical condition” (17). Mantel underscores the instability of the past by revealing how Cromwell’s recollections are shaped by personal loss, political ambition, and an awareness of history as always already in flux.

The disorientation readers experience in Mantel’s Tudor court, where a crucial conversation might segue into memories of a distant childhood beating, aligns with Lewis’s (2011) explanation that “postmodernist fiction ... disordered the linear coherence of narrative by warping the sense of significant time, *kairos*, or the dull passing of ordinary time, *chronos*” (172). Throughout *Bring Up the Bodies*, for instance, Mantel juxtaposes Henry VIII’s immediate political crises—his anxiety over producing an heir—with flashbacks to earlier regal ceremonies or smaller domestic scenes involving Cromwell’s family, thus collapsing the boundary between consequential and mundane moments. This deliberate warping highlights what Lewis calls “temporal disorder,” reflecting a world “soon to be 24/7,” where time itself cannot be neatly

compartmentalized (2011: 172). By guiding the reader back and forth in chronology, Mantel illustrates that personal, political, and historical timelines are all part of a single, entangled narrative. Mantel in her fiction, shatters the traditional linear narrative technique and forsakes the wearisome and repetitive way of writing about history. The events in the three novels shift unpredictably between the present, past, and future. Similarly, the relationships between fiction, reality, imagination, and history emerge in a disorderly manner. This unconventional style of the *Trilogy* reflects the characteristics of postmodernism.

In addition to her temporal experiments, Mantel's fascination with everyday life—daily gossip, jokes, clothing, food—turns the history of the Tudor court into what critics label historiographic metafiction. Rather than centering solely on Henry's grand gestures or Anne Boleyn's rise and fall, Mantel immerses the reader in Cromwell's mundane exchanges, from ordering meals to negotiating a servant's wage. Such scenes resonate with Bressler's (2006) assertion that new historicism offers a multi-perspective analysis of history, notably emphasizing marginalized voices and overlooked social contexts. While conventional Tudor histories linger on monarchs, Mantel follows the 'humble-born man' (Thomas Cromwell) whose perspective reveals fissures in the social and political order, thus aligning with Howard's (1986) emphasis on "narratives of rupture, tension, and contradiction" (17). By weaving in Cromwell's recollection of his impoverished childhood against the backdrop of Henry's sumptuous court, Mantel subverts the classic 'great man' version of history, insisting that even the minuscule details—the shape of a spoon, a passing joke—are charged with the same significance as royal decrees.

Intellectuals in postmodernism attack history and distrust it; moreover, "reality and truth are terms which antagonize most postmodernists" (Polemics, 1994: 114). In this context, the narrator of *Wolf Hall* affirms that "beneath every history, another history" (2010: 66). History in postmodernism has multiple faces, each historian, novelist, playwright, or any kind of authorship can change the face of history on a specific event or figure. In this regard, Hutcheon quotes Carl Becker's speech that "the facts of history do not exist for any historian until he creates them" (2004: 122). Additionally, an important aspect to consider is the presence of metafiction, a defining feature of postmodernism.

Metafiction involves the deliberate blurring of the boundary between reality and fiction, as well as the intentional use of abrupt changes in narrative style, all done with a heightened self-awareness. Kathryn Hume in her *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* calls that “the deliberate departure from the limits of what is usually accepted as real and normal” (2014: xii). Mantel blends elements of realism and mythology by suggesting that the Tudors are descendants of Brutus, who supposedly vanquished the giants born from the union of thirty-three princesses and demons in ancient Britain. Onega (2013) postulates that “the unique combination of history and fiction that takes place in historiographic metafiction perfectly expresses” (93) the nature of postmodernist historiographic metafiction. In *Wolf Hall Trilogy* one might perceive imaginary or nonexistent images of things, people, dwarfs, living Christ, and places like an unreal river that is not on the map, etc. In addition to metafiction, the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* serves as an illustrative model of historiographic metafiction and faction. These genres are similar in that they both blend fact and fiction; the narratives in faction and historiographic metafiction are grounded in actual events.

2.5. CHALLENGING SINGULARITY OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Wolf Hall Trilogy challenges the singleness of historical narrative through five central characters Thomas Cromwell, Thomas More, King Henry, Anne Boleyn, and Cardinal Wolsey because “no truth is a single truth” (Mantel, 2021: 452). Mantel eschews the stereotypical sketches of these historical figures, instead employing lacunae and imbuing them with her own imaginative and emotional interpretations. History textbooks and biographies often provide limited information about Thomas Cromwell’s childhood “because till now no other kind of history has been available” (Mantel, 2021: 578). However, the *Trilogy* introduces new and insightful details about his early years, filling gaps in the historical record. Mantel depends on the power of imagination to refill the gaps of Cromwell’s childhood and other historical gaps. Cox & Reynolds (1993) argues that postmodernism “rejects the idea of ‘history’ as a directly accessible unitary past, and substitutes for it the conception of ‘histories,’ an ongoing series of human constructions” (4). There is no one single history but there are multiple versions of history.

Knowledgeable readers of the above-mentioned characters will find a blatant difference if they compare them between the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* and other fictional and

non-fictional works. Mantel's historical chronicles are distinct from those of her peers due to her conviction that there exists a "secret history of England" (Mantel, 2021: 845). McCullagh in his *The Truth of History* (2003) deems "those who would confine history to little narratives of particular episodes from the actors' point of view would blind us to the structure of society and to the influence it can have on human experience" (309). Adhering to a singular historical narrative and perspective is akin to obscuring reality and constricting one's horizons.

Mantel (2017a) in her "The Day Is For The Living" summarizes the theory of new historicism when she says that "evidence is always partial. Facts are not truth, though they are part of it – information is not knowledge. And history is not the past - it is the method we have evolved of organizing our ignorance of the past" (4). Historical accounts can in no way be unified around a single subject; in other words, there are always different opinions and thoughts about any historical event or figure. Mantel has another engaging work called "Can These Bones Live?" In it, she states that "mathematical truth may be pleasing, elegant. Historical truth is a rough beast – shapeless, blundering, hard to tame. It fights you every step. It cuts against storyteller's instinct. Your characters are never how or where you'd like them to be" (2017b: 4). Historical facts are uncontrollable and prodigious forces. They may be unsatisfactory or not meet expectations. They consistently oppose, resist, and astonish you. They do not conform to the expectations of the writer or chronicler.

In the domain of historical fiction, the concepts of accuracy and authenticity are often used interchangeably and as terms that imply one thing; yet even though they seem similar they differ. Accuracy pertains to the veracity of the text and the extent to which the novel aligns with established historical facts, available evidence, and the opinions of historians. In other words, accuracy is an objective measure. Authenticity refers to what extent the text can recall and revitalize the feeling of the past, that is authenticity does not necessarily have to be accurate i.e. authenticity is subjective.

Some of Mantel's narrations are based on contemporaneous references like George Cavendish's *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey* which was published in 1541 as a biography of the Cardinal; knowing that George Cavendish is a character in Mantel's story as well. She also uses some scenes from John Foxe's book *Fox's Book of Martyrs*

Or A History of the Lives, Sufferings, and Triumphant Deaths of the Primitive Protestant Martyrs (1563). These contemporaneous references increase the accuracy and authenticity of the *Trilogy*. However, Mantel's commitment to ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of her work does not imply that she unquestioningly accepts all historical accounts. On the contrary, she deliberately challenges certain aspects of history. Hume (2014) examines the traditional discussion of Western narrative in terms of mimesis, which originated from Plato and Aristotle's assertion that literature imitates reality. And authors of historical fiction, Mantel as an example, use "fantasy- the deliberate from reality – [that] has become the hidden face of fiction" (in the inner cover of Hume's book, 2014). The intentional deviation from reality became a permanent feature of writing fiction and a natural inclination for postmodernist authors.

Wolf Hall Trilogy challenges the notion of a singular historical narrative by including metafictional involvement with historiography, highlighting the limitations in the gathering of historical information, and presenting a skeptical viewpoint on the acquisition of the historical record. When there are no alternatives, "we can't help but imagine the past; we have no choice. It is part of us and we must acknowledge that it is we who reimagine it" (O'Reilly, 2010: para. 13). Historical novels have the potential to confront and improve the study of history by employing literary methods, creatively filling in missing information in historical records, and offering alternative understandings of established historical archives. According to Sayar (2024), the new historicism theory "allows multiple perspectives in historiography" (1234). This means that there are multiple versions of history and these versions can be derived by examining contextual elements such as social, cultural, and economic factors.

To Mantel, "nothing is ever clear" (2021: 452) hence no truth is one single truth. In a similar vein, Hutcheon questions "the authority of any act of writing by locating the discourses of both history and fiction within an ever-expanding intertextual network that mocks any notion of either single origin or simple causality" (2004: 129), ridiculing the very idea of singularity. The primary challenge in the *Trilogy* is the fresh image of Thomas Cromwell; his image of being a deceitful and deviant schemer is ruined in Mantel's story, and Thomas More's icon as a catholic martyr is dismantled. Fighting oneness in history is not only restricted to the characters but also the religious institutions. *Wolf Hall Trilogy* represents the catholic church as a corrupt and unscrupulous institution,

that exploits the poor crowds and levies their properties, in addition to the use of its ecclesiastical power to achieve political prosperity. This topic will be discussed at length in the fourth chapter.



CHAPTER THREE

THE CONCEPT OF TEXTUALITY OF HISTORY IN THE *WOLF HALL* *TRILOGY*

Louis Montrose is credited with introducing the concepts of the textuality of history and the historicity of the text in his leading article titled “Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture”. Montrose is a significant new historicist, supporter, and establisher in the early stages of the theory, particularly in relation to the study of English literature, language, and culture. The textuality of history is the procedure of putting history into texts and reporting history from a personal stance. In other simple words, it is writing and interpreting tales, legends, historical occurrences, and characters just the same as writing and interpreting normal texts or fiction; it may be viewed as fictionalizing history.

The textuality of history is retelling history from the writer’s opinion. Therefore, the textuality of history gives the authors the freedom to change some familiar information about specific historical figures and the liberty to reimagine chronicled occasions like wars, folklore, revolutions, and combats for the throne. Moreover, it enables the novelists to re-narrate some periods of time that are historically acknowledged as truth, like rewriting the reign of a sovereign, the duration of civil conflict, etc. In essence, the textuality of history is the process of literalizing history. Montrose declares:

By the textuality of history, I mean to suggest, firstly, that we can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question - traces whose survival we cannot assume to be merely contingent but must rather presume to be at least partially consequent upon complex and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement; and secondly, that those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are construed as the ‘documents’ upon which historians ground their own texts, called ‘histories.’ As Hayden White has forcefully reminded us, such textual histories necessarily but always incompletely constitute in their narrative and rhetorical forms the ‘History’ to which they offer access. (1997: 242)

John Brannigan in this regard says “literature and history, in Montrose’s view, were fully interdependent, and no knowledge existed outside of the realms of narrative, writing or discourse” (1999: 418). History, as a text, possesses the characteristics of a narrative piece of literature. And “narrative is a vital human activity that gives shape to history” (Batara, 2023: 40). The textuality of history dismantles the barrier that has always existed between

discussions of literature and history. Montrose (1997) considers all kinds of texts as inscriptions in history and the textuality of history is misconceived by old historicism as demonstrated below:

Acts of textuality that traditional modes of literary history efface or misrecognize. It also necessitates efforts to historicize the present as well as the past, and to historicize the dialectic between them - those reciprocal historical pressures by which the past has shaped the present and the present reshapes the past. In brief, to speak today of an historical criticism must be to recognize that not only the poet but also the critic exists in history: that the texts of each are inscriptions of history; and that our comprehension, representation, interpretation of the texts of the past always proceeds by a mixture of estrangement and appropriation, as a reciprocal conditioning of the Renaissance text and our text of Renaissance. (244-5)

The new historicist perspective on literary criticism fundamentally opposes literary formalism, which disregards external factors and assesses the text in isolation. The primary focus of new historicism is to redefine the link between texts and the cultural context of their production. Montrose (1997) sees that the historicity of texts and the textuality of history conceptions are currently in vogue because “they figure forth from within discourse itself the model of a dynamic, unstable, and reciprocal relationship between the discursive and material domains” (243-4).

From this point, the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* applies the concept of the textuality of history by reshaping the history of some characters. Mantel reimagines the life of some famous people in the Tudors’ reign, specifically the reign of King Henry VIII. She blurs between history and imagination, as a result, her characters are unlike those in the regular British historical chronicles.

3.1. THOMAS CROMWELL, THE ASTUTE SELF-MADE REFORMIST VERSUS THE HYPOCRITE VILLAIN

3.1.1. Thomas Cromwell’s Historical Bad Reputation

Most of the Catholic theologians and historians since the reformation time and Reginald Pole look at Cromwell as a monster-hired gun and a merciless enforcer of a totalitarian king. Maxwell Anderson (1948) in his *Anne of the Thousand Days* dubs him as a man devoid of morals and scruples, driven by avarice and a passion for wealth. Cobbett (2012) also portrays Cromwell and his myrmidons as ruffians and agents of the

tyrant. Elton (1972) in his *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* demonstrates the opinion of some notable figures in English history about Thomas Cromwell. John Tutton judges Cromwell as “a stark heretic” (Elton, 1972: 7), and John Woodward complains that “we never had good world since the Lord Cromwell and his master [Wolsey] did rule” (1972: 7). Furthermore, William Barton and Richard Smith consider Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Audley as “the greatest thieves and traitors living within this realm” (Elton, 1972: 7-8).

A. S Byatt in her introduction to Ford Madox Ford’s *The Fifth Queen: A Novel of the Court of Henry VIII* clarifies that “Ford attempts to vilify Cromwell, and idealizes Katharine’s idealism” (2011: 12). Ford’s tendency to vilify Thomas Cromwell, along with other authors, can be interpreted through a postmodern perspective, as Levi-Strauss (1966) asserts that “history is never history, but history for” (257). Hayden White agrees with Lévi-Strauss that it is not always a history *of* but sometimes a history *for*, and history is “always written for a specific (manifest or latent) purpose ... history written in the interest of some infrascientific aim or vision” (1978: 56). This means that history consistently serves a particular group and fulfills a distinct ideology. Akman (2017) in this regard confirms that “we have seen how the historian is perhaps no more than a narrator, far from being objective” (98). White (1978) inquires how can historians or novelists assess the reliability of a historical text by comparing it to historical reality. Facts are not predetermined; rather, they are generated through the inquiries we pose regarding events. Moreover, Collingwood (2005) contends that the similarity between the historian and the novelist is significantly greater than anticipated. These historians may have discredited Cromwell for reasons that are unknown to us. Therefore “the new historicism with its interpretive imagination has rejected an imprisonment in the subjective ego and a flight from history. Admittedly, the new historicism has accepted an unalloyed dependence on history and a resulting uncertainty” (Dean, 1986: 277). New historicism acknowledges the presence of ambiguity and uncertainty in historical narratives. Dean (1986) also corroborates that “they have argued that actual truths are entirely historical creatures, conceived within history, directed at history, and grown in a historical chain, as interpretation refers to interpretation refers to interpretation throughout history” (261). Historical events that are regarded as facts are, in reality, inventions, renditions, and explanations of explanations.

Cromwell, in the *Trilogy*, in all respects was conscious of his bad reputation. Even though he did not allow himself to get involved in torturing jailed people; bearing in mind that Elton (1982) noted that torture was common against convicts in most governments and monarchs in that period. Mantel's biofiction illustrates Thomas Cromwell's infamous historical reputation and subsequently subverts this perception, presenting a markedly different portrayal of him. Cromwell reflected that when he asked his sister, Kat: "Why did I have a bad name before I was born?" (Mantel, 2010: 333). The courtiers and the nobles, even the king, kept reminding him of his low birth and he had to swallow their insults. In his first meetings with the King, Henry told him "Master Cromwell, your reputation is bad" (Mantel, 2010: 183). When Cromwell became a senior man in the court and controlled most of the government's affairs, Henry once got angry with him and shouted "I really believe, Cromwell, that you think you are king, and I am the blacksmith's boy" (Mantel, 2013: 276). Into the bargain, The Duke of Norfolk was the first one to criticize the king for promoting a common man like Cromwell and never stopped insulting him in front of people: "You ... person, you nobody from Hell, you whore-spawn, you cluster of evil, you lawyer" (Mantel, 2010: 187). Norfolk screamed at him that he is only a banker and not to interfere in big matters: "Get back to your abacus... when it comes to the affairs of nations you cannot deal, you are a common man of no status ... you are not fit to talk to princes" (Mantel, 2013: 155). Likewise, Henry Howard, Norfolk's son, was not less fierce to Cromwell than his father, he told him "Cromwell, you plan to murder all noblemen. One by one you will cut off our heads till only vile blood is left in England, and then you will have all to rule" (Mantel, 2021: 493). Further, his wickedest enemy Gardiner belittled him also by cheering "God damn you, Cromwell. Who are you? What office do you hold? You're nothing. Nothing" (Mantel, 2010: 339). Finally, George Boleyn teased him that even if he becomes the king's master secretary, he is still a man of low birth by telling him "remember, Cromwell that though you are of the king's council, you are not a gentleman born" (Mantel, 2013: 71).

Cromwell did not give an ear to all these affronts and felt self-confident in front of them and advised Stephen to "be immune to insults, he says. Look at me, I take them as compliments. Norfolk calls me vile blood. The north calls me a heretic and a thief" (Mantel, 2021: 548). Even when he was a boy, Cromwell said: "The eel boy in Putney used to say to me, Yah, Thomas Cromwell, you miserable gibbet-bait, you toss-brain, you

remnant, you crumb: your mother died rather than look at you longer” (Mantel, 2021: 548). To clarify, Cromwell suggests that a powerful gust of wind does not have an impact on a firmly planted tree, allowing it to persist without being deterred by discouragement.

At a crucial juncture, the readers are uncertain whether Cromwell employed physical torture to extract confessions and secrets from his rivals. However, Mantel effectively conveys that both Cromwell and the readers are well aware of his enemies’ belief that he resorts to force. Nevertheless, the readers are quite certain that Cromwell used mental torment and psychological agony of Anne’s musician and supposed lover, Mark Smeaton. Ives (2004) confirms this by saying: “What undoubtedly was used against the musician [Smeaton] was psychological pressure” (327). LaCroix (2015) also discusses that “Mantel thus presents Cromwell as always stepping back from the precipice: using threats of torture, but not torture itself, to extract the admissions he needs” (20). When Mark refused to name Queen Anne’s lovers, Wriothesley suggested putting him on the rack in the Tower; however, Cromwell had a different opinion. Cromwell lectured Wriothesley separately to nevermore identify the kind of pain and told him that he was not going to rack him because “the mind is its own best torturer” (Mantel, 2013 330). Instead, Cromwell used other techniques to extract information from Mark, he fabricated pictures and imaginations of torture. As an illustration, Cromwell asked for fire (because the weather was cold), but Mark panicked and thought that they were going to burn him. They placed an uncoiled rope in the room, heated an iron, and introduced feathered items; subsequently confining him in a dark location for the night. The next morning Smeaton spelled all the names of the queen’s abusers without touching him.

In a 2012 interview with *The Guardian* titled “How I Came to Write *Wolf Hall*”, Mantel responded to the interviewer’s comment about historians portraying Cromwell as a villain by answering, “I do not run a Priory clinic for the dead. Rather, I was driven by powerful curiosity. If a villain, an interesting villain, yes?” (para. 3). Mantel is a writer in the postmodern era and like most of the authors in this period, she does not credit everything the historians claim. She welcomes those readers who want to see behind the stories and those who are ready to get rid of the stereotypical images. To her “no text stays clean” (2021: 261); it is only a matter of printing, you can consume piles and mountains of paper but “no word is the last word” (2021: 261). This is what Yazıcı confirms when he says: “The loss of faith in past has caused diversified focal points in

history” (2022: 16). The decline in reliability and credibility of history in the postmodern era has resulted in the emergence of multiple versions and perspectives on history, leading to the existence of conflicting views on the historical figure of Cromwell.

However, Thomas Cromwell had supporters on the opposite side, especially among the protestants. Opinions differed about him between seeing him as a criminal villain and seeing him as a good-natured and pragmatic man. Robert Bolt (1995) in *A Man For All Seasons* shows Cromwell as a bribable, venal, devilish, evil-natured character and a “jackal with sharp teeth” (62). John Schofield (2008) in his *The Rise and Fall of Thomas Cromwell: Henry VIII’s Most Faithful Servant* uncovers that the widespread picture of Cromwell as a bloody statesman is likely invented and imaginary. Comparatively, the British historian Robert Hutchinson (2007: 79) in his book *Thomas Cromwell: The Rise and Fall of Henry VIII’s Most Notorious Minister* describes Cromwell as a devious minister and notorious minister; yet Mantel depicts him as an honest minister in *The Mirror And The Light*.

3.1.2. Thomas Cromwell in *Wolf Hall Trilogy*

Fredric Jameson believes that “history is inaccessible to us except in textual form, or in other words, that it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization” (2002: 67). This means that history is unreachable and the sole means of rendering it attainable is through textualization. Hutcheon (2004) states that “history as narrative account, then, is unavoidably figurative, allegorical, fictive; it is always already textualized” (143). To her, history is a narrative discourse that has been fancied and textualized in a fictional-like method. Hilary Mantel uses the technique of textuality of history to reshape and reimagine a completely new and unstereotypical image of Thomas Cromwell. Mantel through the textuality of history opposes most of the literary and historical textbooks about the personality of Cromwell. She chooses him to be her hero because he is, without doubt, an unusual experience; he belongs to a common family in England and endured thick and thin. He graduated from the university of life and self-reliance, he could through his stamina and vitality overcome all the obstacles in front of achieving kudos and history. Cromwell

is distinguished by his courtesy, his calmness and his indefatigable attention to England’s business. He is not in the habit of explaining himself. He is not in the habit

of discussing his successes. But whenever good fortune has called on him, he has been there, planted on the threshold, ready to fling open the door to her timid scratch on the wood. (Mantel, 2013: 7)

The fascinating quality in Mantel's narrative is that she puts the preconceived notions about Thomas Cromwell on the table, treats them, and then reimagines different possibilities and recreates dissimilar actualities:

He is a good friend and master; this is said of him everywhere. ... he was an Irishman, he was a criminal, he was a Jew, and he himself was just a wool-trader, he was a shearsman, and now he is a sorcerer ... He is a master of language, Chapuys writes, a man of most eloquent address. (2010: 585)

These juxtapositions of Cromwell are portrayals of the new historicist approach toward historical characters. Mantel gives us a multilayered picture of Cromwell, he is a fine fellow, criminal, wizard, and a man of everything. Jane Seymour says "one can learn a great deal from him" (Mantel, 2013: 369). There are some factors in the novels that aid in constructing a positive impression of Cromwell including his attitude toward his household, his gentleness toward women, his tenderness unto his family, and his loyalty to his master Cardinal Wolsey. It is necessary to add to the previous factors, his compassion towards the heretics and Thomas More; his openness; his political tactics; and lastly his astuteness in business. In the narrative, Cromwell is generous to the poor, and there are two examples in *Wolf Hall*. In his will, he splits his fortune and he orders 40 pounds for impoverished maidens and 10 pounds for pauper detainees in London's jails. The other one is that the poor often come to his place, Austin Friars, to eat bread and soup.

