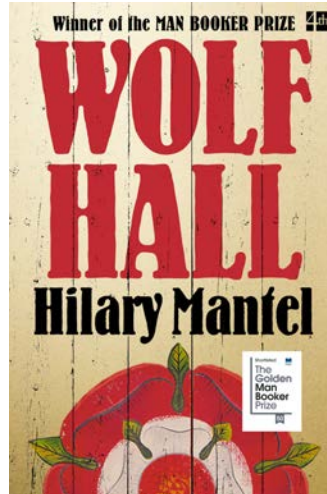


THE WALTER
SCOTT PRIZE
FOR HISTORICAL
FICTION **10**YEARS



Readers' Guides



2010 Winner

Wolf Hall

Hilary Mantel

Fourth Estate

About the author

Hilary Mantel is the two-time winner of the Man Booker Prize for her best-selling novels, *Wolf Hall*, and its sequel, *Bring Up the Bodies*. *Wolf Hall* has been translated into 36 languages, *Bring Up the Bodies* into 31 languages, and sales for both books have reached over 5

million copies worldwide. She is the author of fourteen books, including *A Place of Greater Safety*, *Beyond Black*, and the memoir *Giving Up the Ghost*. In 2014 she was appointed DBE. The final part in the trilogy *The Mirror and Light* will be published in March 2020.

About the book

Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* tells the story of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, of the execution of Thomas More and the English Reformation, all from a new vantage point—through the eyes of the man traditionally considered its villain. For centuries Thomas Cromwell has been

widely regarded as the unprincipled and power-hungry opportunist whose influence on Henry VIII contributed to the worst excesses of Tudor England. But Mantel gives Cromwell a chance to tell his side of the story, from his humble beginnings at the hands of a drunk and abusive father, to his unprecedented rise, becoming the closest advisor to Henry VIII.

As Reformation spreads on the Continent, Henry suddenly finds himself at odds with the Catholic Church he had once so vigorously defended. Henry is without a male heir, and, the Tudor line imperiled, has pressed his advisor Cardinal Wolsey to lobby the Pope for an annulment of his twenty-year marriage. Wolsey's failure and subsequent downfall suddenly places Cromwell in a unique position of influence with the king. As Cromwell rises in Henry's esteem, he begins to turn Henry away from the idea of annulment in favor of a more radical solution—a complete break with Rome. But accomplishing such a task is a daunting political feat, and while Henry and Anne Boleyn both wait impatiently to bring about a legal union, Cromwell must plot against his enemies and prepare the country for a fundamental transformation in religious identity.

What the judges thought

"For once, you can believe the hype. This is as good as the historical novel gets – immersive, constantly engaging, beautifully crafted, and compulsively readable. Choose any superlative: it will fail this book. Mantel's empathy for, and assimilation of, her world is so seamless and effortless as to be almost disturbing. Each book on the shortlist is deserving of the prize, but *Wolf Hall* was for us the outright winner, in a class of its own."

Discussion Questions

What is the significance of Mantel's "occult" history of Britain? How might these legendary traditions have influenced Henry in choosing to marry Anne Boleyn? What role does legend play in the perpetuation of a monarchy?

Why was Cromwell so attached to Cardinal Wolsey? Was Wolsey more of a mentor or a father-figure for Cromwell?

What do love and loyalty mean for Cromwell?

Why is it meant as an insult when Norfolk calls Cromwell a "person?" What is it about Cromwell that frustrates members of the nobility so much? Why were Wolsey and Henry able to appreciate Cromwell's talents when everyone else merely saw him as an impudent schemer?

What is it that makes Cromwell resolve to be gentle and mild with his children? What gave him the will and the confidence to become a different man than his father?

What kind of a character is Thomas More in this novel? Does he come off as sympathetic in any way? Why does More choose to die rather than accept breaking away from the Catholic Church? Would Cromwell be willing to die for his beliefs?

What is the significance to Cromwell of seeing the woman burned at the stake as a child? How could an event such as this have influenced Cromwell in his later attitudes towards Reformation? Does Cromwell have any specific religious convictions? Or is he more driven by convictions of common decency and personal loyalty?

What kind of a king is Henry VIII in this novel? What motivates him? Are his preoccupations solely self-interested, or does he have the good of the country in mind as well? What is it that makes him so susceptible to Anne Boleyn's seductions?

In conjuring Cromwell on the page, what does Mantel create, and what does she re-create from this historical record? Along those lines, how does historical fiction influence the way we look at history?

What is it that makes Cromwell so driven? Does his ambition stem from a desire to do good, or is it just a survival instinct based on his past? How is Cromwell both personally ambitious and yet generous and unselfish?

Is Cromwell attempting to realize any particular political vision for the country, or is he just reacting to the situation at hand? Does he strive to bring about a more egalitarian society, or is it more a matter of being unconsciously influenced by his experiences as a commoner?

What is the significance of Guido Camillo's "memory machine?" Why is Cromwell interested in it? Does he see it as some sort of potential weapon, or is he driven by a desire for knowledge?

Is there something tragic about the fate of Elizabeth Barton the prophetess? Was she merely deceived by the monks, or was there something cynical about her? Did it seem that she ever believed in her visions? If she had not been exploited for political gain, might she have made a genuine contribution to spiritual life at the time? Or was she simply a fraud?

What is the source of Cromwell's antipathy for More? What is it about More that outrages him? Is there something personal in it for Cromwell, or does More simply represent a particular type of

villainy to him? Later in the novel we see Cromwell come to the realization that his home now is either where there's business to be done, or with the king. How is this a personal transformation for him, considering what life was like when his wife and daughters were alive? In the lively Austin Friars, full of extended family and wards and guests, Cromwell seemed the consummate family man. Why did he change? Is there something sad about this change in him?

Did Cromwell truly want to spare More from being executed? Did he do everything he could to save him? What made More so inflexible? Was it related to his desire to always live life in the public eye?

As the novel ends and Cromwell is at the height of his power, is there anything in his actions that foreshadow his later downfall? Has he become too much like Wolsey? Would the mercurial Henry VIII have been likely sooner or later to turn on Cromwell anyway?

(Questions supplied by publisher)

Further resources

The World of Wolf Hall: A Reading guide to Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* - available free in bookshops and online