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"Beneath every history, another history:" History, Memory, and Nation in Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

“Beneath every history, another history:” History, Memory, and Nation in
Hilary Mantel’s *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

In the years since I began this degree, Hilary Mantel has risen from obscurity to ubiquity. The many years she has toiled away as author, reviewer, and journalist have left behind an impressive collection of novels, short stories, countless reviews, sharp-witted critiques on her society, and a memoir. In each piece of her writing, Mantel makes one thing clear: she is a political animal. In *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Hilary Mantel uses historical fiction to call for a new perspective not only on the saintly Thomas More as a flawed, tragic hero, but also on Anne Boleyn as a tragic scapegoat, while at the same time laying the foundation for seeing Cromwell's fall as that of another tragic hero, the victim of a nation that slips back into Medieval attitudes and practices, mirroring Mantel's critique of her own nation's similar slip into archaic attitudes and practices.

Because of Mantel's use of myth in these two novels, I begin with an examination of magic and myth in the British context, relying heavily on the work of Keith Thomas. In order to understand the nature of history and its interaction with historical fiction, I explore how history has evolved from occupying the genre of literature to becoming a social *science* then, following the arguments of Hayden White, becoming once again a close cousin of literature because of its narrative structure. After establishing the original framework for historical fiction first set out by Georg Lukács, I then go on to explore more recent analyses of historical fiction, including Ann Rigney and Mantel herself. In order to better understand how early Tudor England can be considered a nation, I examine the different approaches—from Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm to Liah Greenfeld and Philip S. Gorski—to what a nation is and the history of how the idea of nation has evolved.

Moving on from the theoretical framework, I focus on the major tragic characters of Mantel's Cromwell novels: Sir Thomas More, Anne Boleyn, and Thomas Cromwell. Because of Mantel's frequent use of ekphrasis, I deem it necessary to discuss some of the key portraits featured within the pages of her novels. Distinguishing Anne Boleyn from More and Cromwell is the absence of a verifiable portrait of her image.

My research will contribute to the relatively small amount of critical scholarship—a recent search of MLA International Bibliography (29 Oct. 2014) produces nineteen entries for Mantel but, for example, three hundred and sixty for Ian McEwan—performed on the work of an author clearly, as indicated by her back-to-back Man Booker Prize wins for the novels in this study, receiving critical praise from well-established reviewers.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures and Illustrations.....	viii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Theory.....	14
2.1 Mantel’s Magical, Mythical England	16
2.1.1 Magic: Prophecy as a Political Tool.....	20
2.1.2 Magic: Politically Motivated Accusations of Witchcraft.....	23
2.1.3 Mythical England: “an undercurrent of feelings shared by many people”.....	26
2.2 Academic History, Public History, Fictional History.....	32
2.3 Nation and Nationalism.....	41
2.3.1 Nationalism: Fundamentals.....	44
2.3.2 Primordialists, Perennialists, and Neo-Perennialists.....	45
2.3.3 Biblical Nationalism.....	50
2.3.4 Gorski’s “Outline of a Postmodern Theory of Nationalism.....	57
2.4 Historical Fiction.....	60
2.4.1 Lukács and the “mediocre, average English gentleman”.....	62
2.4.2 Late-twentieth- and Early-twenty-first-century interventions.....	64
2.4.3 Ann Rigney: Historical Fiction and Cultural Memory.....	72
2.4.4 Mantel on Historical Fiction.....	78
2.5 Conclusion.....	81
Chapter Three: Sir Thomas More, National Hero.....	87
3.1 More’s Family Portrait.....	89
3.2 More’s Ambition.....	95
3.2.1 <i>Utopia</i> as Ambition’s Tool.....	97
3.2.2 Self-fashioning.....	101
3.3 More’s Pride.....	105
3.4 More’s Cruelty.....	116
3.4.1 Torture.....	117
3.4.2 Ridicule.....	121
3.5 Conclusion.....	123

Chapter Four: Thomas Cromwell, Renaissance Man.....	129
4.1 Holbein’s <i>The Ambassadors</i>	133
4.2 Cromwell’s Ambition.....	145
4.3 Cromwell’s Pride.....	150
4.3.1 Pride in His Family and Position.....	152
4.3.2 Attacks and Vengeance.....	156
4.3.2.1 Revenge Against Priests.....	160
4.3.2.2 Revenge Against More.....	165
4.3.2.3 Revenge Against Four Courtiers.....	170
4.4 Cromwell’s Generosity.....	178
4.1 Cromwell’s Generosity to the Poor.....	183
4.2 Cromwell’s Generosity to Women.....	186
4.5 Conclusion.....	189
Chapter Five: Anne Boleyn, National Matriarch.....	195
5.1 The Anne Boleyn Portrait.....	198
5.2 Ambition.....	202
5.2.1 Strategist.....	204
5.2.2 Religious Reformist.....	218
5.3 Losing Henry’s Trust.....	225
5.4 Myths of Female Sinfulness.....	229
5.4.1 Anne Boleyn and the Myth of Jezebel.....	231
5.4.2 Anne Boleyn and the Myth of Albina.....	235
5.4.3 Anne Boleyn and the Myth of the Witch.....	243
5.5 National Matriarch.....	251
5.6 Conclusion.....	258
Chapter Six: Conclusion.....	264
Works Cited.....	269

List of Figures and Illustrations

Fig. 1. Hans Holbein, The Younger, Study for the <i>Family Portrait of Sir Thomas More</i> , Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland.....	90
Fig. 2. Roland Lockey, <i>The Family of Sir Thomas More</i> (after Hans Holbein, the Younger), <i>National Trust Collections</i> . Great Britain.....	91
Fig. 3. Hans Holbein, <i>The Ambassadors</i> , National Gallery, London, Great Britain.....	133
Fig. 4. <i>Anne Boleyn</i> , The National Portrait Gallery, London, Great Britain.....	198
Fig. 5. Hans Holbein, <i>Portrait of a Woman</i> , Royal Collection, Windsor, Great Britain...	199
Fig. 6. <i>The Chequers ring</i> , Collection of Chequers Court, Chequers Trust, Buckinghamshire, Great Britain.....	200

Chapter One: Introduction

In 2005, the oeuvre of Hilary Mantel was, according to Diana Wallace, “relatively neglected” (211) due to her inability to fit into “either mainstream or feminist’s accounts of fiction in immediately obvious ways” (211). That same year, Mantel released a new novel, *Beyond Black* (2005), a narrative about a spiritual medium who was the product of an abusive home and the reluctant confidante of ghosts—both benign and malignant. *The New Yorker*’s Joan Acocella rated it “her finest” in a line of novels that have “jump[ed] from genre to genre” (Mantel, Acocella), including the historical fiction genre: *Fludd* (1989), *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992), and *The Giant O’Brien* (1998). By the end of the article, Acocella pins down the constant theme in Mantel’s novels: “Mantel is a master of ugliness in general. It is the engine of her satire on a world awash in fake respectability, fake cheer—a world of ‘closure’ and ‘cycles of caring,’ of death as a cozy new job” (Acocella).

By the time I first read *Wolf Hall* in 2010, the tide of neglect of Mantel’s work had turned in earnest; her 2009 Man Booker Prize for *Wolf Hall* had brought critical attention to her work. My binder devoted to all things Mantel grew from being chiefly essays and reviews she had consistently written—for publications such as the *London Review of Books*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *The Guardian*—to being predominantly interviews and reviews written about her. By the time she had made history as the first British author and the first female author to win two, back-to-back Booker Prizes, she had become, in the words of the chairman of the 2012 Booker “‘the greatest modern English prose writer’ working today” (Stothard qtd. in Brown, “Hilary Mantel wins”). She has also become, to some, a pariah for outspokenness on how women of royalty are treated in the media and how her active imagination turns her political views into provocative stories. In a lecture at the British Museum in February 2013, Mantel criticized how avid royal watchers and the tabloids they purchase pursue a dangerous objectification of royal

women, first begun with Anne Boleyn and seen more recently with Princess Diana and the Duchess of Cambridge (Mantel, “Royal Bodies” and Freeman). More recently, she has caused a media furore over the titular short story in her latest collection: *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher*.

Recent interviews and profiles have fleshed out Mantel’s path from obscure, health-challenged, social worker to the exemplar British author while writing book after book filled with “ugliness in general” but in such a compelling style that she began to win awards for her work¹. A.S. Byatt, in her 2000 collection of essays, ranks her alongside Pat Barker, another Booker winner: “the power of Mantel and Barker’s third person narrations has something to do with the knowledgeable narrators they take from George Eliot.... Barker and Mantel tell us what we can’t know—they imagine it on the grand scale—and we are richer as readers” (56). Byatt’s interpretation specifically refers to *A Place of Greater Safety*, the earlier novel that best resembles *Wolf Hall* for its enormous cast of characters, its complexity, and its historical detail. Yet Byatt’s insight could just as easily be applied to Mantel’s Cromwell novels.