Greenblatt (2009) thinks that Hilary Mantel isolates herself from most historians and those who believe that Cromwell is 'the devil incarnate'. Greenblatt confirms that "Cromwell was a master of Machiavellian realpolitik" (part. 1). He thinks that Mantel's Cromwell has properties that make him survive and overbear his rivals. Examine the following passage from Greenblatt:

Cromwell's actual life story is, in its way, a somberly fascinating one. But it is not the story that Hilary Mantel has chosen to relate. The Cromwell of *Wolf Hall* has some of the qualities that his enemies feared and detested—toughness, wiliness, worldliness—but as Mantel depicts them, they are qualities in the service of survival, success, and even a measure of decency in a cruel and indecent world. A formidable character constructed from fundamentally base materials, he is rather like the great mosque of Djenné, a magnificent structure made out of mud. (2009: part. 1)

Greenblatt resembles Cromwell as the Great Mosque of Djenné in Mali, a mighty character made up of adobe. It is an important point to mention here that with each promotion, Cromwell was gaining new enemies, especially after his success in sweeping Anne Boleyn out of his way. His enemies thought that now, it was the time to wind up Cromwell, yet, specifically in this stage, they were wrong:

Let them try to pull him down. They will find him armoured, they will find him entrenched, they will find him stuck like a limpet to the future. He has laws to write, measures to take, the good of the commonwealth to serve, and his king: he has titles and honours still to attain, houses to build, books to read, and who knows, perhaps children to father, and Gregory to dispose in marriage. (Mantel, 2013: 481)

Mantel in *The Mirror And The Light* demonstrates to us Cromwell's seven lives. When he was a child in Putney he was cordial and he was his father's collection agency, he collected loans, and his nickname was Put an Edge on It. This nickname was because of his father's career as a blacksmith who sharpened knives. As a teenager, he was a problem-maker with his gang fighting every day. His next life between 15-18 was in France fighting for King Louis, he learned French and trading. The third one was at age eighteen, he proved himself as an able accountant and businessman in Florence, Italy. His fourth life was in Antwerp, Belgium where he was a fresh merchant and learned Latin, Spanish, and German. The following life was in England with Cardinal Wolsey, his wife, and his children. The sixth life was in the court as Master Secretary. The last one is the present one, Lord Cromwell.

Wolf Hall Trilogy's Cromwell is a polyvalent and multitasked minister, and "his neighbors at Austin Friars think he is in charge of everything, from framing the laws to propping cellars and cleaning drains" (Mantel, 2021: 523). The king himself thinks that Cromwell is a thorough man, and "if ever a man was thorough, you are that man" (Mantel, 2021: 457). People invented folk tales on his success, some attribute it to the Boleyns, others to the cardinal, and many believe it is from wizards and conjurers. He is a man out of this world, he is a trader, fighter, banker, and lawyer. When Francis Bryan told him that he was ascending in the positions so fast and that England did not have sufficient ladders for him, Cromwell told him that he did not need them because he had wings. He is an exceptional man, and "he spoke whatever language you need for trading and bartering" (Mantel, 2021: 67). He is an expert persuasive, thus the king sends him for any matter that needs negotiation and persuasion, Cromwell can change between different

types of behavior and adjust his speech in accordance with the condition. This indicates that he can effortlessly switch between masks, alternatively stated, he has become an actor, taking on various roles in the drama.

Mantel's Cromwell is portrayed as tireless and resolute, a man of unwavering discipline who sleeps little, rises early, and never neglects his duties or responsibilities. His determination is so unyielding that not even the devil could deter him; when Cromwell declares his intent, he follows through, and when he makes a promise, he fulfills it. His unparalleled ability to perceive the nature of things sets him apart, rendering him an almost superhuman figure of reliability and insight. He permanently has a plan and alternatives for it, and "he is the inconsolable Master Cromwell: the unknowable, the inconstruable, the probably indefeasible Master Cromwell" (Mantel, 2010: 568-9). His son Gregory summarizes everything: "You do everything. You have everything. You are everything" (Mantel, 2021: 497). When the king wants to change his wife, all the eyes are on Cromwell, they ask him who you will make the next queen.

MacCulloch (2018b) states in his biography of Thomas Cromwell that he did not have the chance to go to university, "but he more than made up for it by efforts of self-help" (9). Mantel also emphasizes that "the blacksmith makes his own tools" (2010: 291). These words can be also understood as Cromwell the self-made man, who created his way to the peak. Another phrase by Cromwell supports this idea when he mentions that "I have served an apprenticeship to myself" (Mantel, 2013: 418). It was his self-help and self-empowerment, perhaps it is a metaphor that Cromwell is making his own life, destiny, and truth. Cromwell did not have a teacher or an expert to teach him but he was his own apprentice, he taught himself by himself. Greenblatt asserts that in credible and thoroughly developed historical narratives, the characters assume a significant role, as indicated in the subsequent paragraph:

In the most fully realized historical novels, the historical figures are not merely background material or incidental presences but the dominant characters, thoroughly *reimagined* and animated. They are at the center of our attention, and their actions in the world seem to carry the burden of a vast, unfolding historical process that is most fully realized in small, contingent, local gestures. Those gestures are ordinarily hidden from official chroniclers, but they are the special purview of the historical novelist. (2009: part. 2)

Greenblatt posits that historical figures are central to historical novels; they are not peripheral but rather crucial to reader engagement. While historians may overlook their

significant actions, historical novelists emphasize them, which elucidates Cromwell's situation. Historians failed to acknowledge his contributions, attributing the majority of the reforms to other men; however, the historical novelist Mantel defended him and highlighted his endeavors. Benfey is of the view that Cromwell continues to be a contentious and enigmatic individual, stating, "Thomas Cromwell remains a controversial and mysterious figure. Mantel has filled in the blanks plausibly, brilliantly. *Wolf Hall* has epic scale but lyric texture" (para. 9).⁷ Benfey deems that *Wolf Hall* did a great job of filling in the blanks about who he is, but he may still need more research.

3.1.3. Thomas Cromwell's Loyalty

Hayden White in essay "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory" views that the contemporaneous historical "narrative figurates the body of events that serves as its primary referent and transforms these 'events' into intimations of patterns of meaning that any literal representation of them as 'facts' could never produce" (1984: 22). White posits that the historical discourses of the past are merely simulations and that historians are essentially forging imitations of them when they report past events. However, they are unable to capture the exact specifics of these events. One of these things that historians cannot be sure about is Cromwell's loyalty to his master Wolsey, a controversial topic in history. Many historians and writers, including Maxwell Anderson, Robert Hutchinson, and Robert Bolt, believe that Cromwell is deceitful in his dealings with Wolsey. However, some argue that Cromwell is actually honest with Wolsey.

Some historians deform the relationship between Cromwell and Wolsey; Anderson (1948) shows Cromwell as a man with two faces who tries to defame the cardinal's name in front of Henry. Anderson reports that Cromwell accuses Cardinal Wolsey of neglecting the king's affairs by telling King Henry that "the Cardinal's. He has something else in mind. He's playing his hand to get himself made pope in Rome. He's not thinking of you or your divorce" (1948: 71). Hutchinson (2007) regards King Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell as adversaries of the Catholic Church, asserting that Cromwell was loyal to the king. However, Hutchinson believes that Cromwell was not truly loyal to Wolsey and that "Cromwell appears to have trodden a precarious line between remaining ostensibly

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/01/books/review/Benfey-t.html>

loyal, defending Wolsey in public... while craftily still insinuating his way into fresh circles of influence. He was thus adept at playing both ends against the middle” (38-39). Hutchinson also presumes that Cromwell used the Catholic Church properties to buy the nobles’ loyalty.

Although certain historical accounts indicate that Cromwell ultimately betrayed Wolsey by pursuing favor with the king; *Wolf Hall Trilogy* commemorates Cromwell’s unwavering allegiance to his mentor Cardinal Wolsey. It is noted that Cromwell was not present by Wolsey’s side when he was needed and at the time of his death. On the opposite side, Mantel defends Cromwell by clarifying his absence:

Rafe rides up the country with messages to Wolsey too secret to put into letters. He would go himself, but though Parliament is prorogued he cannot get away, because he is afraid of what might be said about Wolsey if he is not there to defend him; and at short notice the king might want him, or Lady Anne. ‘And although I am not with you in person,’ he writes, ‘yet be assured I am, and during my life shall be, with your grace in heart, spirit, prayer and service. (2010: 217)

Cromwell remained in the parliament to support Wolsey against any accusation and sent letters with Rafe to the cardinal to update him with information. Notwithstanding that Cromwell was not with Wolsey physically, he was with him mentally and inwardly. In the meanwhile, King Henry favored Anne Boleyn and listened to her, so Cromwell enticed her to speak for Wolsey, by informing her that “no one knows the workings of Christian countries like my lord cardinal. ... Think how bound to you he would be, Lady Anne, if you were the means of erasing these misunderstandings and restoring him to the king’s grace” (Mantel, 2010: 201). In the *Trilogy*, the historical claim of Cromwell’s disloyalty is represented by Wolsey’s daughter, Dorothea, who tells Cromwell that he betrayed her father. Cromwell responded by saying “I loved your father next to God, and any child of his body, or any soul who was true to him, may command me to any service. No risk, no cost, no effort too great” (Mantel, 2021: 287). Cromwell defended himself and presented many offers to help her, but she refused. Cromwell made a final attempt to assist her by proposing marriage, but she declined once more and accused him of being unfaithful.

Among the various reasons, Henry’s admiration of Thomas Cromwell was fueled by his loyalty, as Mantel illustrates through Henry’s words: “I will say this for you. You stick by your man” (2010: 218). Cromwell seized the opportunity to commend Wolsey,

stating, “I have never had anything from the cardinal other than kindness. Why would I not?” (218). Not to mention that Thomas Cromwell and George Cavendish did their best to manage the cardinal’s financial issues after his impoverishment, it was they who gave the servants salaries and the household demands. It was Cromwell who “engineered some improvements in Wolsey’s living conditions” (Hutchinson, 2007: 39). Let alone Cromwell’s effort to draw out a thousand pounds from the king to cover the expenditures of moving the cardinal’s house. After fixing the accountancy issues, Cromwell told Cavendish that he must go to the parliament before passing an act against the cardinal: “I don’t know, but someone must speak for my lord. Or they will kill him. I can only try” (Mantel, 2010: 157). Make or mar, with this intention, Cromwell went to the court, it was either he would manage to rescue the cardinal’s life or he would tear himself down.

Mantel hints that Cromwell indeed succeeded in winning Henry’s favor and putting off penalizing Cardinal Wolsey for some time. Mantel also argues that if it had not been Cromwell, Wolsey would have been executed rather than dying in peace under the demand of his God. Cardinal Wolsey was aware of Cromwell’s fidelity, Wolsey trusted him more than anyone and trusted his intelligence and capability. In this context, Wolsey said, “mine own good, trusty and most assured refuge in this my calamity. He is mine own entirely beloved Cromwell” (Mantel, 2010: 217). Although Cromwell did rise in the court following Wolsey’s death, this does not imply that Cromwell was disloyal to Wolsey. George Cavendish in his biography *Thomas Wolsey: Late Cardinal, His Life and Death* affirmed Cromwell’s loyalty to Wolsey. Schofield (2008) confirms that “there is no valid reason not to accept Cavendish’s testimony that he remained loyal to a fallen master” (38). Certain contemporary historians assert the fidelity of Thomas Cromwell towards his superior, Thomas Wolsey. Everett (2015) indicates that the “loyalty shown to Wolsey by Cromwell is often held, by contemporaries and historians alike, as being one of Cromwell’s most positive attributes” (53). One of these contemporaneous historians is Borman (2014) who maintains that Cromwell “was also intensely loyal to those whom he served, from his first master in Italy, Francesco Frescobaldi, to the man who launched his political career, Cardinal Wolsey, and – above all – his royal master” (13). Another is Loades (2013) who also affirms that Cromwell “was a man of wit and humour, whose table conversation lingered in the mind, but above all he was a statesman and fundamentally loyal to his master” (185). The king personally witnessed Cromwell’s

trustworthiness and unwavering loyalty to his master. Recognizing the value of having such an individual in his inner circle, King Henry brought Cromwell into closer proximity. To Mantel what made Cromwell a trusty man rather than a Machiavellian was Cromwell's motive, and his urge to do his mission and duty.

Amidst the debates and skirmishes regarding Cromwell's denunciation by one faction and commendation by another, there exists a dichotomy between allegations of treason and characterizations of integrity. The stance of new historicism is neither to affirm treason nor to endorse trust, as both are plausible considerations, and it is unattainable to ascertain a definitive truth regarding Cromwell's genuine intentions. Cromwell's loyalty to Cardinal Wolsey and King Henry is a moot issue that can never be solved. Coby (2009) articulates the perspective of the new historians regarding this issue as follows:

It is still a disputed question whether Cromwell managed and manipulated Henry or Henry instructed and commanded Cromwell ... At the time, and in the rush of events, no one could tell for certain whether Cromwell was concealing a despotic absolutism under the cover of a mixed regime; or whether Henry was being schooled by Cromwell in the limits of his own power. (4-15)

New historicism advocates for the rejection of singular interpretations, recognizing that history conceals multiple meanings and complexities. Not all information derived from historical texts is accurate. Some are factual while other elements are fictitious, some assertions are valid while others are erroneous. Therefore, clinging to a singular perspective is untenable within the framework of new historicism. New historicism promotes openness and acceptance of plurality, possibilities, and multiple interpretations.

3.1.4. Thomas Cromwell after *Wolf Hall Trilogy*

The general perception of Cromwell as the cunning man has changed, thanks to new historicism. Gebauer (2021) conceives that what Mantel did to Thomas Cromwell is "turning a historical villain into a fictional hero" (151). According to Alghamdi (2018), Mantel's *Wolf Hall Trilogy* has significantly enhanced the rehabilitation of historical fiction. After Robert Bolt's distortion of Thomas Cromwell's reputation in literature, LaCroix (2015) believes that "Mantel's project is less explicitly rehabilitative, but she does redeem Cromwell from Bolt's [appalling] characterization" (3). LaCroix also thinks that "Mantel thus saves Cromwell from the charges of torture" (2015: 22). Arias (2014)

asserts that the portrayal of Cromwell in the *Wolf Hall trilogy* is markedly different from the ruthless, amoral figure represented in earlier literature. In

Wolf Hall (2009) Hilary Mantel breathes life into the character of Thomas Cromwell ... In *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012), Mantel continues her project of rescuing Cromwell from obscurity ... Mantel therefore acts as ‘an adept resurrectionist’ and is able to infuse life into a character whose reputation has been marred by history. (Arias, 2014: 19-23)

Herbert Lindenberger in his article “Toward a New History in Literary Study” argues that traditional history shrinks in the postmodern epoch. He also debates that the common denominators between the old and the new history are very few as illustrated in the subsequent quotation:

The new history we are beginning to see these days has little in common with the old—and for an interesting historical reason: its practitioners were nurtured in the theoretical climate of the 1970s, a time during which the individual literary work came to lose its organic unity; when literature as an organized body of knowledge abandoned the boundaries that had hitherto enclosed it, to an extent even abandoned its claims to knowledge; and when history began to seem discontinuous, sometimes in fact no more than just another fiction. It is no wonder that the scholarship we now pursue cannot take the form or speak the language of the older literary history. (1984: 16)

Based on Lindenberger’s perspective, it can be inferred that contemporary literature differs from traditional literature, and the same principle applies to the study of history. Consequently, the portrayal of Cromwell’s character in contemporary history and literature diverges from the depiction of Cromwell’s character in earlier historical and literary works. In addition, I argue that the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* has affected public opinion and the intellectuals’ attitude altogether toward Thomas Cromwell. The proof of the aforementioned is that most of the publications about Cromwell after Mantel’s *Trilogy* are handling him positively and healthily. Tracy Borman in *Thomas Cromwell: The Untold Story Of Henry VIII’s Most Faithful Servant* (2014) demonstrates Cromwell as a loyal friend and devoted father towards his acquaintance and a relentless and pragmatic official towards his duties. Similarly, Diarmaid MacCulloch (2018) issued *Thomas Cromwell: A Revolutionary Life*, a book that describes Cromwell’s reformist and revolutionary spirit and the book that Mantel characterizes: “This is a book that - and it’s not often you can say this - we have been awaiting for four hundred years” (on the book external cover). In Loades’ book *Thomas Cromwell: Servant to Henry VIII* (2013) Cromwell is portrayed as a close associate of Wolsey, a humanist, and a practical

individual who reformed the state's legal system. Despite lacking academic credentials and authoring books, Cromwell's actions and correspondence offer a lucid insight into his convictions and principles, as perceived by Loades. Loades also defends Cromwell by saying: "There is no doubt that the charges were a tissue of lies and exaggerations" (2013: 163). Loades adds that Cromwell was not only a diligent director of legislation but he "was a statesman with a vision of how the kingdom should be run, and this involved defending the king's honour and interests" (2013: 174). I argue that these examples have arisen and highlighted Mantel's success.

Expanding the perspective on how history is approached extends beyond just new novelists, but also includes new historians, which aligns with the viewpoint expressed by Stone (1979) in the statement below:

New historians are turning back to narrative seems to be a desire to make their findings accessible once more to an intelligent but not expert reading public, which is eager to learn what these innovative new questions, methods and data have revealed, but cannot stomach indigestible statistical tables, dry analytical argument, and jargon-ridden prose. (15)

In light of Stone's assertion, historians in the postmodern era started altering their approach to writing history based on new methodologies, aiming to attract a larger readership and aligning with the principles of new historicism. Stones argues that scholars of a new historicism "often tell their stories in a different way from that of Homer, or Dickens, or Balzac. Under the influence of the modern novel and of Freudian ideas, they gingerly explore the subconscious rather than sticking to the plain facts" (1979: 19). Stones posits that the attitude of historians and the process of writing history were influenced by new historical novels, whether consciously or subconsciously. Miyares (1999) is in the same opinion, assuring that "historians have actually begun to write from apparently postmodernist perspectives" (170). The adoption of the new historicist and postmodern historical perspectives, along with the impact of the *Wolf Hall Trilogy*, have contributed to the shift in the views of new historians regarding Thomas Cromwell.

Hutcheon assumes that fiction and history "appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality. But these are also the implied teachings of historiographic metafiction" (2004: 105). In postmodernism, historical discourses are often reimagined as fiction, enabling novelists to construct new interpretations of past events and historical figures. Historiographic metafiction not only

acknowledges but actively embraces the textual nature of history, encouraging the blending of historical fact with creative narrative to challenge conventional historical representations. Thomas Cromwell and Thomas More are two notable characters in King Henry VIII's reign; they are foes and opponents but historians chose to take More's line. Based on Paul Veyne (1971), the individual who is documented in historical, theoretical, and literary works is depicted as an ideological construction, resulting from a particular historical, social, and ideological inclination. The bias in writing about historical figures can be attributed to various factors. In the case of Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell, it is evident that Cromwell, being a reformist and Protestant, took actions such as closing Catholic churches, diminishing their influence in England, and investigating those who committed wrongdoings or exaggerated claims. As a result, it is natural that Catholics held animosity towards Cromwell and depicted him in a negative light, while portraying Thomas More, who adhered to Catholic doctrine, in a positive manner. History showed Thomas More

as a heroic figure executed by Cromwell for being a firm defender of the Pope and refusing to embrace Protestantism. If in the play the protagonist is More and Cromwell is a cunning, manipulative politician, *Wolf Hall* presents Thomas Cromwell as a hero, a wise adviser, and a sympathetic man who is attractive in the eyes of Londoners. (Arias, 2014: 30)

Mantel, even though she might not intend that, succeeded in shifting this prejudice and partiality against Cromwell in his favor. As Arias (2014) proclaims that in "*Wolf Hall*, Mantel reanimates the figure of Cromwell, traditionally shadowed by the imposing presence of Sir Thomas More" (22). Or at least Mantel managed to achieve equivalency and parallel between these two historical figures and let it to the readers to judge and take their sides.

It is increasingly difficult to perceive Cromwell as the same person as he was before the *Wolf Hall Trilogy*. Although Mantel did not mean that, her novels were to be considered as a resurrection of a thoroughly new Thomas Cromwell. Mantel through her intensive research and curiosity about this mesmerizing character could remove the fog and confusion in front of the readers' eyes. She changed the view of this historical character forever, she challenged the historians and novelists for their unchallenged and unquestioned prejudice for many years. Once she said: "Not the sum of historical facts, but the sum of prejudices. Information, disinformation, rolling on, from generation to

generation among popular historians, amongst novelists and dramatists, unquestioned, unchallenged”⁸ (Ashfield, 2020: para. 5), and finally she added, “you don’t know this man, but you’re about to meet him” (para. 5). She means that the world is going to see a fresh Thomas Cromwell rather than the stereotypical one. Finally, to be said here is that not only has the method of writing historical fiction changed, but so has the process of writing history itself.

3.2. THOMAS MORE AS A DOGMATIC STUBBORN VERSUS A CATHOLIC MARTYR

Thomas More, born in London in 1478 and deceased in 1535, was the progeny of John More, a lawyer who subsequently became a judge for the king. He was knighted and awarded a Coat of Arms during the reign of King Edward IV. He studied law and became an utter barrister, but due to his exceptional abilities, he also excelled in literature and Catholicism. He adopted monastic attire and practiced their disciplines, including prolonged prayer and fasting. In 1505, he wed Jane Colt, and from 1513 to 1518, More composed *The History of King Richard III* in both English and Latin. Although he did not complete it, the work inspired numerous subsequent historians and writers, including Shakespeare. More was a friend of Desiderius Erasmus, a Catholic theologian and philosopher, and was strongly influenced by him. More published his prosperous *Utopia* in 1516, he talked about law, education, mercy killing, feminism and female rights, pluralism, divorce, penology, and criminology. In 1523, he was appointed as the spokesperson for the House of Commons, and in 1529, he ascended to the position of Lord Chancellor, succeeding Cardinal Wolsey. More refused to sign the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Succession thereby he was beheaded in 1535 at age 57 (Marchadour, 2024).

