

## Trauma And Memory: Inquisitional Echoes In Philippa Gregory's The Queen's Fool

<sup>1</sup>Nisha T. P,<sup>2</sup> Dr. V. Amutha

<sup>1</sup>Ph. D Research Scholar, Reg. No.: 19213114012021, Department of English and Research Centre, Women's Christian College, Nagercoil- 629 001, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abhishekapatti, Tirunelveli- 627 012, Tamil Nadu, India. Email Id: [nishatp008@gmail.com](mailto:nishatp008@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English and Research Centre, Women's Christian College, Nagercoil- 629 001, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abhishekapatti, Tirunelveli- 627 012, Tamil Nadu, India. Email Id: [ammusleo@yahoo.com](mailto:ammusleo@yahoo.com)

---

Cite this paper as: Nisha T. P, Dr. V. Amutha (2024). Trauma And Memory: Inquisitional Echoes In Philippa Gregory's The Queen's Fool. *Frontiers in Health Informatics*, 13 (5) 852-854

---

### Abstract

Philippa Gregory's *The Queen's Fool* brings a complex narrative environment where history, trauma, and memory converge. Focusing on the protagonist, Hannah Green, the paper analyses how the traumatic memories of the Spanish Inquisition shape her perceptions, decisions, and interactions within England's tumultuous political and religious landscape. The analysis highlights the inquisitional practices and ideologies in the novel, placing the narrative within the larger historical memories of religious persecutions in Spain and England. Through Hannah's masquerading as a Christian fool in the English court, Gregory reimagines the transnational inquisitional trauma and its psychological lasting mark on the survivors. By emphasising Hannah's internal conflicts and her traumatic memories, Gregory's narrative reflects intolerance, forced conversions, and survival.

Key words: Inquisition, Trauma, Memory, Religious persecution, Identity

*The Queen's Fool* (2003) is one of Philippa Gregory's historical novels, part of her Tudor court series. The novel is narrated through the point of view of Hannah Green, a Marrano girl who escaped from Spain to England with her father when her mother was burned at the stake during the Inquisition. With the help of Carpenters, another Marrano family, they open a book shop in London. Robert Dudley and John Dee take her to the court of King Edward VI as a holy fool, on discovering her power to see the future. Becoming their vassal, she is thrown into the life and conspiracies in the English court. Through the novel, Gregory highlights the cyclical nature of religious persecution and its psychological scars in the characters. The novel not only portrays the perilous life of Hannah Greene, who is masquerading as a Christian, but also serves as a meditation on the historical trauma of Jewish people over the centuries.

The novel narrates the brutalities of the Spanish Inquisition through the protagonist and other Jewish characters, which affected their lives profoundly. Inquisition is a judicial procedure established by the papacy to combat heresy. The word inquisition derived from the Latin verb *inquirere*, which means 'inquire into', and the name was applied to commissions in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and subsequently to similar structures in early modern Europe. The inquisitors used torture and violence to make confessions from the heretics. The inquisition started in France in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It continued in different places in Europe during the Middle Ages. The Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions are popular in history for their cruelty in the name of heresy.

The protagonist, Hannah Green, and her family faced the Inquisition in Spain in their early life and later in England, where they sought refuge during Queen Mary I's reign. The memory of the Inquisition in Spain often haunts them, and they live in fear in their refuge land. The persecution, fear, and brutality connected with the Inquisition had a profound impact on the Jewish diaspora. The memory of trauma haunts the victims more than the actual event. The traumatic

events reappear to them through flashbacks, nightmares, and hallucinations. Hannah Green and her father, Oliver Green, witnessed the inquisition in Spain. They left Spain when her “mother was found guilty of being a Jew false Christian, a ‘Marrano’- by the church court” (6) and “burned alive at stake” (7) during the Spanish Inquisition. In England, they secretly follow Jewish customs and prayers, though they seem converted in the reformed country of England. They live in fear of being caught in their refuge land. The ascension of Queen Mary I and her marriage to the Spanish Prince Philip made them more scared of facing another inquisition in England.