Hilary Mantel was born in 1952 in Hadfield, a small village that “squatted, like a fossil toad” (*Ghost* 24) in a valley on the outskirts of Manchester, to a family of Irish Catholic extraction. Mantel was only seven when Jack Mantel moved into her home at her mother’s invitation and despite her father, Henry, already residing there. Public displays of scorn for her mother’s private living arrangements kept Mantel’s mother not only from the town grocer but also from Mass on Sunday, “or indeed anywhere at all” (*Ghost* 85). By the time she was eleven, Henry had moved (she never saw him again) and Mantel found herself registered at school under

¹ Some of these awards included the Cheltenham Festival Prize, the Southern Arts Literature Prize, and the Winifred Holtby Prize for *Fludd* (1989). *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992) won the Sunday Express Book of the Year Award. *An Experiment in Love* (1995) won the Hawthornden Prize (“Discover Author Hilary Mantel”).

Jack's last name. Perhaps lingering resentment against the woman who was at the centre of such family drama motivated Mantel to resist ever naming her mother in her memoir, only her two fathers. As for the mothers and mother figures in her fiction, some die,² while others are absent,³ abusive,⁴ or manipulative or passive aggressive.⁵ In two of her novels, a mother's neglect physically or psychologically damages her children.⁶ If Mantel's female characters display admirable characteristics, they are either childless,⁷ victimized,⁸ or suffer an unnaturally early death.⁹

Despite the domestic upheavals in her own family, Mantel excelled in her education; she passed the examination in primary school that earned her admission to the “‘good’ school in the area” (*Ghost* 128). As for the religious education she received as part of her convent education, Mantel recalls that the doctrine of transubstantiation gave her “no headache” (*Ghost* 86), but “the knowledge of the black soul wiped clean at Confession, but then dirtying itself, by the mere accident of thought, by the time you were five minutes down the road from church” (*Ghost* 87) did. Mantel does, in fact, go into great detail about her religious upbringing—the feast days, confessions, and communions—in her memoir, but it is her ability, she recalls in a later essay, to “always reliably see what was almost not there” (Mantel, “Diary”) that accounts for her encounter with the devil at the age of seven, an experience that she credits for heightening her awareness of evil in the world. This awareness makes her question, “Is evil simply—simply?—an

² Evelyn Axon in *Every Day is Mother's Day* (1985), Sylvia Sidney and Isabel Field in *Vacant Possession* (1986) and Katherine of Aragon in *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012).

³ *The Giant, O'Brien* (1998).

⁴ Mother Perpetua in *Fludd* (1989), Carmel's mother in *An Experiment in Love*, and Alison Hart's mother in *Beyond Black* (2005).

⁵ Anne-Françoise-Marie Duplessis in *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992), Anna Eldred in *A Change of Climate* (1994), and Anne Boleyn and Katherine of Aragon in *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012)

⁶ *A Change of Climate, An Experiment in Love*

⁷ Francis in *Eight Months*, Sister Philomena/Roisin O'Halloran in *Fludd*, and Alison Hart in *Beyond Black*

⁸ Frances Shore in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, Mary in *The Giant, O'Brien*

⁹ Liz Wykys Cromwell in *Wolf Hall*, Anne Boleyn in *Bring Up the Bodies*

outgrowth of human nature, or is it detachable from the human, a force at large in the world like a mercenary for hire, looking for a human master to serve, never without one for long and always worth the whistle” (*Ghost* 109). Mantel credits her early encounter with evil for turning her away from “an omnipotent God; I believed in him as a pretty conceit for a year into high school, but I didn’t credit him with much pull, and after I was twelve I didn’t believe in him at all” (*Ghost* 145).

During her first year in law at the London School of Economics, Mantel continued to excel in her school work, but, isolated from family and in love with a young man back home (whom she later married), her aspirations for a career as a barrister looked bleak: “I was female, northern and poor” (“No Passes” 150). Insufficient funds undermined her ability to be one of the “few brave women” (151) who had made it into that male-dominated profession. This marginalized position—reinforced within the law faculty in Sheffield, where she transferred—would influence Mantel’s writing as discrimination rose again and again to challenge her: “Some people have forgotten, or never known, why we needed the feminist movement so badly. This was why: so that some talentless prat in a nylon shirt couldn’t patronize you” (153).

Mantel moved painfully from newlywed to a woman wracked with pain but misdiagnosed by the, then, mostly male medical establishment:

It was *assumed* (the symptoms) were psychosomatic, and that you were under some sort of strain owing to the fact that you were trying to operate in a man’s world. This is what I was told: I was told my symptoms were caused by ambition. (Mantel, “Accumulated Anger”)

When she travelled to Botswana for her husband’s job, Mantel researched her symptoms herself, and diagnosed her own condition: endometriosis. Unfortunately, the diagnosis was too late; returning to England, Mantel was operated upon: “my fertility [was] confiscated, and my insides

rearranged” (“Accumulated Anger”). Although her medical advisors told her the drastic operation would solve her endometriosis, they were wrong. These misdiagnosing male doctors, like the “talentless prat[s]” she encountered in law school, likely play a major role in the vehemence of Mantel’s feminism; the “[a]nger suffuses her face, an intensity almost indecent” (“Accumulated Anger”) when Mantel approaches the topic of how feminism has been rejected by contemporary, educated women. She argues that the only reason these young women deny feminism is because “they’re standing on the shoulders of their mothers, who fought these battles, I think for a woman to say ‘I’m not a feminist’ is [like] a lamb joining the slaughterer’s guild. It’s just empty-headed and stupid” (“Accumulated Anger”).

Many years spent abroad in whatever country her husband found work both detracted and contributed to Mantel’s sense of identity. Mantel and her husband endured a brief separation after her hysterectomy, but they remarried and left England again in 1982, this time for Saudi Arabia. Her time spent in the Islamic kingdom proved psychologically challenging and illuminating; living in “a culture where, as a woman, [she had] not even the right to be seen” (“No Passes” 100) had left her sense of identity “bleached out, stretched thin” (100). She explores this feeling of being “bleached out” in her 1988 novel, *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*. It was during these periods abroad, Mantel says, that she reflected on her national identity: “I felt English for the first time, because I was told I was English. When you go abroad, a caricatured version of your nationality is waiting for you, the product of other people’s myths” (“No Passes” 98). In her reflection on nationality in her 2002 essay, “No Passes or Documents Are Needed,” Mantel reveals her seriousness about the role of writers in nations and national identity: “I think it is the role of writers and artists to make sure that the idea of a nation is not regressive, not repressive, not injurious to the freedom of others” (104). It is the ability of artists and writers, according to Mantel, to “deal in symbol and myth” (104) because myth can transport us:

[Myth] is our way back into history, a substitute for lost languages and a mirror we hold to long-vanished faces: see, we say, they were just like us. Myth is a kind of sacred history.... Nations use their myths to affirm and re-affirm themselves. In times of war, occupation, and diaspora, they provide at least an illusion of continuity. In times of prosperity they provide an assurance of a god-given right to thrive and expand. (104-105)

It should be no surprise that Mantel sees James Joyce as the “most enriching exampl[e] of how a European identity may be imagined” (106).

Since her double Booker wins, Mantel seems to have become more focused on what it means to be English. In 2002, her experience with discrimination had made Mantel feel left out of England altogether:

I came to see that Englishness was white, male, southern, Protestant and middle class. I was a woman, a Catholic, a northerner, of Irish descent. I spoke and speak now with a northern accent. And if I tell an Englishman my date of birth and my religion and ancestry, I am telling him, without needing more words, that my family are working people, probably with little education. (“No Passes” 96)

That attitude changed with *Wolf Hall*, a novel that may be “about politics, but it is also a song of England” (Mantel, “Dead are Real”) in the same way *The Giant, O’Brien* is “a song of Ireland” (“Dead are Real”). In her interview with Mantel in the *New Yorker* in 2012, Larissa MacFarquhar reveals how that attitude changed:

But then something shifted, something loosened, and she took a great stride away from her past and planted her flag right in the center of Englishness—because nothing, she thought, could be more seminal to English identity than the reign of Henry VIII and the coming of the English Bible. Thomas Cromwell had showed the English how to know themselves: in 1538, he ordered parishes to keep records of baptisms, marriages, and

burials. And now she, writing about Cromwell, would furnish another document of English self-knowledge. It would be political but also mythological, since Englishness contained equal parts of both. (“Dead are Real”)

The dissemination of her “document of English self-knowledge”—*Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*—has been extensive, thanks to increased sales of her novels as a result of the two Booker wins (N. Clark) and to the adaptation of both novels for the stage by the Royal Shakespeare Company that played Stratford then London and will be heading for New York in Spring 2015. Spreading Mantel’s narrative even further is the BBC six-part mini-series based on both novels to air next year (Ellis-Petersen). This is the public face of *Wolf Hall*, *Bring Up the Bodies*, and Hilary Mantel’s *Thomas Cromwell*. What about the novels themselves? What motivated a woman who had striven most of her adult life for literary recognition to switch her focus from, predominantly, domestic stories about dysfunctional families to the early Tudor era as seen through a male viewpoint? My argument is that Mantel’s motivation is twofold: she believes that “[t]o try to engage with the present without engaging with the past is to live like a dog or cat rather than a human being; it is to bob along on the waters of egotism, solipsism and ignorance” (Mantel, “History in Fiction”); she also seizes the opportunity historical fiction gives any author to make public a contemporary political critique while giving readers “a knowledge of history to give [. . .] a context for present events” (“History in Fiction”). In *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Hilary Mantel calls for a new perspective not only of the saintly Thomas More as a flawed, tragic hero, but also of Anne Boleyn as a tragic scapegoat, while at the same time laying the foundation for Cromwell’s fall as that of another tragic hero, the victim of a nation that slips back into Medieval attitudes and practices, mirroring Mantel’s critique of her own contemporary nation’s similar slip into Medieval attitudes and practices.