Thomas More has been characterized in multiple ways as the most appealing “figure of the early sixteenth century, the voice of conscience of the early English Reformation, and one of the three greatest figures of the English Renaissance. He was a scholar, lawyer, theologian, statesman, and eventual martyr” (Watson, 1994: 185). Watson identifies Thomas More, John Colet, and Erasmus as the three most significant

⁸ <https://www.4thestate.co.uk/2020/02/16/mantel-the-revolutionary-nature-of-the-books/>

figures of the English Renaissance. Ackroyd concurs with Watson, viewing Thomas More as “one of the few Londoners upon whom sainthood has been conferred and the first English layman to be beatified as a martyr” (1999: 482). In the same context, Smith perceives Thomas More as an individual who cherishes charity, children, the impoverished, animals, gardens, and women. Smith represents him as

a devoted family man, and admired poet, a lover of animals and of gardens. ... More gave generously to the poor, brought the needy and sick into his home for food and care; and when he heard of a neighbor woman in labor he would fall to his knees and pray until her delivery. (2003: 581)

Furthermore, Robert Bolt (1995) quoted from Jonathan Swift that Thomas More “was the person of the greatest virtue these [British] islands ever produced” (7).

This very idealistic view of Thomas More dissolves in new historicism because “the new historicist outlook is particularly well suited to reading alternate history in that its theoretical impetus is to pluralize histories” (Feng & Lewis, 2021: 152). New historicism strives to find alternate histories for the rooted historical narratives; moreover, it holds the theory that “apocryphal history involves bogus accounts of famous events” (Lewis, 2011: 171). Hutcheon states that “textuality is reinserted into history and into the social and political conditions of the discursive act itself” (2004: 81). Textuality of history is one of the new historicism’s concepts that takes into account contextual factors when applied to historical figures or past events. Hilary Mantel exploits again textuality of history approach to recreate and reconstruct a fresh unfamiliar Thomas More. Barber (2010) points out that “as soon as artefacts or documents are used to create narrative, a fictional element intrudes” (167). Consequently, any historical or biographical text must incorporate fictional elements and invented ingredients. Mantel paints a radically different portrait of Thomas More in her historiographic metafiction. Mantel’s Thomas More is not the theologian that we know. More in *Wolf Hall Trilogy* has a notorious name and a passive image. There is an emphasis on his cruelty and intransigence. More is not that godly saint and the devoted catholic martyr.

Southgate (2009) suggests that postmodernism has “a continuing tradition of sceptical questioning of any absolute distinction between history and fiction” (31). Postmodern writers’ inclination to blur the line between historical veracity and fictional elements grants them the liberty to depict historical figures in an alternative manner.

Mantel's depiction of Thomas More in her historiographic metafiction serves as an exemplification. Moreover, De Groot (2009) clarifies the new historical stance as it pertains to some historical discourses of historical figures, stating that certain historical norms "might be challenged, subverted or questioned" (57). Mantel, in turn, questions the idealized picture of More and challenges the historical conventions surrounding him, thereby providing us with a more comprehensive understanding of him. Historically, he has been regarded as courteous and ladylike; however, he differs in Mantel's perspective:

More, in his pamphlets against Luther, calls the German shit. He says that his mouth is like the world's anus. You would not think that such words would proceed from Thomas More, but they do. No one has rendered the Latin tongue more obscene. (2010: 121)

Thomas More used words like anus to describe Martin Luther's mouth, a German theologian and a grand figure in the Protestant Reformation. More cursed Luther's mouth because he translated the Bible into German. Mantel challenges the stereotype of More's character, stating that no one can believe that such words would originate from him. Furthermore, she declares that nobody had deployed the Latin language more outrageously. Mantel's use of 'you' directly engages the reader, fostering a cordial and intimate atmosphere that enhances the credibility of her assertions, thereby affirming More's confrontational and aggressive position towards the reformists.

DeMolen (1992) states that Thomas More was willing to relinquish all his positions in the government, his opportunities, and his wealth for the benefit of his family. And that "More's declared willingness to divest himself of his wealth and position in government attests to the importance he placed on his role as paterfamilias" (87). In historical accounts, Thomas More is depicted as the exemplary paterfamilias and sacrificer; however, in Mantel's biofiction, he is portrayed as his antithesis. Thomas More exhibited poor treatment towards his wife, lacking affection for her. Due to her illiteracy, he attempted to impose his doctrine upon her, compelling her to memorize his sermons. When she expressed discontent, he resorted to threats of physical violence. More "tried to get her to learn sermons by heart, but she grumbled and was stubborn in her ignorance; he took her home to her father, who suggested beating her" (Mantel, 2010: 123). DeMolen (1992) mentioned that Erasmus in his *The Uneasy Wife in Colloquies of Erasmus* said that Thomas More

married a girl of seventeen who had been reared wholly in her parents' country house ... Her lack of sophistication recommended her, because he would fashion her to his tastes the more readily. He undertook to teach her literature and music and gradually to accustom her to repeating what she had heard in a sermon, and by other devices to train her in what would be of later use. (92)

This caricature depicts a domineering figure intent on controlling his young wife and shaping her to fit his preferences. Mantel's *More* embodies anti-feminism, depicting women as serpents, asserting that among seven women, only one is virtuous. To More, "choosing a wife is like putting your hand into a bag full of writhing creatures, with one eel to six snakes. What are the chances you will pull out the eel?" (Mantel, 2010: 123). Thomas views marriage as a chance or lottery, where the outcome is contingent upon one's luck. If one is fortunate, their spouse will be a decent woman, but it is more likely that she will be indecent.

His masculinity transcends the limits and transforms to loathe women, in his comment: "If you are so lenient with yourself as to insist on living with a woman, then for the sake of your soul you should make it a woman you really don't like" (Mantel, 2010: 123). The angel-like Thomas More in old historicism is a misogynist in new historicism. This reiterates the concept of subjective reality and the multiplicity of realities in new historicism. To him, if compelled to cohabit with a female and seek self-reconciliation, one must cultivate disdain for her and regard her as an object of aversion. Orthodox and conservative readers will remain skeptical of Hilary Mantel and continue to trust history books; nevertheless, Mantel cleverly presents a fact about him from their books which is "when More's first wife died, her successor was in the house before the corpse was cold" (Mantel, 2010: 123). For those readers who accept everything in history books, it is documented in these books that More married Alice Middleton less than a month after his first wife's death.

Thomas More looked against the idea of marriage but when his first wife perished he married instantly. He "would have been a priest, but human flesh called to him with its inconvenient demands. He did not want to be a bad priest, so he became a husband" (Mantel, 2010: 123). Mantel asserts that More's motivation for marriage is not the institution itself, but rather his libido, which precluded him from becoming a priest, as Catholic doctrine mandates celibacy for priests and prohibits marriage. In addition to that, there is an insinuation that More is incestuous. Anne Boleyn grotesquely informs

Cromwell that it is rumored “that Thomas More is in love with his own daughter” (Mantel, 2010: 236). In response, Cromwell believes that these rumors may be accurate.

History’s indispensable perspective of Thomas More’s sacredness is often seen as a rejection of multiple interpretations and a lack of willingness to consider other viewpoints. In traditional historicism, the author was the authoritative source for the explanation. The meaning of the text was determined by the author’s intentions. Contemporary theorists, after dismissing the authors’ intention as the only definitive source of meaning, have established the reader as the new authoritative figure for determining fresh and unusual interpretations of past texts. Belsey (2002) asserts that “any attempt to locate a guarantee of meaning in concepts of human experience or human hopes and fears, which are outside history and outside textuality, is as inadequate” (44). However, historiographic metafiction plainly undermines the feasibility of any definitive ‘guarantee of meaning,’ regardless of its context within discourse. This interrogation is consistent with Foucault’s critique of the potential for knowledge to ever produce a definitive, dominant truth. Foucault, like Derrida, recognized that his own discourse must be incorporated into this radical skepticism as it is inextricably linked to the same assumptions it aims to expose. Southgate (2006) acknowledges that new historicists

would argue that, though the past admittedly existed, it can’t be simply accessed as an entity, but only through others’ representations – through others’ inevitably partial and selective descriptions – and that it can never be approached with the naivety and theoretical purity that seems to be implied by such commendatory words as ‘objectivity’; one can’t help but be in some way ‘positioned’ in relation to any object of study. (25)

Postmodernist scholars regard history as inescapably biased, and the word objective is merely complimentary. Harlan (1989) underscores that “historians cannot strip themselves of their inherited prejudices and preconceptions ... because the historians’ preconceptions and prejudices are what make understanding possible in the first place” (587). This may give the idea that historians were prejudiced in favor of Thomas More.

Taking this perspective into consideration, Mantel as a postmodernist author, endeavours to uncover new insights and unfamiliar realities concerning Thomas More’s character. The significance of Thomas More in the *Trilogy* is equally as important as the significance of Thomas Cromwell in order to exemplify Mantel’s new historicist perspective. History overlooked Thomas More’s transgressions due to his prominence as

a theologian and philosopher in the 16th century, but the *Trilogy* exposed these potential wrongdoings to the readers. In *Wolf Hall*:

More says it does not matter if you lie to heretics, or trick them into a confession. They have no right to silence, even if they know speech will incriminate them; if they will not speak, then break their fingers, burn them with irons, hang them up by their wrists. It is legitimate, and indeed More goes further; it is blessed ... that anyone who supports the king's divorce will be damned. (2010: 361)

Wolf Hall Trilogy renders More's brutality toward the reformists the people he calls heretics. He deems it justifiable to deceive them in order to obtain secrets, and if they refuse, he considers it legitimate to inflict torture, viewing their suffering as a blessing. Kessler (2002) claims that "Thomas More advocated religious freedom in *Utopia* to promote civic peace in Christendom and to help unify his fractious Catholic Church" (207). If Kessler's claim is accurate that Thomas More advocated for religious freedom, then why did he execute heretics, exile them, confiscate their books, torture them, and prevent them from practicing their religious beliefs? He confronted heretics through his political power and writings, authoring several books against them, one of which is *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529). Simultaneously, he prohibited heretical texts, particularly Tyndale's New Testament, and he further scrutinized and penalized individuals solely for possessing, reading, purchasing, or selling these works. He was practicing cultural hegemony and religious dominance, as

the word is that the Lord Chancellor [Thomas More] has become a master in the twin arts of stretching and compressing the servants of God. When heretics are taken, he stands by at the Tower while the torture is applied. It is reported that in his gatehouse at Chelsea he keeps suspects in the stocks, while he preaches at them and harries them: the name of your printer, the name of the master of the ship that brought these books into England. They say he uses the whip, the manacles and the torment-frame they call Skeffington's Daughter. It is a portable device, into which a man is folded, knees to chest, with a hoop of iron across his back; by means of a screw, the hoop is tightened until his ribs crack. It takes art to make sure the man does not suffocate: for if he does, everything he knows is lost. (Mantel, 2010: 298)

More diversified in using agony machines such as Skeffington's Daughter, scourge, chains, and torment-frame, in addition to extending, squishing, and squeezing machines. More in his *Utopia* says "God has deprived us of the right to kill not only others but also ourselves" (2020: 164). But in real life, he killed the heretics; therefore, from a postmodernist point of view, Thomas More is a "blood-soaked hypocrite" (Mantel, 2013: 244). Not only that but Thomas More was inventive in finding new unscrupulous methods

of death as he boiled Richard Roose, John Fisher's cook, alive on 5th April 1531 (Stacy, 1986; Kesselring, 2001; Ridgway, 2013; & Hamilton and Wriothlesley, 2024).

William Tyndale was an English linguist and Protestant reformer who was the first to translate the Bible into English. William Tyndale "longed for the day when even the common people in England would be able to read the Bible in their own language" (Let there be Light, 2005: 1).⁹ The Catholic priests believed that the Bible should be read exclusively in Latin and "it was against the law to read the Bible in English" (Let there be Light, 2005: 1). Consequently, Tyndale fled England after being declared a heretic. He assured Cromwell in one of his letters that he would not have the opportunity to return to England, even if Anne Boleyn were to become queen and the king himself provided him with a security guarantee, as long as Thomas More was alive. And that is "because More says you need not keep a promise you have made to a heretic. Here. You may as well read. Our Lord Chancellor respects neither ignorance nor innocence" (Mantel, 2010: 305). More's oppression of heretics is not only fiction from Mantel but some historical books chronicled that. One of them is Morgan in his *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain* criticized Thomas More, who "abandoned reform for repression and extermination of heresy ... and has gone down to history, save the writings of his apologists as a persecutor rather than a prophet" (1984: 244). This was the reason according to Morgan that made Erasmus, Thomas More's friend, worried.

The principle of reciprocity manifests when the religious reformation reaches a critical juncture. More supports the Pope against the King and resigns from his position, as he is "too proud to retreat from his position. He is afraid to lose his credibility with the scholars in Europe" (Mantel, 2010: 515). However, his resignation did not rescue him, and he was incarcerated in the Tower. Thomas Cromwell, Thomas Cranmer, and Thomas Audley frequently engaged in discussions to persuade Thomas More to alter his position. After reading the Act of Succession ten times, More unequivocally articulated his stance by saying: "I cannot swear, but I will not speak against your oath, and I will not try to dissuade anyone else from it" (Mantel, 2010: 562). Thomas More suggested remaining neutral rather than accepting or rejecting the proposal; however, he was informed that this stance was insufficient and that he should sign it. More assured them that he would not

⁹ https://hc.edu/publications/museums/newsletter/vol-02_issue4_05-06bia.pdf

act against his principles and would not betray the Pope or the Catholic Church. Subsequently, Cromwell retaliated:

Your undivided church has liked nothing better than persecuting its own members, burning them and hacking them apart when they stood by their own conscience, slashing their bellies open and feeding their guts to dogs. You call history to your aid, but what is history to you? It is a mirror that flatters Thomas More. But I have another mirror, I hold it up and it shows a vain and dangerous man, and when I turn it about it shows a killer, for you will drag down with you God knows how many, who will only have the suffering, and not your martyr's gratification. You are not a simple soul, so don't try to make this simple. You know I have respected you? You know I have respected you since I was a child? I would rather see my only son dead, I would rather see them cut off his head, than see you refuse this oath, and give comfort to every enemy of England. (Mantel, 2010: 566)

Cromwell accuses More and his church of hypocrisy, asserting that they exploit history and religion for their own advantage; in addition to that, the Catholic Church has, in fact, misused its authority to oppress individuals and amass wealth. It is noteworthy to highlight Cromwell's eloquence in informing More that there exists another mirror and another More, namely the lethal Thomas More. Mantel alludes here to historical and literary works that commemorate More as a Catholic martyr, who steadfastly refused to renounce his faith and faced death with dignity and courage. Cromwell admonishes More that his actions will impact not only himself but also numerous others who will follow his example, emphasizing that he is not an ordinary individual. Consequently, he urges More to recognize that these souls will endure suffering due to his decisions and to regard the issue not as a personal matter but as one of public interest. Posteriorly, Mantel exploits the situation to flatter her protagonist and show his patriotism and nationalism. Cromwell prefers seeing his son dead to giving the chance to England's enemies to interfere and see it divided and internally fragmented. King Henry and Thomas Cromwell were quite aware of More's position in England and all of Europe, so his refusal would allow the Pope and the Catholic European countries to find supporters to make civil war in England.

Greenblatt in the examination of the artwork called *The Ambassadors*, establishes correlations between Hans Holbein's anamorphic virtuosity and More's *Utopia* as a significant form of humour:

Utopia presents two distinct worlds that occupy the same textual space while insisting upon the impossibility of their doing so. We can neither separate them entirely nor bring them into accord, so that the intellectual gratification of radical discontinuity is as impossible to achieve as the pleasure of wholly integrated form.

We are constantly tantalized by the resemblances between England and Utopia ... and as constantly frustrated by the abyss that divides them. (1980: 22)

A new historicist, like Greenblatt, recognizes that Utopia is distinct from Britain and Amaurotum is not equivalent to London. Thomas More's concepts in his writings and his actions in reality represent two separate realms. More's reputation in the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* is tarnished, and his *Utopia* has been belittled. The notion that states "Utopia must mark out More as one of the most eminent humanist thinkers and visionaries of the Renaissance period" (Watson, 1994: 196) is questioned in postmodernism. And Trevor Roper's glorification of Thomas More as shown below is challenged and subverted. In Trevor Roper's opinion,

everyone venerates him now. Catholic and Protestant, Conservative and Socialist, traditionalist and reformer, English and Irish- all are united in his praise. Sweetness and light, spirituality and good humor, scholarship and wit emanate from his portrait, whether painted in color by Holbein or in prose by Erasmus. He is a man of marvelous completeness and for all seasons. And naturally all of us ... are very indignant with King Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell, who sent him to the block. (1979: 19)

In postmodernist fiction, *Utopia* has been mocked and belittled. It has been denigrated and ridiculed in works of postmodern literature. When Anne Boleyn once asked Cromwell where he had been lately, he answered, rather absurdly, "In Utopia." On another occasion, during a discussion about daylight robbery and the incineration of books, Cromwell remarked, "This is Utopia." Similarly, it appears that not only does Cromwell reject the notion of Utopia, but Christopher St. German, the English lawyer and Protestant debater, does as well. He is the author of *The Doctor and Student: Or Dialogues between a Doctor of Divinity and a Student in the Laws of England* (1523) and "the aged jurist, whose word is respected all over Europe" (Mantel, 2010: 340) said that "Utopia, after all, is not a place one can live" (340). In another instance, when Cromwell fell ill and, influenced by fever, began to envision fantastical images such as roasted birds coming to life, honey returning to bees, and wood transforming back into branches, Mantel's narrator observes that Cromwell perceives himself in Utopia, thereby constructing a ludicrous and comical fantasy of More's society.

This skepticism in Utopia is an elementary trait of postmodernists and new historicists, who

share the same questioning stance towards their common use of conventions of narrative, of reference, of the inscribing of subjectivity, of their identity as textuality, and even of their implication in ideology. In both fiction and history writing today, our confidence in empiricist and positivist epistemologies has been shaken—shaken, but perhaps not yet destroyed. And this is what accounts for the skepticism rather than any real denunciation. (Hutcheon, 2004: 106)

The confidence that contemporary historicists have in any given text has been shaken. Currently, both fiction and historical writing have undermined our trust in empiricist and realist conceptual frameworks. In Thomas More's *Utopia*, divorce is permitted and humans are free to worship and embrace the religion that they believe in; however, in real life, it is the other way around. More refused the divorce of Catherine of Aragon and burned the protestants at the stake. This led Wood James to conclude that "Utopia is not an ideal society so much as a comic one" (2010: 18). Wood replies to Robert Bolt's *A Man for all Seasons: A Play of Sir Thomas More* (1995) in which he considers More as a saint and moral man in a work called "Sir Thomas More: A Man for One Season". Wood contends that Bolt's Play has led to an exaggerated perception of Thomas More, asserting that no individual can be regarded as a saint in the sight of God. Moreover, Wood argues that

one of those sides was Sir Thomas More, cruel in punishment, evasive in argument, lusty for power, and repressive in politics. He betrayed Christianity when he led it so violently into court politics, and he betrayed politics when he surrendered it so meekly to the defense of Catholicism. Above all, he betrayed his humanity when he surrendered it to the alarms of God. (2010: 28)

According to Wood, Thomas More simultaneously betrayed himself and humanity, as well as Christianity and politics, by utilizing religion to justify political actions and vice versa. Watson (1994) debates that

leading critics of this state of affairs were men like Erasmus and Thomas More. However, while both wanted reform of the church, unlike Luther in Germany and Zwingli in Switzerland, they did not seek to break from the Roman Catholic Church. They wanted reform from within. (187)

Thomas More and Erasmus sought to implement reforms within the Catholic Church while maintaining its unity and avoiding the establishment of a new Protestant denomination, in contrast to the actions of Thomas Cromwell and King Henry VIII.

Contrastingly, *Wolf Hall Trilogy* recreates More as a dogmatic, stubborn, torturer, and refuser of reformation. When Cromwell deemed argumentation and discourse futile with More, he resolved to employ an alternative strategy. More denied the heretics the

opportunity for evasion, subjecting them to intense interrogation, prompting Cromwell to enquire why More did not anticipate receiving similar treatment. Nonetheless, Thomas More asserted that “the cases are not the same. When I compel an answer from a heretic, I have the whole body of law behind me, the whole might of Christendom” (Mantel, 2010: 628). So he did not deny his crimes but he conceived them as legal, and that “against Henry’s kingdom, I have all the kingdoms of Christendom. Against each one of your bishops, I have a hundred saints. Against your one parliament, I have all the general councils of the church” (Mantel, 2010: 645). Following these remarks, Cromwell comprehended that Thomas More had crossed the Rubicon, marking a point of no return. It was a time for avenging many scholars and innocents, a moment for settling debts with blood.

Hilary Mantel’s narration corresponds with the historical accounts of More’s courage in death, asserting that “Thomas More stands before him, more solid in death than he was in life” (2010: 644). Cromwell contemplates More’s resoluteness and obstinacy, stating, “I have never understood where the line is drawn, between sacrifice and self-slaughter” (Mantel, 2010: 626). Cromwell believes that More’s actions constitute self-homicide rather than sacrifice. The fall of Thomas More is a symbol of the decline of the Catholic clerical rule in England. Since a new historicist novelist “works to subvert dominant discourses” (Hutcheon, 2004: 46), Mantel characterizes him as “some sort of failed priest, a frustrated preacher” (2010: 39); while Cromwell regards him as a persecutor rather than a divine figure. However, his apologists regard him as the defender of the faith. It is Mantel’s habit to give two options or further and let the readers decide and choose according to their views and beliefs. Before concluding this argument, Mantel portrays Thomas More as neither entirely contemptible nor wholly admirable. After a year of his death, Mantel in the mouth of Cromwell utters that Thomas More has “civilized us” (Mantel, 2021: 247). In any case, and from a postmodernist perspective, he remains a scholar who deserves two very different stances: denunciation and appreciation.

3.3. ANNE BOLEYN, AMBITIOUS AND CRAFTY SERPENT VERSUS GUILILESS GIRL

Anne was the daughter of Thomas Boleyn and Elizabeth Howard, daughter of the Duke of Norfolk Thomas Howard. The birth date of Anne is disputable, but most probably

it is 1501 or 1507. She is the second Queen of King Henry VIII, and the mother of renowned Queen Elizabeth I. Anne spent her childhood in the French court before returning to England to serve Queen Catherine of Aragon. She attracted the eyes of the philanderer, King Henry and she was a formidable reason to change England and Europe. Anne “had pushed England toward Lutheranism and alliance with German Protestants” (Coby, 2009: 130). She was one of the reasons for the divorce of Catherine of Aragon and the elimination of Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas More; in addition, she was considered to be the ignition key of the Religious Reformation.

In *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, Ives recounts Anne as “the most influential and important queen consort this country has ever had. Indeed, Anne deserves to be a feminist icon, a woman in a society which was, above all else, male-dominated” (2004: 12). Ives praises Anne for having the “intelligence, spirit and courage” (2004: 559). Furthermore, in his play *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare portrays Anne Boleyn as “The fairest hand I ever touch’d! O beauty / Till now I never knew thee!” (1981: 23). In their first meeting, Anne danced with Henry and captivated him immediately, prompting him to describe her “a dainty one” (1981: 23).

