

Religion as A Political Instrument to Maintain Power in The *Wolf Hall*

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to analyze how religion functions as a political tool to maintain and expand power in Hilary Mantel's novel *Wolf Hall*, focusing on narrative strategies and textual indicators that show the use of religion as a political instrument.

Methodology: This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with primary data in the form of dialogue, narrative descriptions, and character interactions in *Wolf Hall* (2009). Data were collected through intensive reading, text marking, thematic grouping, and supporting theoretical sources. The analysis combines Foucault's theory of the power of knowledge to interpret ideological control mechanisms and Abrams' theory of narrative elements to explore how character, plot, setting, and point of view are used to depict religion as a tool of political domination. Data validation follows the Miles and Huberman model through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion verification to ensure analytical accuracy.

Results: The results show that religion in *Wolf Hall* functions as a strategic mechanism to restructure political authority, legitimize state power, build national identity, and shape collective obedience. The novel shows how religious discourse influences the psychological and social spheres, thereby enabling the consolidation of political control.

Applications/Originality/Value: This research involves literary, political, and religious discourse studies, demonstrating how historical fiction reveals religion within power structures. This research explains the importance of Foucault and Abrams' theoretical frameworks for analyzing political narratives in literary works. This research can provide a reference for further studies on religion, ideology, and representations of power in narrative texts.

Keywords: Religion, Politics, Power

Introduction Section

Religion and politics have long gone hand in hand in shaping society as interrelated forces, in forming communities, building systems of authority, and regulating individual mentalities. In recent years, religion and politics have been embroiled in global conflicts where religion is not seen as a theological framework, but also as a political tool used to defend territory and justify violence. The conflict between Israel and Gaza continues, demonstrating how religious symbols and identities are used strategically to shape public opinion and reinforce political agendas. Leaders often use religious rhetoric to justify state actions, strengthen collective identities, and legitimize authority. This phenomenon demonstrates a long standing dynamic in which religion functions not only as a spiritual guide, but also as an ideological instrument in the power system and in shaping the mentality of society.

Throughout history, rulers have often used religion as a mechanism to consolidate power and influence the beliefs, emotions, and behavior of their people. From ancient kingdoms to medieval empires, religious institutions often functioned as political powers, serving as tools for rulers to discipline society and in still certain ideologies. One historical example of the close relationship between religion and power occurred in England in the 16th century under the Tudor reign. During this period, religion played an important role not only in shaping political structures, but also in legitimizing authority, building national identity, and controlling the moral consciousness of society. The Reformation of the Church of England under King Henry VIII, who severed ties with the Roman Catholic Church and established the Church of England, shows how religious discourse was engineered to restructure political power.

Hilary Mantel's novel *Wolf Hall* (2009) focuses on the rise of Thomas Cromwell and the transformation of English politics. Mantel explains the psychology and ideology of how religion operated as a political instrument during the English Reformation. Through Cromwell's perspective, Mantel describes religion as a flexible discourse, something that can be reshaped, weaponized, and used strategically to generate obedience, regulate behavior, and legitimize radical political change. The elimination of the influence of the Catholic Church in *Wolf Hall* is related to Henry VIII's desire to annul his marriage due to an event that revealed the political interests behind religious authority. In Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*,

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religion becomes a system used to exercise power, as a political tool. The following are relevant studies on religion as a political tool.

Borah (2024) argues that religion can be used as a political instrument, especially in the context of English reform. Furthermore, Boyle (2018) highlights the use of rhetoric, symbols, and religious institutions, representing religion as both a moral force and a negotiable tool. This description is also in line with Mantel's (2010) analysis, which describes religion as a tool of social control. In his study, Loades (2011) shows how religion was manipulated by the Tudor rulers to free England from the domination of the Roman Catholic Church, so that the Reformation was not only a religious event but also a political strategy. MacCulloch (2018) says that the main actors in the Reformation used religion for the political needs of the kingdom.

Greenblatt (2022), through a new historicism approach, explains that individual identity in the Tudor era was greatly influenced by social, political, and religious factors. This shows that power structures and religious discourse shaped each other. Betteridge (2011) expresses the connection between literature and religious reform. He shows that literary texts functioned as a political medium that shaped public opinion and reinforced ideological dominance. David (2011) reinforces this analysis by explaining that the separation from papal authority was not only a spiritual act, but also a strategy to control church institutions and wealth in order to expand power. Mantel (2012) highlights the dynamics of religious manipulation in the context of the relationship between Cromwell and Anne Boleyn, showing how religion was used as a tool for reform and as a strategy to maintain the stability of power.