Mantel does not restrict the public airing of her opinions to only fiction. She has publicly critiqued her England's¹⁰ new welfare policies, seeing them as regressive, projecting a medieval attitude towards the poor and poverty:

We have reached a period where we are going back to the Middle Ages; where poverty is once again being viewed as a moral failing or a weakness, and relief by the state is a privilege and not a right. I find this terrifying. Unmistakably, those resonances are there. (Mantel, "Cromwell's Welfare State").

Mantel is referring to the drastic changes currently underway by the coalition British government of Conservative leader David Cameron and Liberal Democrat Nick Clegg. In a podcast for the *London Review of Books* earlier this year, Alan Bennett makes a similar analysis when he compares the changes to the Dissolution of the monasteries under Cromwell's direction, during which "the monasteries and religious houses were systematically visited, stripped of their wealth, and partially destroyed" (Campbell, "Monasteries, Dissolution of the"), to the changes in the British welfare state. In the printed version of the podcast that appears in the *LRB*, Bennett reveals a personal revival of his youthful pastime of investigating medieval churches and exploring what "dregs of history" (Bennett, "Fair Play") remained inside. He reflects on how the destruction of church property during the Dissolution should serve as "a warning of what in other respects is continuing to happen in the present, with the fabric of the state and the welfare state in particular stealthily dismantled as once the fabric of churches more rudely was, sold off, farmed

¹⁰ Some clarity must be established regarding "England" and "English" versus "Britain" and "British." Although Brutus is credited in the Galfridian originary myth for founding *Britain*, this myth is foundational to *England*, rather than Great Britain or the United Kingdom. Great Britain did not come into use as the name for England and Scotland before James I came to the throne in 1603, informally joining the two countries. Wales had been absorbed into England under the rule of Henry VIII. The United Kingdom of Great Britain came into being following the creation of Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State (later the Republic of Ireland) in 1921. Consequently, it makes sense to refer to the country in which Cromwell lives and the originary myths which are retold in publications as diverse as H. E. Marshall's *Our Island Story* and *Wolf Hall* as England.

out” (Bennett). The perpetrators of both forms of dismantlement, Bennett argues, put profit before “any other consideration” (Bennett):

The perpetrators today [are] as locked into their ideology and convinced of their own rightness as any of the devout louts who four and five hundred years ago stove in the windows and scratched out the faces of the saints as a passport to heaven. (Bennett, “Fair Play”)

Reinforcing this idea of a contemporary slip back into Medieval attitudes and practices is the “stall[ing]” (De Piero) of social mobility among the middle class and working class who attend “comprehensive schools” (De Piero). In Britain, the secondary school system is composed of comprehensive schools (state-funded), grammar schools (state funded), and private “public” schools (privately funded); comprehensive schools accept any student while grammar schools will only accept those that pass a selection test. Whereas education and, in particular, access to universities—institutions that Cromwell calls Wolsey’s “breathing monument” (*Wolf Hall* 22)—was once seen as “the great leveler” (Grandy) in the British class system, the recent “tripling” (Grandy) of tuition fees as a result of government cutbacks makes a university education out of reach for many young adults. What this means is that Britain “is on the verge of becoming permanently divided between tribes of the haves and have-nots as the young increasingly miss out on the opportunities enjoyed by their parents generation” (Boffey). This prediction is based on a report produced by the British government’s Commission on Social Mobility. The chair of the Commission, Alan Milburn, has argued that “there had been a failure to provide many young people with the skills that could allow them to escape a life of poor pay” (Boffey). Young people under thirty have been especially hard hit, making it virtually impossible for them to own their own homes while also facing “lower wages and diminishing job prospects” (Boffey). Without money and jobs, this demographic group will require more welfare support and, because of their

insolvency, be unable to travel abroad where more jobs might be available. This combined social and personal immobility is strikingly similar to serfdom, in which the ownership of land was held by the few while the many toiled on that land. In the Middle Ages, the aristocratic hegemony denied serfs the freedom to travel—“[t]hey were attached to the land and denied freedom of movement” (Wright)—the freedom to marry someone of their own choice, and the freedom to find work of their own choice. Whereas certain modern civil liberties are in place to prevent anyone from interfering in someone’s choice of partner, the gloomy job prospects for young adults in Britain mean some will take whatever job they can. However, low wages and high accommodation costs make impossible, for many, the chances of moving to a city, county, or country with better job prospects.

In Mantel’s novels, medieval attitudes and practices coexist with the blossoming of humanism and capitalism that characterize the Renaissance. For example, Henry VIII will fall back on the medieval belief in the “charms and false practices” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 202) associated with witchcraft in order to dispose of Anne, just three years after Cromwell freed him from the yoke of the Roman Catholic Church’s oppression by creating a document that identifies England’s national sovereignty—“This realm of England is an Empire, and so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one Supreme Head and King” (qtd. in Elton 160)—the act of appeals (1533). While Henry and his courtiers continue to joust and Gregory Cromwell loves to read Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (*Wolf Hall* 221), Cromwell is working on a poor law because he thinks that rich men have “some responsibility to [. . .] labourers without labour” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 204). As these two examples demonstrate, Cromwell represents the voice of reason and pragmatism amidst the medieval cacophony around him. Indeed, Mantel not only critiques her government’s policies on welfare by holding up a mirror to Cromwell as an exemplar in his progressive welfare policies, but she would also hold that mirror up to reflect on

his financial acuity: “One thing Cromwell was really good at was sound money. He made an English gold piece worth what it said it was worth. We could do with him coming and sorting out the crisis of confidence in the banking system” (“Cromwell’s Welfare State”).

My analysis of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* begins by explaining the theoretical framework on which I shall rely for my interpretation of Mantel’s novels. Since myth is both an important component of the novels, “an undercurrent of feeling shared by many people” (Schultz 233) in England, and an important “psychic resource” (“No Passes” 104) for Mantel, I examine some of the archetypes of mythology—witches, devils, incubi, giants—and how they have been manipulated for purposes of gaining or keeping political power. Providing special insight into giants and, in particular, one of the founding myths of England is Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s exploration of the figure of the Giant in folklore, theology, history, and literature. In addition to reviewing these archetypes and the prophecies often associated with them, I discuss how Ernst Cassirer, René Girard, and Bronislaw Malinowski interpret the influences and uses of myth in society. Through the exploration of myth, prophecy, and witchcraft, we can understand the power of originary myths and realize Mantel’s strategy for replacing the primacy of male “memorializing fables common to ethnic or nationalist affirmation” (Hartman) with female “memorializing fables” in which mythical, magical women are given the power of founding a nation (*Wolf Hall* 65-66) or a dynasty (*Wolf Hall* 96). In order to understand Mantel’s use of history, I discuss the different forms history takes in society: academic, public, and fictional. In the eighteenth century, history and fiction began to be at odds with each other; history strove to establish itself as a science while literature began to plunder history for stories. It is Johann Gottfried Herder who introduced the idea that history could be broken down into individual history, that the “great historical process” (Lukács 29) could be comprised of individual acts by individual agents. More recently, Hayden White (*Metahistory: the historical imagination in*

nineteenth-century Europe 1973) has argued for the similarities between history and fiction—that history is in a narrative form, like fiction—blurring again the lines between the two. Within this same chapter I explore different theories of nationalism in order to arrive at a framework that helps to identify Cromwell’s England as a nation. Anthony D. Smith offers a general framework for current theories of nationalism—modernists, primordialists, perennialists, neo-perennialists—while Liah Greenfield argues for the Bible as a critical component to the rise of nationalism. While this is helpful in understanding how the Reformation in England could also birth a nation, it is Philip S. Gorski who offers a postmodernist theory of nationalism that helps to define the realm of England as a nation because of Cromwell’s influence, as first suggested by Geoffrey R. Elton. A survey of theory about historical fiction, from Georg Lukács to Avrom Fleishman and Linda Hutcheon to Diana Wallace, will establish the current scholarly discussion around historical fiction. Finally, this chapter will examine how Ann Rigney’s contribution on cultural memory and Mantel’s own contribution to the discussions about historical fiction will help to emphasize how Mantel’s novels act as a “counterforce” (Hartman qtd. in Rigney, “Portable Monuments” 374) to British national, official history and British “prosthetic memory” (Landsberg qtd. in Rigney, “Fiction as Mediator” 87) by offering a new perspective on the legacy of Thomas Cromwell’s role in Tudor government at the expense of Thomas More’s and by emphasizing how patriarchy silences and defames women whose power give them a public voice.

