



Broken altars: spiritual ruptures and mission in Hilary Mantel's *Bring Up the Bodies*

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Abstract: This article takes Hilary Mantel's novel, namely *Bring Up the Bodies* and analyses it through the lens of missiology by taking into account the spiritual dislocations and the moral issues that undermine the narrative. The book takes place in a sizzling Tudor England and disputes the truth of religious convictions, the human faith, and the interrelation of moral values and political power. The main purpose was to study the religious aspects of Cromwell's communication between ethics and institutional demands and how the story is linked with mission problems, witness, and reconciliation issues, along with missiology. Through the use of literary theology and the historical background, the paper argues that the conflicting faith and moral uncertainty depicted in the novel are, instead of being a disturbed discourse for mission activities in the context of cultural and religious fragmentation, the bridging devices of a narrative between the religious and secular. Furthermore, her use of different characters and introspective writing become the main driving force of this process and her new innovative technique of the clashes of the personal beliefs and institutional ones is seen as a personal investigation. The study references Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thoughtful musings about his discipleship as well as Miroslav Volf's theory of reconciliation, along with the literary critique, in order to illustrate how Mantel's missiology is still materialized and relevant in the present times of the church. The interdisciplinary route of research brings out the text, *Bring Up the Bodies*, as a strong reminder of spirituality fracture and renewal, thus providing new theories on how literature, theology, and mission work with each other.

Keywords: Hilary Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies*, spiritual ruptures, Tudor England, missiology, and religious fragmentation.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Contemporary thematic relevancy in Hilary Mantel's *Bring Up the Bodies* historical fiction tends to be reprimanded for covering events and characters that are long gone. Nevertheless, if properly penned, a novel can be both thematically engaging and contextually relevant to present-day issues. Hilary Mantel's *Bring Up the Bodies* is a present-day historical fiction novel that through thorough historical research creates intense human interactions with love, honesty, and power that changes. Mantel uses extensive historical research together with deep insights into the affairs of the heart, the moral imperatives, and the forces that rule human lives to create a very sad and unequivocally human story. This is the second book in her very celebrated Thomas Cromwell trilogy. She recounts the bitter years of the English Reformation when religious identity was the very place of dispute and ambition mingled with the holy to such an extent that it was no longer possible to tell one from the other. (1)

This narrative, which takes place during Henry VIII's notorious rule that is so full of contradictions, functions as both an account of history and an analytical essay on the issue of faith, power, and autonomy. At the level of meaning, the structure of Mantel's work is said to allude to Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* that has, likewise, shown the close links between personal experiences of belief and social issues. However, the fact that they are set in completely different time periods and that there are two completely different cultures does not make them radically different. Also, the book is addressed through the missiological perspective and it is discovered that the literature takes advantage of it for investigating the existential and religious matters. This shows the faith struggles of the characters and the crisis of the religious certainties. (2)

In the guise of a politician and also as a person shaped by historical context, Mantel's depiction of Cromwell gives room for a discussion of the difficulties of the individuals' internal religious conflicts during institutional crises. Cromwell's not so clear moralistic side stimulates discourse on religion matters. Similarly, this topic can be likened to Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, where the *whiskey priest* is the main character, who is tormented by his own personal redemption and failure in the church. On the other hand, all the court rules and atmospheres which were luxurious and challenging in the time of the Tudors were also commonly used by the writer, being the place of political



and church power presenting a description of the convergence and collision of the two branches of power. Nevertheless, she claims that these issues are experienced on personal levels inside the court of the Tudors, which is after all a more congenial and familiar place. (3)

