
AN “OCCULT” HISTORY OF TUDOR ENGLAND: HILARY MANTEL’S *WOLF HALL*

Tudor İngiltere’sinin “Esrarengiz” Tarihi: Hilary Mantel’in Wolf Hall Romanı

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Özet

Hilary Mantel’in sansasyonel romanı *Wolf Hall* tarihsel roman türüne kazandırdığı farklı yaklaşımla dikkat çeken bir eserdir. Yazar Mantel romanında tarih ve tarihsel roman yazımıyla ilgili çağdaş algılayışlardan hem etkilenmiş hem de etkilenmemiş bir görüntü çizmektedir. Postmodern tarihsel romanın tarihsel gerçekliği sorgulama ve sorunsallaştırma girişimlerine kuşkuyla yaklaşan Mantel, romanındaki tarih anlatısının gerçeğe olabildiğince yaklaşması için çaba sarf etmiştir. Böylelikle okur anlatılan dönemde gerçekten yaşamış gibi hissetme imtiyazına kavuşmuştur. Romanın ironik ve satirik üslubu ve mizahı trajik olanla ustaca birleştirmesi özde öznel olan bir türü nesnelliğe yaklaştırmıştır. Roman İngiliz tarihinin en görkemli ama aynı zamanda en tartışmalı devirlerinden biri olan Tudor döneminin gizemini çözme noktasında başarılı bir girişim olarak dikkat çekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tarih, tarihsel roman, *Wolf Hall*, Hilary Mantel, Tudor Dönemi

Abstract

Hilary Mantel’s sensational *Wolf Hall* is remarkable for the different perspective it has brought to the writing of historical fiction. Mantel seems to be both affected and not affected by the contemporary trends in the perceptions of history and historical novel writing. Sceptical of the attempts in postmodernist historical fiction to question and/or problematize the historical reality, Mantel wants to make the history she narrates in her novel seem as real as possible. With Mantel’s peculiar narrative style, the reader has the privilege of having the sense of living in the periods the novel describes.

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The novel's ironical and even satirical stance, light mood and good combination of humour with tragedy serve to strengthen the objectivity in an essentially subjective form of writing. *Wolf Hall* remains a very successful example among many in its attempt to unlock the mystery of one of the most glorious and most controversial eras of British history.

Key Words: history, historical fiction, Hilary Mantel, Wolf Hall.

Hilary Mantel's Booker Prize winner novel *Wolf Hall* depicts the influences of contemporary views on historiography and remains a reflection of related perspectives in the fictional realm. The novel presents a brutal as well as sympathetic view of the history as made by human beings in the Tudor era. Covering a period between 1500 and 1535, a relatively short and relatively long period for different people living at the time, *Wolf Hall* mentions the histories of different people at the same time although it is mainly concerned with the comparably quick rise of Thomas Cromwell in the court of Henry VIII. Mantel tries to give a comprehensive panorama of the age she is describing, in the picture of which bloody and deadly diseases and infections are mentioned together with the compassionate love of a father. In short, *Wolf Hall* is a "human" history although the things it narrates can sometimes be far from being humane in nature. The mystery of history is what Mantel attempts to unlock with her novel, which coincides with the ongoing interest in similar goals in our time; that is, with the wishes to uncover the mystery of history, the thing where the codes of present lives are to be found.

Before discussing the peculiarities this novel has as a distinguished account of history, it should be borne in mind that what Mantel is attempting to do is above all related to writing a novel, not a history. Although the novel vs. historiography controversy has a very long history, in earlier centuries, there was no need for a comparison indeed: "For a long time, the relation of history to literature was not notably problematic. History was a branch of literature. It was not until the meaning of the word *literature*, or the institution of literature itself, began to change, toward the end of the eighteenth century, that history came to appear as something distinct from literature" (Gossman, p. 227). This has had to do with the idea that literature is supposed to deal with the probable and history with the real. According to Gossman, Quintilian was treating history as a form of epic while Cicero was arguing that the historian was not supposed to say anything false. The roots of the debate might also be

traced back to those familiar views held by Aristotle in his famous *Poetics*. "And it is also evident from the things that have been said that the work of the poet is to speak not of things that have happened but of the sort of things that might happen and possibilities that come from what is likely or necessary" (*Poetics*, p. 32, Joe Sachs). Although history had entered literature much earlier, its emergence in the novel is dated back to Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley*, which is claimed by Lukacs to be the first truly historical novel written and which might also be claimed to have contributed much to the novel vs. historiography controversy. As de Certeau suggests in his *Histoire et Psychanalyse entre Science et Fiction* that we witness the emergence of the distinction between writing of history and writing of novel since the 17th century onwards. In the 18th century, literature on the one hand and science on the other were clearly distinguished from each other. And in the following century that very distinction became sharper and in a way institutionalised through universities. At the base of this distinction lied, according to Michel de Certeau, the border drawn by positive sciences between the objective and the subjective and/or imaginative, that is, between what they put under their control and what remained outside it (De Certeau, 2006, p. 49, translation mine). De Certeau's arguments draw a clear borderline between the status of a historian and a novelist in that while a novelist is much freer compared to a historian in terms of his/her authority over his/her text, the historian's text seems to be directed by the very fact about which he is writing, namely, history. Still, this does not eliminate the fact that historiography is something in the hands of the historian and the final product is his own; to de Certeau, the writer and researcher of history turns into solely a novelist when his title "Professor" is put aside (De Certeau, 2006, p. 71, translation mine). Therefore, it might easily be argued that history is a kind of literature after all, but it is literature dominated by its substance (de Certeau, 2006, p. 51, translation mine).