Shagen, E.H. (2003) states that the English Reformation did not move on the basis of (political elites) but involved the manipulation of religion to gain popular approval. Bernard, G.W. (2005) argues that the theme of the Reformation supported the formation of the Catholic Church. Haigh, C. (1993) explains that the English Reformation was "elite engineering" and that religion was politicized for the benefit of the Tudor dynasty. Marshall, P. (2017) discusses how religion and politics were intertwined in the Tudor era, including systematic efforts to make the monarchy the highest authority over the bodies and minds of the people. Warnicke, R.M. (2006) shows how religion was used as an instrument of social and political control, especially in regulating gender and power conflicts. This analysis reinforces the argument that religion in Wolf Hall was used to shape a social structure that benefited the monarchy.

Fitriana (2012) found that religion in Indonesian literature can function as ideological and political power, not only spiritual in religion as a tool for controlling consciousness. Aminah (2014) examined religious values as character builders in Bumi Cinta. Although the context is different, this study confirms that religion can shape the identity and consciousness of characters in the context of Wolf Hall, which has turned into a mechanism of power. Wulansari (2024) shows how Muhammadian values can shape ways of thinking, morality, and obedience. This is relevant to how religion in Wolf Hall internalizes ideology in society. Sulistyono (2022) states that the internalization of religious values has a major influence on moral consciousness and social behavior. This study provides important insights into how religion can function as an ideological tool in the formation of consciousness.

This study uses a theory that can explain the symbolic, ideological, and psychological dimensions of religious power. The main framework comes from Michel Foucault's theory of power and discourse (1977, 1980), which states that power operates not only through coercion, but also through the production of knowledge, discourse, and truth. Power/Knowledge Foucault asserts that religious teachings and institutions not only regulate physical behavior, but also shape "truths" that influence how individuals understand themselves and the world. This framework is essential for interpreting how religion is used for religious purposes.

M. H. Abrams (1999) theory of narrative elements in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Abrams explains that narrative is a story consisting of a series of events contained in the story. The first element is plot, which is the structure of events, including conflict, climax, and resolution. Second, character and characterization describe characters with moral, emotional, and intellectual qualities, which are divided into two methods: showing (through action and dialogue) and telling (direct explanation). Third is setting, which covers place, time, atmosphere, and cultural and social details of the environment. Finally, Point of View is the perspective of the story chosen by the author through the first person, third person, and others, which determines how readers understand the events in the story. All of these elements work together to build the narrative integrity described by Abrams.

Based on relevant theories from Michel Foucault and M. H. Abrams, as well as previous relevant research, this researcher is interested in conducting research entitled "Religion as a political instrument to maintain power in the *wolf hall*." This research focuses on two main research questions, namely (a) What are the indicators of religion as a political tool in Wolf Hall? (b) How is religion as a political tool depicted in the novel Wolf Hall? By combining historical context and ideological theory in narrative elements, this study contributes to the understanding of how religion functions as a discourse of power in literary works. This study also shows how religious ideology shapes political identity, moral consciousness, and mental structures in revealing the psychological mechanisms in the novel Wolf Hall.

This study is expected to enrich literary studies, particularly in the fields of historical fiction and political literature. In addition, this study also provides a theoretical basis for future researchers studying the intersection between religion and ideology. The purpose of this analysis is to examine the role of religion in political power, how religion is used as a tool of political control in the context of Wolf Hall, particularly in relation to religious leaders and their role in maintaining power.

Research Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to describe the role of religion in politics in Hilary Mantel's novel *Wolf Hall* (2009). A qualitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on the interpretation of meaning and ideology. The objects of research in this article are Hilary Mantel's novel *Wolf Hall*, published on April 30, 2009 in the United Kingdom, as well as theories from Michel Foucault (1977, 1980) and M. H. Abrams (1999) that focus on religious power in the mental space of characters. The type of data used in this study is dialogue. This study focuses on several quotations and dialogues that show how religion is used as a political tool. Data collection was conducted by (a) reading the novel *Wolf Hall* several times, to understand the structure and characters of the novel (b) identifying relevant sections, marking or noting parts of the text (dialogue, narration, character descriptions, and political situations) that show the role of religion in maintaining power or influencing the characters' way of thinking (c) collecting supporting data such as books on literary and political theory (Foucault and Abrams), journals or academic articles discussing religion, power, and relevant previous research (d) grouping the data into thematic categories. The data was analyzed using the Credibility model, which relates to the extent to which the research results can be trusted and represent the reality from which they were taken. This study uses text analysis with the Miles and Huberman (1994) approach with an interactive analysis model. The analysis was conducted in three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. With an in depth reading of the dialogue, narrative, and story structure in the novel *Wolf Hall* to ensure the scientific excellence and accountability of the research results.