Apart from questions of faith and power relationships, Mantel's work is also used as a source for investigations into the thinking that took place during the transformation. For instance, Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* establishes the mythological memory and faith of the Britons living in the post-Arthurian times as the central image to stage of social collective beliefs and reconciliations expositions. Kazuo Ishiguro's, *The Buried Giant* explored through a mythic scenario the fragility of memory and belief in a post-Arthurian Britain. Similarly, Mantel's book throws some light on this problem. In the same manner, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, being quite a straw man for the reader, stands as a challenge, inviting the reader to grapple with problems of faith, culture, belief, and identity. (4)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Hilary Mantel learnt to play the piano emotionally as well as physically with David Rizzio. and critics have acclaimed her expressive characterization and vivid depiction of Tudor England as the most notable aspects of the historical work she wrote. Diarmaid MacCulloch, the author of *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*, has investigated the historical intricacies of the character's personality, while Lucy Wooding has shown how Mantel subtly tackles the different elements of the Reformation era with its religious tensions of the period even though the religious and political tensions of reformation-era England were something that England was on. Nevertheless, the missiological aspect of the narrative is possibly something that some researchers have thought of as being undercooked so far. (5)

Theological reflection on historical fiction as instances like Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* two Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* are rich topics to analyse the intersection of faith and morality in Mantel's work. Robinson's meditative exploration of grace and redemption is the viewpoint that helps the critic see Cromwell's trouble with conscience as a consequence that is present in the narratives of other authors. Guzzle's view was different from Greene's which was and other protagonists were flawed people like Cromwell that the faith-driven stories had to deal with. Structural aspects of literary theories, especially the beat of narratives, and polyphony in music are a few specific domains that throwback the reader to Mantel's form. (6)

According to Mikhail Bakhtin's, where dialogism plays the main role in, which the utilization of the novel's multi-voiced narrative leads to readers being I disturb to think through moral and spiritual aspects. One of the works of Volf is the exclusion and embrace that show the theology of the reconciliation and discuss the religious division of bring up the body which is in the text. (7)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The study applies an interdisciplinary qualitative methodology, which includes closely analysing the text and reflecting theologically to explore the missiological aspects of Hilary Mantel's *Bring Up the Bodies*. The research, however, is in-depth in the historical and cultural contexts of the novel, with emphasis on its description of religious fragmentation, moral conflict, and spiritual rupture, all of which occurred during the English Reformation. Primary analysis of Mantel's narrative style, character development, and thematic elements form the core of this methodology. Through the vehicle of theological frameworks, these literary features are interpreted by casting particular references on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's point of view of discipleship and Miroslav Volf's viewpoints on exclusion and reconciliation. (8)

These insights are collocated with comparative interpretations of other contemporary historical fiction works like, for instance, Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*, which sheds light on topics like grace and human moral complexity. Secondary sources of information on Mantel's oeuvre, such as reviews and critiques of the political and theological dimensions of her work, offer further scope for interrogation. Lastly, a hermeneutical approach is employed, which brings the various implications of the text's missiological nuance to the fore of the broader questions of mission and witness. The inquiry thus includes the exploration of Cromwell's religious strife in connection with the contemporary faith conflicts in secularized and divided societies. Through the integration of the interpretations from literary and theological studies, the project is to find a new way of grasping how the narrative *Bring Up the Bodies* is relevant both to the past and to current discussions on mission, faith, and reconciliation.

4. THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF TUDOR ENGLAND:

The religious turmoil in Tudor England during the English Reformation, the interpretation of a crucial stage in the history characterized by the break of spiritual unity and the state-church relationship that became the foundation from which a new type of faith was born to generations. This earthquake of change, the break from Rome by Henry VIII was not a small religious argument but a realignment of all the spiritual, political, and cultural structures of the society's



operation. The closure of monastic centers, the distribution of ecclesiastical property, and the adaptation of the Bible from the first English versions symbolized liberation, but also a sense of loss of *home*. Eamon Duffy, among the writers in the British Isles such as *The Stripping of the Altars*, in his effectual representation describes both the disruption and the resilience of the traditional Catholic practices, thereby viewing the Reformation as a means that enabled but was also a destructor to the laity. (9)