A historical novel is supposed to reconstruct history and recreate it imaginatively. And a writer of a historical novel is supposed to write his novel as if he had really lived at the period(s) which his novel represents, which is a difficult task for creative mind as a matter of fact. "There are several ways by which the historical novelist may gain access to the past and communicate his insight to his readers. There is the written word, and the spoken word- livelier, but not able to reach so far back; and there are *things*- ruined buildings, pieces of man's handiwork once in common use. As the written word speaks to the trained mind of the historian, so these speak to the trained eye of the antiquary.



But all kinds of evidence have something to say, vivid if imprecise, to the imagination. And here we must reckon, not only with the imaginative apprehension of the story-teller, but also with his reader's capacity for response" (Lascelles, p. 1). As understood from what Lascelles argues, a historical novelist is also supposed to take into account possible reactions from his reader. Still, one should not expect a historical novel to have the attributes of a chronicle or a history book. "In most respects, historical fiction depends upon the formal techniques and cultural assumptions of the main traditions of the novel. Because of this dependence, it does not have a significant history apart from the history of the novel as a whole" (Harry E. Shaw, p. 23). Therefore, those looking for a reliance and loyalty on realities and truths in a novel of history might be disappointed simply because a novel's realm or the realm of any fictional work is the place where one loses his contact with the real naturally. It must be emphasized that one of the purposes of novel writing is entertaining the reader although this aspect is also blurred in contemporary works of fiction. Scott was a historian at the same time; nevertheless, he did not hesitate to recreate history. Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* proves how extensively she carried out her research on history; however, what she produced finally is primarily a work of fiction.



A historical novelist will most probably create a subjective work in his attempt because he will face the dilemma of feeling sympathy or empathy towards the people whose history he is narrating in a fictional atmosphere. A historian might not necessarily feel such a need because his material is already there to be composed and penned. A historian will feel obliged to tell almost anything that happened but a novelist will most probably be choosier in this respect and prefer to tell some things while deliberately excluding some others. The reason for this might be that some historical events or figures might serve better for the working of novelist's imagination. Any kind of historical record will help the novelist to compose and construct his novel; nevertheless, it is the imaginative power that will primarily shape that work of fiction.

Postmodern period's disregard of history as simply a grand narrative like others on the one hand and its growing interest in such a fact as "history" on the other (since, in Hutcheon's terms, postmodern fiction is labelled as postmodernist historiography) remains a paradox. Attempting to question people's *need* for history, Mantel also wonders "Why are we so attached to severities of the past? Why are we so proud of ourselves for having endured

our fathers and our mothers" (WH, p. 311). The contemporary era has witnessed the rise of historical fiction with Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* and Graham Swift's *Waterland* together with many other examples. Recent examples of historical fiction show the domination of a tendency towards reflecting mysterious, hidden and 'occult' aspects of the history on account of the fact that readers' overall interest is more oriented to this history rather than the history which only speaks about great historical victories and significant figures in it. There are, broadly speaking, two main trends in the representation of history in contemporary literature; the first one being the postmodernist one, with its emphasis on parody and questioning of the so-called historical fact, and the new historicist one, which shares some of the assumptions and/or features of postmodernist understanding of history although it clearly distinguishes itself in terms of its faithful hold to 'the historically real'. In other words, while postmodernist view of history blurs the very reality and factuality of history, new historicist tendency still believes in the reality of history as a documented fact although it also questions the nature of historical fact.

Common to both views of history and its representation is an emphasis placed upon the textual nature of history, which is an indication of the existence of a linguistic turn in historicist studies. History as such is perceived to be accessible to us only through texts and this is the main reason why both postmodernist and new historicist ideas of history remain sceptical of historical facts. The fact that history is made available to people by means of texts problematizes our perceptions of historical reality on account of the historian's status as a human being that might be involved in power relations as simply a subject like many others. This leads the new historicists to read historical accounts together with the other narratives of a particular historical period, such as diaries, legal documents, medical texts, travel writings, registered writings of any sort and of course literary pieces. The aim is to reach a more comprehensive, and thus, a more objective knowledge of the related period. This attitude annihilates the privileged status of not only historical accounts but literary texts. Accordingly, culture is also turned into a text to be read and commented upon: "The culture of a people is an emsemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong" (Geertz, 1973, p. 452). Contemporary conceptions of history are especially focused on cultural minutiae of people living at a specific time in history rather than dealing with the victories and victors generally mentioned in the traditional history books.





