



THOMAS CROMWELL'S CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT BY HILARY MANTEL: CHILDHOOD AND MARRIAGE

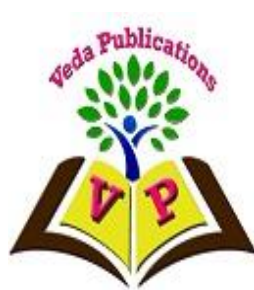
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ABSTRACT



"In fiction writing, character development is the process of building a unique, three-dimensional character with depth, personality, and clear motivations. Character development can also refer to the changes a character undergoes over the course of a story as a result of their actions and experiences." (masterclass.com) It is defined as, "The portrayal of people in a work of fiction in such a way that the reader or audience seems to learn more about them as they develop." (Collins Dictionary)

As the definition suggests, the paper renders the novel in terms of the developments of the central character and looks at his character in relation with childhood and marriage. The novel starts out with the central character Thomas Cromwell in his early teens or even younger, and goes onto the various stages of his life until he is a full-blown adult, ready to take on life and understands it as he perceives it. *The Wolf Hall* along with two other successive novels, notes Thomas Cromwell's life in parts and in this present paper we concentrate on *The Wolf Hall* as a novel with above mentioned characteristics.

Keywords: *Character, Childhood, Development, Personality, Psychological, Moral, Novel, Trilogy, Thomas Cromwell, Wolf Hall.*

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Hilary Mantel was born on 6 July 1952, at Hadfield, Derbyshire, England. She was born into a working class Roman Catholic family, the eldest child of Margaret (née Foster) and Henry Thompson and later she took her de facto stepfather's surname legally. She studied law at The London School of Economics and Sheffield University and worked as a social worker. She was married to Gerald McEwen, a geologist in 1973 and moved to Botswana for five years and then to Saudi Arabia for four years and returned to Britain in the mid 80's. Her Novels include *Every Day is Mother's Day* (1985), *Vacant Possession* (1986), *Eight Months on the Ghazza Street* (1988), *Fludd* (1989), *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992), and many other short stories, memoirs and articles along with the Thomas Cromwell Trilogy, *Wolf Hall* (2009), *Bring up the Bodies* (2012), and *The Mirror and the Light* (2020). She was awarded the Booker Prize twice for the novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* and longlisted for her work *The Mirror and the Light* and many other for the other novels.

The Present Novel "*Wolf Hall*" begins as the central character named Thomas Cromwell was being beaten up very insensitively by his father. Hillary Mantel chooses to open the novel with a bloody scene, it reads,

"So now get up.' Felled, dazed, silent, he has fallen; knocked full length on the cobbles of the yard...Blood from the gash on his head – which was his father's first effort – is trickling across his face." (3)

Thomas Cromwell almost becomes unconscious and was terrified thinking it's his last day. He decides to stop provoking him as that might make the situation bitter. Thomas Cromwell's pathetic situation as a child is clearly mentioned here in the beginning itself, which helps us to get an idea that the story continues to dwell on such scenarios. Even being a helpless and depressed kid, Thomas Cromwell rises with strength and hope and we see him as a minister in the King's court. However, later in the story, he appears before his sister Kat with all those wounds. His sisters have been the only relief to him and they were free from their father's hands

after getting married. She clearly understands that it's the work of his father. She was very worried and out of her mind at the sight but recovers quickly to nurse him and gets him food. As she remembers her cruel father, she explains it to her husband, Morgan Williams. She Shouts,

"Listen, Morgan, shall I tell you about my father? He'll pick up whatever's to hand. Which is sometimes a bottle, true. I've seen him do it to my mother. Even our little Bet, I've seen him hit her over the head. Also, I've not seen him do it, which was worse, and that was because it was me about to be felled." (6)

As we saw above, the story continues as Thomas Cromwell, Kat and her husband discuss on various things starting from their father. Here, we understand how Walter, Thomas Cromwell's father, uses force on his own child out of foolishness, as he himself lacks control. Here, we see why parents use a rod on their children.

"In most cases, parents are forced to take the rod out of desperation. When all other methods of disciplining or reasoning fail to work, parents use force." (Mrunal)

Suddenly, Thomas Cromwell appears before us as a forty-year-old man conversing with Stephen Gardiner, a confidential secretary to Cardinal Wolsey. Cardinal Wolsey is the Archbishop of York and an advisor to the King, Henry VIII and we understand that Cromwell works under him and was returning to him as he was away for two weeks on a work given by Wolsey.

