



# An Experiment in Love: A Novel

By Hilary Mantel



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### *A New York Times Book Review Notable Book of the Year*

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Hilary Mantel's magnificent novel examines the pressures on women during the early days of contemporary feminism to excel--but not be *too* successful--in England's complex hierarchy of class and status.

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## **An Experiment in Love: A Novel** By Hilary Mantel Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #268296 in Books
- Brand: Mantel, Hilary
- Published on: 2007-06-12
- Released on: 2007-06-12
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.22" h x .74" w x 5.53" l,
- Binding: Paperback
- 256 pages

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

Hilary Mantel's seventh novel examines the pressures on women during the 1960s to excel--but not be *too* successful--in England's complex hierarchy of class and status. Pushed by a domineering mother, Carmel McBain climbs her way through the pecking order and ends up at London University as an acquiescent and undernourished teenager, achieving the status so desired by her mother, but too weak to make use of it or pose a threat to anyone. Though this is Carmel's story, it reflects on a generation of girls desiring the power of men, but fearful of abandoning what is expected and proper.

### From Publishers Weekly

Carmel McBain is a bright Lancashire-Irish child whose mother is fond of telling her, "your father's not just a clerk, you know"-though, in fact, he is. As Carmel grows up, this snobbish tendency metamorphoses into the brutal driving force of the girl's young life. As a teenager, with ambition bullied into her, she alternates between nights spent locked in her room to study and days filled with the "routine sarcasms of nuns." Carmel's move from posh convent to London university is a lonely one; at school, she undergoes a disturbing loss of self-awareness. Between her mother's ruthlessness and the cruelties of the nuns, Carmel's self-worth has been damaged, with near fatal results. Mantel's seventh novel (but only her second to appear here, after *A Place of Greater Safety*, 1993) is a powerful coming-of-age story that meticulously highlights the patterns of self-inflicted cruelty sometimes taught to young women. It perfectly conveys the confusion of one contemporary Catholic girl, and provides a subtly moving take on the mystery of anorexia nervosa. Despite its grim subject, the writing, replete with sharp humor and evocative details of 1960s England, is never self-indulgent. Irony prevails stoutly over sentimentality, while the finale delivers a surprising twist of horror that will shake readers to the core.

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### From Library Journal

Although Mantel is well known and highly praised in England, this is only the second of her seven novels (following *A Place of Greater Safety*, LJ 2/15/93) to be published in the United States. As it begins, middle-aged, affluent suburbanite Carmel McBain sees a photo of her college roommate in the morning paper and flashes back to her first day at university, where she is asked to choose between the other two Holy Redeemer graduates attending her college. She picks Julianna, a popular and pampered girl, over her fellow scholarship student, Karina. Carmel's "experiment in love" is multifaceted. It begins with her mother's desire to change the working-class Catholic girl from Lancaster into a typical English lady--an experiment that both succeeds and fails, as each of Carmel's successes widens the chasm between mother and daughter. The young college women also experiment with love and sex, as members of the first generation to claim the Pill as their birthright, and with sisterhood as they explore the relationship between self-interest and care of their neighbors. The plot is not linear, moving from contemporary times to Carmel's college years and before, but the writing is concise and touching. One is left hoping for a sequel about these intriguing characters.

Recommended for popular collections.

*Debbie Bogenschutz, Cincinnati Technical Coll.*

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