Hayden White's thoughts have played a major role in the rise of perceptions regarding the textual nature of history. White's attempt is to examine works by important historians like works of literature. *Metahistory* reflects a historian's desire to show all written history's literary aspects, namely, their fiction-like qualities. In it, White depicts historiography as a literary enterprise and historian as a man of letters. Even the title of the book, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, suggests it in that it expresses historiography as something associated with imagination. In other words, history-writing is primarily an act of narrating and a historical account or a book is textual above all. He points out the fact that artistic components of historiography are generally ignored for the sake of a particular focus on the scientific aspects of it (White, p. xi) whereas historical accounts are works that "contain a deep structural content which is generally poetic, and specifically linguistic, in nature" (White, p. ix). That is why, in the hands of White, historiography is an action that could best be described with the prefix 'meta' since it is simply 'history about history' or 'story about history'. The historian "prefigures the historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which to bring to bear the specific theories he will use to explain 'what was *really* happening' in it" (White, p. x). While describing the historical events, White uses the expression "sets of events presumed to have occurred in times past" (White, p. ix), which is a clear indication of the fact that one can never exactly know whether the events "presumed to have occurred" in history really happened. The nature of historiography is problematized also in *Wolf Hall*, especially in Cromwell's criticism of historiography in the hands of people. Cromwell accuses the men of religion of writing the history of their country wrongly: "For hundreds of years the monks have held the pen, and what they have written is what we take to be our history, but I do not believe it really is. I believe they have suppressed the history they don't like, and written one that is favourable to Rome" (WH, p. 219). Uttered from inside Cromwell's conscience, these words bring the nature of historiography in which a history of mistakes, tyrannies and defeats might be easily shown as a history of glories. Similarly, history is accused of serving people's changing benefits in different times: "You call history to your aid, but what is history to you? It is a mirror that flatters Thomas More" (WH, p. 566). It is felt to the reader that it is not so difficult for those in power to write history as they like or even change it. Thus More writes the history of Richard but does so only to show him a wicked man and his time a dark one, which is of course an act of currying favour with Henry, who envies the

French king since he can more competently control, or rather suppress, his people while Henry cannot do it as easily as he does: "Many years ago Thomas More began to write a book about him. He could not decide whether to compose it in English or Latin, so he has done both, though he has never finished it, or sent any part of it to the printer. Richard was born to be evil, More says; it was written on him from his birth" (WH, p. 231).

The main focus of *Metahistory* is upon the poetic, or rather, literary and stylistic aspects of history writing. A historian might utilise various styles in order to convey what is called the historical truth; however, White is not sure about the best style although he indicates the fact that *Metahistory* is written in an ironic mode (White, p. xii). Historical reality takes the form of romance in Michelet and comedy in Ranke while Tocqueville favours tragic form and Burckhardt satire. White claims that the "difference between 'history' and 'fiction' resides in the fact that historian 'finds' his stories, whereas the fiction writer 'invents' his" (White, p. 6). In *Wolf Hall*, Mantel not only seems to have found her material but to have invented some naturally; whatever the case, it is clear that her fiction is extensively researched. Like Wolsey in the novel who "talks as if he himself had witnessed everything, eye-witnessed it" (WH, p. 28), she 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. Hers is an attempt to write a history from a novelist's perspective and it might be easily claimed that at the base of the emergence of all historical novels, classical or postmodern, lies such an attempt. Despite the counter arguments of orthodox historians, the novel might well serve as a conveyor of historical reality and in this respect especially, it enjoys a common status with the history books mentioning the era it describes. As La Capra suggests, "a different way of reading novels may alert us not only to the contestatory voices and counter-discourses of the past but to the ways in which historiography itself may become a more critical voice in the 'human sciences'" (La Capra, p. 132). The reader of the historical novel gains the advantage of looking at a historical period from a different perspective and differences of perspectives help him get a more objective view of the mentioned period. Thus, for those who would like to get a true-to-life picture of the Tudor era, *Wolf Hall* will be a challenging invitation. Mantel's novel seems to have combined tragic and comic perspectives together with an ever-present ironic one since all human history, which is the greatest example of irony, contains very good examples of irony. For the audience reading the past events, all those historical happenings might be viewed with an ironical



stance because of the very fact that these audiences do not belong to the ages when such things happened. In other words, the distance between us as the readers of the events taking place in *Wolf Hall* and the very historical age when these events took place inevitably leads to the emergence of an ironical stance. Thus, history simply becomes a fact to be looked at or viewed by a reading audience. Nevertheless, Mantel's novel is also dialogic in the sense that she invites us to enter a time, space and culture different from our own; she manages to familiarize the world of the Tudors with the witnessing eye through which she writes. She is trying to give a voice to the already-dead and in a sense forcing them to speak so that they will not remain dead. Her attempt for dialogue does not fail since she is always reminding us the fact that we are our history through her use of present simple tense.

