



# TREATMENT OF HISTORY IN HILARY MANTEL'S WOLF HALL

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## ABSTRACT:

The British writer, Hilary Mantel, earns both critical acclaim and bestseller status for her Cromwell trilogy. She is two-time Booker Prize winner for the first two books of this trilogy. This paper highlights the ways in which Mantel handles the historical characters in a lively and interesting manner in her first Booker Prize winning novel *Wolf Hall*.

## FULL PAPER:

Hilary Mantel is Hilary Mary Thompson, born in July 6, 1952 in Hadfield, Derbyshire, England. She has been composing novels for really a long time before her scholarly fame. Her novels showcases her dull mind and complex expertise. She is known especially for her depressingly funny, socially examining books set in an extensive variety of contemporary and historical fiction. The most famous of her all novels, *Wolf Hall* (2009) portrays the growth of Thomas Cromwell, former Lord Great Chamberlain of the United Kingdom. It is praised for its great degree and complex depiction of its characters. It turned out to be a worldwide smash hit and won the Booker Prize. Its sequel, *Bring up the Bodies* (2012), centers all the more barely around Cromwell's part in the defeat of Anne Boleyn, and it too won the prestigious Booker Prize as well as the top honor of the Costa Book Awards. Both of these novels are adopted for stage play by Royal Shakespeare Company in 2013 and it is also made into television miniseries in 2015. In 2020, mantel released her last part of her Trilogy, *The Mirror and the Light*, which accounts Cromwell's tumble from power and his execution. Hilary Mantel had her sad demise on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2022 because of stroke.

Hilary Mantel is viewed as the representative of the Post-World War II English fiction writer. Her twelve novels range from the obscurely creative thrill to historically fictitious work. She is thus, the post-modern novelist. Her books though mirrors the comic components, yet she is a serious writer expressing the ethical vision. Her

books depicts her perspective towards life in a hopeful and in most part in a negative way. Her liking for history and historical events enable her to generate praiseworthy works like *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992), *A Change of Climate* (1994), *An Experiment in Love* (1995), *Beyond Black* (2005) and the Thomas Cromwell series.

*Wolf Hall* firmly follows the true history of Tudor Court. The Tudor reign begin with the King Henry VII, who believes firmly that to maintain the power one must keep a strong allies. So he marries his first son Arthur, to the Spanish princess Katherine of Aragon. Arthur passes just four months after his marriage and the second son, Henry VIII is made the King. Henry VIII is strong-willed to marry Katherine, and for that he gains a special ecclesiastical order which would permit him to wed his sibling's widow. Unfortunately, Katherine fails to give him a son and the only child left for them is Mary Tudor.

*Wolf hall* is set up in the England of 16<sup>th</sup> century. King Henry VIII is trying hard to divorce his wife Katherine and wed Anne Boleyn, but as Catholic Church believes marriage to be long-lasting and permanent, it does not support him for his divorce. Thus, he breaks away from the clutches of Roman Catholic rules and declares himself as the supreme head of the church and the country. He did this with the assistance of his self-determined and skillful minister, Thomas Cromwell, who is the protagonist of this historical novel. *Wolf Hall* begins with his humble, poor life as a child of blacksmith to his prosperity to rise as a lawyer and a legal adviser to the king himself.

Mantel has been evaluated as a hazily fanciful narrator. Her books range from confusing thriller to dark humor and to historical novels. She focuses mainly on family life, seclusion, the idea of time, feminism, religion, the outcome of the political and social framework. In this way she manages a variety of themes throughout her novel.

The *Wolf Hall* begins with the scene of Thomas Cromwell as a child being beaten mercilessly by his father, Walter. The scene makes it clear about father's brutality towards his only son. Everyone sympathize over the future of Cromwell and the thing that it is better for him to leave the house than to tolerate beatings. Thomas, too feel it as the proper solution and leaves the house. In France, he learns three card game and helps the lowlanders, where he learns good and miserable side of life. His only longing is to get enlisted in the military to be an officer: "he walks around the docks saying to people, do you know where there's a war just now?" (Mantel 14). Cromwell from the very young age dreams of achieving a great height.