In chapter three, I set in opposition the traditional narrative of Sir (Saint) Thomas More as a national hero, a martyr, and a man of conscience against Mantel’s portrait of an ambitious, prideful, and cruel fundamentalist. Instead of a secular and sacred national hero, Mantel portrays More as a tragic hero, one whose *hubris* contributes to his downfall. Because of her frequent use of ekphrasis in her novels, I begin my examination of More through Cromwell’s lens as he enters More’s Chelsea home and is greeted by *The Family of Sir Thomas More* by Hans Holbein.

In chapter four, Thomas Cromwell, Mantel's Renaissance man, is the subject. In order to introduce Mantel's new perspective on Cromwell, I examine the striking portrait of Holbein's known as *The Ambassadors*, created, in part, as a cryptic reflection of Christ's crucifixion and with an anamorphic skull slashing across a floor below the two French gentlemen. Mantel alludes to this portrait at a critical moment in novel—just after Anne's coronation—suggesting by her allusion to the requirement of finding the correct perspective to view Holbein's anamorphic skull, that Cromwell's legacy needs a similar recalibration of perspective. Mantel's Cromwell is, like More, ambitious and proud, but these traits are tempered by his generosity. Although Cromwell is the central character of both of these novels, his story is left unfinished at the end of *Bring Up the Bodies*. Because of Cromwell's vengeful nature, developed mostly in *Bring Up the Bodies*, I believe that Mantel will complete her representation of Cromwell as a tragic hero in her next novel, the last in this trilogy.

Chapter five is devoted to Anne Boleyn who, unlike Cromwell and More, has no extant, verifiable portrait. Instead, Mantel offers us a portrait of a complex woman who is neither victim nor femme fatale but a woman of intelligence and ambition, two characteristics deemed unnatural in women of the early-sixteenth century (Wayne)—and the early-twenty-first century (Sandberg 40). I also examine how myths, an important part of a nation's pre-modern identity, continue to play an important role in the legacy of Anne Boleyn. In particular, the myth of Jezebel—an epithet still used in certain contexts today for a morally corrupt woman (Hazleton)—has been linked with Anne's name. Although Mantel does not “re-imagine” (Wallace 2) Anne, filling in the gaps of her unrecorded life (Wallace 2) by shaping her narrative into something “more appropriate” (2) than the narrative found in conventional history, Mantel does suggest that Anne critically influences British identity as a national matriarch whose daughter, Elizabeth I, finished the job of creating the national identity begun under Cromwell.

Chapter Two: Theory

Walter Benjamin laments the pervasiveness of information in the modern world because of its rejection of the “miraculous” (81) and because its “prompt verifiability” (80) negates space for human reflection or interpretation by “already being shot through with explanation”(81). In his essay, “The Storyteller,” Benjamin privileges storytelling for keeping the story free from explanation:

The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks. (81)

We live in an age in which the kind of information of which Benjamin speaks is metaphorically understood as a highway that circumnavigates the globe, bombarding those who access the on-ramp with more information than one driver can possibly handle. This is especially true of the availability of historical information. How does one navigate the academic, popular, and public history arteries of the complex information highway of the early twenty-first century? Does this kind of information subvert or support the “marvelous things” for which Benjamin praises fiction? The award-winning fiction of Hilary Mantel is a good place to find not only “the most extraordinary things, marvelous things . . . related with the greatest accuracy” (81), but also a challenge to the “prompt verifiability” of a certain period of history.

Mantel began her career as a writer by delving into the French Revolution and creating an immense manuscript—*A Place of Greater Safety* (1992)—that no one would publish until after she had had success with four other novels. She would return to historical fiction in *Fludd* (1989) and *The Giant, O’Brien* (1998), but would not tackle history as immense—both in material and in legacy—as the French Revolution until *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012). These

two novels rest “on the shoulders of historians” (Mantel, “Novel Approaches”), but they also rest on Mantel’s unique worldview that comes from her upbringing in an Irish Catholic family living in northern England in the years of economic struggle that followed World War II. Her worldview declares an awareness of the “miraculous,” the recognition of a spiritual plane accessible only to some, as especially explored in *Beyond Black* (2005). She said in a 2009 interview:

If you were brought up in a religious setting, like Catholicism . . . you believe in magic, but you were also told there was something more powerful than magic and that is the invisible world created by God. And the fact is that the visible world is only the tip. I still believe that. I have a very strong sense of the world of our senses being—how can I put it—not the whole story. (“Accumulated Anger”)

It is perhaps this spiritual belief that engages Mantel with the myths of England in her Tudor novels as much as the magical and supernatural stories that permeates both the era and Mantel’s novels. Yet historical fiction has, traditionally, been seen as “a product of romantic nationalism” (P. Anderson) and Sir Walter Scott, traditionally accepted as the father of the genre, as engaged in a “nation-building narrative” (P. Anderson) in his *Waverley* novels. Although Mantel has admitted her engagement with the nation in her historical novels, she also argues that she must explore the mythological “since Englishness contained equal parts of both” (“Dead are Real”). This chapter will explore theories behind the themes of national myth, magic, history, national narrative, and fiction in order to better understand how Mantel weaves them together in her *Cromwell* novels in an effort to reclaim lost histories and explore new national narratives and national identities.

2.1. Mantel's Mythical, Magical England

Mantel self-consciously writes and re-writes history in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, but she also weaves national myth into them both: originary myth in *Wolf Hall* and the myth of Anne Boleyn in *Bring Up the Bodies*. As she told Larissa “Dead are Real” in a 2012 interview, Mantel says that *Wolf Hall* may be about politics, “but it is also a song of England” (“Dead are Real”). Despite expressing in a 2001 essay how she felt excluded from any kind of British or English identity (Mantel, “No Passes” 95), a decade later Mantel admitted to a shift in how she thought about her identity, that is, she felt a shift away from her Catholic, Northern England, Irish ancestry:

[Mantel] planted her flag right in the center of Englishness—because nothing, she thought, could be more seminal to English identity than the reign of Henry VIII and the coming of the English Bible. Thomas Cromwell had showed the English how to know themselves: in 1538, he ordered parishes to keep records of baptisms, marriages, and burials. And now she, writing about Cromwell, would furnish another document of English self-knowledge. It would be political but also mythological, since Englishness contained equal parts of both. (“Dead are Real”)

Mantel is no stranger to the “mythological voice” (“Dead are Real”), having engaged with weaving myth and history together in the eighteenth-century mystery surrounding a real Irish giant, Charles Byrne, and a Scottish surgeon, John Hunter, who surreptitiously acquired Byrne’s skeleton; she does this in *The Giant O’Brien*, “a song of Ireland” (“Dead are Real”).

Perhaps Mantel likes to weave mythological narratives into her historical narratives because the “huge archetypes” (Mantel, “Novel Approaches”) she writes about in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* can often be found in mythology; for example, the femme fatale, the

discarded wife, and the ruler who must secure his kingdom for his descendants. Literature has already seen the treatment of the archetype of the wise man, with Sir Thomas More as the exemplar. Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* (1960) portrays More as an "ascetic scholar who seems willing to lay his life on a matter of principle" (Hitchens, "*The Man Who Made England*" 147), a representation that venerates More and demonizes Cromwell. Mantel reverses these archetypes; Cromwell is the wise man while Thomas More, saint (he was canonized in 1935) and literary giant—especially for his *Utopia* (1516)—is the demon. There is a connection between More's giant literary status, the evil acts he commits, and the myth: Tudor society believed giants to be evil (Stephens 4) because of their role in myth, fable, and the Bible. By the late-eighteenth century, giants became more interesting as specimens to study, something Mantel explores in *The Giant, O'Brien*, her eighth novel. Just as Mantel's two Cromwell¹¹ novels explore the ascendancy of the rational—science, rhetoric, and "real history"—over the mythical—including religion, myth, magic, and prophecy—*The Giant O'Brien* focuses narrowly on two men: Charles O'Brien and Dr. John Hunter. In the end, Hunter, a Scottish man of science, vanquishes O'Brien, an Irish storyteller. Until *Wolf Hall*, Mantel considered it her favorite among her works ("Dead are Real").