It is arguable how objectively Mantel writes her novel since she also seems to have taken side in her production. Historiography, according to de Certeau "bears within its own name the paradox-almost an oxymoron- of a relation established between two antinomic terms, between the real and discourse" (de Certeau, 1988, p. xxvii). And White suggests, "there does, in fact, appear to be an irreducible ideological component in every historical account of reality" (White, p. 21) and as far as the fictional status of Mantel's work is concerned, it is natural it might have some ideological implications since it is not essentially a book of history essentially. In new historicist accounts of history, literary pieces are claimed to be contributing to the dominant discourse of the era by which they are affected and on which they leave their effects, which is a process defined as "circulation of social energy" by Greenblatt. In *Wolf Hall*, there are indications of a support towards more liberal ways of governing set against the despotic and cruel way Henry VIII governs his kingdom.

Like most novelists of her era, Mantel seems to be trying to give voice to the silenced history of the otherised and in this respect, she may well have been influenced by the writings of another figure placing much emphasis on textuality and the nature of writing, Michel de Certeau, who believes in the conquering aspects of writing. The Western traditions of writing, according to de Certeau, have always posed a fundamental paradox in that they have not allowed the 'other' to speak while at the same time forcing him to speak. And, according to him, the literary text is the space where the logic of the 'other' is observed or made obvious (de Certeau, 2006, p. 58) In the writing of de Certeau, the historiographer emerges as another 'other' of the society he lives

in, a kind of castaway who is suspected of dealing with a dangerous issue since he might in a way be revealing the disturbing facts or events that need to be hidden. Mantel, though much freer compared to historiographers of the past ages, might also be accused of stirring up a hornet's nest especially in the eyes of those conservatives who strongly believe in the impeccability of any historical figure and for whom depiction of discomfiting realities related to history might harm the 'divine history' belonging to a proud and victorious people. De Certeau is well aware of the fact that a historian or historiographer is supposed to evaluate those who once had what he presently does not have, namely, power. That is why he is supposed to play the role of a prince or a king from time to time. That Mantel also might have tried to feel like the historical figures she has been writing about in her novel is natural on account of the very fact that historian and fiction writer resemble and come closer to each other in the process of handling history: "It is through a sort of fiction, however, that the historian is accorded this place... When the historian seeks to establish, for the place of power, the rules of political conduct and the best political institutions, he *plays the role* of the prince that he is not; he analyses what the prince *ought* to do" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 8). This might necessarily have forced Mantel to act as a novelist and a critic at the same time. *Wolf Hall* seems to have managed to combine the aspects of both successfully and Mantel's efforts to question the Tudor history have not permitted each one of these aspects to preponderate the other. Like historians, she can only write "by combining within [her] practice the "other" that moves and misleads [her] and the real that [she] can represent only through fiction" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 14).¹

The fact that there is such a thing as history is certain; however, Mantel's perception differs from that of many other people. She has no intention of destroying history; she does not problematize the reality of events and/or people and she never attempts to make a parody of Tudor history although her style sometimes becomes humorous. Mantel's main objective is drawing a truly realistic picture of Tudor history despite the fact that she is also mentioning occult aspects of this history and thus she must be differentiated from the other postmodernist historical novelists. The comfort she has in narrating is typical of novelists writing about the history because she was *not there* although she writes as if she were there. There is an inevitable distance between Mantel and the period she has been writing about;

¹ In the original text, de Certeau uses "their", "them" and "they", respectively.



however, Mantel manages to shorten this distance successfully through her power of imagination. In this case, her imagination forms our access gate to history. Her aim is not only to save the dead but to release them from the prison of history. That history is, in a Freudian sense, a repressed thing; however, Mantel is less worried about its return compared to a historian because, after all, she is *not* a historian despite the fact that she sometimes makes the reader feel the existence in her of the authority peculiar to historians. That is why a paradox evident in all historiographies is also found in Mantel's historical novel: while the historiographer tries to free the departed from the prison of history, he at the same time imprisons them in the prison of writing as indicated by de Certeau: "The dear departed find a haven in the text *because* they can neither speak nor do harm anymore. These ghosts find access through *writing* on the condition that they remain *forever silent*" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 2). Similarly, Mantel on the one hand wishes to grant the people of the Tudor Era the freedom they seek through writing, but she on the other hand might easily deny the freedom she is supposed to give because all these people have now turned into the material by which she is going to construct her novel.