Hilary Mantel introduces Cromwell as a man of valour, knowledge, versatile and hardworking, who is able to achieve anything that's on his way; here, the author might have forecasted and given the readers an idea about Cromwell's future and his growing years. She marks,

"Thomas Cromwell is now a little over forty years old...Various expressions are available to his face, one is readable: an expression of stifled amusement...It is said he knows by



heart the entire New Testament in Latin, and so as a servant of the cardinal is apt – ready with a text if abbots flounder...He can draft a contract, train a falcon, draw a map, stop a street fight, furnish a house and fix a jury. He will quote you a nice point in the old authors from Pluto to Plautus and back again...He'll take a bet on anything." (31)

We are now introduced to Cromwell's wife named Lizzie and we also learn about their son named Gregory Cromwell, who is becoming thirteen (36). She waits for him and welcomes him as he returned from his work and hands him over the books; they converse about their child, books and Cromwell suggests her to read Tyndale's New Testament where we see Cromwell somehow adored the Luther's reforms, which Thomas More and the King rejected. He questions his wife asking, "Show me where it says in the Bible, 'Purgatory'. Show me where it says relics, monks, nuns. Show me where it says 'Pope'." (39)

Thomas Cromwell, being alone and suffering his whole life, took good care of his wife as projected by the author, Hilary Mantel and discussed with her all the issues of his life and during this, the author reveals to us an insight into Thomas Cromwell's wedding with Lizzie. He admired her father, old Wykys, whom he met for a legal matter probably, at twenty-six or twenty-seven, who had made a good fortune in a wool trade. Thomas Cromwell's thoughts reveal that he's a man of business as he always wanted a wife with good fortune and city contacts, which will ultimately help him grow financially and in Power. On the other hand, Lizzie was a widow and wanted to marry as she wanted children. We see that Old Wykys introduces each other and by revealing the thoughts of marriage to both of them and kindles a conversation between them as below,

"'You want a new husband. Will he do?' She stood up and looked him up and down. 'Well, Father. You didn't pick him for his looks.' To him, her eyebrows raised, she said, 'Do you *want* a wife?'" (43)

So, this happened and they both were married in weeks, had Gregory in a year. As he saw him, he remembered his own childhood and the way his father treated him and he promised the child that he'll take care of him tenderly unlike his father and he questions and quotes, "For what's the point in breeding children, if each generation does not improve on what went before." (44)

Thomas Cromwell then appears with Cardinal Wolsey, who was about to be exalted from the palace to Esher, his country refuge, as he didn't get passed, the annulment of King's marriage with Katherine. They started to take everything from him, and he refused to hand over the Great Seal of England as Thomas Cromwell. His lawyer had suggested him that he can let go of the Seal only after he gets a written letter from the king. Hilary Mantel reveals to us a lot about the character and development of Thomas Cromwell through Cardinal Wolsey. Cardinal expresses,

"My servant Cromwell, for instance – his youth was secluded, spent almost entirely in fasting prayers and study of the churchman fathers. That's why he's so wild now a days."

Thomas Cromwell has been a trusted servant to Wolsey and planned to go with him for the voyage across the narrow sea. It is also noted that, Thomas Cromwell has also been an admirer of Katherine and he remarks, "What a woman she is,". So, here we can understand that Thomas Cromwell has been a loyal servant to Wolsey and he believed and worked for Cardinal Wolsey's ideas and thoughts. So, he has been sent to Esher along with Wolsey, he went with him but at last, he decided to stay back in the palace under the king. He expresses that to his wife, Liz, as below, 'Liz, I'm not going,' he says. I'm not going with Wolsey."

Thomas changes his mind immediately, thinking to stay and by here, we're not sure about the reason for his decision. Towards the middle, we can clearly understand how intelligently manipulative his thoughts are. Here, even Hilary Mantel sided with Thomas Cromwell; she revealed all his characteristics while developing his character in the trilogy.



We can also see that, Mantel notes about the sweating sickness, in London during the time of Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell, which made many people leave the city and suffer from headaches and pains in their limbs because of which Thomas Cromwell got effected a lot, as Liz and their daughters lost their lives with the sweating sickness.