The memory of the Inquisition haunts Hannah throughout her life. Her traumatic experiences deeply shadowed her life in England during the Inquisition. Cathy Caruth suggests, “To be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (04). The image and smell of smoke possess Hannah. She often says, “I smell smoke every night in my dreams” (128), a remembrance of her mother’s burning at the stake. This recurrent reminder of the inquisition in the form of smoke foreshadows the dangers on her way. Hannah experiences the smell of smoke during the burnings of the Inquisition somewhere in the country. In the novel, during her journey with Princess Elizabeth, she screams about smoke and fire in a hallucination. The soldier explains that “New laws. Heretics are put to death by burning. They’re burning today in Smithfield” (258). She further smells of “the aromatic scent of dried orange and cloves. It did not take away the stink of burning flesh, nothing would ever free me from that memory” (258). Through the smell of smoke she can hear the “cries of those on the stakes, begging their families to fan the flames and to pile on timber so that they might die the quicker and not linger, smelling their bodies roasting, in a screaming agony of pain” (258-259). The memory of her mother’s death often haunts her mind. It leaves her in terror. She narrates her mother’s death happened “on a Sunday afternoon, part of the promenade, a pious and pleasurable tradition to everyone else” (259). She views the world through the lens of her past traumatic experiences. Her constant fear of exposure and her internalized trauma reflect the generational scars left by the persecution.

Hannah’s father, Oliver Green, reminiscing about Spanish Inquisition days, is much more traumatic than Hannah’s. He says

every Sunday, every saint’s day, they burned heretics, sometimes hundreds at a time. And those of us who had practiced Christianity for years were put on trial alongside those who had hardly pretended to it. And no-one could prove their innocence! Old women who had missed Mass because they were sick, young women who had been seen to look away when they raised the Host, any excuse, any reason you could be informed against. And always, always, it was those who had made money, or those who had advanced in the world and made enemies (TQF 154).

Oliver Green also lost his parents during the inquisition. These memories of personal losses deeply scarred him. This allows him to live in exile from his homeland in fear. Gregory’s use of Hannah’s status as a Christian convert helps to portray the vulnerability of the people who live under religious surveillance. Her dual identity of religion- an outward Christian and inward Jew – shows the secret lives led by many marranos in the Catholic England. This dual identity results from remembering the persecution they faced during the Inquisition.

Gregory’s portrays the inquisition in England during the reign of Queen Mary I. Hannah’s father and others, Marranos, flee from Marian England to escape the Inquisition. Hannah is caught again in the surveillance for religious persecution. She witnesses the brutalities of the inquisition once again. Even pregnant women are not spared from burning in the name of heresy. The queen does not reduce the punishment if the heretics repent. The queen’s council “passed a new law which said that the heretics who repented on the stake had changed his mind too late- he should still be burned to death. Also, anyone who sympathized with his fate would be burned also” (320). During her custodial day, Hannah confronts a woman whose nails had been pulled, arm and leg bones broken, and who had lost her tongue as well in the prison room, which reveals the harsh treatment in the hands of inquisitors. Like her father, she runs for safety after being relieved of the charges against her. The novel delineates the lifelong running of her people, who live with different identities and their unending fear.

Hannah and her father’s testimony about the inquisition draws sympathy from readers through their traumatic

experiences. In his essay “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival,” Dori Laub says, “There is, in each survivor, an imperative to tell and thus to come to know one’s story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself” (78). Their story is revealed occasionally. Hannah’s double role as a holy fool and a hidden Jew in the court places her in a space where she witnesses and interprets the trauma of others, while struggling to process her troubles.

Hannah’s character in the novel functions as a conduit for personal and communal trauma. She has suffered in Spain and England in the name of her community, which is marginalised. Her visions are partially dependent on her psychological disturbances. Her fear of fire and her hypervigilance in the court and the public spaces indicate her post-traumatic response. Gregory’s use of first-person narrative allows the readers to experience the ruptures and fragmentations of Hannah’s mind, blurring the boundaries between the past and the present, memory and hallucination. Her presence in the court, witnessing the pivotal religious and political events, frames her as both victim and observer, which bolsters her dual burden of trauma and testimony.

Through the perspective of Hannah Greene, Gregory not only revisits the brutalities of the Spanish Inquisition, but also criticises the pervasive culture of the religious persecutions in the name of God. Gregory masterfully portrays personal and political trauma, elucidating how memory shapes the identity and historical consciousness of the characters. Through Hannah’s role as a victim and survivor, Gregory reveals the repetitive nature of trauma where the past haunts the present.

## WORKS CITED

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Gregory, Philippa. *The Queen’s Fool*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2003.

Laub, Dori. “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival”. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, edited by Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub, Routledge, 1992, pp.75-92.