In other words, it is Mantel herself that will provide the related freedom or deny it depending on the authority her authorship makes possible. Nevertheless, writing remains to be the only medium in order to establish a relationship with the Tudor people, who remain in any case to be the 'other' for her. With their gestures, smiles, gossips, implications, mockery and hatred, the characters occupying Mantel's novel's fictional space are those who are more or less similar to us essentially and her history is a human history mentioning, above all, human condition.



Perhaps the only chapter where, at least on its early pages, an obviously magical, tale-like account of history is found is the chapter titled "An Occult History of Britain", which starts as "Once, in the days of time immemorial, there was a king of Greece who had thirty-three daughters" (WH, p. 65). The chapter is significant in that it creates a mythical atmosphere while narrating the history of Britain, reminiscent once again of de Certeau: "History is probably our myth. It combines what can be thought, the 'thinkable', and the origin, in conformity with the way in which a society can understand its own working" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 21). We need to hold to the mythical, which is implied on the final page of the novel: "Just this last year a scholar, a foreigner, 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; 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?" (WH, p. 650). In other words, people need stories and myths as well as legends although they might have no proof demonstrating the reality of them. *Wolf Hall* in this chapter exemplifies the role of the myth in historiography. There is the image of journey by sea following the murder of the husbands of the above-mentioned thirty-three daughters, who rebel and kill their own husbands and after which are exiled by their father king (WH, p. 65), as well as the copulation between them and the demons they encounter on the island they reach. The island shrouded in the mist is Britain, which is named as Albina by the exiled princesses. The result of the copulation is a race of giants and these giants soon spread over the whole island. Mantel's implications relating historiography is significant here: "There were no priests, no churches and no laws. There was also no way of telling the time" (WH, p. 65). After eight centuries of rule, the inhabitants of the island are defeated to Brutus, the Roman emperor, whose history is also narrated with a different perspective. Mantel's narrator is exploring the role of fate in one man's life, which is a case found in some examples of recent novels that place a special emphasis on history as a concept and a fact, such as Coetzee's *Foe*. Like such novels' writers, Mantel is also trying to determine the role of chance and coincidence in history, which is in clear conformity with new historicist as well as postmodernist views of history. Greenblatt discusses the role of contingency in history in his *Practicing New Historicism* giving various examples in his discussion of the painting by Joos van Gent and in a way contrasts traditional historicism with new historicism, emphasizing that the new historicist perceptions of history focus on "local contingency" and "accidental likeness" (Greenblatt, 2000, p. 93). Accordingly, in the novel, Brutus is depicted as a man in whose life or history chance plays a significant part: "His mother died in giving birth to him, and his father, by accident, he killed with an arrow" (WH, p. 65). Nevertheless, Mantel is also trying to place emphasis upon the emergence of an order out of a [seemingly] disordered and disunited set of events. The things which seem to be unrelated might be contributing to the emergence of what we call history as suggested by Susan in *Foe*: "...there is after all design in our lives, and if we wait long enough we are bound to see that design unfolding; just as, observing a carpet-maker, we may see at first glance only a tangle of threads; yet, if we are patient, flowers begin to emerge under our gaze, and prancing unicorns, and turrets" (Coetzee, p. 103). A similar case is thinkable as far as the humble situation of Cromwell is concerned because he becomes the King's right hand although his life starts as a lowborn boy. Wolsey "never lives in a





single reality, but in a shifting, shadow-mesh of diplomatic possibilities” (WH, p. 27) and he is described as a man who is required to have an alternative plan always because “all outcomes are likely, all outcomes can be managed, even massaged into desirability” (WH, p. 28). And Cromwell dreams of “a world of the possible. A world where Anne can be queen is a world where Cromwell can be Cromwell” (WH, p.205). The chapter titled “An Occult History of Britain” is at the same time the place where Mantel provides her readers with an account of history different from the one she generally employs throughout the novel. “Whichever way you look at it, it all begins in slaughter” (WH, p. 66) is only one of the comments made in relation with history by Mantel and this is a novelist’s way of perceiving and narrating history. And Norfolk can’t help admitting the way Tudors came to power: “How did the Tudors get the crown? By title? No. By force? Exactly” (WH, p. 255). Tudors’ understanding of history and their wish to rule over it is also referred to in the chapter: “Some say the Tudors transcend this history, bloody and demonic as it is: that they descend from Brutus through the line of Constantine, son of St Helena, who was a Briton. Arthur, High King of Britain, was Constantine’s grandson. He married up to three women, all called Guinevere, and his tomb is at Glastonbury, but you must understand that he is not really dead, only waiting his time to come again” (WH, p. 66). This is a clear example of Mantel’s mixing of the two forms of historical account; one is the realistic or at least believed to be realistic, and the other is mythical and even magical. “Beneath every history, another history” (WH, p. 66) says the narrator on the same page, which is aimed at demonstrating the fact that ‘History’ as the account emerging as a result of various other ‘histories’ overlaps with its constituents. In addition, *Wolf Hall* from time to time includes an image of magical and mysterious country, where one can encounter things, events and people which or whom he does not see in real life. The great forests of England provides one of such images: “In the forest you may find yourself lost, without companions. You may come to a river which is not on a map. You may lose sight of your quarry, and forget why you are there. You may meet a dwarf, or the living Christ, or an old enemy of yours; or a new enemy, one you do not know until you see his face appear between the rustling leaves, and see the glint of his dagger. You may find a woman asleep in a bower of leaves. For a moment, before you don’t recognise her, you will think see is someone you know” (WH, p. 224).