Another set of archetypes Mantel explores in her Cromwell novels is that of the witch and the prophet. For example, contemporaries accused Anne Boleyn of having bewitched Henry while biographies and fictional explorations of Anne never cease to explore her link to witchcraft. Elizabeth Barton, who appears in *Wolf Hall*, was a prophet whose opposition to Henry's marriage to Anne resulted in Barton's death. Mantel links these two women together in *Wolf Hall* as women who think they can influence and manipulate the men around them only to discover their

¹¹ Since the popularity of these two novels, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, has resulted in an increase of 463% in sales as of October 2012 (Stoddard), a subsequent dramatic adaptation, and an upcoming television adaptation, the novels have become more famous for the rehabilitation of Thomas Cromwell and simply another look at the Tudors: hence, "Cromwell novels".

own expendability. Whereas the decline in many superstitious beliefs occurred “[l]ong before the repeal of the Witchcraft Act in 1736” (Thomas 681), it took longer to see a decline in the associated belief that “women were generally believed to be sexually more voracious than men” (679). Historian Keith Thomas credits Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) as being a major influence in the reversal of the attitude of women as carnal creatures because of Richardson’s representations of women as “sexually passive and utterly unascivious” (Thomas 679). Henry VIII’s court, however, would have regarded any suggestion of witchcraft attached to Anne Boleyn as an implication that she was “sexually more voracious than” her husband, a reputation that would have served to support the charges laid against her. The accusations of witchcraft brought against Anne will be more thoroughly explored in chapter three.

If witches and witchcraft were linked to the devil in the sixteenth century (Thomas), prophets and prophecies enjoyed legitimacy through their connection to either the Church, as was the case with Barton, or with respected scholars of the past, as was the case with Geoffrey of Monmouth. In both cases, because of the helplessness of the people of Tudor England “in the face of disease” (Thomas 17) and their “exceedin[g] liab[ility] to pain, sickness and premature death” (6), the people of this period “had many methods by which they thought it possible to gain knowledge of the future” (Thomas 461) including ancient prophecies and the predictions of contemporary prophets. One such ancient prophet can be found in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain*, who, according to Thomas, was “the archetypal source of this genre” (461). Geoffrey was the first to record the tales of King Arthur, creating the best-known prophet of the era in the process: Merlin. Many of these prophecies relied on “elaborate animal symbolism” (461), such as Merlin’s White Dragon and Red Dragon, his Boar of Cornwell, and his Ass of Wickedness (462). Consequently, feudal society came to associate families with “elaborate animal symbol[s]” (Thomas 461), translated into “heraldic emblems... identified with

families and individuals” (462) in what anthropologists identify as a totemic system of identity. Cromwell, unlike Anne Boleyn and other courtiers, did not belong to an aristocratic family with an emblem or a coat of arms, and he resists the pressure to acquire one. He reflects, in the opening of *Bring Up the Bodies*: “There was once a noble family called Cromwell, and when he came up in the king’s service the heralds had urged him for the sake of appearances to adopt their coat of arms; but I am none of theirs” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 10).

The ancient prophecies found in the Galfridian *History* were also “immensely adaptable, and so long as the monarchy and peerage used such emblems, they could be plausibly applied to fit contemporary events” (Thomas 462). The medieval dating of both Galfridian prophecies and those prophecies claiming monastic associations lent a patina of prestige to these documents, but their ambiguous sources did not detract from their influence: “although some contemporaries discussed whether the prophets had got their foreknowledge from God, from conjuration or from astrology, there was on the whole little interest shown in the precise origin and basis of such predictions” (469). Although Eustace Chapuys, Emperor Charles V’s Imperial Ambassador to England and a regular visitor at Cromwell’s house, observes that the English “were peculiarly credulous, and easily moved to insurrection by prophecies “ (472), Mantel’s Cromwell dismisses prophecies. In *Wolf Hall*, as in history, Cromwell interrogates (499-502) and convicts (513-14) Elizabeth Barton for her treasonous prediction of Henry’s death (397-99). Nevertheless, as will be discussed in the chapter on Anne Boleyn, English belief in magic-based myths like prophecies and witches have been used to motivate attacks on women who have achieved positions of power, especially through their intellectual abilities or their public voices.

Because these prophecies often became entwined with national myths of origin, I would like to examine how myth—encompassing witches and prophets as much as religion—is used as a tool for appropriating or for wielding political power. Power, its acquisition and its loss, is a

core theme in both Cromwell novels, just as it is a theme in all of Mantel's work. In order to correctly interpret and appreciate Mantel's novels, it is necessary to set them—that is their artistic creation—in the postmodern context in which Mantel lives. What about the characters within these myths? Rarely are they non-aristocratic, suggesting only aristocrats can wield power. What about the women in these myths? Rarely do they retain power, suggesting female suppression.

Although the West now lives in a secular age, is it possible to say that the “demons and devils and witches and prophets have never been firmly expunged from the collective imagination, whether by Christianity or any other enlightening movement” (Poole 29)? In his exploration of the tragic form, Adrian Poole argues that the great tragedians Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Racine share “the effort to stage the points of convergence at which the light and darkness meet, the sacred and secular, divine power and human reason” (29). This is why Mantel's Cromwell novels resound with the “tragic note” (Leech 13) and make connections between the early Greek dramatists, Shakespeare, and her own fiction through her exploration of the conflicts “between old religion and new politics, between traditional faith and modern rationalism, between the sacred and the secular” (Poole 29). In Mantel's novels, as in British society today, it is the nation that fashions itself as secular, its citizens who subscribe to the sacred. In order to better understand the “convergence at which the light and darkness meet” in the political and social culture of the Tudor era, I would like to explore how both “the light and darkness” were used as political tools before summing up what myths meant to a young nation.

2.1.1 Magic: Prophecy as a Political Tool

In the Middle Ages, Thomas argues in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, religion, spells, curses, and prophecies were the coping methods for people faced with the challenges of diseases and plagues without medicine, human misfortune without social institutions to mediate, and inequality without legal redress. Mantel's introduction to a 2012 illustrated edition of Thomas's

work praises this “special study of magic and magical thinking” (“Magic Thomas”), one that Mantel assures us is revered and loved by readers of history. “Helplessness in the face of disease,” Thomas argues, “was an essential element in the background to the beliefs” (17) of the sixteenth century. In this area of mystical explanation for mysterious events or illness, prophecies had the most potential for power. As mentioned earlier, newly discovered prophecies, usually of monastic origin, were commonplace, appearing often during the turbulent years of the sixteenth century and disseminated in order to “conceal the breach [with the past] and make [the breach] respectable by bringing it into line with the pattern of the past” (503). One example Thomas offers is the prophecy—one on which Cromwell relied—that the breach with Rome was not a new direction but the return to an old one:

This desire can be seen during the Reformation, when the breach with Rome was presented not as a new departure, but as a return to the situation which had existed before the Papal ‘usurpation’. The Act in Restraint of Appeals to Rome (1533) invoked ‘divers old chronicles’, which showed England to have originally been an ‘empire’ independent of Papal jurisdiction (503-4).

Prophecies like these would “circulate extensively by word of mouth” (475), but they were also “disseminated by semi-professional purveyors” (475). Henry’s subjects, according to Eustace Chapuys, Ambassador for Emperor Charles V, were “peculiarly credulous, and easily moved to insurrection by prophecies” (Thomas 472). This national trait facilitated the passing and enforcing of Cromwell’s Act in Restraint of Appeals because of its appropriation of an old prophecy declaring England’s independence from Rome.

Another important connection between Mantel and Thomas can be found in how Thomas links these prophecies to Geoffrey of Monmouth’s twelfth-century *History of the Kings of Britain*, “the archetypal source for this genre” (Thomas 462). It is the stories told in Geoffrey’s *History*

about how early England was formed that appear in an early chapter in *Wolf Hall*: “An Occult History of Britain” (65-153). But this chapter opens with an originary myth that goes further back in time than Geoffrey, back to the discovery of “an island shrouded in mist” (65) by thirty-three daughters of a Greek king, naming it Albina after the eldest. Shortly after this mythological opening, Mantel retells Anne’s rise in the king’s favor and hints at Cromwell’s violent past. As he struggles to acquire a divorce for Henry, so that their monarch might sire a boy to secure his dynasty, Wolsey tells Cromwell about the Greek and Roman roots of Albion and the influence of myth or witchcraft on the power shifts of England’s kings. By retelling these stories, Mantel uses Wolsey as a conduit of “old stories” (*Wolf Hall* 94), reminding us that “some people, let us remember, do believe them” (*Wolf Hall* 94). Indeed, these old stories, with their tales of prophecies and the witch-like women who mate with kings or bear kings, still circulate today in various forms. For example, the promotion of an old history text for school children, H. E. Marshall’s *Our Island Story*, by the ruling Conservative government in Britain “wants a patriotic narrative that will find the roots of British identity in Anglo-Saxon institutions and the battle of Trafalgar” (Vickery); Prime Minister David Cameron even went on record to say it was his favorite book as a child (Hough). Given that this book begins with a different originary myth for Albion (it invokes the son of Neptune) the motivation behind Mantel’s promotion of these foundational myths as the narratives that “people...do believe” becomes clearer. As for Britishness, *Our Island Story* that Marshall cautioned ought not to belong with schoolbooks but rather, “beside *Robinson Crusoe* and *A Noah’s Ark Geography*” (Marshall) promotes “English greatness” (Marshall) because Scotland, Wales and Ireland only get attention “after [each] has been joined to England” (Marshall). It is easy to see why non-Conservatives have spoken out against this kind of government-backed narrative, calling for “an inclusive, multi-ethnic national history” (Vickery). It may be possible to interpret Mantel’s cryptic conclusion to *Bring Up the*

Bodies as a comment regarding the appropriation of these narratives: “There are no endings. If you think so you are deceived as to their nature. They are all beginnings. Here is one” (407).