David Hume, the Scottish philosopher and historian, authored a comprehensive work on England’s history, published in six volumes from 1754 to 1761, titled *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*. The book is seen as a cornerstone in English history, therefore, it has had more than a hundred editions since then. Hume claims that at Anne’s coronation, people were happy to have such a graceful queen. Moreover, he contends that “Anne, though she appears to have been entirely innocent, and even virtuous, in her conduct, had a certain gaiety, if not levity, of character, which threw her off her guard and made her less circumspect than her situation required” (2004: 871).

The preceding arguments reflect the conventional views of Anne; however, postmodernists hold contrasting opinions. Like Derrida and Foucault, who have urged us to adopt a fresh perspective and transcend our conventional disciplinary boundaries in favor of discourse analysis; Hutcheon emphasizes that “for postmodern history, theory, and art, this has meant a new consideration of context, of textuality, of the power of totalization and of models of continuous history” (2004: 97). Postmodern metafiction

writers frequently hint that through the textual rules of history, they weaken the legitimacy and objectivity of past documents and descriptions.

Wolf Hall Trilogy challenges, through the strategy of the textuality of history, this traditional picture of Anne Boleyn. Mantel refutes Hume on three grounds, asserting that the English populace harbored animosity towards Anne, partly due to her role in the separation of Henry and Catherine, the beloved Queen who had treated them kindly, and partly because she was perceived as the catalyst for the schism with the Roman Church. These people desired Anne's death, believing it would restore England to its previous state of religious inclination. Dorothea, Wolsey's daughter, expressed that "when Anne Boleyn came down, we believed true religion would be restored" (Mantel, 2021: 283). What is even worse, some overstated that she is a witch, and "you all know she [Anne] is a witch. And if she witched him into marriage" (Mantel, 2013: 464). Henry Fitzroy, the Duke of Richmond and the king's illegitimate son, asked Cromwell whether slow poison genuinely exists, as he feared that Anne Boleyn had poisoned him, seeing that "she was a witch" (Mantel, 2021: 86). In addition, Charles Brandon articulated that firstly Henry "married his brother's wife, then he had the misfortune to marry a witch" (Mantel, 2021: 45). Brandon deemed Henry unfortunate, as his first wife was his sister-in-law and his second wife was a sorceress. Philippa Gregory (2001) in her *The Other Boleyn Girl* provides a marvelous narrative about Anne Boleyn:

She is a witch and has enchanted the king by sorcery. That she is a murderess and would poison the queen if she could. That she has made him impotent with all other women so he has to marry her. That she blasted the children in the queen's womb and put barrenness on the throne of England. (2001: 421)

Mantel and Philippa Gregory are concordant in characterizing Anne as a witch and a shrewd ambitious woman. They both describe her as willing to sacrifice everything to achieve her plans.

Postmodern fiction "no longer aspires to invoke what Richardson called that kind of Historical Faith" (Foley, 1986: 143). Historical faith is no longer effective in new historicism. Therefore, Arias (2014) supposes that in "*Bring Up The Bodies*, she [Mantel] proposes a new view of Anne Boleyn" (22). Mantel's Anne is not as Hume said "entirely innocent" and "virtuous" but she is crafty and "a hot minx" (Mantel, 2013: 373), and the people on the roads dub her "a goggle-eyed whore" (2013: 10). Mantel exhibits the

Boleyns relentlessly, as “her lady mother trained her up, and she was a great whore ... Her sister Mary trained her up, and Mary was trained in a brothel” (2010: 393). Anne relinquished her previous husband Harry Percy and disavowed any kind of relationship with him to get Henry.

Regarding the subject of Queen Anne’s chastity, Coby (2009) says that “most historians believe that Anne was innocent of the adultery charges stipulated in the indictment” (126). While in *Wolf Hall Trilogy* Anne is promiscuous. After some years of her marriage to the king, Anne believed that the problem was in Henry, so she slept with some gentlemen to get pregnant and one of them was her brother George Boleyn. In the narrative, Anne “was a book left open on a desk for anyone to write on the pages, where only her husband should inscribe” (Mantel, 2013: 455). Henry believed that Anne had betrayed him with a hundred men, and assumed that “it is easy to be deceived about a woman’s history” (Mantel, 2013: 347). Consequently, he bastardized his young daughter from Anne, Elizabeth. His illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy, was already a bastard, and Princess Mary, Catherine’s daughter, was also declared illegitimate following the declaration that Henry’s first marriage was unlawful; thus, all of Henry’s offspring were rendered illicit.

Hume also described Anne with adjectives like “gaiety” and “levity” which mean cheerful and full of joy, yet Mantel manifests Anne as melancholic, dark, and gloomy. Anne delineates herself as “a black glance ... I suppose I seldom. Laugh” (2010: 201). On another occasion, Mantel says “she neither smiles nor speaks. She is very pale, very grand” (2010: 483); so she reflects Anne’s atrocious actions on her personal appearance. Mantel identifies Anne as the worst wife of Henry among the three wives that we meet in the *Trilogy*, Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, and Jane Seymour. Mantel says that Anne is tiny and “two Annes make one Catherine” (2010: 200). By juxtaposing the two women, Catherine is double Anne physically. And most probably Mantel intends other implications by this doubleness, regarding the virtuous and ethical prospects. By way of comparison between Anne and Jane, Cromwell visualizes that Henry became ten years younger as if Jane has washed the weariness of these years. Mantel delineates Jane in Henry’s eyes as “a tender, modest, shame-faced maid, such as few be in our day” (2013: 57). Henry dropped a tear when he described Jane to Cromwell: “Her little hands, her little paws, like a child’s. She has no guile in her. And she never speaks. ... Her little

sleeves, her seed pearl necklace ... she has nothing ... she expects nothing” (2013: 249). Jane was a modest, composed, and compliant girl; in contrast, Anne exhibited largely antithetical traits, being verbose, demanding, treacherous, devious, and fiery-natured.

Historiographers who chronicled Anne, according to new historicism, lacked complete factual accuracy in their writings. Teo (2011) confirms that “historians are perfectly aware that they fictionalise, especially where facts are scarce, to create a coherent narrative of an individual life” (304). Teo then cites Martha Hodes, a historian who acknowledged the inclusion of some fictional elements in her historical writing, as an example: “Indeed, Martha Hodes has openly admitted to doing this in *The Sea Captain’s Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* (2007)” (304).

Lyotard (1977) argues that the focus on particular applications and representation of a specific single pragmatic context, both in theory and practice, undermines the notion of fundamental or transhistorical significance for postmodern discourses, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Therefore, the portrayal of Anne in traditional historical accounts does not align with the attributes of postmodernism. From a postmodernist angle, Anne Boleyn is strikingly astute, and the reader of the *Trilogy* feels that she is the nearest to Cromwell in ingenuity, together they created an unstoppable team:

He has made her queen, she has made him minister; but they are uneasy now, each of them vigilant, watching each other for some slip that will betray real feeling, and so give advantage to the one or the other: as if only dissimulation will make them safe. But Anne is not good at hiding her feelings. (2013: 44)

It is only entirely natural when allies reach the top and after eliminating their enemies, they start to wipe out each other; Thomas Cromwell and Anne Boleyn are not exceptions. The clever schemers started to detect slips in one another, in the last sentence, Mantel gives the readers a foreshadowing that the winning party is Cromwell. One of the topics of disagreement between them was Princess Mary. Anne despised Mary due to her status as a potential heir to the throne. Consequently, Anne sought to have Mary removed in front of her daughter Elizabeth, ensuring that the latter would be the sole heir to King Henry. Coby (2009) remarks that “Anne’s overriding political objective was to ensure the throne for her daughter” (118). Anne aimed to tarnish Mary’s reputation publicly, contemplating a visit accompanied by some dashing gentlemen to entice her into

debauchery. She proposed to Cromwell that he enlist attractive men from his circle for this purpose, or even undertake the task himself, as she had heard that Mary likes Cromwell. Quite the opposite, Cromwell respected Mary and her mother the queen, he opposed Anne and told her “that is not my aim and those are not my methods” (Mantel, 2013: 131).

Another reason for their divergence was Cromwell’s reluctance to organize an advantageous marriage for little Princess Elizabeth with a vigorous prince abroad. Anne and Cromwell dealt as friends because they needed each other; they made their dialogues appear to be like merchants’ bargaining. Their talk was “like a shop when the shutters are taken down: good morning, Master Cromwell, what can we sell each other today?” (Mantel, 2010: 430). The game of power lasted for years between them until the balance tipped for Cromwell. Afterward, the game turned out to be a struggle for survival, Anne threatened him that “those who are made can be unmade” (Mantel, 2013: 133). However, he was not the blacksmith’s boy anymore, he was the church and the state now. He told her: “Not so, madam, he thinks. If need be, I can separate you from history. ... But do not threaten me, good madam. I find it uncomfortable” (Mantel, 2013: 132). They used each other to ascend the social ladder, and now it is the time to settle scores.

The relationship got colder between them, and Anne continued to threaten Cromwell, by telling him: “You will be sorry for the way you speak to me. You think you are grown great and that you no longer need me. Her voice is shaking. I know you are talking to the Seymours” (Mantel, 2013: 131). At this moment, Anne came to the realization that the king was on Cromwell’s side and that Cromwell was orchestrating her downfall and elevating Jane Seymour to succeed her as Queen of England. Cromwell detained Anne and her purported paramours, leading Anne to deduce that “Cremuel, you have never forgiven me for Wolsey” (Mantel, 2013: 352). Mantel offers her readers many alternatives for the reasons behind Anne’s collapse, one of them is Cromwell’s wish to take Wolsey’s revenge on Anne, and another is the capricious nature of King Henry. Or perhaps it is the former queen’s curse on Anne, that she will not bear Henry a male heir, and if she does, it would be from another man.

Mantel in her historiographic metafiction, writes a new history of Anne Boleyn. She is simply like the other “historians [who] have always told stories” (Stone, 1979: 3).

Barber (2010) thinks that contemporary biographers are not less exposed to adding imaginary elements in their chronicles. He elucidates this by stating: “Modern biographers are no less prone to fictional constructions” (169). Kellner (1989) assures that “historians do not ‘find’ the truths of past events; they *create* events from a seamless flow, and *invent* meanings that produce patterns within that flow” (24). In old historicism, historians would secretly manipulate and write history as they wished, filling in historical gaps with their ideas. Simultaneously, they would criticize novelists for incorporating any fictional elements into their historical novels. However, in the context of new historicism, the methods of editing, forgery, and addition employed by historians were revealed, resulting in a convergence between novelists and historians.

In traditional historicism, confidentially and behind closed doors, historians were permitted to articulate what others could not, whereas in new historicism the situation has been turned upside down, novelists are allowed to write what others are not. The contradiction in history about Anne’s character arises from postmodernism’s refusal to accept previous historical narratives. Lewis (2011) opines that in postmodernism, “anachronism disrupts temporal order by flaunting glaring inconsistencies of detail or setting” (172). These discrepancies and disparities of opinions about some historical cases are the essence of new historicism. Hutcheon (2004) assumes that postmodern “historiographic metafiction, for example, keeps distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context, and in so doing problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge, because there is no reconciliation, no dialectic here—just unresolved contradiction” (106). Historical fiction challenges the feasibility of historical understanding by highlighting the absence of rapprochement or logic, and instead emphasizing unsettled contradictions. In addition to what she pointed out above:

Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity. (2004: 93)

Historical fiction does not separate history and fiction by stripping history of its credibility as they are both creations of human beings.

Anne Boleyn in *Wolf Hall Trilogy* is not idealized as some historical books and writers proceeded. Some look at her as a victim and others consider her a femme fatale.

Claire Ridgway a specialized living author on the Tudor lands claims in her *The Anne Boleyn Collection II* that “there is no evidence that Anne was unfaithful to the King and it appears that it was simply a plot to get rid of her once and for all” (2013: 96). Mantel after publishing *Bring Up The Bodies* posted an article “witch, bitch” (2012) in The Guardian. In this article, Mantel summarizes Anne’s character in one paragraph, claiming that Anne is a disputable figure and that history will keep reinventing her. To Mantel,

Anne Boleyn is one of the most controversial women in English history; we argue over her, we pity and admire and revile her, we reinvent her in every generation. She takes on the colour of our fantasies and is shaped by our preoccupations: witch, bitch, feminist, sexual temptress, cold opportunist. She is a real woman who has acquired an archetypal status and force, and one who patrols the nightmares of good wives; she is the guilt-free predator, the man-stealer, the woman who sets out her sexual wares and extorts a fantastic price. She is also the mistress who, by marrying her lover, creates a job vacancy. Her rise is glittering, her fall sordid. God pays her out. The dead take revenge on the living. The moral order is reasserted. (2012: para. 3)

One may love Anne and one may curse her. She is like a chameleon that takes the color of our opinions in her. Anne’s character accepts all the viewpoints. Her growth is shining, but her collapse is heinous.

In this complexity, what is certain is that Anne in *Wolf Hall Trilogy* has a fresh and innovative portrayal that is more negative than positive. In this research, Anne Boleyn will be discussed again later from the perspective of being a subversive character of the power balance in her society and a deconstructive symbol of phallocentrism.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONCEPT OF HISTORICITY OF TEXT IN THE *WOLF HALL TRILOGY*

The historicity of a text refers to the process of analyzing any text in relation to its historical context, including social, political, and economic factors, as well as considering the time period, authorship, and surrounding circumstances. The concept of the historicity of a text was formulated by Louis Montrose, who says: “By the historicity of texts, I mean to suggest the historical specificity, the social and material embedding, of all modes of writing” (1997: 242). The concept of historicity of text arises from the principles of new historicism. Consequently, the text is not viewed as a separate personal artifact, but rather as a collective product of a particular society. Furthermore, literary texts help to understand the history of the epoch in which they were written. The historicity of a text can be succinctly described as the process of historicizing literature.

The *Wolf Hall Trilogy* by utilizing the historicity of the text provides a detailed explanation of the religious, political, and economic issues during the Henrician age. The novels of the are written in the 21st century and they explore events from the 16th century. However, Mantel excels in narrowing this period between the two centuries, allowing us to feel as if we were with them and as if the 16th is not too far back. She presents all the dimensions and contexts of that era on a large screen before the audience, while incorporating her postmodernist concepts.

Mantel excelled at connecting history and fiction, a complex dynamic in which both disciplines mutually affect and enrich one another. Emanuel Mickel (2012) argues that “from the earliest examples of history-writing in the European tradition, the writing of history has been intertwined with fiction” (57). Southgate’s ideas in his *History Meets Fiction* parallel with Mickel’s concerning the interconnection between history and fiction. This is exemplified in the below quote:

Recent trends, however, both in popular historical practice and in historical theorising (or in philosophy of history) have been challenging the propriety of that long assumed absolute distinction: from the one side, ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ have become inextricably intertwined, or increasingly indistinguishable, in such hybrid forms of entertainment as ‘docudramas’, ‘historical fiction’, ‘non-fiction novels’, ‘novelised’ biographies, and the more dauntingly labelled ‘historiographical metafiction’; while from the more theoretical side, critiques of history and the nature of narrative have culminated in the assimilation of the ‘factual’ and ‘fictional’ – or,

to put it more bluntly, the claim that history itself is nothing more than an alternative form of fiction. At the very least, then, boundaries between the two have been eroding; so that their respective territories now are in a state, if not of downright warfare, then at least of interesting flux. (2009: x)

To Southgate, there is a coincidence between the theory and practice in the fusion between fact and fiction. There is no distinction between what is factual and fictional. The boundaries between them have been removed in postmodernism. This allows the new historicists to historicize the texts and textualize history. All texts, whether fictional or nonfictional, scientific or literary, geographical or philosophical, intellectual or poetic, constitute a form of historical narrative that mirrors the culture of a particular era or society. Mantel's integration of history with fiction frequently acts as a bridge, merging real occurrences with fictional narratives to enhance comprehension of historical events. This synthesis facilitates a more nuanced examination of historical events, providing insights that raw accounts of history may overlook. Mantel's historical fiction exemplifies the fusion of history and fiction, employing imaginative plots to captivate readers with contexts while frequently contesting conventional interpretations of history.

Through contextualization, Mantel facilitates the understanding of historical incidents and artifacts by situating them within their specific chronological and cultural contexts. The procedure boosts historical rational thought and analysis, allowing greater involvement with the past. In turn, Antoine Lilti (2024) in his *The Historicity of Texts* underscores the importance of contextualization in the process of retrieving and discovering history, and that “the past is no longer and that its productions are henceforth no more than documents, archives, or traces whose meaning can only be restored through a distancing and contextualizing operation” (61). Furthermore, Hutcheon asserts that in order to analyze past occurrences or individuals, it is necessary to examine their historical context, which encompasses their cultural, economic, and political background, as demonstrated in the passage below:

Historiography has had its impact on literary studies, not just in the New Historicism, but even in fields—such as semiotics—where history had once been formally banished. Just as history, to a semiotician, is not a phenomenal event, but ‘an entity producing meaning’, so the semiotic production and reception of meaning have now been seen as only possible in a historical context. And historiographic metafiction ... teach us this as any theoretical argument, though both theory and practice have worked to situate their own discourses economically, socially, culturally, politically, and historically. (2004: 100)

New historicism grants an all-embracing comprehension of literature by investigating its historical context; moreover, new historicism emphasizes the close relationship between literary texts and history. Veeser (1994) confirms that “literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably” (16). Consequently, it can be enunciated that the historicity of text is a new historicist technique to highlight the effectiveness of the historical context on literature.

Feng & Lewis (2021) stress the significance of surrounding factors and context in historical studies. To them “history has always been made up of many discontinuous and even contradictory histories, conditioned by various power relations composed of social contacts, economic activities, political struggles, state powers, literary arts and moral ethics” (152). They take into consideration all these factors in the historical studies and discoveries. From this point, in order to

recover the author’s intention, historians have to reconstruct the mental world in which the author wrote his or her book-the entire set of linguistic principles, symbolic conventions, and ideological assumptions in which the author lived and thought. Only by fixing the author’s text in this elaborately reconstructed context can historians hope to recover “all that can have been intended”. (Harlan, 1989: 584)

In simple words, to attain the most accurate truth and comprehension of the author’s intentions, it is essential to reconstruct the cognitive and imaginative landscape of that era. The *Wolf Hall Trilogy* thoroughly examines all of these factors within the period that it scrutinizes. The concept of historicity of text will be discussed by reviewing the religious, political, social, and economic matters of the time that the *Trilogy* narrates.

4.1. THE RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN THE WOLF HALL TRILOGY

The *Wolf Hall Trilogy* deals with the religious issues in the Tudor dynasty period, especially in the reign of King Henry VIII. The *Trilogy* as a new historicist work “can be seen to share these points: reject (1) foundationalism, (2) realism, and (3) the transcendentalization of the subject; they accept (4) unlimited pluralism, (5) radical empiricism, and (6) pragmatism” (Dean, 1986: 267). Dean means by pluralism, the multiple possibilities of history and history interpretations. From this logic, Mantel represents priests and monks as parasites who do nothing beneficial or innovative to people and the country. They are only good at squeezing money from citizens. Jesus Christ did not give the churches the authority over people and did not give them lands

and sovereignty to monopolize everything, as Mantel delineates: “Christ did not bestow on his followers grants of land, or monopolies, offices, promotions. All these things are the business of the secular power” (2010: 532). Grzymala-Busse contends that in the era preceding Henry VIII’s dissolution of the monasteries, the “church held 25 percent of English land” (2023: 2). Moreover, “a man who has taken vows of poverty, how can he have property rights? How can monks be landlords?” (532). Holding the priesthood necessitates commitments to serve both religion and humanity, dedicating one’s body, mind, and spirit to divine service while refraining from marriage, financial gain, and the exploitation of people. Mantel questions how, if the priests’ pledge is as stated, priests could possess wealth and land, and how the Catholic Church could own one-third of England’s property in the 16th century.

Dean focuses on the role of imagination in writing and explaining history, to him the imagination in new historicism “is interpretive; its purpose is really to communicate with the past — not merely to reproduce but to interact, to initiate, to create, as one does in a conversation” (1986: 264). This imagination inspired Mantel to resurrect aspects of people’s lives and their beliefs in the sixteenth century under the reign of Henry VIII. A Christian individual can “interpret that history in conversation with other Christians, he or she would always reinterpret, twisting that tradition to meet the nuance and need of his or her own cultural situation” (1986: 278). Dean believes that Christian theologians can explain and then re-explain history through their cultural frameworks; what is more:

The theologian should not only learn from the new historicism but should also contribute to the new historicism. For unanswered questions remain. How more adequately can the newfound power of interpretation in historical analysis be distinguished from simply making the past whatever one wants it to be? (Dean, 1986: 281)

In this light, Mantel can address unresolved inquiries through the application of new historicism and can use imagination, which according to the new historicists is not “supplied by something abiding within or beyond history. Rather, the imagination is supplied by the individual’s own effort to perceive or to make sense of past history” (Dean, 1986: 267). Moreover, the interpretive imagination “which lies behind the new historicism, would suggest that changes in religious meanings are attributable not to universal an eternal Being, but entirely to innovations of creatures within history” (Dean, 1986: 279). Interpretive fantasies and historical interpretations, such as those presented

in the *Wolf Hall Trilogy*, are not confined to a singular individual or school of thought but encompass a multitude of individuals with varied perspectives.

The novels contend that the church's authority is secular rather than divine, noting that clergymen often enter the church very poor and die rich, with most not hailing from noble lineage; thus, how do they attain landownership? The answer is clear to Mantel because "Christ did not make Popes. He did not give his followers the power to make laws or levy taxes, both of which churchmen have claimed as their right" (Mantel, 2010: 531). Churchmen claim that collecting taxes is their right but that is not true and not under the permission of Jesus Christ. Grzymala-Busse (2023) notes that "secular rulers were supposed to support the church financially" (3) and that Popes, clergies, and bishops grew wealthy in medieval times; this explains why half of the lands in Germany and about 40% of the land in the Scandinavian region were in ecclesiastical hands.

Mantel discusses that the title of the Pope is not a part of the religion and neither the Bible nor Christ validates it. More than that, she wonders which religious legislation states that the Pope should be in Rome and not another place, by asking: "Why does the Pope have to be in Rome? Where is it written?" (2010: 142). The novels refute the myth of Purgatory and the ghost tales and deem that "the purpose of ghost stories is extortion, generally: to frighten poor folk into paying for prayers and charms to protect them" (Mantel, 2021: 545). These stories are fabricated by the church in order to instill fear and a sense of dependence on the church. The Catholic Church concocted Purgatory, which is a place to punish the souls until they become pure and ready to enter heaven. Popes and priests in the middle ages could "condemn entire communities to damnation" (Grzymala-Busse, 2023: 4). These practices led Louis Weil in his article titled "The Papacy: An Obstacle or a Sign for Christian Unity" to claim that "the papacy is a major obstacle on the road to Christian unity" (2017: 6). The narrator informs that Cromwell does not believe in such a place, whose "daughters are now in Purgatory, a country of slow fires and ridged ice. Where in the Gospels does it say Purgatory?" (Mantel, 2010: 152). He also does not believe in the abbess, priests, and these alleged sacred relics, uttering: "Show me where it says, in the Bible, 'Purgatory'. Show me where it says relics, monks, nuns. Show me where it says Pope" (Mantel, 2010: 39). Cromwell contemplates this when his niece Alice requests that he ask the Cardinal to petition the Pope for her aunt's release from purgatory.