Result and Discussion

This chapter presents the results of data analysis and discussion based on Michel Foucault's (1977, 1980) theories of power and discourse, as well as narrative elements from M. H. Abrams (1999). The research results are compiled based on two research questions and presented in the form of analysis tables.

Table 1. Indicators of religion as a political tool in *Wolf Hall*.

No	indicators of religion as an instrument of power	Data	Description
1.	Religious Discourse Legitimizes Authority	"Are the Clergy his subjects, or only half his subjects? Should they not be talking an oath to me?" (page. 256) "You Cannot tell people just part of the tale" (page. 255) "We must show the king that scripture supports his cause" (page. 255)	Henry questioned whether the clergy were subjects of the pope or of himself. He demanded that they swear allegiance to the king, not to Rome. Religion was used as a tool to reorient loyalty from the pope to the king. The Bible is use as source of politics to be changed according to political interests.
2.	Religious institutions act as mechanisms of surveillance and discipline	"she was his brother's wife. Their union has offended divine law" (page. 215) "Their marriage broke divine law" (page. 206) "Marriage was invalid in the sight of God" (page. 206)	Henry used the excuse of "breach of divine law" to divorce Catherine, which served to cover up his political motives of producing a male heir and strengthening the stability of the dynasty. Religion in this case served as a moral justification for political needs.
3	Religious knowledge produces moral norms	"The pope is a prince of another county" (page. 411) "Rome has asked them to believe what only children could believe" (page. 410) "Henry give him a title no one has ever held before: Vicegerent in spirituals" (page. 530)	Cromwell called the pope a foreign ruler so that the people would see Rome as a threat to English sovereignty. Because of his position, Cromwell had complete control over religion, replacing the role of the pope. Religion was officially used as a tool for the political interests of the kingdom.
4	Religious discourse regulates body and mind	"They will find it more natural to abbey an English king than a distant Roman bishop" (page. 172)	Cromwell said that loyalty to the Church of England was more "natural" than loyalty to the Pope. Religion was used to build a new national identity.

“The people’s eyes are opened to new truths” (page. 51)
“The word of God spreads” (page. 410)

Table 2. Religion as a political tool depicted in the novel.

No	Narrative Elements	Data	Description	Religion of political tool
1.	Character and Characterization	“Surely they will find it more natural to aboy an English king... For centuries rome has asked them to believe what only children belive” (page. 172) “One king, one law, is God’s ordinance” (page. 410)	Henry questioned whether faith was more subject to the pope or to himself, revealing the struggle for spiritual power as part of state politics and political strategies to exploit religion.	Rejecting papal authority
2.	Plot	“We must show the king that scripture supports his cause” (page. 225) “As the word of God spreads, the people’s eyes are opened to new truths” (page. 172)	Cromwell ordered a reinterpretation of our holy scriptures to suit political interests and reforms as a form of “enlightenment,” creating the impression that religious renewal was God's will..	Religious law is used to justify the annulment of marriages in politics.
3.	Setting	“For centuries Rome has asked them to believe what only children could believe. Surely they will find it more natural to aboy an English king...” (page. 112) “If you wish to see a parade of the seven deadly sins... call without at a monastery” (page. 113)	Catholicism as a childish doctrine and Rome as a national enemy, declaring that religion must be subordinate to the state and monasteries as a political foundation	Rome as a foreign power
4.	Point of view	“The church will yield nothing unless you force its hand” (page. 221) “When kings interpret scripture, the Gospel soon become a charter for their appetites” (page. 68)	Emphasizing that the Roman Church was not a passive spiritual institution, but a political force that would defend its authority. Conflict arose because Henry sought to seize power and conflict between Catholics and the King's power through manipulation of the interpretation of the scriptures.	Forming a new religion for political control