Whereas these narratives –broken down into chapters in Marshall’s book—may represent the closing of one chapter of history (for example, the execution of Anne Boleyn) and the beginning of another (Henry’s marriage to Jane Seymour), these narratives are also a never-ending story, continuing to circulate and to be appropriated for various political and personal reasons.

2.1.2 Magic: Politically motivated accusations of witchcraft

The belief in witches and their power to do harm “was very old by the sixteenth century. On one level it was no more than the logical corollary of the equally widespread possibility in the belief of beneficent magic” (Thomas 519-20). By emphasizing the tension between witches and magic and prophets and religion, Mantel reinforces the intertextuality between her fictional novel, the myths of the creation of England, and the myths integrated with the history of Henry VIII’s break from Rome. Thomas, a resource for Mantel on this subject, explores witches and witchcraft in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. According to medieval beliefs, a witch “was a person of either sex (but more often female) who could mysteriously injure other people. The damage she might do—*maleficium*, as it was technically called—could take various forms” (Thomas 519). During the late Middle Ages, a new definition took precedence:

This was the notion that the witch owed her powers to having made a deliberate pact with the Devil. In return for her promise of allegiance, she was thought to have been given the means of seeking supernatural vengeance upon her enemies. Seen from this new point of view, the essence of witchcraft was not the damage it did to other persons, but its heretical character—devil-worship. Witchcraft had become a Christian heresy, the greatest of all sins, because it involved the renunciation of God and deliberate adherence to his greatest enemy. (Thomas 521)

Behind this new belief lay the Roman Catholic Church, “whose intellectuals rapidly built up a large literature” (521) describing the nature of witchcraft, demonology, and devil worshippers in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) treatise. Following the creation of a series of edicts and a Papal Bull, two Dominican Inquisitors published *Malleus Maleficarum*, a document more influential in Europe than in England, where it became “the favoured reference for witch-hunters of the modern period” (Paravy). It was originally printed in Strasbourg in 1486-1487, undergoing fifteen subsequent editions before 1520. Although Thomas Cromwell scoffs at the idea of using witchcraft as a basis for the charges against Anne, the close ties he has to European society suggest that he was aware of the use of this treatise for persecuting transgressive women. This meant that Cromwell could have relied on the associations of the devil and sexual promiscuity with witchcraft to influence the verdict of the jurors at Anne Boleyn’s trial, most of them members of the old aristocracy and therefore Medieval in ideology, consequently believers in witches. But the story of Albina and her sisters, the founders of Albion, also contains a latent narrative of a female pact with the devil, of paganism, and of female misrule.

The first mythological narrative recited in “An Occult History of Britain” by the unnamed narrator is the legend of Albina and her thirty-three sisters, princesses of Greece. Their punishment for transgression in Greece—they rejected the submission expected of them by their husbands, killed them—is to be set adrift in a rudderless raft. They eventually land on an island, which Albina names after herself, and discover that demons are the island’s only inhabitants. Albina and her sisters mate with these demons—unlike Brutus who will kill the island’s inhabitants—and create a race of giants, who then commit incest with their mothers. Connecting Albina and her sisters to the myth of witches is their “pact with the Devil” through these demons, while their incest is an example of their monstrous “sexual appetites” (Thomas 679). Consequently, when rumors spread about Anne being a witch, or of having bewitched Henry,

these associations with the devil and monstrous sexual appetites are part of the baggage of that epithet. Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden and the Irish goddess of the Cuchulainn myths, Morrigan, are only two other such archetypes that appear across cultures that spread the belief "that the presence of women and of sexuality can only undermine the strength and dominance of men" (Leeming). As sexual voracity became associated with witches and witchcraft, religion became the antidote. The important connection to make here is Mantel's own religion: she is a lapsed Catholic who "believe[s] in magic" ("Accumulated Anger"). Even more critically, Mantel believes that "the visible world is only the tip. I still believe that. I have a very strong sense of the world of our senses being... not the whole story" ("Accumulated Anger"). She is, therefore, in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, intertwining religion with magic because, in Tudor society, "[m]agic clung to religion" (Mantel, "Magic Thomas"). Where magic held sway, witches were possible.

But what is the historical relationship between history, myth, and literature? By the end of the Middle Ages, literature consisted of romances, histories, poetry, and drama. By the early eighteenth-century, the emerging preference for rational thought downgraded myth to fable and fairy tale while history continued to be closely aligned with literature. It wasn't until the nineteenth century that, in the interests of proving history to be a true science in search of historical truth, literature was ostracized from history. Yet even before postmodernity would question the disassociation of these three genres, historical fiction brought history, fiction, and myth back together again, confounding the theorists of the Enlightenment and the Victorian Age who sought to rid history of "fable or romance" (White, "Irrational" 140). Even before the incredible success of Sir Walter Scott's popular nineteenth-century historical fiction, historical authors "produced fictional biographies set against a background of public events, such as wars and dynastic marriages—'history everybody knows'" (Maxwell, *Historical Novel in Europe* 2).

Since wars and dynastic marriages are usually nation-defining, it can be said that these authors chose to set their historical fiction in moments that defined their country's history and their national identity.

2.1.3 Mythical England: “an undercurrent of feeling shared by many people”

A nation's history acts as its foundation, influences its concept of national identity, and provides a collective memory to which each member of the nation can subscribe. Yet a nation's history often finds its origins in the distant past through the myths that first circulated orally then in print form. Although history as recorded in the early days of print may have been perceived as truthful, fixing into print as it did a narrative that had mutated with each new recitation, printed records did in fact repeat the myths of origin that included such fantastical creatures as giants, demons, and incubi. Recall that Mantel has Wolsey affirm to Cromwell that “some people . . . do believe” (94) the old myths of Brutus and Edward IV's three sons. How have these myths perpetuated, coming down to perform a major role in an early twenty-first century novel about the early-sixteenth century?

In order to better understand Mantel's allusions in “An Occult History of Britain” (65-153), and since myth is “an undercurrent of feeling shared by many people” (Schultz 233), I want to explore how these myths have been passed down, interpreted, and deployed over the centuries. I will begin with a look at the work of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen on giants, both in his dissertation and his subsequent book on the role of the giant in myth and the Bible. As part of his research, Cohen necessarily examines Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The Historia regum Britanniae* with its story of Brutus. It is Cohen who explains how the Albina myth became a later, fourteenth-century addition—what we call today a prequel—to Geoffrey's work. But the combined narration of these myths by Wolsey and the unnamed narrator also serves to allude to the modernist writers—Joseph Conrad, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence—who invoked some of the archetypal

myths retold by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. More recently, the works of Ernst Cassirer, Bronislaw Malinowski, and René Girard look at how archetypal myths are used to serve a nation's political ambitions, while Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* provides some insights into sixteenth-century myths about the witch. Since Mantel herself begins with the originary myths of England, I shall start with Cohen's close examination of the giant.

In Cohen's dissertation, *The Tradition of the Giant in Early England: A Study of the Monstrous in Folklore, Theology, History and Literature* (1992), he argues that giants were just one example of a mythological trope that appears as history in medieval texts and were, like the giants that appear in the Bible, accepted as history. Giants appear often in literature and folklore up until the fourteenth century, both in Germanic cultures as well as Anglo-Saxon England, and, as previously mentioned, they also appear in Bible. Mythological tradition underwent a change in "the earliest years of the Middle English period" (Cohen 161), an era that spans 1066-1500 (Abrams 211), when both secular and sacred myths were used as foundations for secular historical writing. These early historians may have invoked the Biblical symbolism of giants as "proud men, idolaters, and great sinners" (Cohen 161), but early historians' appropriations of familiar stories from the Bible were also used to create national histories and "the giant became part of a literary call to expansionism . . . an aid to the promulgation of nationalism" (Cohen 161).

In *Wolf Hall*, Mantel relies on a version of one of these early narratives: *The Historia regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth*, completed by 1139 (Crick), the story of how the mythological founder of Britain, Brutus, fought the giants of Albion. This was an extremely popular work that was copied by a Norman clerk into a French version under the name of *Roman de Brut*. "It is this *Brut* and its variants that formed the basis of most people's 'vision of history'" (Wogan-Browne 301) when the unnamed narrator of *Wolf Hall* divulges this story in a chapter that covers the years 1521-1529 (*Wolf Hall* 65). The retelling of this originary myth is modified

by the addition of Albina's story. This retelling is a significant, intertextual strategy that Mantel uses to establish the prevailing medieval attitude, inherited by Cromwell's society from texts like these, that a woman ruler, leader, or dominator of men is an abomination. Whoever first added the Albina prologue to the *Brut* may have sought to portray the sinfulness and sexual monstrosity of these sisters as the result of their presumption to rule. Brutus reverses this unnatural order when he arrives with his Trojan men, who kill the last of the giants, slaying the Other, foreshadowing the future colonizing empire that Britain will become: "no matter . . . it all begins with slaughter" (*Wolf Hall* 66).