According to La Capra, the historian will inevitably find himself in a dialogue or a conversation with the dead and even enter into an argument with

them (La Capra, p.36). Mantel seems to be an observer rather than a polemicist and prefers to watch the people of the Tudor era from a distance. Her main objective is to try to hear what those famous figures of the Tudor court are saying; despite her comfort in the narration, she remains a timid woman in taking part in their conversations. She is trying to describe the daily life, which has not been a popular subject for orthodox historians till the contemporary era. That is the main point why she easily catches the reader's attention because the modern reader of history seems to be fed up with those accounts of wars, kings and stately figures and has an increasing interest in the history of daily life, the everyday. Unlike a traditional historicist, Mantel seems to favour the existence of not one total history but 'histories' and believes that there are different histories lived in the same period. In fact, her novel is made up of a set of histories all of which are interpenetrating. All over the world, the television series describing the cultural and ordinary aspects of historical people's lives are attracting people more and more in spite of the controversies and hot debates they bring about especially among the conservatives, an example for which is the *The Magnificent Century*, a television series in Turkey mentioning the life during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent. The apparent aspect of such a historiography is the deliberate focus on everyday life or everyday history of the people since even the king has an everyday history as well as other historical figures in the plot. In Mantel's novel, the narrated history is the history of everyday and she successfully gives details from the daily lives of people. In their daily lives, people of the Tudor era seem like us and that is the main reason why we can easily associate or even sympathise with them. Mantel's everyday history helps eliminate the image of history as "our other". In addition, it overcomes the problem of narrating history in a dull manner; La Capra finds Woolf's novels exemplary in this sense and claims that a novelist of history is supposed to "depict a 'lived reality' and a way of transcribing it that are uncomfortably close to what one finds in Woolf's novels" (La Capra, p. 122). I comfortably argue that Mantel's *Wolf Hall* has managed to go beyond the novels of even Woolf in depicting lived reality with her detailed everyday history. People like to find associations between a historical era narrated in a historical novel and their own lives because of the very fact that they would like to see the people who lived in previous centuries as *human beings* like *themselves*. The everyday life and its depiction are not related to the depiction of historically less significant affairs and/or people; on the contrary, it is the very *politicalness* of this life that matters. The rule of the king over his subjects, the men of politics and



their acts in a dog-eat-dog world and struggles for power among the men with higher positions and status can easily be mentioned in a historical novel, which is done successfully by Mantel. However, it is the reflections of the rule over people that should be mentioned primarily. Mantel manages to give an ear to the man on the street distancing herself from the court of Henry; she seems to share the same ideas with de Certeau in that she also believes in the extraordinariness and unusualness of this man. Her distinctive success is the way she depicts the everyday history of even the king and aristocrats. In Mantel's novel, those in power turn into mere ordinary men since they struggle through their tactics to get a place in the middle of these power wars, which is an indication of their weakness as a matter of fact since "a tactic is an art of the weak" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 37). In other words, everyone is mass and ordinary as far as the very concept of humanness is concerned and as long as there are enemies waiting outside for a simple mistake to be made by their prey. The people in Mantel's novel are especially notable for their hypocrisy and it is almost impossible to find a character acting authentically, that is, by being his true self, perhaps except for Cromwell, who is even thinking that he is becoming someone else at times. This attitude should also be evaluated as a sign of the weakness of the tactic and strategy employers, who are everymen of the world in fact.