Based on the data listed in Table 1, the indicator of religion as a political tool in the novel Wolf Hall uses Michel Foucault's theory of ideological state apparatus. Every dialogue in the novel shows how religious indicators are used as political tools as part of this study. The first data is Religious Discourse Legitimizes Authority, "Are priests subjects, or

only half subjects? Should they not swear allegiance to me?" (p. 256), "You cannot tell only part of the story" (p. 255) and "We must show the king that scripture supports his cause" (p. 255) explain that Henry VIII questioned this position and demanded that the oath of allegiance to the Pope be transferred to him. This shows an attempt to move religion from Rome to England. In Foucault's theory, the process of redefining truth is explained, whereby religion is reshaped to suit the king's desired politics. Religion became a means of ideological reorientation, so that the people saw the king, not the pope, as their spiritual leader. Second, religious institutions act as mechanisms of surveillance and discipline: "She is his brother's wife. Their marriage violates divine law" (p. 215), "Their marriage violates divine law" (p. 206), and "The marriage is invalid in the eyes of God" (p. 206) illustrate the use of the religious argument "violating God's law" to annul his marriage to Catherine. Here, religion functions as a political decision. Third, Religious knowledge produces moral norms: "The Pope is a prince from another country" (p. 411), "Rome has asked them to believe in things that only children can believe" (p. 410) and "Henry gave him a title no one has ever held before: Vicegerent in spirituals" (p. 530) describe the Pope as a national enemy who threatens England. By creating a common enemy, the Tudor leaders instilled the idea that rejecting Rome meant defending the country. Fourth, religious discourse regulates body and mind: "They would feel more natural obeying an English king than a distant Roman bishop" (p. 172), "The eyes of the people are open to new truths" (p. 51) and "The word of God spreads" (p. 410). This explains the fact that the people are more obedient to religious leaders from their own country, which shows an effort to create a new religious identity for the Church of England as a symbol of nationalism.

Based on the data presented in Table 2. Religion as a political tool depicted in the novel, using M. H. Abrams narrative elements theory, uses story structure, characterization, setting, plot, and point of view to illustrate how religion was used as a political tool by Henry VII and Thomas Cromwell. The first piece of data, characterization, rejects the authority of the pope through the creation of the image of the King as a spiritual leader, "Surely they will find it more natural to obey an English king... For centuries Rome has asked them to believe what only children believe" (p. 172), and "One king, one law, is God's ordinance" (page. 410) explains Cromwell's characterization as a rational figure who shows how the English people are better led spiritually by the king. In this context, religion was used as a tool to manipulate image and authority, as well as to strengthen the king's divine and more legitimate power than that of the pope. The second piece of data, the plot manipulating the scriptures as political legitimization, "We must show the king that scripture supports his cause" (p. 225) and "As the word of God spreads, the people's eyes are opened to new truths" (p. 172) are elements of the plot that show how Cromwell rewrote the religious narrative through a new interpretation of the scriptures for the political interests of Henry VII. The third piece of data is the setting of Rome as a foreign power and the church as a political arena: "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..." (p. 112) and "If you wish to see a parade of the seven deadly sins... call without at a monastery" (p. 113) explain that Rome is positioned as a "foreign power" in religious and political terms. Thus, the setting in the novel emphasizes that religious reform is an effort to build national sovereignty by rejecting the spirituality of the pope. The fourth piece of data relates to the point of view of power through the interpretation of scripture and the power of the Church: "The Church will not surrender unless you force it" (p. 221) and "When kings interpret scripture, the Gospel immediately becomes a guide for their lusts." (p. 68) explains the main conflict in this novel, which involves two figures of power, namely the pope and the king. Mantel describes the Roman Church as an institution that will not surrender its power and reflects the struggle for spiritual and political power. The point of view in this story shows how religion is used as a tool to create a new power structure, namely the Church of England. Bayley (2016) explains that *Wolf Hall* uses narrative strategies to rewrite the history of Tudor power, particularly the relationship between religion and politics.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion that has been carried out, it can be concluded that in Hilary Mantel's novel *Wolf Hall*, religion does not function solely as a spiritual belief, but also as a strategic political tool to maintain and expand power. Using theories from Michel Foucault (1977, 1980) and M. H. Abrams (1999), through dialogue and characterization, it is explained that religion is used to shape public consciousness, regulate behavior, and legitimize the power of King Henry VIII. First, analysis based on Foucault explains that religion is a form of power/knowledge that produces "truth" and controls the mindset of society. Second, analysis using M. H. Abrams narrative elements theory explains how the Church of England was transformed into a tool of the state. Through the characters, setting, plot, and point of view in *Wolf Hall*, religion can be manipulated as a form of subjection to the king's power. Therefore, this study emphasizes that religion in *Wolf Hall* is not only a historical backdrop, but also a complex tool of power found in politics and the psychological characters of the characters.

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