If literature becomes entwined with history through public history and historical fiction, and history's claim to pure science is corrupted through its use of literary devices, how does myth function? Not surprisingly, the Victorians rejected myth as "incompatible with science" (Segal) and made it a subcategory of religion. Among the theorists who sought to find other meaning and significance for myth was Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), in whose view the myths in the early-twentieth century that are told and retold resulted from mental reception and interpretation made by earlier cultures confronted with the natural world and finding its latent power "both magical and extraordinary. This condition of consciousness is the spirit's teleological endeavor to shape and determine the nature of spiritual reality" (Vickery). More recently, René Girard revives part of Sir James Frazer connection of myth to ritual, but rather than the "killing of the king, whose death and replacement magically ensure the rebirth of crops" (Segal)—famously invoked in T. S. Eliot's modern poem *The Waste Land*—Girard takes a different approach, seeing myth as a psychological and social tool to "cope with the guilt and anxiety that members of society feel toward their own aggression, and to unite society by turning that aggression onto outsiders" (Segal). This recalls the aggression that Brutus and his followers inflicted on the giants of Albion.

Girard's approach shares some similarity with what Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) has said about myth's function:

Myth reconciles humans to the travails of life by rooting those travails in the primordial actions of gods or humans. . . . Myth spurs acceptance of the impositions of society by tracing them, too, back to a hoary past, thereby conferring on them the clout of tradition.

Myths say, Do this because this has always been done. (Segal)

An example of the "impositions of society" that can gain acceptance through myth can be found in Adolf Hitler's Nationalist Socialist Party, who used the myth of a superior German race to improve German morale after defeat in World War I, but also to support and enforce anti-Semitic policies by creating the Other to the superior German: Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and the insane. This is an infamous example of how myths make a powerful political tool. Cassirer elaborates on how the myths such as these can influence a country's history:

It is not by its history that the mythology of a nation is determined but, conversely, its history is determined by its mythology—or rather, the mythology of a people does not *determine* but *is* its fate, its destiny as decreed from the very beginning. (Cassirer qtd. in Schultz, original emphasis 233)

Consequently, the myth of Brutus *is* England's fate, "its destiny as decreed from the very beginning" through colonization: "it all begins in slaughter" (*Wolf Hall* 66). The Albina myth is a complicated addition to this story because, rather than defeat the demons they find inhabiting their island, the sisters mate with them: making love, not war. It would seem that the arrival of Brutus, his role in overturning the rule of the descendants of Albina, suggests a societal need to establish the unnaturalness of woman as ruler. The Albina and Brutus myths, according to Cassirer, continue to circulate for several reasons; for example, the dynamic nature of a culture

and the problems inherent in it can be transcended through a myth that is embedded in the collective consciousness of a culture. Myth can also operate as an antidote to the fragmenting effects of technology and how it “makes a split with the past, does not provide means of forming concepts of personal identity, and subverts feelings of community among people” (Schultz 239).

A state that promotes myths like these for political purposes usually does so to meet a political objective. Cassirer argues that there always exists a binary of people characterized as demons and people characterized as divine in myths. In Nazi Germany, for example, Jews were cast in the role of the demons. In *Wolf Hall* the demons of England shift from being those who follow Martin Luther to those who do not reject the Pope as the supreme head of the Church in England; consequently, Sir Thomas More is venerated but then must die. In *Bring Up the Bodies*, the role of the demon is projected onto Anne, the archetypal femme fatale, the witch. The fifteenth-century treatise *Malleus Maleficarum*, also known as the “Hammer of the Witches,” had widespread influence because of the printing press and because of spiritual crises stemming from the Reformation. It states: “All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable” (qtd. in Garry and El-Shamy 166). Bewitching is deemed an act of malice by the *Malleus Maleficarum* because it causes harm; the one bewitching, “in folklore and literature from ancient times to the present, is usually a woman” (166). By accusing Anne of bewitching him, something that occurs when “someone with magic power enchants or transforms a person” (Garry and El-Shamy 166), Henry alludes to these other significant associations that came with the charge.

Cassirer, Girard, and Malinowski’s overlapping interpretations of myth find expression in the use of the Albina and Brutus myth in Mantel’s Tudor novels. Yet, through Cromwell, Mantel also shows how new myths are made, remade, and re-worked. These new myths parallel the myths of the “hoary past” because they narrate the origins of modern England and the birth of the

nation through the machinations of King Henry VIII and his master secretary, Thomas Cromwell. But Mantel is not the first author to explore myths in conjunction with ontological questions of society. In this, she shares something with the modernists.

By the early part of the twentieth century, Sir James G. Frazer's *Golden Bough: a study in magic and religion* (1890) had influenced a broad range of disciplines in British society. Only one of the many anthropological studies that arose at the end of the nineteenth century as a result of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, Frazer's study examined symbols, myths, and rites across cultures, making connections but allowing his readers to "draw their own conclusions" (qtd. in MacClancy 79). His influence was also felt among modernist writers such as Joseph Conrad, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and D. H. Lawrence. He connects with Keith Thomas's exploration because Frazer argued that "[m]agic and religion, no matter how seemingly 'primitive,' were to be seen as logical in process, though based on faulty reasoning" (MacClancy 79). More particularly, *The Golden Bough* addressed what Jeremy MacClancy argues were "many of the central issues of its time: questions about the status of religion, the value of empire and industry, the role of the classical past, as well as the nature of the domestic and the sexual, the rural and the urban" (79). These "central issues" identified by MacClancy continue to engage virtually all societies today. Consequently, by employing myth as she does in her Tudor novels, Mantel not only appropriates "an undercurrent of feeling shared by many people" (Schultz 233), she also invokes the modernist exploration of "humans' place in the world" (MacClancy 86). In his exploration of Frazer's influence on modernist writers, MacClancy examines W. B. Yeats's work, finding that the author denied "the myth of 'progress' . . . str[iving] for the revival of magic, whose validity would be scientifically confirmed, he believed, by spiritualism" (87). Tangential to Yeats's promotion of magic and things spiritual was the invocation of national aspirations and the folklore on which such hopes could rely. By re-telling the myths and folk tales of Ireland,

Yeats could promote a distinctly national culture, giving birth to national myth. Later, Robert Graves explored the mythological construct of *The White Goddess* (1948), the deity upon which the poetic tradition rests. He briefly talks about the Danaids' appearance in British history and their dismissal by John Milton while arguing for the trans-cultural importance of Albina:

a form of which was also given to the Riber Elbe (*Albis* in Latin); and which accounts for the Germanic words *elven*, an elf-woman, *alb*, elf and *alpdrücken*, the nightmare of incubus, is connected with the Greek word *alphos*, meaning 'dull-white leprosy' (Latin *albus*), *alphiton*, 'pearl-barley', and *Alphito*, "the White Goddess", who in Classical times had degenerated into a nursery bugbear but who seems originally to have been the Danaan Barley-goddess of Argos. (67)

Graves's allusion incorporates the incubi, which in some versions of the Albina myth are the only inhabitants of the island on which the Greek princesses land. Whereas the idea of the goddess being white is at odds with the darkness attributed to Anne Boleyn, her association with Wyatt attests to Anne's link to poetry. What all this intertextuality with the modernists implies is that Mantel, through the use of myth and through the form of historical fiction, is attempting, like Yeats before her, to establish a new kind of national myth and a new kind of national identity through a new interpretation of a critical epoch of British history.

2.2 Academic History, Public History, Fictional History

Shortly after winning her first Man Booker Prize for *Wolf Hall*, Mantel wrote an editorial for *The Guardian* in which she talks about the "time-worn debate about the value of historical fiction" ("History in Fiction"). In her defence of this value, Mantel argues, "To try to engage with the present without engaging with the past is to live like a dog or cat rather than a human being; it is to bob along on the waters of egoism, solipsism and ignorance" ("History in Fiction"). Her

editorial is a plea for “better history, rather than less history” (“History in Fiction”) because of what history can offer, how it can contextualize:

History offers us vicarious experience. It allows the youngest student to possess the ground equally with his elders; without a knowledge of history to give him a context for present events, he is at the mercy of every social misdiagnosis handed to him. (“History in Fiction”)

If she has not made clear through her Cromwell novels how much Mantel finds history compelling, she does so in this article. What is interesting is that Mantel, who resisted the “British” label earlier in her career, is at the end of a long line of British historians, British historical fiction authors, and a history of British passion for history. It is perhaps because of this passion—from the steady search for historical truth by academics to the national agenda of promoting historical houses and monuments—that those who Mantel defends herself against distrust the search for historical truth within the aesthetic creation of a novel. How can anyone know what is fact and what is fiction? What are the dangers if people accept fiction for fact? Where did this fascination for history come from? How long have authors been turning that history into fiction? These are some of the issues I want to explore in order to situate Mantel’s work in the tradition of historical fiction as well as in the controversy with the historical tradition in academia and history as government-created institutions want England to recall it.