In Catholicism, the Pope and his representatives can take the souls out of hell and out of purgatory. John Gilchrist (1969) asserts that Popes throughout the Middle Ages professed their capacity to liberate souls from hell and elevate them to heaven, as well as to absolve sins and provide guidance, or alternatively, to curse individuals and even excommunicate monarchs. Mantel questions who gave them this jurisdiction and shows how the churchmen used these fake ecclesiastical legislations in the 16th century to raise wealth. Contemplating Harold Veaser's new historicist five-issue explanation allows for a deeper understanding of how to address these Catholic ecclesiastical claims:

New historicism really does assume: 1) that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices; 2) that every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes; 3) that literary and non-literary "texts" circulate inseparably; 4) that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths or expresses unalterable human nature; and 5) that a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe. (1994: 2)

The fourth point asserts that neither fictional nor historical discourse provides access to immutable truths or conveys a fixed essence of humanity. Therefore, the archived documents that explore the English religious reformation in the 16th century cannot be trusted completely. Most of them are from catholic theologians like Thomas More and Cardinal Reginald Pole.

The church deceptions were not exclusively dismissed by Thomas Cromwell; several other scholars also rejected them and perished in the pursuit of religious reformation. Little Bilney and John Frith are notable among those scholars featured in the *Trilogy*. John Frith assumes that "the Eucharist is but bread, of penance we have no need, Purgatory is an invention ungrounded in scripture" (Mantel, 2010: 435). Eucharist is an ecclesiastical ritual in which the church celebrates the last meal of Christ by eating bread and drinking wine as Jesus did with his apostles. Frith is of the view that people do not need such things but they need real amendments and reforms. John Foxe published a book in 1563 named *Fox's Book of Martyrs Or A History of the Lives, Sufferings, and Triumphant Deaths of the Primitive Protestant Martyrs* in which he studies those who suffered because of the Catholic Church before and during the Reformation until Protestantism was settled in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Foxe (1881) explains how Frith and a boy suffered while burning on the stake for more than two hours because of the wind. Hilary Mantel displays this scene in *Wolf Hall* and also asserts that Thomas

Cromwell did his best to save John Frith, but he failed, and “later he will hear that Frith and the boy suffered, the wind blowing the flames away from them repeatedly. Death is a japester; call him and he will not come” (Mantel, 2010: 479).

The Roman Catholic Church in Rome employed diverse forms of violence against dissenters and religious reformers across Europe. More than that “the Vatican has long been a major capital of the secret world of espionage and that popes, no less than kings and prime ministers, presidents and dictators, inhabit a secret world of spies, assassins, saboteurs, and clandestine operations” (Alvarez, 2002: 1). Alvarez verifies that the popes, like other tyrannical power holders, maintain networks of agents, killers, and criminals. When Cromwell was a child, he witnessed the burning of a woman, the Loller, his first reaction was: “What’s her sin?” (Mantel, 2010: 353). Cromwell the child thought that this woman had committed a horrible vice, but unexpectedly her sin was her opinion, as “she says the saints are but wooden posts” (353). The downgrading of the English church before the Reformation reached the level of burning a soul only for saying that the churchmen were ‘wooden posts’, while the woman was screaming, the monks were cheering and chanting, but: “What’s the point?” (Mantel, 2010: 355). Did they triumph over the devil or achieve something to be proud of? Heretics were toughened in this manner by Catholics.

Wolf Hall Trilogy shows that some of the catholic deeds and doctrines are false and not genuine. In his discussion with King Henry about priests, Cromwell delineates his viewpoints evidently:

The monks take in children and use them as servants, they don’t even teach them dog Latin. ... What I cannot stomach is hypocrisy, fraud, idleness – their worn-out relics, their threadbare worship, and their lack of invention. When did anything good last come from a monastery? They do not invent, they only repeat, and what they repeat is corrupt. (2010: 219)

King Henry supports Cromwell in his beliefs and says “dogholes, then?” (Mantel, 2010: 219). Cromwell’s father is similar to the monks in the regard that he assumes that being a literate person is a chance to exploit the illiterate people; for him “the point of being able to read is to take advantage of people who can’t; for the same purpose one must learn to write. So his father sends him to the priest” (Mantel, 2010: 114). In the 16th century, the cultivated classes were the clergymen and the nobles and both of these classes wanted the other people to remain unschooled and uneducated. Indeed, that is the major reason

behind the catholic church's refusal to translate the Bible into English, if people could read their holy book, the role of the church and its fellows would be reduced. In the 16th century,

people could not know God's truth unless they knew God's Word. Yet, it was against the law to read the Bible in English, possess any portion of the Scriptures in English, or teach any portion of the Scriptures (such as the Lord's Prayer or the Ten Commandments) to one's own children in English. The people only knew what the priests told them, but the priests themselves were ignorant of the Scripture. Tyndale believed the Church and Papacy had become corrupt, hiding God's Word from the people by their traditions. (Let There Be Light, 2005: 1)

What the clergymen told the masses was all that was known to them. According to Tyndale, corruption in the Catholic religious establishment prevented people from knowing and reading the Book of God. For this reason, Fineberg (1997) believes that

Tyndale was tied to a stake, strangled with a rope and torched outside a castle near Brussels on Oct. 6, 1536. His crime: Translating the scriptures from Greek and Hebrew into vernacular English so that commoners could read the Bible for themselves, rather than having to depend on the church hierarchy to interpret the official Latin Vulgate. (para. 6)

Tyndale's sole transgression was translating the Bible into English, enabling English speakers to access their sacred text in their native language.

New historicism engaged with Christianity and the Jewish Torah in search of new meanings, as William Dean points out: "New historicist theology can be seen not only in the writings of Cornel West and Jeffrey Stout, but-and perhaps more explicitly-in the traditionhistorical method of Hebrew Bible criticism and its extensions into analysis of the New Testament" (1986: 280). Dean also mentions that some theologians in their sociohistorical method of religious research applied new historicism to "biblical criticism religious history, and to contemporary theology" (1986: 263). Mantel's novels demonstrate that religious historical studies of the Tudor period can yield new insights and visions. However, in new historicism, there are no untouchable figures or texts; all are open to scrutiny and criticism. The narrator of *Wolf Hall* draws a comparison between the prostitute and the clergyman, by stating that "if you must take risks these days, better the preacher than the whore" (2010: 42). Cromwell looks at them as frigid and weird people, emphasizing that "there are some strange cold people in this world. It is priests, I think" (Mantel, 2010: 250). The nations ached because of their inner battles, the "bishops and cardinals slay each other, and humble men suffer for their crimes" (Mantel, 2021:

676). Mantel provides another instance of the deceit among church members, citing Elizabeth Barton, the prophetess who asserted her possession of supernatural abilities concerning the afterlife and unseen phenomena. She claimed to communicate with the devil and discern the souls in heaven and hell, among other assertions; however, she later “confesses that her visions are inventions. She never spoke to heavenly persons. Or raised the dead; that was all a fraud. She never had a hand in miracles” (Mantel, 2010: 500). Subsequently, it is disclosed that she was a pawn exploited by powerful clergymen to transmit messages that advanced their objectives, including advising the king against marrying Anne Boleyn, ominously predicting his demise within two months if he proceeded, and forewarning of a curse should he oppose the pope, among other claims.

The narrative further underscores that the priests in the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* resemble ordinary individuals, possessing mistresses, illegitimate offspring, and spouses; in essence, they lack the esteemed status typically associated with the priesthood. Cardinal Wolsey served as the Archbishop of York, yet he never visited the city during his lifetime due to his preoccupation with personal interests. He was an extravagant spender and fathered two illegitimate children. Stephen Gardiner was the Bishop of Winchester, he himself was an illegal son of a royal family and a man with many faces. Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, although a senior cleric expected to be celibate, seemingly possesses an inclination towards romance and sexual relations. Finally, Reginald Pole, a Catholic Cardinal who prioritized worldly matters over divine concerns, claimed the throne on the basis that his mother’s uncles were Kings Edward IV and Richard III. All these priests preferred money and property over their ecclesiastical sacred duties.

The *Trilogy* exhibits how the Pope interferes in England’s issues; David Alvarez affirms this when he states that “the Papacy relied on friendly Catholic powers, especially France and Austria, to ensure its political control over [Europe]” (2002: 12). The narrator remarks that “the wealth of twenty-nine monasteries has gone to those foundations – suppressed by permission of the Pope, on the conditions that proceeds were used for colleges” (Mantel 2010: 217), then Henry continues “I am beginning to care very little for the Pope and his permissions” (217). King Henry seems tired of Rome and their practices and from here starts the beginning of the religious reformation.

Under such circumstances, Thomas Cromwell emerged as a man willing to change. Many scholars wanted to do what Cromwell did, yet they met their demise, either executed by burning at the stake or imprisoned, while others, such as William Tyndale, sought refuge abroad during Thomas More's tenure as Lord Chancellor. Yet Cromwell was different from them in that he was more intelligent and had political power as he was the king's trusted right hand. Macculloch (1995) indicates that "here Thomas Cromwell emerges as innovator, with his creative perception of how a government might launch out into opinion-forming to secure consent and approval for a religious revolution" (1995: 9). Leading a religious reformation is a challenging endeavor that requires 'creative perception', as noted by Macculloch. Mantel argues that Cromwell was brilliant not only in economic and accounting matters but in religious matters as well; he as "people say. That is an ingenious man. Do you know he has the whole of the New Testament by heart? He is the very man if an argument about God breaks out" (Mantel, 2010: 91). Cromwell memorized the whole New Testament and he was eligible to enter any religious debate.

The religious incompatibility in any nation constitutes a significant issue, as each party perceives itself as nearer to the truth (Coby, 2009). He elucidates the circumstances surrounding the religious reform movement in England as follows:

Religious non-conformity, always a problem, could not so easily be stamped out if heresy enjoyed the protection of state power. And if state power was not united and overwhelming, but disjointed and contested, then warfare within a state was likely to occur, since resistance to a heretic prince was generally allowed. Disestablishment was off the table because of the presumption that people professing different faiths could not all be loyal to the same state. And toleration of dissent was as yet an unnoticed option, because of the conviction, nearly universal, that religious truth was singular, evident, and of first importance, and that malignity and self-interest, therefore, were all that prevented dissenters from seeing the light. (Coby, 2009: 10)

Coby regarded the reformers as heretics, and it was impossible to suppress these dissidents because the state was supporting them (King Henry and Cromwell). The state's mission was not easy either, as a rebellion against a heretic ruler such as Henry was permissible in the Catholic Church. This corroborates Macculloch's assertion that the English religious revolution of the 16th century would not have triumphed without the brilliance of Thomas Cromwell. According to Coby, England's separation from Rome was one of the most renowned splits of the century, and "the Protestant creed brought bloody religious strife and fresh political thinking" (2009: 9). Hutchinson (2007) believes that the dismantling of churches and monasteries in the religious reform movement in

England had negative rewards in that these monasteries helped the poor, the sick and the pilgrims. To Hutchinson,

Cromwell's dissolution of the monasteries – his audacious legal pillage that remains the greatest single act of privatisation in the history of Britain's governance – also abruptly ended their care of the poor and sick and the provision of education and spiritual comfort to thousands of pilgrims. An additional social by-product of the dissolution was the fashioning of a new affluent class of gentry through the redistribution of monastic wealth. His necessity knew no laws. He gave the King absolute rule merely by proclamation, which drastically reduced any parliamentary scrutiny of government measures and provided a powerful *carte blanche* to the King and his sycophantic Council. (2007: 9)

Hutchinson asserts that Thomas Cromwell's actions in severing England's ties with Rome, thereby facilitating the schism from the Catholic Church and the establishment of the Protestant Church, enabled King Henry to attain absolute and tyrannical authority. Furthermore, he contends that Cromwell prioritized parliamentary laws over justice, rendering all members of Parliament subordinate to Cromwell and his directives. Rockett (2004) supposes that King Henry discovered that he could acquire power and control through Parliament under the influence of Thomas Cromwell. He also assumes that King Henry was indoctrinated with anticlericalism by Cromwell. And that

by mid-1531 Cromwell was working at the king's immediate behest as a parliamentary draftsman. Thus, there is abundant reason for viewing Cromwell early in 1532 as the king's chief agent in parliamentary and legislative matters. For these reasons, it was probably Cromwell's inspiration that led the king to see that parliamentary authority could be a useful implement against the clergy's right to enact laws and to exercise complete control over trials in episcopal courts. (Rockett, 2004: 143)

The new historicist and postmodernist look at the English Reformation movement of the 16th century is entirely different. Mantel portrayed the Catholic Church as exploitative and in urgent need of reform, asserting that Thomas Cromwell was a key figure in this transformative movement that altered the landscape of both England and Europe.

Cromwell believed the church deceived the folks with fairy tales that only children could accept, so people were more likely to accept from a king and a parliament, as shown in the following quote: "For centuries Rome has asked them to believe what only children could believe. Surely they will find it more natural to obey an English king, who will exercise his powers under Parliament and under God" (Mantel, 2010: 516-7). As a lawyer, Cromwell always tried to legitimize his deeds by passing laws from the parliament, and

to him obeying an act from an institution like a parliament is more plausible than obeying a myth from a tainted church. To Cromwell, there is “no man in England, who does not believe our church is in need of reform which grows more urgent by the year, and if the church cannot do it, then the king in Parliament must, and can” (Mantel, 2010: 340). The urgency of the reformation was becoming more necessary every year and Cromwell added that he had been weighing the situation for decades and lastly came to this inference, “what I thought I believed, is chipped away a little and a little, a fragment then a piece and then a piece more. With every month that passes, the corners are knocked off the certainties of this world” (Mantel, 2010: 39). Cromwell’s faith in the Catholic Church decreased day by day, and the facts and the postulates that he presupposed scattered little by little.

Some factors helped Cromwell to make his religious revolution like Anne Boleyn, the king’s wish for a male heir, the king’s need for his first marriage dispensation, and the inclination of “Popes and rulers tried to undermine each other’s authority” (Grzymala-Busse, 2023: 4). During his discourse with King Henry, Cromwell told him that it was the time “to be sole and supreme head of your kingdom” (Mantel, 2010: 277). Cromwell started to enhance most of the state’s institutions and to close those superfluous convents and monasteries, that he considered unnecessary, and not required by Christ or the Bible. Moreover, he succeeded in passing the Act of Supremacy in which the parliament considered the king the supreme ruler of the country, and

on 15 May, the bishops sign a document of submission to the king. They will not make new church legislation without the king’s licence, and will submit all existing laws to a review by a commission which will include laymen – members of Parliament and the king’s appointees. They will not meet in Convocation without the king’s permission. (Mantel, 2010: 365-6)

After this document of submission (1532), the clergymen could not make any decision before asking the king and they could not hold a big official meeting without authorization. Moreover, a committee was formed to revise the current ecclesiastical legislation. These changes did not happen all of a sudden but in stages, because neither the king nor the crowds were ready for these amendments at once. Initially, King Henry refused the translation of the Bible into English, and since Luther’s version of the Bible in Germany was allowed and the people there could read the holy book in their tongue, some English people inquired: “Why should the Germans have God’s word, and not

Englishmen?” (Mantel, 2021: 261). However, after five years King Henry permitted Tyndale’s version to be printed and said that “the gospel may be given to the people, this new translation is fit: and the bishops sign off on their deliberations, and send both of them to the printer” (Mantel, 2021: 502). William Tyndale’s Bible was authorized for printing and distribution in England in 1537, a year after his death, preventing him from witnessing the prosperity of his work in his homeland.

Foucault invites us to analyze the reformist movements in the 16th century, and “all those movements which took place in the 15th and 16th centuries and which had the Reformation as their main expression and result should be analyzed as a great crisis of the Western experience of subjectivity” (1982: 782). Then he focuses on the religious change “and a revolt against the kind of religious and moral power which gave form, during the Middle Ages, to this subjectivity” (782). He also argues that people often say that Christianity fetched moral standards to ancient humanity and forget that it also fetched new power criteria. From Foucault’s vantage, Christianity is unique in the regard that it unionized itself into one institution, the Church, which originates a structure of power that should be different from the royal one; this power is intended to serve and sacrifice for the redemption of individuals rather than exploit them. As another option, Dean (1986) observes that

the significance of the new historicism for ... theology can be approached by reference to two implications of the interpretive imagination. According to the interpretive imagination, (1) we do know the objective world, but (2) we know it not by looking beyond the contingencies of history but only by looking at the contingencies of history. These two epistemological features of the new historicism set it apart from modernism and align it with postmodern ways of speaking. The first implication suggests the positive character of a newly historicist theology; the second implication suggests what a historicist theology must live without. (277)

These two conceptual characteristics of new historicism distinguish it from modernism and align it with postmodern discourse.

Further, Mantel applauds Cromwell’s crucial role in this religious conversion. She also cheers for the translation of the Bible by Luther and Tyndale from Latin, and the decomposition of Catholic Churches. Some intellectuals connect the break with Rome and Catholicism with Brexit (the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union). However, the first separation from Europe was for religious reasons and the second separation was for economic reasons. *Wolf Hall* considers this transformation as

a battle between England and Rome; it is indeed “England against Rome ... The living against the dead” (Mantel, 2010: 637). A battle between Thomas Cromwell and Thomas More; between open-mindedness and dogmatism; between the plurality of opinion and the singularity of it. David Loades assures that “the reformers hailed Cromwell as God’s special instrument” (2013: 139). It really needed a man such as Cromwell to achieve all these changes in a short period, a man who is ‘God’s special instrument’ and a man for all missions.

Lastly, since the novels of *Wolf Hall Trilogy* are historical novels, they use historical information abundantly; therefore, the historicity of text concept prevails throughout the whole of Mantel’s historiographic metafiction. Mantel benefits from the historicity of text tactic to the greatest possible extent and employs it for her fictional style, providing historical clarifications on some controversial points, and sending her messages to the readers explicitly and clearly.

4.2. THE POLITICAL ISSUES IN THE WOLF HALL TRILOGY

England achieved religious independence from Rome which led automatically to fulfilling its political independence since the political and religious authorities in the 16th century were related to each other closely. Cromwell tells the king that “it will be the last money Your Majesty sends to Rome, if it rests with me” (Mantel, 2010: 429). This means political and financial independence from Rome as well. The Pope’s decisions were authoritative over the king; he could neither remarry nor divorce without papal consent. The “Catholic Church was the most powerful, wealthiest ... in the Middle Ages. Starting in the eleventh century, the papacy fought [and challenged] European rulers and then claim[ed] authority over people, territory, and monarchs alike” (Grzymala-Busse, 2023, on the internal cover page). The Pope possessed the power to condemn English citizens to death or grant them clemency, as well as to sell lands, construct churches, or demolish them within England. He appointed the head of the ecclesiastical authority in the country, granting the Pope the jurisdiction to excommunicate or bless a king. Differently stated, the Pope of Rome could interfere in small details in the whole of England under his churchly authorization; therefore, Cromwell was encouraging King Henry to be the single and superior ruler in his kingdom. All these interventions were stopped and England achieved its political autonomy during the reign of Henry VIII. The *Wolf Hall Trilogy*

portrays Thomas Cromwell as a pivotal figure in transforming England and establishing it as a formidable kingdom in Europe.

All texts are seen as political weapons by new historicism as Gao (2019) posits that “in the eyes of new historicists, all texts are ‘political tools’ that are used to regulate social, political, and cultural relationships” (192). Southgate (2009) suggests that a significant discourse has emerged regarding the schemes and potential use of history in political and moral domains and that “at the turn of the twenty-first century, some historians have begun to question that cultivation of detachment, and that a serious debate has been joined about the purposes and possible utility of history in political and ethical contexts” (126). The postmodern contemporary historians in the 21st century discuss the aims and potential value of history within political frameworks. To Southgate (2009) as well,

it is writers of fiction who, in a widely accessible form, have more recently provided historiographical illumination – who have, that is to say, deliberately and explicitly shed light on history’s darker corners, by revealing afresh the inevitability of its ideological involvement and its function as a vehicle for politics. (157)

He asserts that contemporary historical novelists, Mantel as an example, have been instrumental in addressing contentious historical matters and illustrating the exploitation of history for ideological and political purposes. The *Wolf Hall Trilogy* explicitly executed this through historiographic fiction.

Cromwell was an adept legislator, a skill that enabled him to leverage Parliament to acquire authority and legitimize his actions. Cromwell contributed greatly to the process of changing the treason law in England, the law that turned against him at last. Treason exited from its concept as an act or conspiracy with enemies against the state; merely contemplating the king’s demise, labeling him a heretic, or expressing any malevolent desire was deemed treasonous. The British historian specializing in the Tudor period, Geoffery Elton, in his *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary* argues that the Tudors depended on “expand or contract treason” (1982, 60). Guy agrees that the Tudors accused those who opposed them of treason, where “treason, not heresy, became the penalty for denying the royal supremacy” (1993, 22). The Henrician court converted into a bloody court that swept many fresh lives and souls.

MacFarquhar (2012) speculates that “Cromwell was a farseeing modern statesman who had transformed the English government from a personal fiefdom of the king to a bureaucratic parliamentary structure that could survive royal incompetence and enact reforms through legislation rather than through fiat” (23). Mantel also portrays Cromwell as a shrewd visionary diplomat who changed the system of government from totalitarian tyranny to parliamentary democracy. Coby (2009) on the other hand asserts that “Cromwell was a leading figure in Reformation politics. The biographer’s bias mandates no less” (ix). He also believes that even scholars who critique Cromwell commend his argument for its analytical depth, comprehensive presentation, insightful policy proposals, and witty irony. Coby is in the viewpoint that

Cromwell persuaded Henry to utilize parliament, not only as an occasional instrument for the collection of taxes, but as a partner in power necessary to perpetuate the initiatives of the crown. The English Reformation, which could have rested on royal decrees, rested instead on parliamentary enactments. Parliament was almost continuously in existence during Cromwell’s near-decade in office ... At the time, and in the rush of events, no one could tell for certain whether Cromwell was concealing a despotic absolutism under the cover of a mixed regime; or whether Henry was being schooled by Cromwell in the limits of his own power. (2009: 15)

To Coby, it remains uncertain whether Cromwell was masking a tyrannical absolutism beneath the guise of a parliamentary system, or if Henry was being instructed by Cromwell regarding the constraints of his authority. However, it is unequivocal that Cromwell and Henry demonstrated to Europe that their choices were not individual but rather formal collective decisions made by Parliament. Coby asserts that Cromwell was a leading figure in the initiative to emancipate monarchs from papal authority and feudal dependency, positioning kings as the leaders of regional churches and national governments, liberating them from the ethical constraints of philosophical and religious belief, while binding them to parliaments and legal frameworks. Cromwell’s significance and symbolic status stem from his role as the architect of the initial phase of the English Reformation.