It might of course be claimed that the everyday history provided by Mantel's novel is a possibility made possible by the aspects of novel writing. Thus we are given the everyday dialogues of these once-living people and witness the observation of a life similar to ours. The people and places are different from those found in the lives of the present audience naturally; however, Mantel teaches us the fact that essentially nothing changes in human's life and ongoing struggle. The lives of all those people in the novel, both those who are involved in fierce power wars and those who only try to save the day hoping to see the next morning, are narrated within an everyday history of Mantel's novel. The facts such as the writing of a book against Luther by Thomas More (WH, p. 39), which the present readers read with curiosity, are told as ordinary happenings in a routine life. In other words, Mantel makes us feel that the historical is not historical at the time of its happening. Even wearing styles are a subject of narration in this everyday history: "In public the cardinal wears red, just red, but in various weights, various weaves, various degrees of pigment and dye, but all of them the best of their kind, the best reds to be got for money" (WH, p. 50). It is especially Henry's descriptions which require more emphasis in terms of the use of

everyday history because our narrator generally catches him in everyday situations: "But it is only when they get into the presence that he fully understands how it rattles the old duke to be in a room with Henry Tudor. The gilded ebullience makes him shrink inside his clothes. Henry greets them cordially. He says it is a wonderful day and pretty much a wonderful world. He spins around the room, arms wide, reciting some verses of his own composition... Hand behind his back, he indicates, be gone, my lord Norfolk, I'll catch up with you later" (WH, p. 210).

Mantel's employment of everyday history enables the reader to gain access to unknown aspects of the lives of historical figures she is putting in her novel, which from time to time ends in the emergence of a deprivileging attitude towards history. Again for those conservatives who have a firm belief in the so-called sacredness of great historical figures, Mantel's attitude might prove shocking at times. Accordingly, we sometimes find a despotic crazy man in the personality of Henry VIII and Cromwell's discontent with the way Henry rules is discernible in his oath ceremony after he is appointed as a member of king's council since he remembers nothing but people's hypocrisy during this ceremony. The names he counts are all significant figures of Tudor history: "He swears to uphold the king's authorities. His pre-eminences, his jurisdictions. He swears to uphold his heirs and lawful successors, and he thinks of the bastard child Richmond, and Mary the talking shrimp, and the Duke of Norfolk showing off his thumbnail to the company" (WH, p. 282). In addition, *Wolf Hall* places significant emphasis on the hypocrisy of people it is describing, for which the novel provides many examples throughout the narration. Even the title of one of the chapters is called "Arrange Your Face", implying that people at the time are supposed to wear masks and refrain from behaving in a sincere way. Thomas More, "some sort of failed priest, a frustrated preacher" (WH, p. 39), who is famous for his scholarly life in traditional history books, is depicted as a torturer: "The word is that the Lord Chancellor 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... They say he uses the whip, the manacles and the torment-frame they call Skeffington's Daughter" (WH, p. 298-9) and a relentless lover of tyranny, to which he is subjected at the end of the novel and whose split personality or two conflicting identities, according to Greenblatt, are both destroyed on a scaffold (Greenblatt, 2005, p. 73). Mantel's narrator from time to time touches upon





More's justification, and even love, of torture: "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" (WH, p. 361). His infamous Tower is a recurrent image of brutal punishment, dealt sometimes with sarcasm throughout the novel, and it is claimed he might utter sentences that are not expected from him: "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" (WH, p. 121). The narrator reveals some facts about the private history of More as well, which turns Mantel's novel into a novel of gossip and magazine: "When More's first wife died, her successor was in the house before the corpse was cold. More 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. He had fallen in love with a girl of sixteen, but her sister, at seventeen, was not yet married; he took the elder, so that his pride should not be hurt. He did not love her; she could not read or write; he hoped that might be amended, but seemingly not. He 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, which made her so frightened that she swore she would complain no more" (WH, P. 123). There are hints of incest as far as More's personality is concerned: "They say that Thomas More is in love with his own daughter" (WH, p. 236). Cardinal Wolsey also has his share of Mantel's attempt in the novel to disclose the secrets of people at the time of the Tudors since he is described as a benefit-seeker from time to time. The novel continually maintains a satirical image of Anne Boleyn as well. Anne is shown to be very much pleased with the murder of Cardinal Wolsey and she is depicted as someone who cannot do a favour for anybody: "At New Year he had given Anne a present of silver forks with handles of rock crystal. He hopes she will use them to eat with, not to stick in people" (WH, p. 296). In this sense, a paradoxical case is that of the Catholic Church as an establishment and an institution: "If you ask me about the monks, I speak from experience, not prejudice, and though I have no doubt that some foundations are well governed, my experience has been of waste and corruption. May I suggest to Your Majesty that, if you wish to see a parade of the seven deadly sins, you do not organise a masque at court but call without notice at a monastery?"