Hillary Mantel clearly expresses from the people that Cromwell is a man of genius who knew the whole New Testament by heart, he's always there to defend God or to stand in the argument, he can clearly convince people about their rents, or take up and untangle a case that has not been solved from generations. He can also make someone to marry him. Here, Mantel clearly refers to his marriage with Liz as she was reluctant to marry at all before, but she agreed to marry Cromwell and undoubtedly, that's his doing. She also refers to his manner, which is gentle and easy with animals, women and with anyone as he can just make anyone agree on anything. She then states, "Nobody can out-talk him, if he wants to talk." Thinking of all his abilities, he believes that he will be rich in one or two years from then, and in a conversation with his wife, Liz, Thomas Cromwell himself remembers and expresses that he is at least lucky, if not rich. "He thinks, I may not be rich yet but I am lucky." (92)

As a grown-up Individual, Thomas Cromwell remembers his sisters and father, writes to his brother-in-law, Morgan Williams, that he'll be coming home and he doesn't want his father to know about it, which clearly makes the reader understand that his father is still alive and also, he was a changed man unlike before as he has given up drinking. We see that, Cromwell's sisters persuaded him to come back to Putney from a long time but he waited to go there until he got married and has children. He had been to Putney and his father recognises him and asks him about his profession and calls him a foreigner, to which Thomas Cromwell adamantly accepts. Walter clearly mentions to Cromwell that, it is because of lawyers, he had lost all his provisions, where Cromwell thinks about the Lordship, and expresses,

"If you get to be a Lord by fighting, shouting, being bigger, better, bolder, and more

shameless than the next man, Walter should be a Lord." (111)

Even Thomas Cromwell has a clear idea about everything like Power, Lordship, Money, and how they demean a person. We see in the coming events that he'll be running after them, and that's how, these things will chase and grab a human soul and thoughts. Cromwell then in a conversation with his father, reveals to him about his marriage and his children, where, William asks him about his wife referring to her as a 'rich widow' and he clearly expresses his mind saying, Cromwell might have thought he was dead and also gives us an idea about his son, Thomas Cromwell, he remarks, "Lawyer, is it? You were always a talker. A slap in the mouth couldn't cure it." (112)

We also see another character here, named Uncle John, to whom Thomas Cromwell used to go and eat as the chances of having food for him is better at his uncle's than at his dad's which his dad, William makes him remember. Thomas Cromwell remembers his uncle's household where, he remembers about the children, household officers and his uncle preparing for the dinner. He mentions,

"Other children than he made themselves useful in the kitchen by fetching and carrying, their small fingers being employed in plucking songbirds and hulling strawberries. Each dinner time the household officers formed up in procession, in passages off the kitchens, and they carried in the tablecloths and the principal salt. His uncle John measured the loaves and if they were not just right, they were tossed into a basket for the lower household." (113)

Here, we see that, Thomas Cromwell admired his uncle John as he used to be a deputy under him and has learned how to separate the not right loaves from the right ones. He clearly remembers his childhood and we see, he was influenced by his uncle rather than his father as he leaves Putney for Lambeth, when his father expresses that, he is sick of the sight of Thomas Cromwell but when his uncle



John says there's work, he used to come back to Putney. This clearly shows how he followed his uncle, as he has been the person for his care and affection along with his sisters, and he also had seen other children like him who were put to work by his uncle as he did not encourage an idle mind.

He also gives us an idea about his stepmother's; there are many who last for a short time with his father. Thomas Cromwell marks that, he never knew about these things but his sisters Kat and Bet had told him and whenever he comes in dirty and wet clothes, they ask about his whereabouts and try to kick him out into the yard. As much as we know about his childhood, the sympathy grows in the reader and thus, Hilary Mantel's point of view has been clearly sided with the main character, Thomas Cromwell.

As we saw in the above lines, Thomas Cromwell, being a lonely, suffering child, (Baron), who has been ill treated by his own father has endured, been strong and committed to his development as a person, being influenced by his sisters and uncle, to becoming a lawyer and a trusted minister and servant under Wolsey. He also had a wonderful family life with his wife Liz, and their children, who had given him a hope for life which did not last for long. Hilary Mantel has successfully developed Thomas Cromwell's Character from an optimistic point of view unlike other authors in relation with his childhood and marriage in the beginning chapters of Wolf Hall.

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