*Wolf Hall* cherishes, recollection of childhood memories which plays an essential part in the evolution of the characters as well as the plot of the novel. Thomas Cromwell, is seen recalling his sad miserable life, which caused him to leave his house and achieve on his own. *Wolf Hall* also has the description of King Henry VIII thinking of his lost blissful childhood: "I lived at the palace at Eltham, I had a fool called Goose" (Mantel 618). Queen Katherine too recalls her childhood multiple times.

The novel portrays that, people of Tudor court are exceptionally ambition to snatch power, even if it is through their double dealing or through defilement. When King Henry VIII realizes that the church won't give him a divorce, he nullifies the power of the church and declares himself as the supreme head over all the churches. Anne Boleyn with her timid diplomacy, secures the favor of the King and earns high posts for her brothers and father. She also remains strict on the notion that before beginning the relationship, King Henry VIII must legally marry her.

Cromwell is an intellectual man. He is fully aware that men wear mask to hide their own identity. One must be very careful and always find out what people wear under their clothes. That is, one must be careful towards others motifs. Thus, he keeps a close eye on people's defiance and reservations to execute his plans at the right moment. To earn the favor of the king, Cromwell disregards his own principles and satisfies all the cravings of the King. Cromwell knows that Cardinal Wolsey is powerful only till he satisfies King's desire. Wolsey's power and nobility disappears at the King's dismay, which teaches Cromwell that he should have the King's aid to rise in court. As needs be Cromwell is ready to continuously oblige to the King even when he is ethically against to what King is doing. When Henry request the King to prosecute Thomas More for a wrong doing which he didn't carry out; Cromwell shows no opposition. Thus, Cromwell's ambition combined with his important skill assists him to climb to the high position in the King's court.

King Henry VIII is an ardent devotee of Roman Catholic Church. He, thus wants to nullify his marriage with the papal support. He waits for twenty years to get a male heir. If Henry VIII fails to produce a male heir then there is a chance of Civil War. It is because of this that he marries six women; namely Katherine of Aragon, the mother of future Queen Mary I; Anne Boleyn, the mother of Future Queen Elizabeth I; Jane Seymour, the mother of future King Edward VI; Anne of Cleves; Catherine Howard and Catherine Parr.

Marriage, thus plays a major role in *Wolf Hall* as the story revolve around the dissolution of one marriage and legitimization of another marriage of Henry VIII. Katherine who doesn't want to divorce the King, plays all her cards till Cromwell persuades her advantages saying that, her daughter Mary will be made the Princess and she will get a decent sum of wealth for her living.

Anne Boleyn who the King needs to marry, likewise is been anxious to become the Queen of England, which is impossible unless she legally marry the King. She feels the vulnerability and uneasiness about her marriage. As their secret marriage is fixed, there fosters another problem, one Harry Percy claims that he has covertly married Anne and she is his lawful wedded wife and the King can't marry her. It is Cromwell again who decides to dispose of this case. In a public gathering where King needs to get the public consent to his marriage, a nun, Elizabeth Barton, shows up and predicts the destruction of the Kingdom if he marries Anne. Anne at this time keep a close watch on the individuals who support her and individual who go against the marriage. The people assisting their marriage were heavily rewarded and the rivals where tormented after she legally became the Queen.

In the beginning of the novel, the castle of Cardinal Wolsey is being vacated and he is being ordered to return back the great seal of England, which is his power of authority. He is shifted to Tower, which is a place of torment. This embarrassment of Wolsey gives Thomas Cromwell a tricky idea of revenge. He, thus intentionally draws near to the King so that he can do the things all the more without any problem. He sends Cardinal Wolsey to north and instead of going with him, he sends Rafe and Richard to accompany Wolsey. Meanwhile he is working to become more close to the King. Cromwell plots vengeance against all who are responsible for Wolsey's condition. Among them he needs to diminish the significance of Stephen Gardiner, Henry Norris, Harry Percy, Duke of Norfolk and Duke of Suffolk and some others. At a certain point of time, after becoming the counselor of the King, he puts before the House of Commons a bill to suspend the money to be deposited to Rome. This is a plan of Cromwell to show the King, his true supporters. Thus, King finds out who all are for him and who all are against him. He does it cunningly. At this point he forces to desert the Stephen Gardiner from his house in the name of Anne Boleyn. He thus, outsmart every individual in plotting revenge. He works cunningly like a wolf. King Henry has praised him saying that he is as clever as a bag of serpents.

