

Historical Impressions in Paulo Coelho's *The Spy*

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New Historicism approaches history in a way that is more holistic than Old Historicism, but it tries to flatten out the differences in identity negotiation by its constant allusions to power politics contrary to this, the renowned feminist Judith Butler argues that power is not only the monolithic determinant in assessing history, gender can be studied with respect to identity. Alison Conway sees the analysis of literary history and cultural history as mere theoretical exercise if they are not located within contemporary debates and political or other ideological, as against the anecdotal approach of the New Historicist.

The paper takes up the point of view of feminist critics of New Historicism and investigates the history-literature interface in the life of Mata Hari, a spy involved in World War I. In, *The Spy* by Paulo Coelho, the protagonist is Mata Hari. She is a dancer who defiant against the stereotypes of women for her time in order to chase her dream. During World War I, she was foraged by the German officials to act as a spy, since she was having an affair with a man who would become France's minister at the time of war. She resists working as a spy, she argues saying that she is okay with being a Prostitute, rather betraying France. But unfortunately, she was accused and found guilty.

Never fall in love. Love is a poison. Once you fall in love, you will lose control over your life – your heart and mind belongs to someone else. Your existence is threaten. (pg: 63)

Paulo Coelho's life remains the primary source of inspiration for his books. He has flirted with death, escaped madness, dallied with drugs, withstood torture, experimented with magic and alchemy, and studied philosophy and religion, read voraciously, lost and recovered his faith, and experienced the pain and pleasure of love. In searching for his own place in the world, he has discovered answers for the challenges that everyone faces. He believes that, within ourselves, we have the necessary strength to find our own destiny. His 1988 novel, *The Alchemist* has sold more than 65 million copies and has been cited as an inspiration by people as diverse as Mala Yousafzai and Pharrell Williams. Paulo Coelho has sold more than 200 million books worldwide. His work is published in eighty one languages, and he is the most translated living author in the world.

His novel, *The Spy* starts with a detailed account of the execution of Mata Hari on October 15, 1917 in Paris. The preceding chapters are actually letters that are written by Mata Hari to her lawyer during her last weeks of life. It also contains a letter that her lawyer Edward Clunet wrote to her. This novel is based on the facts of Mata Hari's real life, trail and execution. It is a great piece of fiction that focuses on New Historicism. The letters of Mata Hari to Clunet opens, where she tells the story of her life. She explains how she was sexually abused as a sixteen-years old girl by her school principal. It also showed her unsuccessful marital life, where she was tortured and abused by her husband. The marriage soon left her to frustrate and after the birth of her children, she got divorce. To escape from the marital vows, she started taking up dance lessons. She went to Paris and presented herself as a classical dance performer who dances to oriental music. Though her dance included nudity, she believed that nudity was meaningful in the context of dance. She lived the most luxurious life not just because of the earnings she got through dance, but because of the affairs that she had with the men of high social status. She was ready to offer sex to get whatever she wanted. As time flies, she became old and her popularity derogated in France. But then she came in contact with a man named Franz Olav, who promised her for new career and opportunities.

Flowers teach us that nothing is permanent: not their beauty, not even the fact that they will inevitably wilt, because they will still give new seeds. Remember this when you feel joy, pain or sadness. Everything passes, grows old, dies and is reborn. (Pg: 19)

Her career in Germany was only for a short span because, the German soldiers shut down the performance and the person who helped her also joined the army. He was planning to send her to Netherland, a neutral country and also made an offer to her to act as a spy for Germany. But she refused. Olav gave her the number of Karl Kramer, a friend of him who was the member in German council in The Hague, saying that he could help her to return to France, but will also try to recruit her as spy. Mata met Kramer, he tried to recruit her as a spy, but she went to Gorges Landoux, the head of Counterespionage for France. She was under surveillance, for her not being the good citizen of France. Landoux marked her with false charges and convicted her for being an anti-nationalist. She was ordered to be executed.

The last chapter of this novel is a letter written by Clunet, her Lawyer to her. In this letter, he says how much she loves her and tells about his efforts to free Mata from this case. He also mentions that Mata hid many things from him and the more she lied, the more it made his job crucial. At last he ends his letter telling that God will pass judgment on those people who wrongly condemned her death.

Instead of justice there was wickedness, instead of righteousness, there was yet more wickedness...But God will judge them all, both the righteous and wicked, God will judge them both for there is a time for every intention, a time for every deed. (Pg:181)

It is interesting to examine how the life and identities of Mata Hari was negotiated through the Literary aspect, that depicts her as a human being and a person being a part of interesting and dangerous history. Summerfield says, "The women were national heroines but

they shared the identity as victims of war with millions who suffered persecution and displacement in Europe and across the globe. Mata Hari always spoke of her beloved Paris and was grieved to see its condition during war and it was as she says, “the only true north of my life, the only city where I felt like a human being and everything that means.” The fact that she was implicated in betraying France was execration to her. The woman under discussion is a single woman. Women in wartime Europe were not the most free nor most admired. Mata Hari says, “No one trusts a woman alone”. Coelho brings out a picture about how the warring factions could not leave alone a woman whose greatest sin was having a free mind in a war-torn world. Judith Newton suggests that, “Feminist theory allows us to interrogate more badly that we bring to our study of past. The tremendous capabilities and talents of the women, which were not noticed in earlier historical references, have been given a new resonance by feminist theory and in many modern day literary works.

The complicated life of this woman taught that every dream has a price. When one is dared to be different, one should be ready to be attacked. Though they are in a hostile, masculine world, they can find a situation to circumvent this. This novel offers the readers a more human side to the protagonist, Mata Hari, as a victim of domestic abuse and historical circumstances may finally vanquish the historical Slut-shaming of Mata Hari. Many mourned her death. Coelho brings the depth to this novel by combining the fact with fiction. He provided the readers with both emotional states of mind as well as research facts being the modern evidence to suggest her innocence.

If we do not allow ourselves to be frightened, we will always to be frightened, we will always awaken in a palace, if we far the steps that will be required by love and want it to reveal everything to us, the result is that, we will be left with nothing. (Pg: 141)

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