Cromwell’s governmental repairs were to the advantage of the unity of the nation on one hand and the interest of King Henry’s concerns on the other, but definitely with some losses. In each reformation or revolution, there were victims and the English Reformation was not an exception. Greenblatt affirms that “you cannot make a Reformation without breaking eggs” (2009: part. 1); and Mantel says that “the fate of

peoples is made like this, two men in small rooms” (2010: 610). People’s destinies are not within their control in such circumstances but are predetermined in the chambers of decision. Johnston (2017) notes that during pivotal events in the *Trilogy*, the youths (Gregory, Charles, and Rafe) residing in Cromwell’s household reenacted the occurrences at Austin Friars through an impromptu play. A similar occurrence transpired in the court of King Henry, reminiscent of the actions taken by certain gentlemen during the downfall of Cardinal Wolsey. These theatrical scenes frequently appeared in the novels, conveying political messages and foreshadowing future events to the readers.

New historicism hypothesizes that a comprehensive understanding of the Tudor era and the English Reformation necessitates an awareness of the societal, cultural, political, and communal contexts of 16th-century England. Mantel adeptly incorporates the historicity of the text, skilfully presenting various elements to enhance her readers’ historical awareness and facilitate their engagement in revisiting a significant period in English history while bringing famous people’s pasts to life. Bressler (2006) explains that well like so:

Unlike the old historicism, this new historicism, or Cultural Poetics, asserts that an intricate connection exists between ... a text or any work of art and society, while denying that a text can be evaluated in isolation from its cultural context. We must know, it declares, the societal concerns of the author, of the historical times evidenced in the work, and of other cultural elements exhibited in the text before we can devise a valid interpretation. This approach to textual analysis questions the very act of how we can arrive at a meaning for any human activity, whether it is a text, a social event, a long-held tradition, or a political act. (219)

This method of analyzing texts interrogates the process by which we derive meaning from any human endeavor, including texts, social occurrences, longstanding traditions, or political actions. Parrish (2008) has contended that “fiction in the postmodern era has become both the primary medium for arguing about what history is” (34), as well as “fiction has become the critical genre for understanding how history is made” (37). This has obvious ramifications for our current discourse on the functions of history, particularly the ideological functions that were previously addressed. If we examine the nature and method of building history, we can easily ascertain the motives that may be driving it, as well as the intentions of those who create it. Therefore, in our analysis of the essential tasks of history, we are once again drawn to fiction and must consider Parrish’s contention that the reasons and goals of historians are exposed as overtly political in

numerous novels and historical books, albeit not always with the intention of doing so. Parrish names some “popular historians such as Ellis, McCullough, and Isaacson and academic historians such as Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob. Their histories are also political” (2008: 36). Politics has started to intrude upon every aspect of existence. It has started to meddle in the realms of science, economics, religious matters, literature, poetry, and historical fiction.

Mantel’s narrative illustrates England’s political isolation from other European nations. Henry’s initial marriage to Catherine of Aragon was politically motivated; and aimed at securing Spain as an ally, which subsequently transformed into an adversarial relationship following their divorce. This divorce introduced England to another foe, the Roman Empire, as the Emperor was Catherine’s nephew. King Henry VIII violated the majority of the peace treaties established by his predecessor, King Henry VII. Old Henry established an extensive truce with France and arranged a marriage between his daughter Mary and the French King; however, his son, Henry VIII, undermined the peace treaty, resulting in renewed tensions between the two nations. Analogously, old Henry signed a Treaty of Perpetual Peace between England and Scotland and his daughter Margaret Tudor married King James IV, but Henry VIII’s relationship with King James was anxious and uneasy. In a nutshell, England’s political landscape during Henry’s reign was tumultuous, characterized by internal revolutions and coup attempts; given the significant transformations of his rule, such political instability was to be expected. Mantel by adding all these historical details into her narrative, effectively historicized her text and added to it the required historical flavor for the success of the work.

4.3. THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE *WOLF HALL TRILOGY*

In the *Trilogy*, Mantel provides an overview of the economic circumstances and social conditions during the era of Thomas Cromwell and the reforms he implemented. In addition to the religious and political reformation, Cromwell was also concerned about the economic reformation, Cromwell thought “that people ought to be found better jobs” (Mantel, 2010: 87). This phrase reflects his entrepreneurial mindset and business mentality. It is particularly surprising for a man in the early 16th century to contemplate the establishment of birth registration and the generation of population statistics for England. Cromwell created “some form of registration, documentation to record baptisms

so he can count the king's subjects" (Mantel, 2013: 383). This contributes to his extensive record of regenerations and the social reforms he implemented during his tenure. King Henry once contemplated him and enquired from which planet he hailed that he "can do the work of ten" (Mantel, 2021: 43). More than that "his neighbours at Austin Friars think he is in charge of everything, from framing the laws to propping cellars and cleaning drains" (Mantel, 2021: 523). The narrator of *Wolf Hall* tells us that Cromwell "is running everything, including the weather" (2010: 462). Likewise, the narrator of *Bring Up The Bodies* admires him by saying "no man in England works harder than he does" (2013: 245). No wonder of that since he is a man of 'metal sheet' and a man who never feels tired.

The parliament dismissed Cromwell's legislation regarding assistance for the impoverished, believing that the government and affluent individuals ought to aid the destitute populations. In

March, Parliament knocks back his new poor law. It was too much for the Commons to digest, that rich men might have some duty to the poor; that if you get fat, as gentlemen of England do, on the wool trade, you have some responsibility to the men turned off the land, the labourers without labour, the sowers without a field. (Mantel, 2013: 243)

Cromwell proposed legislation to foster social solidarity in England, aimed at assisting landless farmers and unemployed workers. Cromwell believed that providing them with professions, rather than allowing them to beg in the streets, was more beneficial for both them and the state, as "England needs roads, forts, harbours, bridges. Men need work. It's a shame to see them begging their bread, when honest labour could keep the realm secure. Can we not put them together, the hands and the task?" (Mantel, 2013: 243). England needed the development of infrastructure and construction of facilities like building seaports, streets, and bridges, but "parliament cannot see how it is the state's job to create work. Are not these matters in God's hands ... And if Secretary Cromwell argues that famine provokes criminality: well, are there not hangmen enough?" (Mantel, 2013: 243). Cromwell perceived and anticipated what the members of parliament were oblivious to. They did not attempt to avert the crisis before its occurrence; instead, they awaited its emergence and subsequently sought to address it through repression.

Mantel, through the character of Cromwell and utilizing new historicist concepts, historicizes the cultural elements of the Tudor period in her historiographic metafiction. This historicization is both legal and mandated according to Lilti as manifested here:

The concern for historicization defended by the main currents of cultural history is perfectly legitimate. It is even necessary for constructing works or texts as objects of history, a fortiori when offering an alternative to certain deeply ahistorical currents in literary criticism. (2024: 62)

The cultural history that Lilti talks about is an “obvious delight of the New Historians in detailed description of concrete objects and moments” (Hohendahl, 1992: 96); moreover, the cultural history “is a preference they share with Geertzian cultural anthropology where history turns into a cultural map” (96). The process of the historicity of the text includes various social items, and by the historicity of texts, new texts are written and generated. David Forgacs (1982) supposes “that literature can only be properly understood within a larger framework of social reality” (135). The economic and social realities are “not an indistinct background out of which literature emerges or into which it blends” (135). They are found in a specific shape in history and this shape is

also found in any given moment of society, because particular class relationships and particular political, cultural and social institutions are related to the system of economic production in a determinate way. Both the structure of history and the structure of society are what Marx and Engels called dialectical, a term which draws attention to the dynamic and opposed forces at work within them. (Forgacs, 1982: 135)

Economic and social realities manifest in various forms across history and within any specific moment in society. Social and economic factors are essential components of new historicism in the examination of any text, historical period, or notable figure like Cromwell.

Wolf Hall Trilogy critiques some social norms and the social hierarchical classes in the 16th century, and it shows how this hierarchical classification system could stop the wheel of progression. For instance, Edmund Howard is a half-brother of the Duke of Norfolk and has a big family to look after but “he once declared to the cardinal that if he were not a lord he would go out and earn an honest living by digging and delving, a labouring man; but rank condemned him to indigence” (Mantel, 2021: 704). His noble class prevented him from working and his rank as a lord doomed him to grinding poverty. Helen is another sample, she is an impoverished yet attractive woman who marries Rafe

Sadler, a member of the king's household and one of the wealthiest commoners in the nation. Helen "can become Sadler's wife, a rising man in Henry's service; she can become a serene hostess, a learned woman. But she cannot lose her history" (Mantel, 2013: 170). Nonetheless, society continued to perceive her as a destitute beggar, with her past and social class accompanying her until her death. The same principle applies to Thomas Cromwell, the blacksmith's son of humble origins.

In conjunction with Cromwell's initiatives to enhance religious institutions, he sought to ameliorate the commercial and financial conditions of his nation, attempting once more to enact legislation to harness the labor resources for national prosperity. Cromwell was

preparing a bill for Parliament to give employment to men without work, to get them waged and out mending the roads, making the harbours, building walls against the Emperor or any other opportunist. We could pay them, he calculated, if we levied an income tax on the rich; we could provide shelter, doctors if they needed them, their subsistence; we would all have the fruits of their work, and their employment would keep them from becoming bawds or pickpockets or highway robbers, all of which men will do if they see no other way to eat. What if their fathers before them were bawds, pickpockets or highway robbers? That signifies nothing. Look at him. Is he Walter Cromwell? In a generation everything can change. (Mantel, 2013: 51-2)

He demonstrates his commitment to socialism and social democracy by advocating for the appropriation of wealth from the wealthy and the payment of laborers' salaries. Even if they were criminals, their history is irrelevant to him; rather, their employment will prevent them from engaging in riots, robberies, and plunder. Regarding him, he is not like his father Walter. Cromwell's

greatest ambition for England is this: the prince and his commonwealth should be in accord. He doesn't want the kingdom to be run like Walter's house in Putney, with fighting all the time and the sound of banging and shrieking day and night. He wants it to be a household where everybody knows what they have to do, and feels safe doing it. (Mantel, 2013: 83-4)

Mantel's narrative explicitly illustrates Cromwell's endeavors to emancipate England from the external hegemony of the Catholic Church and to prevent Henry from engaging in expensive wars, thereby enhancing the nation's economy, which could foster domestic unity.

Montrose's text's historicity allowed us to perceive Cromwell as a Renaissance man who dedicated his life to the prosperity of his country as in *Wolf Hall Trilogy*, rather than

a malicious minister. Montrose (1997) also contends that through the examination of culturally particular discursive procedures in new socio-historicism “versions of the real, of history, are instantiated, deployed, reproduced; and by such means, they may also be appropriated, contested, transformed” (244). Bressler (2006) is of the opinion that any reading of a text is inadequate without considering its connections to the discourses that shaped it and to which it responds. And since any “historical situation is an intricate web of oftentimes competing discourses any interpretation of a text would be incomplete if we do not consider the text’s relationship to the discourses that helped fashion it and to which the text is a response” (Bressler, 2006: 187). Dean (1986) argues that

the point of Derrida’s deconstruction of the ontological presence of being is to reconstruct the historicity of texts (where ‘texts’ are understood to include social artifacts, such as games and wars, as well as literary artifacts). The starkness of this position becomes apparent when it is realized that there is nothing to consult beyond the history of texts and the history of those who interpret texts, and who, in interpreting ‘write’ new texts. (271)

The “new texts” reveal that when King Henry went to his bed with his incalculable mistresses, Cromwell’s real job started. Even in his will, he did not forget to give some portion of his fortune to repair the roads, he allocated “twenty pounds for mending the roads” (Mantel, 2010: 148). He never worked for himself and never prioritized his interests over the state’s interests, but conversely, he always worked for a better England. During the Tudor period and especially during Cromwell’s prosperity, England achieved some commercial progression and development in agriculture by using new tools, and fertilization techniques, and inventing new farming manners. New labor law was made up in addition to a modern taxation system, and what is more important as we saw in *Wolf Hall Trilogy*, the lands were taken from the over-wealthy church and were distributed to the farmers to grow crops. Yet, the general economic condition of England and the English people under King Henry VIII’s rule was not so good because of Henry’s wrong policies and his personal extravagant expenditures, besides the civil war.

In summary, Mantel does not isolate her text from external factors and influential circumstances; rather, she offers a thorough examination of the religious, political, social, and economic context of the Tudor period. Her fiction is seamlessly integrated into the 16th-century English context and executes the historicity of the text approach with precision.

CHAPTER FIVE

GREENBLATT'S SUBVERSION AND CONTAINMENT OF POWER

5.1. SUBVERSION AND CONTAINMENT OF POWER

Curthoys & Docker (2006) demonstrate that “Herodotus conceived of power in human societies as dispersed: religious, social, cultural, erotic and sexual histories are entwined with the history of rulers, rule, and ruled, while Thucydides focussed on the state” (181). Power is a combination of histories, the histories of governors and governed, in addition to religious history, cultural, political, and other histories. Feng & Lewis (2021) put forward that “what New Historicism brings into view is a fundamental shift in the power relations, as it were, between history and literature: the subordination of historical writing to literary poetics and analysis” (154). Greenblatt, as a pioneer of new historicism, has expanded on Foucault’s concept of power. He has investigated power subversion and containment as viable instruments for exposing the power system and its implementation. Foucault (1982) in “The Subject and Power” considers the relationships between human beings and power complex, and to comprehend these relations, the forms of resistance types and the opposition shapes of these relations should be analyzed. Foucault gives a list of oppositions: “Opposition to the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live” (1982: 780). To him, these anti-supremacy challenges have common features; they are universal and not in only one country. These struggles fight the uncontrolled powers, they are immediate, they criticize the government of individualization, and they oppose the scientific knowledge that creates forms of power. For instance, the medical career practices an uncontrolled power over humans’ life, death, health, and bodies. Lastly, they resist governmental ideological, scientific, and economic violence that encroaches upon individual identities and daily existence, as well as their self-conception. Moreover, they oppose all forms of subjugation and impose certainties. To Foucault

the exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others. Which is to say, of course, that something called Power, with or without a capital letter, which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist. Power

exists only when it is put into action ... In itself it is not a renunciation of freedom, a transference of rights, the power of each and all delegated to a few. (1982: 788)

The silver lining of power as Foucault debates is that it is not always giving up rights, or relinquishment of liberty, nor does it inherently possess negative or destructive connotations; rather, it involves the procurement of power from the all into a small group, meaning that power entails designating certain individuals to guide the majority. So power is given from the folks to governments, and when these governments begin to dominate and subjugate populations, the public or some of them start to reduce these governments' authority and demonstrate against them. Stephen Greenblatt developed this idea and introduced the concept of subversion and containment of power.

Greenblatt (1988) in his "Invisible Bullets" initiated the concept of subversion and containment by describing the story of the Europeans and the native Americans (Red Indians) in the colony of Virginia in 1586. The indigenous people possessed their own beliefs and were incensed by the colonizers; however, upon encountering European inventions such as clocks, compasses, firearms, and other devices, they perceived these as manifestations of divine power. Consequently, they began to attribute divinity to the occupiers. The Europeans capitalized on this perception to impose Christianity, and during periods of scarce harvests, they persuaded the natives that the Christian God would provide them with superior rewards. Through that, they subverted the native people's beliefs and contained them as well. From the greatest Elizabethan mathematician, Thomas Harriot's book, *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, Greenblatt derived this:

Most things they saw with us, as mathematical instruments, sea compasses, the virtue of the lodestone in drawing iron, a perspective glass whereby was shown many strange sights, burning glasses, wildfire works, gun, book, writing and reading, spring clocks that seemed to go off by themselves, and many other things that we had, were so strange unto them and so far exceeded their capabilities to comprehend the reason and means how they should be made and done that they thought they were rather the works of gods than of men, or at the leastwise they had been given and taught us of the gods. (Quoted in Greenblatt's *Invisible Bullets*, 1988: 27)

Greenblatt also mentioned Columbus's usage of knowledge to impose his hegemony on the natives. When he discovered that a solar eclipse was imminent, he claimed that the Christian God would provide support to the Europeans by displaying a sign, thereby subverting the entire indigenous ideology. In other words, Columbus utilized scientific

developments and calculated creations for subversion and containment. Therefore, it can be said that colonialism created subversiveness in the settlements' power and contained this subversiveness for its own interest.

Subversion is a try to destabilize a system of government or to alter any form of power, i.e. it is an attempt to demolish or weaken a deep-rooted order or any kind of cultural, social, and political system. Simply put, subversion of power is any action against the predominant power, and in most cases, it is an insurrection from the weak against the strong. However, in some cases, it is from the dominant against the subordinate to reinforce new ideologies and philosophies. Whereas containment is the handling and restraining of these subversive powers. Containment possesses multiple dimensions; one involves the dominant ideology suppressing the opposing party and reinstating the prior order. Additionally, containment may be enacted by the dominant power against the challenger, as observed in colonial contexts where the dominant power acts as both the subverter and the container. A third scenario occurs when the challenging power undermines the central authority and subsequently contains the response from that authority, thereby functioning as both the subverter and the anti-container concurrently.

The subversion of power typically does not employ coercion or violent acts to achieve its goals, the definition of subversion in Oxford Learner's Dictionary supports this idea, "the process of trying to destroy the authority of a political, religious, etc. system by attacking it secretly or indirectly"¹⁰. In this respect the concept of subversion and containment is similar to Antonio Gramsci's hegemony, both concepts refer to the secretive and ideological change in social, political, and cultural powers by avoiding any military force as far as possible. John Brannigan supposes that the self constructs its longings and restraints, so power is needless especially when it is framed conceptually and ideologically:

What makes the operations of power particularly complex is the fact that the self polices and regulates its own desires and repressions. This removes the need for power to be repressive. No physical or military force need be deployed or exercised for power to have operated effectively in the interests of dominant ideological systems when the self, ideologically and linguistically constructed, will reproduce hegemonic operations. (1998: 7)

¹⁰ <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/subversion>

It is also possibly wise to presume that the subversion and containment concept is a kind of Derrida's Deconstruction. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, "the point of the deconstructive analysis is to restructure, or displace, the opposition, not simply to reverse it"¹¹ (para. 3). Consequently, both of them try to replace something instead of something else, a conception in place of another conception; an ideology in place of another ideology; a regime instead of another regime; and an opinion in lieu of another opinion.

Pigman (1989) argues that "Greenblatt's focus on subversion and its containment recalls new critical interest in paradox, ambiguity, and irony" (506). Grady (1993) in his "Containment, Subversion, and Postmodernism" talks about this ambiguity, by assuming that "power produced subversive discourses in order more efficiently to exercise itself: subversion would be contained by the forces of a power which could be said to have actually itself produced the subversion" (31). This means that it is the dominant power that creates this subversion as a kind of self-exercise. Grady assures that Greenblatt's "subversion was an effect created by power in order to perpetuate and even constitute itself, so that virtually any instance of resistance to power could be seen as actually in complicity with the power which it appears to resist" (1993: 35). Grady discusses that subversion is only a continuation and a practice of the great power and that the containment of the subversiveness is merely a manifestation and nothing beyond that. Grady's viewpoint may hold validity in certain instances, yet it is not universally applicable, as Greenblatt's subversion and containment of power extend beyond the conventional concept of physical power. Rather, the power that is meant is that of the mind, thought, norms, morals, media, and politics, as well as both mental and intellectual, including tangible and intangible powers, and it cannot be limited only to its abstract meaning. Grady contradicts his assumption when he says: "Containment is seen as one possible outcome of a number of complex interactions between subversion and authority rather than the sole inevitable outcome of their interaction, as Greenblatt had seemed to imply in the end of his essay" (1993: 32). So to him, containment is not inevitable but one possible option and the power may fail to contain this subversion; thus, if this is the case, how can this subversion be considered a product of the power?

¹¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/deconstruction>

Power in Mantel's narrative is presented in three sequential phases: First, the subversive power is dormant, awaiting a propitious moment to unleash its strength; second, the subversive power becomes active, striving towards its climax; third, the dominant party inevitably contains the subversive power. Mantel uses some subversive-natured elements like gossip, Thomas Cromwell's childhood, myths, rumors, and King Henry's dream about Arthur. The official records did not document all these aspects; consequently, Mantel employed them as subversive instruments. Subversion is traditionally defined as the undermining of an entrenched regulation or custom. It pertains to actual situations where people contravene a predetermined set of standards or rules. This term encompasses various actions, but this thesis specifically examines the subversion of hierarchy and patriarchy within the Tudor Court.

5.1.1. Subversion and Containment of Hierarchy in the *Wolf Hall Trilogy*

In the Tudor Dynasty period, there was an uncompromising social hierarchy and an inexorable class structure. Folks were divided into hierarchal ranks in line with their properties, income, power, profession, and birth classification. High-born people had rights more than low-born ones, and most probably it was the aristocrats who decided the fate and the life shape of the commons. Ascending the social hierarchy and altering one's class was arduous, and upon achieving it, individuals would perpetually be reminded of their humble origins. Each class self-fashioned itself to be distinguished from the others.

Self-fashioning is a concept inaugurated by Greenblatt which is a practice of shaping one's personality and public image to conform to a set of societal specifications or cultural conventions. Greenblatt (2012) gives an example of a nobleman from the Renaissance period; this man would wear elegant clothes, educate himself in literature and music, and perform noble principles to fashion himself to the class that he belongs to. A king is self-fashioning himself by wearing a crown and the other royal ornaments; a warrior by using armor; women self-fashion themselves by making themselves beautiful; athletes by making muscles, beggars by wearing shabby clothes, etc. Self-fashioning takes different forms and various fields, in art, literature, real life, social behavior codes, history, and so forth.

Cromwell is a self-fashioned person and as a narrator of the story he self-fashioned himself in an admiring way. He is a good listener to the stories that people invent about him and finds these stories beneficial for the process of self-fashioning. New historicism supposes that the self is hollow and void in nature and then it is constructed by society and social interactions on one hand and self-fulfillment on the other. Brannigan (1998) says:

Self is a construction, a site of masques, roles and adopted personas beneath which is not some true, natural self, but instead hollowness, nothingness. The self is constructed in relation to society and is fashioned in the interaction between social norms and self-invention. (74)

Self is a group of masks, and Cromwell puts on a mask in each situation: He puts on the mask of a banker when people ask for loans from him; a mask of a trader in business; a mask of a lawyer and legislator in the court; a mask of a politician in the parliament; a mask of advisor and secretary with the king; a mask of a pleasant person with his family and friends; a mask of fox-like schemer against his competitors; a mask of a murderer in Hans Holbein's paintings; and finally a mask of power subversive identity to achieve his goals.