The theme of childhood, ambition, religion, marriage etc. in *Wolf Hall* leads to a major theme, transformation. The protagonist, Thomas Cromwell, a son of Blacksmith transforms into a strong and powerful man. He elopes at the age of nine to escape his father's beating and comes back only twelve years later with a wife, Liz. He gets an opportunity to work with Cardinal Wolsey which paves him a way to become close to king and he with his talent emerges as a Counselor to the King, then becomes a keeper to the jewel house. He later replaces Stephan Gardinar and becomes a master Secretary. Then, becomes King's deputy in church affairs too. *Wolf hall* thus, is the story of transformation of Cromwell, which Hilary mantel showcase in an amazing and trustworthy way.

Hilary Mantel is noted for her thematic diversity:

Diversity of theme is the main characteristic of novels of Hilary mantel. There is no one connection in Hilary Mantel's two novels, in respect of theme. Even the sequel of Thomas Cromwell's trilogy novels has different themes *Wolf Hall* deals with rise of Thomas Cromwell from a son of a poor blacksmith to King Henry's right hand. The sequel of this novel *Bring Up The Bodies* is about beheading of Anne Boleyn and Cromwell's avenge on his enemies. (Deokar 18)

She has uniqueness and writes each novel with the unique theme.

Hilary Mantel makes clear her 'novelistic vision'. She states life itself is unstable and so we are. If one tried to be stable then he or she would be finished. Therefore, Hilary mantel hates monotonousness in writing and wants choice. (Deokar 201)

The theme of *Wolf Hall* is vastly distinct. When Thomas Cromwell and Thurston, his cook, discuss Cardinal Wolsey and Norfolk, they discuss the historical concept that "man is wolf to man". This is the central theme of

this novel. The main characters in this novel are trying their hardest to stay in power in the English court by any means necessary. Man has transformed into a wolf in this circumstance.

Although *Wolf Hall* is a historical novel, as a piece of fiction it offers a relatively accurate insight into the lives of people living in the Tudor period. Through this novel Hilary Mantel paints a picture of people in Tudor England. She does not provide a historical factual record that fits stereotypes; but also describes how English people used to think and act during that time. During this time, aristocrats, kings, queens, and even priest has a tendency to say that man is wolf to man. Characters and incidents in the current novel demonstrate the same trend. The saying, man is a wolf to man means, the man acts like a wolf towards another man for his own benefits. King Henry wants to marry Anne Boleyn and divorce his first wife in order to produce a male heir. Yet, Pope of Rome doesn't permit him to do as such. The idea of a male heir is the King's obsession. He captures Cardinal Wolsey and imprisons him for treason, where he dies. By punishing Cardinal Wolsey, the King hope to instruct the Pope. Thomas More, who disagree with the King's status as head of the Church of England, and he too is beheaded by him. King Henry thus, transforms into a wolf and kills his enemies to fulfill his wish. Anne Boleyn needs to wed King Henry and she too becomes like wolf and is ready to kill anyone who gets in the way of her in becoming the Queen of England. The theme of man is wolf to man oozes throughout the novel revealing the Tudor's tendency.

The characters portrayed by Hilary Mantel have not been depicted in historical context. She has however reinvented them. She has shown the readers what goes on inside these characters' heads. The phrase "man is wolf to man" serves as the novel's overarching historical theme. The main characters in the novel use both good and foul tactics to gain or maintain power in English court. The current novel has a very straightforward plot, in order to make it easier for readers to comprehend the serious historical novel and keep them interested in reading. *Wolf Hall* thus is definitely a work that bought fame and recognition to our late writer Hilary Mantel.

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