Bring Up the Bodies, the fictional work of Hilary Mantel, however, encapsulates the tensions that existed, including how the ideas of reform were tied to the ambitions of the political powers within Tudor England. The connection between faith and politics during this era is testimony that the Reformation took place over a politically disputed area where, nevertheless, the theological debates concealed the above-mentioned struggles for authority and legitimacy. Henry VIII created the Anglican church not because he had newly found his religious beliefs but solely for his dynastic stability and sovereign control. This mixture of the king's power and religion is revealed by Hilary Mantel in her imaginary construction of Thomas Cromwell, whose utilitarian approach would eventually be the core of the spiritual reform. (10)

A common ground of relations can also be found in John Guy's *Tudor England* which before anything else, points to the fragility of initial Protestantism and to the colliding comings and goings of tradition and innovation. These particular features are also to be seen in later works like T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* which deals with the murder of Thomas Becket on the background of a conflict between divine and regal authorities. Religion was not only a private issue during the 16th century; formulized as a highly political affair, the religious arena was the main stage for creating and breaking allegiances. (11)

William Tyndale, a theologian, was an otherwise reformer whose Bible translation into the English language became a symbol of reformism, he was even burned at the stake for standing against an already dominant ecclesiastical system. In a similar manner, Mantel shows how individuals including but not limited to Anne Boleyn, seen both as a reformist and as an opportunist, came to be the ones who were actually responsible for the tearing down of the papal power. The blending of the two main levels of politics and personal beliefs characterizes Tudor England as a place where spiritual and civil life was hardly separated. By placing the *Bodies* in this changing atmosphere, Hilary Mantel not only captures the drama of the historical transformation but also raises the question of the continual connection of faith, identity, and power. (12)

5. SPIRITUAL RUPTURES IN BRING UP THE BODIES:

Hilary Mantel presents the spirit of Tudor England in *Bring Up the Bodies* with spiritual fractures and general decline resulting from the adherence to the breakaway movement that caused a certainty of divine expulsion. The breakdown of a common religion due to the Pope being the one and only head and the creation of the Church of England, resulting in the field of deep and acute theological confusion. This to the greatest degree is dragged in the characters' lifeways, where others' competing ambitions and spiritual convictions frequently cannot coexist successfully. (13)

Mantel's *Thomas Cromwell* is seen as a person who embodies this break, being that he is thrown into a world that is full of moral ambiguities and pragmatic choices, which can easily overshadow religious certainties. The thematic element of the novel is similar to that of Greene's *The End of the Affair* where the struggle of individuals with their faith is expressed at the level of their personal relationships, thus, it is a universal experience. The splitting of institution into fragments of authority and, thus, loss of unity. (14)

The Bodies is seen through Mantel's attention to the tension formed between personal faith and religious demands coming from the clergy. Cromwell, who experiences change as the force he wants to change things with, thereby, continually asserts the validity of short-lived doctrinal beliefs, notwithstanding the consciousness of involving negative effects of his interventions. This contradiction in Robinson's *Home* puts the characters at odds as each one tries to embark on their spiritual journey while having to deal with the expectations related to faith to a religious organization. The representation of Anne Boleyn by Mantel serves the purposes of both a political and religious dynamic, since her divorce from the Catholic Church further weakens the connection between personal faith and the Church. The ambivalence is engendered not only in her but also in individuals like Father Rodrigues who in Shūsaku Endō's *Silence* cannot reconcile his private convictions with his responsibilities in a public role. The fictionalization of individual belief and institutional expectation is additionally reinforced through Mantel's research into the Tudor court, where religious adherence is transformed from a faith-building instrument into a power negotiation tool. (15)

Faith, which has become a commodity in the state-run system, is treated as a side story of a chief political narrative as shown in Cromwell's deliberate closures of some monasteries. This correlation between era disintegration and political convenience is evidenced by the happenings in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, particularly through personal values that are obliterated via institutional conditions leading to moral and emotional estrangement. By following the later trajectory of the transfiguration into an authoritative community dimension without even portraying



the internal struggle of characters, Mantel's narrative is a cutting and riveting one, which exhibits the kinds of psychological infernos associated with a person devoted to moral principles changing his/her milieu through the colonial projects. External measures with broader historical and theological currents offered a lens through which *Bring Up the Bodies* among others, become a reflection on the ethical basis of an ever-changing world and the unclear spiritual environment. (16)

6. MISSIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON SPIRITUAL DISRUPTION:

The *Bring Up the Bodies* fragmented landscape of religion is a good source of ideas for missiology to reflect on, as it is a mirror of the problems that missions face in the environments of disunity and institutional uprising. Mantel's clear characterization of the English Reformation, containing competing doctrines and shifting allegiances, reveals the fact that it is a process of building true faith communities in the background of a huge division. The destruction of monasteries, the reallocation of holy places, and the ideological battles between Catholics and Protestants are examples of the complexity of witnessing in a period when people were losing their faith because it was being dismantled in a systematic way. (17)

This depiction of the novel invites a meaningful comparison with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, in which the Christian missionaries experience the fragmented indigenous belief systems and the balance between evangelism and the respect of existing traditions should be considered fragile. In Mantel's story, Cromwell's main contribution to the changing of England's religious identity is a paradoxical mission, which both destabilizes the old structures and also tries to establish a new theological order. Witnessing in such turbulent periods calls for endurance and adaptability, as Mantel's characters convincingly show. One might argue that Cromwell, though often viewed as a political engineer, can be analysed from a missiological point of view as a person who dealt with the spiritual dilemmas of his era. His pragmatic way of introducing reform is mainly linked with statecraft, but it also brings consequences for the propagation of faith in a situation of confusion. The double character is also evident in Orhan Pamuk's novel *Snow*, where people are stuck in ideological conflicts and have difficulties reconciling personal beliefs and social changes. (18)

In *Bring Up the Bodies*, the account of Cromwell's destruction of traditional monastic life may be seen as a kind of mission, though a mission characterized by compromise and contradiction, which shows the difficult task of spiritual rejuvenation in a divided society. Mantel's study of personal faith in a time of institutional collapse also coincides with the missiological idea of witnessing through turmoil, in which the act of giving testimony becomes a manifestation of faith in the face of suffering. The narrative's focus on the inner conflicts of each of the key figures such as Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cranmer roots the human dimension in mission, presenting people who encounter the cost of being a follower in a world that is both spiritual and political instability. The way this theme is used reminds of one of the most impressive aspects of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, the character of Father Zosima, who despite suffering is a witness of faith and therefore an example of faith that can survive such a situation. At the same time, Mantel's representation of Cromwell's carefully planned endeavours to support some of the ideas of reformists in the face of the unpredictable king is a witness that in times of change it often includes a tension between conviction and pragmatism. By placing these struggles in the historical and theological background of the English Reformation, *Bring Up the Bodies* is a good reflection of the long-term challenges of mission in the contexts of spiritual and institutional upheaval. (19)

7. THEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS IN MANTEL'S CHARACTERIZATIONS:

Hilary Mantel entangles ethics with the characters and thus uses personal conscience and inner conflict, as the main elements of the story. As the lives of Thomas Cromwell, Anne Boleyn, and Henry VIII are the main plots, viewers get a chance to experience various political and social difficulties related to the Tudor court. Thereby, they evoke also important inner struggles issue of faith that are linked with wider theological questions. Cromwell through whom most of the doubts accumulate; he has no experience using the relationship between practicality and truth as the path for the mind; even though he is moral, his motives are mysterious. It is the ambiguity of his decisions that is the most instructive point of the novel because when others suffer from his orders execution, as a reader, one remembers that justice and mercy, evil and good are two totally different things. (20)

Through this examination of the conflicted conscience, the author of *The Power and the Glory* allegorically communicates his philosophy of the human condition which is standing on two opposing edges of faith and failure, and ultimately reveals both the vulnerabilities and the strengths of the human spirit while looking into the abyss of inevitable downfall. Mantel's skilful showcasing of such a situation relates it also to the subject of redemption and judgment she has her characters endure in such a life replete with spiritual uncertainties and conflicting loyalties. One of the central figures in this story is Anne Boleyn, is a woman who personifies both sides of this coin, her ascendancy as well as a fall. It is through her character that these queries of sin, salvation, and divine will are elaborated three Anne. In so doing,