Thomas Cromwell's masks and self-fashioning either sentimental or linguistical, spiritual or physical, serve as tools in his pursuit of power, through which he acquired jurisdiction, sovereignty, reputation, and leadership. Using his vast experience and knowledge, he adeptly resolved business conflicts, administrative issues, and political challenges effectively, rendering him nearly omnipotent. The repeated phrase by his master the Cardinal: "Try always, Wolsey says, to find out what people wear under their clothes" (Mantel, 2010: 84, the same phrase on page 99 as well) implies a figurative meaning that he should focus on small details, exploit every single chance, and figure out people's intentions toward him. Jonathan Dollimore & Alan Sinfield (1990) postulate that "nothing can be intrinsically or essentially subversive in the sense that prior to the event subversiveness can be more than potential; in other words, it cannot be guaranteed a priori, independent of articulation, context and reception" (95). This means that subversive powers do not always succeed and it is often prone to failure. However, Cromwell's exceptional competencies and his interior subversive nature inspired him to break his way from the lowest class in society to the highest office in the government.

Grady (1993) in his discussion of this subject considers that “containment and subversion persist as central issues in the debate about the New Historicism” (32). In *Wolf Hall Trilogy*, hierarchy and the political power pyramid were subverted by Thomas Cromwell; he also subverted the socioeconomic structure in the Tudor period. Moeller & Whitehead (2020) calls this kind of subversion “sociopolitical subversion” (3). He was a risk taker and plausibly bold enough to enter this hazard. The blacksmith’s son became a lawmaker in the parliament, and the noble people who looked down on him, now they are at his door. The Lord Chancellor, Thomas More, who previously threatened him, is now at his mercy in prison. Thomas More implored Cromwell to allow his family to visit him, requesting that Cromwell bring his books and facilitate a weekly stroll in the garden; indeed, “the balance of power has shifted between them” (Mantel, 2010: 352). A pivotal moment in Cromwell’s life occurred when George Boleyn, the king’s brother-in-law, transitioned from disparaging Cromwell to pleading him for his survival. Thomas Cromwell inverted the power dynamics and Cromwell turned the balance of power upside down. Cromwell’s adversary, Stephen Gardiner, served as the master secretary; however, Cromwell drove him away as a representative of England in France and assumed his role.

This subversion of the ruling administration was exercised by the low class toward the upper class, by the weak against the strong. Greenblatt in *Learning To Curse* affirms that “while an attempt to stabilize the order of things may turn out to subvert it. And political valences may change, sometimes abruptly: there are no guarantees, no absolute, formal assurances” (1990: 186). He asserts that any power structure is susceptible to upheaval at any moment; nothing is assured or stable, as evidenced by the fate of Cromwell’s enemies in the Henrician court.

In Thomas Cromwell’s case, the dominant power contains the challenging and the subverter part; in other words, Cromwell’s enemies like the Duke of Norfolk and Stephen Gardener convinced the king to bring Cromwell down. They prepared a list of accusations and imprisoned him and after 50 days he was executed. King Henry confiscated all his properties and Cromwell faced an inescapable containment as his master Cardinal Wolsey faced it before. Chadwick (2020) states that the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* mirrors Mantel’s initial historical novel, *A Place of Greater Safety*, where Danton, Desmoulins, and Robespierre fall prey to the very system they played a role in establishing. Cromwell spearheaded the religious reformation and economic reform in England, successfully establishing

Protestantism in the country. He further consolidated matters on behalf of King Henry, but ultimately, the individuals he assisted in rising within the court, including Thomas Wriothesley, Richard Riche, and Thomas Audley, combined with King Henry's capricious nature, led to his downfall.

Another subverter of the hierarchical system is Anne Boleyn, who was a lady in waiting in the French court and then a servant of Queen Catherine. And since the desire to rise to power constitutes the intrinsic essence of humanity as Drozdovskyi (2019) confirms; Anne always sought to bring Queen Catherine down and take her power as a queen of England. Drozdovskyi also validates that

the relationship of human beings with power appears a key theme in contemporary English novel. The will to power is the immanent essence of human beings, a factor of evolutionary and technological development. ... The will to power is an important factor in progress embodied in the evolutionary of humanity to eliminate those features that do not contribute to the evolutionary improvement of individuals. At the same time, biological improvement does not have a direct correlation with moral development, which can be antipathic (reverse) to evolutionary development. (2019: 158)

Drozdovskyi looks at the will to power positively, suggesting that the acquisition of power may be achieved through illicit methods, or may be deemed immoral and contrary to ethical principles.

Anne used different techniques from Cromwell to achieve her intentions; she used her beauty, body, and feminine attractiveness to catch the king's eyes and heart. David Loades argues that Anne "put her sexuality to the service of her political agenda" (2011: 235). Relatedly, Cromwell describes Anne to the cardinal, by saying that "there is one short way to please that lady, and that is to crown her queen" (Mantel, 2010: 166). Indeed, she successfully subverted the rigid hierarchy, elevating herself from a lady-in-waiting to the Queen of England, thereby raising her family to royal status.

Anne destroyed everybody standing in front of her, starting from Catherine of Aragon to her daughter Mary Tudor, Cardinal Wolsey, Thomas More, and John Fisher. Her subversive character wrecked the papal authorization in England and announced that England "should no longer bow to Rome" (Mantel, 2010: 277). And since "subversion refers to any attempt to change or undermine a political system, and containment prevents this change from disturbing the existing power structures" (Krishnapriya, 2023: 141). The supreme power contained Anne's subversive power and "her attempts to challenge the

traditional patriarchal norms were curbed, and she was killed” (Krishnapriya, 2023: 144-5). Pursuant to the King’s orders, Anne was executed alongside her brother and three other men who were alleged to have had a relationship with her.

5.1.2. Subversion and Containment of Patriarchy in the *Wolf Hall Trilogy*

In a patriarchal system, males are constructed as predominant within each family, exercising authority over females. Women are constructed as weaker and inferior in physical, financial, emotional, and political domains. An unmarried woman is subordinate to her father or eldest brother, while a married woman is subordinate to her husband, as she is perceived as the weaker sex. Mantel employs a new historicist methodology in her metafiction, utilizing Greenblatt’s concept of subversion and containment to dismantle patriarchal structures. Subversion according to Bloom & White (2016) is “traditionally associated with the challenging of a dominant worldview; the act of trespassing against accepted social and organizational mores” (3). It is any challenge to a predominant perspective, philosophy, or weltanschauung. Akbay (2022) debates that

based on a New Historicist analysis ... both subversion and containment ... repeatedly affirm itself as a self-regulating system in the operations of power mechanism. Used jointly, subversion and containment are the new historicist concepts applied for the analysis of texts to reveal the underlying meaning by which revisiting history brings different perspectives to the understanding of history as such. (177)

Akbay perceives subversion and containment as a framework that influences the power dynamics within societies, serving as a means to introduce new interpretations of history. In the *Trilogy*, most of Mantel’s female characters are subversive of the patriarchal values and the principles rooted in their societies, like Catherine of Aragon, Mary Tudor, Anne Boleyn, and Mary Boleyn. This thesis is confined to the analysis of two subversive characters, namely Catherine and her daughter Mary.

Starting with Catherine, a casualty of patriarchy; was betrothed to Arthur in England at the age of 16. Following Arthur’s death after six months, his father, King Henry VII, declined to return Catherine to her family due to the incomplete dowry payment. Additionally, he did not provide her with the widow’s rights, seemingly intending to marry her himself, but he “was no sooner dead than he claimed Catherine for his own” (Mantel, 2010: 30). His other son, Henry VIII, ascended the throne and sought

to maintain the alliance with Spain by marrying Catherine. She was compliant, disenfranchised, and excluded from any decision-making regarding her future spouse. After years of marriage, the absence of male heirs prompted Henry to seek a divorce, but Catherine was no longer the submissive, naive girl she once was. And since “new historicist methodology ... uses Greenblatt’s subversion and containment as anchoring mechanisms to analyse the subversive activities undertaken by women” (Krishnapriya, 2023: 142); Catherine’s subversive stance against patriarchy began to manifest as she declined the divorce. King Henry dispatched Thomas Cromwell and other councilors to persuade her regarding the annulment, but she remained resolute. Subsequently, Henry presumed that their marriage was inherently illegitimate due to her status as his sister-in-law; however, this argument proved ineffective. Catherine appeared in court accompanied by numerous solicitors to assert her claim of virginity at the time of her marriage to Henry and to demonstrate that Arthur was impotent and had not consummated their union. Catherine confronted the patriarchal society and showed her strong character in front of the whole of Europe. Catherine says: “It is impossible for me to believe that for twenty years I was a harlot?” (Mantel, 2010: 453). Had she accepted the annulment, she would have acknowledged that her twenty-year marriage was incestuous and her life was unchaste; more critically, her daughter Mary would have been deemed illegitimate.

King Henry began to impose a patriarchal mindset on her by threatening to sever her connection with her daughter, yet she once more resisted his intimidation. Henry’s final endeavor was directed toward the Pope, who likewise denied the annulment. Rather than being silent and speechless, Catherine combatted to defend her rights as a spouse and a woman unshakably. Catherine subverted male dominance through various means, employing her full mental and physical capabilities, and advocated for gender equality in divorce and marital matters. Nevertheless, as the opposing power fails to weaken the entrenched foundations of the dominant power, its efforts ultimately result in unavoidable containment. The “subversion of power is safely contained within the protective realm of” (Akbay, 2022: 181) King Henry. Henry triumphed in the divorce proceedings, resulting in Catherine’s loss of her title as Queen of England. With the assistance of his councilors and legislators, Henry altered certain jurisdictional and ecclesiastical regulations, enabling Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to facilitate the divorce from Catherine. Krishnapriya (2023) verifies that the “subversive currents

generated in the beginning get contained towards the end” (145). King Henry contained Catherine’s subversive power and proclaimed her new title as the Dowager Princess of Wales.

Mary Tudor is another subversive figure within the patriarchal framework. Her refusal to sign the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Succession “can be considered a subversive act challenging the existing male-dominated and patriarchal structures .. and the hegemonic patriarchal structures” (Krishnapriya, 2023: 143). Similar to her mother, Mary endured significant oppression by patriarchy; she was a Princess of England who abruptly became a bastard and an illegitimate daughter of her father. She was estranged from her mother; furthermore, she was divested of her title as Princess of England and was referred to simply as Lady Mary. All of these occurrences transpired during her youth and without any direct culpability on her part, solely due to her mother’s inability to bear a male child. She resided in confinement, distant from her parents, and was prohibited from communicating with the external world. Moreover, excessive political pressure was imposed on her, leading to a significant health decline.

Mary is the best example of the subversive characters of patriarchy in the *Wolf Hall Trilogy*. Since her father is the king she does not resist only her family or father, but a sovereign and a whole government. Consequently, her subversion can be perceived as double against patriarchy and hierarchy. She faced most of her father’s decisions concerning the acknowledgment of her father as the ecclesiastical leader in lieu of the Pope, as well as the assertion that her mother’s marriage was incestuous and her acceptance of being an illegitimate offspring of that union. Henry’s pressure on Mary increased day by day to accept him as the head of the English church, and sign the new acts of law since all of Europe was observing how King Henry could not foist his decision on his own daughter.

Wolfreys (2002) verifies that “subversive figures are normally contained by the dominant power structure” (537). Mary’s resistance to the male-dominated community lasted for years, but eventually, she could not withstand it anymore and signed a deed of submission in which she acknowledged her father’s thorough supremacy. The submission document includes:

Most humbly prostrate at the feet of your Majesty ... To open my heart to your grace
... as I have and will put my soul under your direction ... so I wholly commit my

body ... desiring no state, no condition, nor no manner or degree of living but such as your grace shall appoint ... Forgive my offences ... I do recognise, accept, take, repute and acknowledge the king's highness to be supreme head, under Christ, of the church of England ... I do freely, frankly ... recognise and acknowledge that the marriage formerly had between his majesty and my mother ... was by God's law and man's law incestuous and unlawful ... I put my soul under your direction. I commit my body to your mercy. (Mantel, 2021: 128-9)

By executing this document, Mary's subversive influence was entirely restrained. She acknowledged her illegitimacy, renounced her claim to the throne, and sought forgiveness. Krishnapriya (2023) believes "subversion and containment occur while navigating through patriarchal structures; such a process results in positive changes that cannot be neglected" (146). The subversive actions against authoritarian patriarchy, despite being contained and suppressed, possess positive and illuminating qualities.

Finally, Mantel employs her incisive wit and astute observation to subvert the traditional patriarchal structure through the characters of Thomas Cromwell and his father, Walter Cromwell. Walter exhibited violence towards his son and family, and the *Trilogy* commences with a brutal scene of Thomas Cromwell being brutally assaulted to the point of death by his father:

Blood from the gash on his head – which was his father's first effort – is trickling across his face. Add to this, his left eye is blinded; but if he squints sideways, with his right eye he can see that the stitching of his father's boot is unravelling ... Walter is roaring down at him, working out where to kick him next. He lifts his head an inch or two, and moves forward, on his belly, trying to do it without exposing his hands, on which Walter enjoys stamping. ... He trots backwards, gathers pace, and aims another kick. It knocks the last breath out of him; he thinks it may be his last. His forehead returns to the ground; he lies waiting, for Walter to jump on him. ... His nose is clotted with blood and he has to open his mouth to breathe. (Mantel, 2010: 3-4)

The preceding excerpt indicates that patriarchy significantly influenced Thomas Cromwell, as no one defended him. His mother had passed away, prompting him to take refuge in his sister's house. It is noteworthy that patriarchy, in this instance, was exercised against a young male rather than a female, highlighting that patriarchal systems are not exclusively directed at women but can also oppress men within their own gender hierarchy. Boys and men are also victims of the oppressive patriarchal system (Connell, 1995; Cohen, 2014; Javaid, 2016; Bjorktomta, 2019; Bates, 2021). According to Idriss (2022), "patriarchal theories of violence therefore apply to male victims just as much as they do to female victims" (918). To him also "men and boys are harmed by patriarchy" (905).

Although women are the most vulnerable to abuse within the patriarchal system, men also suffer as victims of this same system.

Cromwell challenged the patriarchal structure of his family by leaving the household permanently; his subversion of his father's authority was achieved through escaping rather than confrontation. His abandonment of the patriarchal environment may also be perceived as a means of subverting power. The subversion and containment dynamics between Thomas Cromwell and Walter Cromwell can be classified into three phases: the initial phase, characterized by Cromwell's childhood under paternal dominance; the subsequent phase, marked by his rebellion upon leaving home and rejecting his father's oppressive rules; and the final phase, wherein Cromwell returned home after many years, ultimately assuming a subordinate position rather than expressing resentment towards his father. Cromwell's "tone was meant to be soothing but Walter was hard to soothe" (Mantel, 2010: 112). In this regard, it is clear that Thomas Cromwell is still constrained by patriarchal culture. He firmly supposes that the father must always be considered the family's essence, and he needs to abide by and esteem him regardless of the damage he has made to the household. This explains why, despite receiving inhumane treatment from his parent as a child, he returns home several years later. To summarize, Cromwell's circle in the context of subversion and containment can be summarized as follows: contained, subversive, and then contained once more.

5.1.3. Subversion of Dead-Alive Trepidation

In the *Trilogy*, a conflict emerges between the dead and the living, where the dead preside over the night while the living govern the day. The dead haunt our dreams and their ghosts haunt our minds, and while we are asleep they reorganize themselves and dominate the earth. During his apprenticeship in his father's blacksmith shop, Thomas secured the lids of coffins while concurrently enquiring of his father, "what for do we nail down the dead?" (Mantel, 2010: 649), his father told him "it's so the horrible old buggers don't spring out and chase us" (649). Furthermore, one day, "on his left side, a hand touches his: fingers without flesh. A ghost walks: Arthur, studious and pale. King Henry, he thinks, you raised him; now you put him down" (Mantel, 2010: 147). A spectral hand instructs Cromwell to document his will, thereby endowing the dead with a semblance of autopsical authority and posthumous influence over the living. Mantel asserts the

significance of acknowledging the existence of the deceased and their influence on the living. Simultaneously, as the novels advance, she unveils a contrasting perspective: the fear of the dead was prevalent in the past, but the power dynamics have shifted now.

New historicism through the technique of subversion and containment problematizes some prevail axioms and then subverts them. One of these axioms posits that the living harbor a fear of the dead, their ghosts, and spirits. Mathias Clasen (2017) in his *Why Horror Seduces* says that if the living hear something of the dead at night “the fear system is designed to cause a series of physiological and cognitive changes that ready us for fight or flight and force us to pay close attention to the cue” (35). Nevertheless, *Wolf Hall Trilogy* subverts this belief; it is predominantly the living who irritate and exert authority over the deceased, as Mantel says “it’s the living that turn and chase the dead. The long bones and skulls are tumbled from their shrouds, and words like stones thrust into their rattling mouths” (Mantel, 2010: 649). It is the power of the strong on the weak, it is the living who inscribes the dead’s world and history, and it is we who “edit their writings, we rewrite their lives” (Mantel, 2010: 649). The dead are more peaceful, as they do not engage in conflict with one another as the living do. To Mantel, the dead wish to hide and run from the living’s smell, and “the dead, for sure, would want to ward off the scent of the living” (Mantel, 2010: 274). Interestingly enough, one night when King Henry saw his brother Arthur in his dream; he summoned Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell after midnight to relieve him. And when Henry said that his brother interrupted him, Cranmer soliloquized: “From the shadows, the dead do not come back to complain of their burial. It is the living who are exercised about these matters” (Mantel, 2010: 275). It is also, according to Cromwell that “the dead are more faithful than the living” (Mantel, 2021: 717). In Cromwell’s life, the living are annoying and troublemakers, while the falcons of his dead wife and daughters are alleviating and mitigating. The narrator of *The Mirror And The Light* ascertains that it is “the living beat the dead” (Mantel, 2021: 129). Cromwell is curious about the dead’s world, and “wonders again if the dead need translators” (Mantel, 2010:152), as well as whether they are capable of hearing or seeing us and suchlike.

In the *Trilogy*, it is the living who exercise power over the dead. It is the noblemen in the court who acted in a play mocking the cardinal after his death and sending him to hell, and it is also the living who put Thomas More’s head on the spike after his execution.

It is the living who mess up the dead's tales, and if it happens and one of them resurrects and reads the history of his era, s/he would die again from shock. Mantel in her lecture "The Day Is For The Living" says: "In imagination, we chase the dead, shouting, Come back" (2017: 2). It is we who interrupt the dead; we reconstruct their history and reimagine their lives and actions. Mantel's postmodernist notion that the dead are afraid of the living is philosophical and complex. But in fact, it can be explained by understanding the principles of the new historicism about history. According to this school of thought, the living control the history of the dead and alter, distort, reimagine, rewrite, and add to it. Therefore, the ones still breathing are the strongest. From this perspective, new historicism subverts the relationship between the living and dead and converse it.

5.2. CROMWELL AND THE CIRCULATION OF POWER

Power is inherently transient, perpetually shifting among its holders. When a sovereign, leader, or empire ascends to the zenith of authority, it is merely a question of time before decline ensues. It resembles a serpent perpetually shedding its skin, and as Foucault posits in *The History of Sexuality* (1978), power is omnipresent and comes from anywhere. It is not only in the hands of kings or governments, but it has many forms and shapes; it is in knowledge, institutions, persons, and everywhere. Furthermore, in *Discipline and Punish* (1991), Foucault contends that power is not solely repressive; it is crucial for production, security, and public discipline, and serves as a vital constructive force within communities. The Foucauldian power is disciplinary, not absolute power. Foucault returns to confront power in another place, by emphasizing that "the relationship between rationalization and excesses of political power is evident" (1982: 779), and then he adds "I think that the word 'rationalization' is dangerous" (779). The rationalization and justification of the excessiveness of political power are hazardous and the beginning of bureaucracy.

Ibn Khaldun (2005), the Muslim polymath and a preeminent scholar in sociology and historiography of the 14th century, talks about the cyclical theory of power. According to his theory, power is analogous to living organisms, which are born, develop, mature, and ultimately pass away. This cyclical theory of power pertains to Cromwell, who originated from the lowest social class and subsequently honed his skills in law,

accountancy, negotiation, marketing, and trade; he acquired proficiency in various languages and elevated his status within society. He began his career as a lawyer for Cardinal Wolsey, one of the most senior officials in the state. Subsequently, he became a member of the parliament, a councilor to the king, and, ultimately, the senior advisor and master secretary of the king. He achieved incremental advancement in acquiring titles: lawyer, Master, Sir, Lord, Baron, and ultimately the title of Earl. Upon attaining the pinnacle, the subsequent inevitable phase is the collapse, during which he was charged with treason and condemned to death.

Krishnapriya (2023) is in line with Grady (1993) and Motlagh (2015) that “the new historicist approach is not inherently pessimistic in explaining power circulation through subversion and containment. Instead, it throws light on the possibility of change and negotiations” (145). New historicism examines the circulation of power through subversion and containment in a favorable light. According to Ibn Khaldun’s cyclical theory of power, Cromwell was unable, subsequently able, then unable again. He experienced periods of both capability and incapacity. One of Thomas Cromwell’s most intriguing characteristics is the pattern of power circulation, which begins with suppression, progresses to competence, and then is once again suppressed.

5.3. A TENDER SOVEREIGN OR A TYRANT?

The Wolf Hall Trilogy subverts the idealized portrayal of Henry, presenting him as a tyrannical ruler. England was governed by a dual authority system, with secular power vested in the king and religious authority held by the Pope of Rome, who occasionally intervened in other affairs. King Henry VIII reformed this system and proclaimed his separation from the Roman Catholic Church, enabling him to become the absolute ruler of England and exercise unrestrained authority, akin to any other autocratic regime. On the other hand, many historians and writers praise King Henry VIII’s extraordinary traits as an intellectual and reformist. Betteridge and Freeman (2012) think that his remarkable character has fascinated the preoccupation of authors for almost five centuries.

Suzannah Lipscomb in her 1536: *The Year That Changed Henry VIII* quotes a letter from Lord Mountjoy to Erasmus in the 16th century when Henry was crowned in 1509:

When you know what a hero now shows himself, how wisely he behaves, what a lover he is of justice and goodness, what affection he bears to the learned ... If you could see how all the world here is rejoicing in the possession of so great a prince, how his life is all their desire, you could not contain your tears of joy. The heavens laugh, the earth exults, all things are full of milk, of honey, of nectar. Avarice is expelled from the country. Liberality scatters wealth with bounteous hand. Our King does not desire gold or gems or precious metals, but virtue, glory and immortality. (28-9)

This letter and other writings by Henry VIII's contemporaries assist in constructing an image of the new monarch during this period. According to John Mackie (1952), Henry's acceptance was well-deserved; he elevated England to the status of one of the most powerful nations of the era, and through his courage "the people of England knew that in Henry they had a great king" (1952: 443). Others divided Henry's sovereignty into two parts, the first one attributed positively and the second attributed unfavorably. The British historian Suzannah Lipscomb (2009) argues that the early years of his reign were fairly good but in the late years, he had transformed from a prince to a tyrant.

