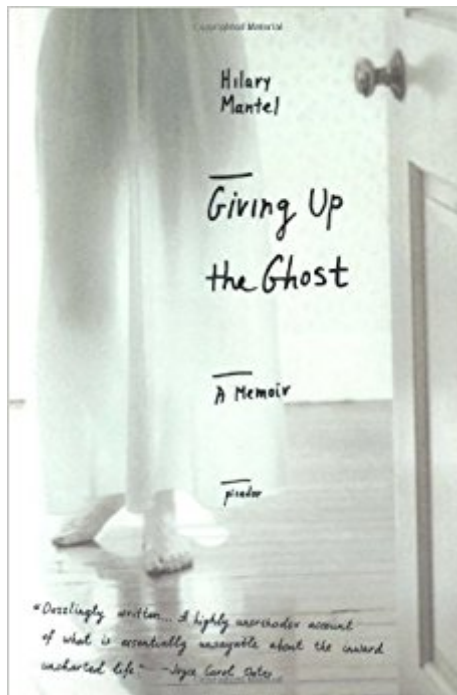




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Giving Up The Ghost : A Memoir (John MacRae Books)



Synopsis

In postwar rural England, Hilary Mantel grew up convinced that the most improbable of accomplishments, including "chivalry, horsemanship, and swordplay," were within her grasp. Once married, however, she acquired a persistent pain that led to destructive drugs and patronizing psychiatry, ending in an ineffective but irrevocable surgery. There would be no children; in herself she found instead one novel, and then another.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As she approaches midlife, Mantel applies her beautiful prose and expansive vocabulary to a somewhat meandering memoir. The English author of eight novels (*The Giant*, *O'Brien*; *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*; etc.) is "writing in order to take charge of the story of my childhood and my childlessness; and in order to locate myself... between the lines where the ghosts of meaning are." Among the book's themes are ghosts and illness, both of which Mantel has much experience with. She expends many pages on her earliest years, and then on medical treatments in her 20s, but skips other decades almost entirely as she brings readers up to the present. At age seven she senses a horrifying creature in the garden, which as a Catholic she concludes is the devil; later, houses she lives in have "minor poltergeists." The first and foremost ghost, though, is the baby she will never have. By 20, Mantel is in constant pain from endometriosis, and at 27, after years of misdiagnosis and botched treatment, she has an operation that ends her fertility. Her pains come

back, she has thyroid problems and drug treatments cause her body to balloon; she describes these ordeals with remarkably wry detachment. Fans of Mantel's critically acclaimed novels may enjoy the memoir as insight into her world. Often, though, all the fine detail that in another work would flesh out a plot-such as embroidery silk "the scarlet shade of the tip of butterflies' wings"-has nowhere to go. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This bleak memoir by a prolific British novelist recounts her upbringing in the North of England in the nineteen-fifties and sixties. Mantel's domineering stepfather has contempt for her intellectual aspirations and for her constant nausea and migraines. When, at college, she takes her symptoms to a doctor, he prescribes antidepressants and sends her on to a psychiatrist, who, in turn, suggests that she give up her studies to work for her mother selling dresses. Finally, at twenty-seven, she is diagnosed with severe endometriosis. Her uterus is removed, and hormone replacements cause extreme weight gain. For most of her life, she has struggled with emaciation, but strangers increasingly assume she is pregnant, now an impossibility. While Mantel's prose shimmers with suppressed anger, the reader might have preferred a story more plainly shaped, and one that gave some sense of the growth of her remarkable imagination. Copyright © 2005 The New Yorker --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

If you're a fan of Hilary Mantel's fiction, then you must read this memoir. It reads like a novel written with the same gifts of wisdom and language that you love in all her writing. I found it fascinating to discover how well she expresses herself while revealing painful and uncomfortable experiences. It reminds me a bit of Frank McCourt's *ANGELA'S ASHES*. All in all, a very good read.

Of course, growing up in post war England at the same time as the author was a bonus. I had to read Mantel's memoir after being totally engrossed in the Cromwell Trilogy (*Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*). I will be the first to buy the third part of her trilogy as soon as it is published. Mantel is a brilliant author, with meticulous research skills, and an incredible intellect that gets inside the mind and thought processes of her characters. History throbs with real life and real people. I have never read any author like her - I was hooked from her first paragraph in *Wolf Hall*. Reading Mantel's memoir, therefore, was a self imposed mandate for me in an attempt to understand how she came to write in her unique and wonderful style. I was not disappointed! Every chapter for me was a gem. She never plays to the gallery. She is pure Mantel from beginning to end. She is the one author I would love to sit down and talk to for hours, preferably in her flat at Budleigh Salterton rather than

her old Norfolk cottage. Since this probably will never happen - reading her memoir was the next best thing. I have nothing but praise and respect for this incredible author who has enriched my life profoundly through her books.

The boom in British memoir writing means, inevitably, that precedents have been established, problems flagged, conversations set in play. Hilary Mantel is smart to these concerns, aware of the intellectual tangles and the technical difficulties involved in inserting herself in an already crowded genre. She muses on the temptation to use charm to make herself lovely and works hard at the problem of how to inhabit the mind of a child as well as an older self without lurching clumsily between the two. She is wise, too, to the expectations of the genre, balking at those points when her life does not quite fit the template (there is an incident, when she is seven, of almost unwritable awfulness, but it has nothing to do with the sexual abuse that Mantel assumes we will, as practised readers, be expecting). Still, none of this knowingness gets in the way of the writing, which is simply astonishing - clear and true. In *Giving Up the Ghost*, Mantel has finally booted out all those shadowy presences that have jostled her all her life, and written the one character whom she feared she never could - herself.

This is a stunning memoir, detailing Mantel's bad luck with the medical world and her struggles. She describes all the characters in her life with vivid detail as she becomes the terrific writer she is today. I was fortunate enough to meet her at two performances of her Thomas Cromwell books in London. She graciously autographed programs for me. As I also write, I just wanted to grab her for a cuppa'. Can't wait for her new collection of short stories due this fall.

Mantel is a wonderful writer, able to illustrate how a very strange, even difficult childhood could produce such a mastery of word and image as she possesses. A precocious child who noticed, thought about and absorbed absolutely everything happening around her. Well worth reading.

If you love Hilary Mantel's writing, you will want to read her memoir. As she opens the psyches of the characters in her novels, she opens the mind of herself as a child and young person. We understand that this artist's perceptions encompass more than the ordinary world most of us inhabit. I was reminded somewhat of the memoir of Karen Armstrong's memoir "The Spiral Staircase" because both of these extraordinary writers struggled with mental health professionals who could not help them. I can't wait for her next novel to be published.

I generally love her books, but didn't particularly like this one. I do like her dark sense of humor and I appreciate that she perhaps needed to write it, but I felt a bit put off and thought it somewhat self-indulgent.

The beauty of the language and the clarity of Hillary's spiritual journey was impressive. Never to be forgotten is the woman's journey and her experience of illness.

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