(WH, p. 219). The English armies are also narrated from a deprivileging perspective:

“The English will never be forgiven for the talent for destruction they have always displayed when they get off their own island. English armies laid waste to the land they moved through. As if systematically, they performed every action proscribed by the codes of chivalry, and broke every one of the laws of war. The battles were nothing; it was what they did between the battles that left its mark. They robbed and raped for forty miles around the line of their march. They burned the crops in the fields, and the houses with the people inside them. They took bribes in coin and in kind and when they were encamped in a district they made the people pay for every day on which they were left unmolested. They killed priests and hung them naked up in the marketplaces. As if they were infidels, they ransacked the churches, packed the chalices in their baggage, fuelled their cooking fires with precious books; they scattered relics and stripped altars. They found out the families of the dead and demanded that the living ransom them; if the living could not pay, they torched the corpses before their eyes, without ceremony, without a single prayer, disposing of the dead as one might the carcasses of diseased cattle” (WH, p.117)

It is debatable whether Mantel herself believes the things written above; however, it is clear that she is trying to open Tudor history to questionings, which is essentially an act compatible with postmodernist assumptions on history and which might be encountered in the works of other contemporary historical novelists like Orhan Pamuk, the Nobel prize winner Turkish author who is harshly criticised by conservative Turkish readers since he is claimed to depict a deprivileged picture of Turkish history with his novels. The deprivileging attitude towards history as employed by Mantel serves a very good purpose as a matter of fact; she is not intentionally defaming those historical names but she is warning everybody against seeing



people as sacred and impeccable beings, which helps us to obtain a more objective knowledge of history.

Wolf Hall describes a world of brutal power relations. It might be claimed that the very power relations which causes Wolsey to feel that “He never lives in a single reality, but in a shifting, shadow-mesh of diplomatic possibilities” (WH, p. 27) force people to assume roles improper to their original personalities. In this world, when one plan does not work by chance or accidentally, there must always be another plan waiting to be implemented. “It is hard to escape the feeling that this is a play, and the cardinal is in it: the Cardinal and his Attendants. And that it is a tragedy” (WH, p. 51). *Wolf Hall* is a history of betrayals at the same time; both More and Wolsey can’t help feeling that they are betrayed. It is felt to the reader that human’s condition is so changeable and that ups and downs are solely an indication of a history full of surprise for anybody who is subjected to its transformative power. Cromwell thinks that “You cannot return to the moment you were in before” (WH, p. 205), indicating an image of history as a fact that can never be obtained once missed. Mantel shows that it might be related to the need for change. People are simply fed up with the way things are, as Cavendish says “The multitude is always desirous of a change. They never see a great man set up but they must pull him down- for the novelty of the king” (WH, p. 54). Mantel tries to demonstrate that history all over the world has followed a similar path in terms of the power relations experienced: “The example of history and of other nations shows that the mothers fight for status, and try to get their brats induced somehow into the line of succession” (WH, p. 76). As for England, it is described as “a miserable country, home to outcast and abandoned people, who are working slowly their deliverance” (WH, p. 124), a country where newness is regarded as odd: “There cannot be new things in England. There can be old things freshly represented, or new things that pretend to be old. To be trusted, new men must forge themselves an ancient pedigree, like Walter’s, or enter into the service of ancient families. Don’t try to go it alone, or they’ll think you’re pirates” (WH, p. 118). The development of history is claimed to be too fast to put up with in the novel, as clear from the thoughts of Cromwell: “He feels a moment of jealousy towards the dead, to those who served kings in slower times than these” (WH, p. 492). Paradoxically the same history is depicted as a fact that seems to serve the very stability of the country in the novel.

Conclusion

Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* stands as a different example of historical novel with its narration that is intended to be realistic unlike contemporary trends in historical novel writing, its ironical stance, its success in depicting everyday history and human condition, its intentionally-sarcastic comments upon and ruthless criticism of those who once held power and who marked a name for themselves in history, its combination of the mysterious and mythical with the logical and the real and its description of those whose lives were trapped, destroyed and repressed by power relations. The novel manages to remain a more objective account of Tudor history since it manages to depict both positive and negative aspects of the historical figures represented in the novel. The details in the novel make the reader have the sense of living at the time of the Tudors. In addition, it helps us demystify the mystery of one of the most contestable eras of British history and reach a more sophisticated knowledge of what it means to be a human.

Sonuç

Hilary Mantel'in *Wolf Hall* romanı çağdaş tarihsel romanların aksine gerçeği sorunsallaştırma ve sorgulama yerine olabildiğince gerçekçi yansıtma çabasıyla, ironik üslubuyla, gündelik tarihi ve insanlık halini başarıyla anlatmasıyla, bir zamanlar gücü ve iktidarı elinde bulunduranlar ve tarihe nam salmış olanlara yönelik acımasız ve alaycı eleştirileriyle, gizemli ve mitik olanı mantıklı ve gerçek olanla birleştirme becerisiyle farklı bir tarihsel roman örneği olarak karşımızda durmaktadır. Romanda karşılaştığımız tarihsel kişilerin olumlu ve olumsuz yönlerinin bir arada sunulması romanın nesnel bir tarih sunumuna yaklaşmasını olanaklı kılmaktadır. Romandaki ince detaylar okurun Tudor döneminde yaşamış gibi hissetmesini sağlamaktadır. Mantel romanıyla İngiliz tarihinin en karmaşık dönemlerinden birine ışık tutmaktadır.



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