Mantel reflects upon human responsibility to the divine, which brings up the question if redemption is possible if power and betrayal cloud acts of grace. This thematic analysis also resonates in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, where the main character's road to redemption is through a piercing examination of his own soul and a religious awakening. (21)

Together with these elements we see also Bergin's perspective about accountability and forgiveness, through which Cromwell's reckoning is based; hence, the tension between judgment and redemption is expanded, creating a more profound conflict between personal blameworthiness and hope for divine forgiveness. Besides the scrutiny of human individuality in judgment, Mantel also views it as a societal and divine machinery, thereby analysing the function and limits of human imperfection through her characters. Henry VIII is a man who has to deal simultaneously with being the judge and an offender. His character permits the interpretation of man's possession of super authority while grappling with the fact that he is also beset with his own desires and contradictions. (22)

The characterization of judgment in the broader sense of theology continues through T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* where the relationship between earthly power and spiritual privilege becomes the birthplace of ethics and life-threatening issues. By the placement of such complex theological questions, she effectively adds more weight to the issues of morality individuals had to suffer during the time when religion provided solace along with a place of conflict for power. The characters experienced complex moral and spiritual upheavals, which added a universal meaning to the novel, drawing reflective responses on the existence of a man trying to find his place in the world, redeem the justice and reconcile his past. This is what makes it inspiring religious historical fiction. (23)

8. CONCLUSION:

Broken Altars, serving as a missiological metaphor, is really the metaphor that encapsulates the faith and spiritual communities which fall apart in the *Bring Up the Bodies*. The rupture of spiritual certainties and the dissolution of communities come together in the phrase broken altars. The complex psychological and even religious intersection that has been excavated in Hilary Mantel's narrative. The disintegration of religion and the construction of institutions as a source of renewal, thus, posing the question of how the Church should be involved in times of upheaval. The individual freedom about leaving monasteries and the rearranging of church functions parallel in today's situation of religion what they are to do in the face of secularism, pluralism, and cultural fragmentation.

Nevertheless, Mantel's characters, especially Thomas Cromwell, touch upon the conflicts that arise in the renewed striving for reform while balancing out moral and historical unclear and well-covered consequences. This gives allusion to the Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*, in which churchman's interrogation, among political and anticlerical confusion, one hand, and renewal or lamentation, the other. Mantel's delving into spiritual ruptures and personal dilemmas, the very issues today's faith discussions, which converge to the intersection of tradition and innovation, are vividly apparent. Her depiction of a society supersaturated with religious identity - Dave Rubin articulated it very precisely in Revolt TV - demonstrates the ever-growing relevance of mission as the thing to keep the two sides apart and help a relationship. Through the character of Anne Boleyn, who is spiritually driven but also incredibly vulnerable, Mantel creates a persona who represents the complexities of faith and is under a lot of pressure.

Shūsaku Endō's *Silence* is a poetic similitude between belief and survival that brings up the question of what it means to be a witness in a hostile environment. Therefore, Mantel's narrative emphasises the debate about the appropriateness and relevancy of such institutional power in shaping individual faith, an issue that still takes the center stage in the discourse on maintaining the delicate balance between the secular and the religious. With the scenario of Tudor Reformation and the struggles of today with the constant diversifying of religious beliefs and the tolerance of moral relativism, the *Bodies* sets up to teach us not only a historical lesson but also an actual subject on how to change one's religious life. The story shows relationship of coming-of-age, redemption and judgment with the theological idea which speaks of something that humans have a timeless, deep need for - meaning in the middle of uncertainty. Along the same lines, Cromwell in his political and spiritual reforms, religious community leaders are faced with the intricacy of dealing with issues like fragmentation and finding the articulation of hope and renewal. Mantel's piece thus offers an intricate terrain through which readers can walk and see not only the history of missions, but also the role of history, theology, and the perseverance of the spiritual truth as they interact with each other. This compelling fusion of the old with the new makes *Bring Up the Bodies* an excellent medium for studying the relationships between literature, history and missiology.

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