The ambassador of Emperor Charles V, Eustache Chapuys, reports on the English people that Henry is "cruel and ungodly" (Mantel, 2013:10). And Cromwell says: "I must restrain my cannibal king" (Mantel, 2021: 119), likening him to a cannibalistic beast. Henry in *The Mirror And The Light* is a sheer dictator, he killed many noblemen some of them are: Henry Courtenay, Lord Montague, and Nicholas Carew. Not only these but also when the Pilgrims (rebels) disintegrated themselves, Henry slaughtered most of them together with those who supported them. Additionally, Mantel's narrator reveals that "the age of persuasion has ended ... Now we live in an age of coercion" (2021: 65). While composing a work concerning the nefarious King Richard, Thomas More remarked: "Deeds of blood. Kings' games" (Mantel, 2010: 231); it seems to Thomas More that bloodshed is in the nature of the kings.

It is essential to address a significant matter in the *Trilogy*: treason, which served as Henry's justification for eliminating anyone who opposed him. An item in the Act of Supremacy redefined the scope of treason in England, defining it as "treason by words" (Mantel, 2010: 589) when speaking or writing about the king malevolently. In such a situation, while in prison, Harry Norris told Cromwell: "You cannot make my thoughts a crime" (Mantel, 2013: 389), to which Cromwell replied that he could "if thoughts are

intentions, if intentions are malign” (389). In *Bring Up The Bodies* there is an interesting conversation between Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Wyatt about the essence of treason:

‘As I understand the law, a queen’s adultery is no treason.’

‘No, but the man who violates her, he commits treason.’

‘You think they used force?’ Wyatt says drily.

‘No, it is just the legal term. It is a pretence, that allows us to think well of any disgraced queen. But as for her, she is a traitor too, she has said so out of her own mouth. To intend the king’s death, that is treason.’

‘But again,’ Wyatt says, ‘forgive my poor understanding, I thought Anne had said, “If he dies,” or some such words. So let me put a case to you. If I say “All men must die,” is that a forecast of the king’s death?’

‘It would be well not to put cases,’ he says pleasantly. ‘Thomas More was putting cases when he tipped into treason. (2013: 420)

The preceding excerpt indicates that Cromwell himself is not persuaded by the new treason law; consequently, he advises his friend Thomas Wyatt to refrain from complicating matters and to avoid distressing himself regarding his safety. Some years later Cromwell affirms that “our law of treason is capacious. It encompasses words and bad intentions” (Mantel, 2021: 621); the law that will overturn him later. Henry accused Tom Truth and his niece Meg Douglas of treason only because they married secretly. Unequivocally, Henry VIII used treason as a pretext to justify his bloody behaviors.

Even in love, Henry was tyrannical. Bonvisi warns that “the king is an inconstant lover” (Mantel, 2010: 195), and the narrative reveals that Henry forsook his first wife Catherine at Windsor, proceeded to hunt, and never returned. Analogously, he abandoned Anne Boleyn in London and never saw her again; Henry left “his queens, before they can leave him” (Mantel, 2021: 518). Furthermore, following Jane’s demise, Henry entered the marriage market in Europe and received numerous ambassadors to discuss potential unions. Among them was Sieur de Castillon, who informed Henry that Christina, the Duchess of Milan, harbored fears of him and requested the Emperor to facilitate a marriage for her anywhere in Europe except England. This prompted Henry to enquire about the reasons behind this situation. The ambassador replied: “Because you kill your wives” (Mantel, 2021: 542). It is notoriously widely known that Henry’s fearful axe was sharp not merely for his enemies but also for his wives. Numerous accounts exist regarding Henry’s six wives; however, I will reference one, specifically a poem and song by Horrible Histories TV, which is accessible on YouTube:

Divorced, beheaded, died
 Divorced, beheaded, survived
 I'm Henry the Eighth, I had six sorry wives
 Some might say I ruined their lives¹²

Henry's six wives were: Divorced (Catherine of Aragon), beheaded (Anne Boleyn), died (Jane Seymour), divorced (Anne of Cleves), beheaded (Catherine Howard), and survived (Catherine Parr).

Another indelible fact about Henry's tyranny is Harry Percy's case, who initially assured that Anne Boleyn was his wife by saying: "I am not afraid to speak the truth any more. Henry may be king but he is stealing another man's wife; Anne Boleyn is rightfully my wife" (Mantel, 2010: 377). Yet, after threatening and terrifying him, he acquiesced to the *fait accompli*: "Put your hand on this Bible, and swear before me and in the presence of the king and his council that Anne ... free from any marriage contract with her? Harry Percy voice shakes. I swear" (Mantel, 2010: 381). Harry Percy could not resist Henry's fascism and accepted what was demanded of him, otherwise, his fate would be on the scaffold like many others. Henry used his absolutism to take another man's wife, and funnily enough, when he grew weary of her, he instructed his minister Cromwell to leverage her prior engagement to Harry Percy to annul his burdensome marriage. Once again Henry forced Harry Percy to swear on the Bible that Anne was his wife and that he lied about it in his first oath. Charles Dickens (1880) states:

Henry the Eighth has been favored by some Protestant writers, because the Reformation was achieved in his time. But the mighty merit of it lies with other men, and not with him; and it can be rendered none the worse by this monster's crimes, and none the better by any defence of them. The plain truth is, that he was a most intolerable ruffian, a disgrace to human nature, and a blot of blood and grease upon the history of England. (237)

Dickens looks at Henry as a monster and a disgrace to English history; his crimes are uncovered, and most of these reformations were done by different men but attributed to him. Elton (1953) in his *The Tudor Revolution in Government: Administrative Changes In The Reign Of Henry VIII* coincides with Dickens in attributing the tremendous merits of reformation and the governmental changes to Thomas Cromwell rather than Henry.

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTdTDCRKvvM>

Henry once confessed his crimes indirectly in front of Cromwell and Archbishop Cranmer to make absolution: “We must look into a glass of truth. I think I am to blame, as what I suspected I did not own” (Mantel, 2013: 374). In the phrase ‘I am to blame’ a feeling of regret and confession hovers in the environment. Once Henry said: “When I look back ... so much falls into place. I was misled and betrayed. So many friends lost, friends and good servants, lost, alienated, exiled from court. And worse” (Mantel, 2013: 375); then he added, “I think of Wolsey” (375). Henry regretted these people who were displaced and banished; however, the phrase ‘and worse’ implies that additional barbaric acts were committed, such as executions and burning alive.

Amid the discourse about King Henry’s character, dissenters such as Bernard (2005) and Musselwhite (2006) challenge Dickens’s and Elton’s assertion that Henry was not the true catalyst for the reforms in England. To Musselwhite and Bernard, Henry “rather than being persuaded by others, he was the architect of his Reformation” (2006: 1288). History encompasses contradictions and divergent perspectives, prompting Lilti (2024) to claim that “the debates on intellectual history often remain locked into binary oppositions ... on the multiple historicities of the singular objects that texts really are” (66). So history is confined to binary oppositions and multiple narratives; in other words, multiple histories regarding a single event are feasible according to new historicists. The postmodernists also believe that history is “open to a variety of interpretations” (Lilti, 2024: 66). This explains the varying depictions of Henry’s character throughout history and historical fiction. Greenblatt (1990) confirms that “new historicism ... does not posit historical processes as unalterable and inexorable” (221). Mantel employs this logic to reimagine the character of King Henry VIII. Ultimately, employing postmodernist and new historicist mechanisms including the textuality of history, the historicity of the text, intertextuality, contextualization, re-textualization, subversion and containment, historiographic metafiction, hyperreality, and parody, enabled Mantel to depict Henry and other figures as distinct persons within her narrative.

5.4. THE OBSESSION OF A MALE HEIR TO GAIN POWER

Henry’s first spouse, Catherine of Aragon, failed to produce a male heir, and the majority of her offspring perished in utero. Consequently, Henry believed she should cease her forgiveness, as it was she who lacked absolution for her “her blighted womb.

For poisoning my children before they were born” (Mantel, 2013: 113). But history repeats itself, some years later when Anne Boleyn also failed to grant him a male heir, Henry said: “Why have I been cursed with women who destroy the children in their own wombs?” (Mantel, 2013: 379). In that epoch, they might favor a bastard son over a rightful legitimate daughter; Henry’s bastard son Richmond claimed in a private talk with Cromwell that as far as his father’s daughters had been bastardized and “all three of Henry’s children are illegitimate. If that is so, why not prefer the male to the female?” (Mantel, 2013: 381). In Richmond’s view, despite being illegitimate, the throne was his right seeing that he is male. New historicism examines the representation of male heirs by emphasizing ignored details and the historical context, thereby elucidating the indications of these visualizations for comprehending gender and power dynamics. In the middle ages, having a male heir was a source of power and the opposite was true, not having a male heir was a weakness. Coby (2009) corroborates this by stating:

The chief vulnerability of the Tudor monarchy under Henry VIII was the absence of a legitimate male heir. Henry was not seriously challenged by his nobles, but domestic peace could not be assured without a successor in place to continue the line. (8)

Coby illustrates the significance of the male heir as a factor contributing to political stability within the state.

One can argue that the predominant occurrences throughout Henry VIII’s reign are largely influenced by the absence of a male heir. Had his first wife produced a son, it was conceivable that he would not have married multiple wives, nor established the English Protestant Church. Furthermore, it was plausible that he would not have executed his wives or many Catholics who opposed him. A male heir would have significantly transformed the trajectory of that period and the entirety of Europe. The existence of a male heir was both a matter of lineage and a political need that influenced the power dynamics and authority of the Tudor era.

Stephen Alford (1998) asserts that the male heir was essential for the Tudor dynasty to survive, as a legitimate male heir could maintain political consistency and security and alleviate succession conflicts and possible rival aspirations. Mantel’s historiographic metafiction aligns with Coby and Alford, as she posits that “the child in Anne’s womb is the guarantee of no more civil war. He is the beginning, the start of

something, the promise of another country” (2010: 449). After twenty-five years without an heir, other aristocratic families began to conspire and vie for succession to the Tudors; thus, the narrative indicates that the child in the queen’s womb will avert a civil war in England. Rafe Sadler once told Cromwell when Anne was pregnant: “All our lives and fortunes depend now on that lady” (Mantel, 2010: 439). Male heirs in that era were sacred persons, without them governments could be changed, wars could be raised, and families could be dismantled.

The *Trilogy* examines this subject comprehensively owing to its weight. The new historicist approach followed by Mantel appears clearly by bringing back the historical context of that period, by providing new meanings, insights, and interpretations that diverge from prior historical narratives, and lastly by offering minor details that other historical accounts did not mention. Displaying the value of the male heir in the Tudor epoch through the outlook of new historicism is achieved through highlighting the interaction between texts and their historical contexts. By contextualizing texts within their socio-political context, new historicism attacks this norm of overestimating male heirs and exposes how historical fiction both mirrors and condemns patriarchal values.

CONCLUSION

The *Wolf Hall Trilogy* exemplifies the new historicist attitude towards history by: Challenging and undermining historical facts and distancing itself from traditional historiographical practices. By regarding history as a mystery and that one cannot attain definitive historical facts. Looking at history as a personal construct, akin to fiction and other literary forms. Interrogating the reality of King Arthur's identity and considering him as a myth. Refraining from endorsing or glorifying the national history and the legends of England. Offering a new England by rewriting a new history of the country and replacing the old stories of it with new stories. Disparaging the Canterbury habit of commemorating the death of Saint Becket and other religious customs. Treating English national history with ease, humor, and a kind of sarcasm. Categorizing certain stories from *The Golden Legend* as 'good' and numerous others as 'invented.' Giving the power to the reader rather than the writer. Urging readers to develop a critical perspective regarding the historical information they encounter, thereby eschewing uncritical acceptance of its veracity. Showing that fabricating facts is simpler than assumed, which requires merely an intention and a sheet of paper. Presenting the portraits of England's monarchs and their history as creations. Casting suspicion on the passing of several key characters like Wolsey and Catherine of Aragon. Fostering uncertainty among readers regarding Elizabeth's legitimacy as the daughter of King Henry and Queen Anne, suggesting that their true offspring perished at birth and that the mother presented another child to allay the king's wrath. And finally by questioning Queen Catherine's virginity and asserting that neither historians nor biographers can ascertain the veracity of her virginity.

Mantel's *Wolf Hall Trilogy* as a postmodernist historical narrative is evident through many facets: Her portrayal of the historical figure Thomas Cromwell in a postmodernist fashion, diverging from the standard representation. In addition to her temporal distortion, fragmented historiographic metafiction, and non-linear narrative technique. Her fiction highlights local and micro-narratives over macro-narratives by recounting the quotidian experiences of ordinary individuals, including daily dialogues, humor, cuisine, attire, gossip, and their relationship to pivotal events. Through Mantel's metafiction that intentionally obscures the distinction between reality and fiction,

combats gender inequalities and patriarchy, and attacks most of the scientific facts. Unlike traditional historical fiction, the *Trilogy*, as postmodernist historical fiction, shifts from neglecting women to empowering them and tackles significant topics through comedic approaches and parody. Ultimately, it contests the uniqueness of historical narrative and provides new representations of numerous historical figures.

The *Wolf Hall Trilogy* transports the readers five hundred years into the past, immersing us in that era through intricate details such as the smoke from the fire, the ambiance of the Tower, the aroma of food, evening gossip, natural humor, vibrant colors and fabrics, adept facial descriptions, and spontaneous dialogues. Mantel in the *Trilogy* uses ekphrasis several times to describe Hans Holbein's portraits, such as the criminal-like Thomas Cromwell portrait, the bull-necked-like King Henry portrait, and some other paintings. Benfey (2009) asserts that Mantel's book is distinctly anchored in the 16th century. Duncan (2017) observes that Mantel's *Wolf Hall* is widely regarded as the most popular and successful historical novel in the English language in recent years.

Mantel challenges traditional literary conventions, where orthodox narratives strive for clarity and unity, providing a straightforward plot and accessible language to enhance reader comfort. In contrast, the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* deliberately eschews this conventional approach, intentionally disorienting readers and compelling them to grapple with comprehension at the outset. It withholds answers, fosters curiosity and anticipation, and defers significant events until the middle or end of the narrative. The narrative is intricate; moreover, the *Trilogy* deviates from formal English grammar by employing present-tense verbs to describe past events and history. Additionally, it utilizes pronouns without clear antecedents, particularly 'he' for Cromwell, which distinguishes him as unique among the other characters in the narrative.

Mantel's endeavor to revive the previously marginalized figure of Thomas Cromwell in her *Trilogy* renders the 16th century more accessible to contemporary readers. In this manner, she functions as a translator-creator, serving as a mediator who endeavors to translate the exotic other into contemporary life. Through various strategies, such as the exploration of the concealed or the occult, via resurrection and transformation, Mantel engages in a dialogue with the exotic, translating it while refraining from adopting a position in the ideological distinction of domestication versus foreignization. Following

the significant success of this *Trilogy*, Mantel's efforts culminate in reviving and interpreting the Tudor era, specifically focusing on the figure of Thomas Cromwell.

The testimony provided by Thomas Cromwell's adversaries is not trustworthy. However, the testimonies provided by Thomas More's friends and supporters in his favor are also deemed unreliable. Therefore, this implies that historians are expected to maintain a neutral standpoint, which is deemed unattainable. Indeed, the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* presents a novel and unfamiliar perspective of Thomas More. Additionally, it presents multiple ideas and opinions about both of these two historical figures to the public, Thomas Cromwell and Thomas More, allowing the readers to make their own decisions. Whether they believe this author or disbelieve that writer is inconsequential. The crucial aspect is to depict these historical figures in diverse forms. What is more crucial is to refrain from adhering to a single perspective, which is the fundamental principle of new historicism.

This anti-traditional fiction of the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* gives a new life to some characters and brings the bones to life again. The juxtaposition of divergent perspectives within the novels prompts us to reevaluate and reconsider various concepts, refining our intellects by eliminating misconceptions. Self-made narratives have historically captivated folks, embodying the archetype of the hero emerging from under the ashes; rags-to-riches tales never die and remain timeless. People often express sympathy for those with low birth, impoverished circumstances, and adventurous spirits, the issue that Mantel fiddles with its tune. The initial pages of the *Trilogy* depict significant violence towards a young boy, compelling readers to align with his perspective from the outset. Mantel revisits these years multiple times across the three novels; although she could commence her narrative with the adult Cromwell, she employs his melancholic childhood to garner readers' sympathy for him over his rivals.

Mantel's historiographic metafiction presents one plausible interpretation among countless others; she explicitly cautions readers against endorsing her narrative, urging them to regard it as a potential scenario of that period and these historical characters. When Mantel narrates that Anne Boleyn engaged in relations with one hundred men, she does not anticipate our credulity; rather, she implies that the veracity of Anne Boleyn's infidelity is debatable and the reality remains elusive. Historical fiction readers have the

chance to examine historical records from a different angle; allowing for thinking outside the box, exploring diverse interpretations, and fostering critical thinking. Historical fiction is not so much about major historical happenings as it is about the artistic renaissance of the characters who played a role in those happenings. Educational and national curricula often create guided clichés to foster national pride and affinity for domestic figures and their countries' laudable history, despite the possibility that these clichés may be exaggerated or fabricated. Historical fiction may broaden the perspectives of these generations to alternative histories, as Mantel assures.

Mantel, through her narrative, adeptly deconstructs and reconstructs numerous historical figures and events in our perception, and through her persuasive eloquence, reshapes various concepts and constants that we previously did not envision as mutable. However, historical novelists are not as free as pure fiction novelists, they cannot lie or change a character according to the way that pleases them. Writing about history enforces specific limitations and constraints on the writer's liberty. In Cromwell's case, Mantel portrays all the opinions toward him in addition to her personal opinion and leaves the rest to the readers. She states his positives and negatives, pluses and minuses, along with strengths and weaknesses. Mantel does not allege neutralness in her narrative, on the contrary, she is against neutralness in fictional narratives because it kills ferocity and attractiveness. Without alignment, historical fiction will be like a boring soulless history book. Objectivity is a condition and prerequisite for historians and biographers, however, novelists are not obliged to be objective.

Historians typically evaluate individuals based on their accomplishments and shortcomings; however, Mantel advocates for a greater emphasis on their personalities. Mantel illustrates the social, economic, and political milieu of that era through Cromwell's discourse and deeds, positioning him as the focal point of the narrative, with scarcely a page in the *Trilogy* lacking his reference. Cromwell is a sympathetic character in the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* and possesses exceptional skills in discerning the thoughts of others. He is good at crisis management, an expert in accountancy, and the hero of the English Reformation. *Wolf Hall Trilogy* ignited the general interest in Thomas Cromwell and whetted the authorship's desire to investigate his life more deeply.

Wolf Hall Trilogy through the new historicist concept of the textuality of history, reinterprets the established narratives of certain historical figures. Mantel challenges the stereotype of Cromwell in most historical texts that portray him as a two-faced, cunning, and treacherous person. She converts him from a historical crook to a fictitious idol and from a historical criminal to a fictional champion. The *Trilogy* subverts Thomas More's godly picture and demolishes the myth of sainting him. According to Mantel, More was oblivious to the brutal realities of the Catholic Church and its employment of severe measures to punish heretics, including burning and torture. Likewise, Mantel's Henry appears to have no qualms about murdering; in the *Trilogy*, he is infamously characterized by four primary traits: his autocratic demeanor, capricious behavior, manifold marriages, and declining health. As for Anne Boleyn, although Mantel expresses sympathy for Anne Boleyn's tragic and catastrophic downfall, the *Wolf Hall Trilogy* portrays her as a serpent, femme fatale, vindictive, and ruthless figure. Ultimately, *Wolf Hall Trilogy's* Wolsey is a spiritual father of Thomas Cromwell, a spendthrift Cardinal but loyal to the king.

Postmodernist writers do not flinch to articulate their perspectives in their writing; their texts speak for themselves, and their literature conveys their ideas and messages. Historical novelists must not merely recount mundane facts; they are required to intertwine them with fictional elements to render their narratives more engaging and worthwhile. New historicism posits that history is not just a narrative by historians and Greenblatt does not regard historical processes as unchangeable and invariable. The *Wolf Hall Trilogy* adheres to Greenblatt's notion that history is malleable and can offer unusual historical perspectives and new factual insights.

This thesis sought to elucidate the messages, meanings, and implications within Hilary Mantel's three novels, while also examining her innovative style and techniques in addressing historical controversies, characters, and sensitive subjects. It also attempted to clarify the research questions as far as possible, in addition to a summary of each part of the novels. The thesis examined the essence of history and analyzed the historical novel, including its definitions and evolution from Walter Scott to postmodernism. Moreover, terms such as metahistory, historiography, and historiographic metafiction were also exhibited. The relationship between new historicism, cultural materialism, and Marxist historiography was elucidated alongside a comparison of new historicism and traditional historicism. Hilary Mantel's new historicist visions and their application in the

Wolf Hall Trilogy were meticulously articulated. Additionally, the postmodern philosophy of history and historical fiction, along with the characteristics of postmodernism in the *Trilogy*, were traced. The thesis elucidated how the narrative confronted gender bias and patriarchy while simultaneously questioning the singularity of the historical narrative.

The concept of the historicity of text in *Wolf Hall Trilogy* was portrayed through three main dimensions: religious, political, and economic scopes. The concept of textuality of history in the *Trilogy* was also addressed through three main characters: Thomas Cromwell, Thomas More, and Anne Boleyn. The researcher provided an extensive elucidation of Thomas Cromwell's identity as the central figure of the novels. Addressing his historically tarnished reputation, his reimagined portrayal in the *Trilogy* as a shrewd self-made reformer, his allegiance to his sovereign, his loyalty to Cardinal Wolsey, and his fidelity to friends and family. Subsequently, the researcher demonstrated the impact of Mantel's narrative on the public perception of Thomas Cromwell by citing various historians, authors, works, and publications that emerged after the *Trilogy*, which recognized and commended this historically maligned character.

Greenblatt's subversion and containment of power concept in *Wolf Hall Trilogy* was negotiated from three angles. The subversion and containment of hierarchy through Thomas Cromwell and Anne Boleyn; the subversion and containment of patriarchy through two female identities Catherine of Aragon and Mary Tudor, along with a male identity Thomas Cromwell; the last one is the subversion of dead-alive fright. Other conceptions related to power were addressed including the obsession of a male heir to gain power, the perils of ambition and the pursuit of power, and Cromwell's rotation in power: suppressed then able then suppressed. Eventually, the debate moved to how Mantel depicted King Henry VIII in her narrative as either a fair sovereign or a dictator.

Ultimately, Hilary Mantel, through her remarkable narrative, conveyed that fiction can be more authentic and acceptable than history, suggesting that literature is more genuine than history as it emphasizes details and specifics often overlooked by historical accounts. The novels are extraordinarily worthy to read and have secured their position among the primary works of literature; moreover, they have inspired other novelists to explore history more profoundly and uncover new truths. Mantel's narrative prowess and

nuanced portrayal of this period in the *Trilogy* position her as a pioneering figure in contemporary historical fiction. In conclusion, Mantel is the modern Scott, and she pertinently deserves to be titled as the mother of the postmodern historical novel.



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