Myth, history, and literature remained entwined until at least the early seventeenth century, as evidenced, for example, by Shakespeare’s history plays. Myth was disregarded as a fantastic form while history focused on a search for the truth about the past, uncovered and recorded as rational rhetoric. In an essay that explores Enlightenment theories of history, Hayden White argues that Enlightenment thinkers possessed a “militant rationalism” (White, "Irrational" 136) that biased them toward the past, making them see irrationality as a cause for the faults of

the people and institutions of the past. White cites Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727-1781) and Nicolas de Condorcet (1743-1794) as exemplars of this bias, possessors of a kind of “simple-minded Manichaeism which saw reason and folly as opposite and mutually exclusive states of mind” (White, "Irrational" 139). It was also during this time, Richard Maxwell argues, that historical fiction emerged in France, “shaped by Enlightenment anxieties about the integrity of historical studies as a discipline” (Maxwell 3). Novels like Madame de Lafayette’s *The Princess of Cleves* (1678) were viewed by enlightened thinkers as “intellectual transgression[s]” (2), because texts by Lafayette and Abbé Prévost were little more than “a series of literary scandals designed to create sensations, yet claiming to rise above them” (3). These “literary scandals” opposed the Enlightenment’s ardent desire for the truth, free from “fable and romance” (Bayle qtd. in White 140), a line, White argues, drawn too rigidly between *history* on the one side and *fable* on the other” (“Irrational” 140), with the recognition of the limitations of a historical vision dedicated to the unmasking of past folly as its principal aim” (147). By the end of the eighteenth century, realizing the inadequacy of condemning past actions that provided the pre-conditions for the present, historians eagerly accepted a new philosophy of history presented by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) in which the whole of history could be broken down to individual history; understanding the historical context of an action or creation is as important as understanding the “intention of the agent or creator, and not merely from without, according to its external causes or some purported universal rules” (Beiser). This importance placed on the individual is at odds with the importance placed on the “great historical process” (Lukács 29) that Georg Lukács attributes to Hegel in *The Historical Novel*. Since Scott is known to have had an early, formative interest in German ballads—including Herder’s—as evidenced in his “Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad” (Barnaby), perhaps it is better to think of his historical novels

as explorations of individual agency in history rather than in the collective experience for which Lukács argues.

Like Hegel, Victorian historical scholars saw history as a “great historical process”: “History is past politics; and politics present history” (Seeley qtd. in Fielding). For Victorians, the study of history in universities was considered an asset that would enable future politicians to govern Queen Victoria’s subjects. With this much riding on a thorough knowledge of national history, its study became entrenched and institutionalized, and its dissemination more widespread than ever before. Yet history and literature were “considered branches of the same tree of learning, a tree which sought to ‘interpret experience, for the purpose of guiding and elevating man’” (Hutcheon 105). In this, Scott’s novels “held tremendous appeal to the Victorian . . . readers” (Landow and Allingham). According to Philip V. Allingham, a past Victorian Web Fellow, Scott’s appeal lies in his depiction of a “heroic and romantic past” (Landow and Allingham), represented by the dashing Highlander of his Waverley stories, who must submit to the “power of the English” (Landow and Allingham). Allingham goes further:

For those of a Liberal, progressive bent such as Dickens and Macaulay, Scott’s Waverley Novels demonstrated the inevitable triumph of English capitalist, middle-class, representative democracy, constitutional monarchy, scientific rationalism, and industrial technology. (Landow and Alingham)

In this way, Scott promotes a “patriotic narrative that will find the roots of British identity in Anglo-Saxon institutions and the battle of Trafalgar” (Vickery).

Outside of universities and schools, “the proliferation of historical pageants, the expansion of historical tourism and the popularity of historical novels” (Fielding) characterized post-Victorian society. For some early-twentieth-century historians, this popular celebration of history was not rigorous enough; they perceived Britons to be mostly ignorant of their past.

Consequently, the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries saw the establishment of several societies for the preservation of historical buildings and sites, for example the National Trust, as well as enterprises that disseminated historical information, for example the Survey of London. These societies represent the origins of public history.

Despite the existence of these new societies, history as a recognized, professional area of study and practice still had a long way to go: “[c]ompared to the position in France, in Germany, or on the eastern seaboard of the United States, professional history, as those contemporaries understood it, scarcely existed in Britain” (Fielding). All that changed when, following the First World War, there was an “unprecedented commitment by successive governments to support a national, university-based intellectual class in both the sciences and the humanities” (Cannadine), a development unique to Britain and an early twentieth-century example of the concatenation of education and politics. While politicians supported these endeavours, a shift was taking place in historical fiction. Female authors, who, in the “family tree of historical fiction’s landmark authors” (Maxwell 2), can trace their genealogy to Madame de Lafayette, had increased their output of historical fiction, despite Lukács’s omission of their work in his analysis. By the twenties, women were engaging with re-imagining the “daily experience” (Wallace 30) of women in history, “leading such lost-and-forgotten lives” (Webb qtd. in Wallace 30). These novels explored both the victimization of women by Victorian industrialization and yet looked to a future of “as-yet-unrealised possibilities of the future and offering a warning to the present” (57) by exploring the “histories of the defeated” (Wallace 56). These kinds of exploration continued into the thirties, reacting to earlier novels by men, in which passive, historical female victims were used as a metaphor for “the human predicament” (57). The idea of history as “both a demanding academic discipline and also as an essential component of the national culture”

(Cannadine), consequently, became a legitimate field of academic study, but the circulation of narratives about victimized women at this time indicates an approach that continues to promote that “patriotic narrative that will find the roots of British identity in Anglo-Saxon institutions and the battle of Trafalgar” (Vickery).

By the 1960s, the number of British historical scholars in academia had risen from the hundreds to the thousands, but the perceived usefulness of history and its practice had changed dramatically with the social upheaval caused by universal suffrage, democratization, more emphasis on how the government should reflect the people’s interests, and increased access to higher education amongst the lower social classes. The agitation for what came to be known as social history, first described by British historian G. M. Trevelyan in 1944 as “the history of a people with the politics left out” (qtd. in Fielding), peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, dissipating in the 1980s.

By the end of the 1980s, the assertion by professional historians that historical studies saw “the human *past* for its objects of study, the truth of fact as its aim, and the dispelling of error, lies, *and* fictions about the past as its purpose” (White, "Kermode's idea" 48) had suffered serious critical attacks. When White argued that historical data is narrativized—shaped into a narrative form—thereby making whatever events are represented more accessible and more easily understood, history’s divorce from literature became suspect. White further identified the literary characteristics of historical narrative through its assembly of events and historical characters into a teleological form: a beginning, a middle, and an end. White goes so far as to argue that the emplotment into which the historian situates historical facts consists of four tropes: comic, romantic, tragic, and satiric (*Metahistory*). Mantel alludes to these tropes in the first epigraph of *Wolf Hall*: “There are three kinds of scenes, one called the tragic, second the comic, third the satiric” (Vitruvius qtd. in Mantel xxiii). Since Mantel’s oeuvre lacks the idealization of themes or

characters that are often found in romantic narratives, and because of her Vitruvius epigraph, I believe that Mantel primarily employs the tragic form in her Cromwell novels. However, Mantel clearly finds room for comedy—for example, the comic relief provided by Cromwell’s fool, Antony (*Bring Up the Bodies* 113-15)—and the satiric—for example, the scene at *Wolf Hall* depicting the reactions of the dinner guests to Henry falling asleep at the table (*Bring Up the Bodies* 18-19).

Popular history, as was exemplified by the post-Victorian “proliferation of historical pageants, the expansion of historical tourism and the popularity of historical novels” (Fielding), became entrenched after the Second World War. Aided by the rapid expansion of new media into the private lives of Britons, “[c]onserving what now became widely known as the national heritage became something of a secular religion. . . . [and] the cult of the English country house... a national obsession” (Fielding). The expansion of museums across Britain, the popularity of memorials and commemorations, and the passion for discovering local and family history contributed to a seemingly “insatiable” (Fielding) public desire to know the past. Fielding calls this passion the “new gardening” (Fielding), but it is only sixty years old. This new British pastime, because it is practiced outside academia, is pejoratively labeled by academics as “popular,” perhaps because most historians consider the practice of their subject “both a science and an art” (Fielding) in which analysis and narrative must work together. However, as was demonstrated by the discrepancy with the political history privileged by academics as the profession of history grew and the exploration by authors in fiction of the victimization of women, there is a polarity in assessments of what stories should be remembered: “those on the right prefer to study people in authority, within the confines of the nation state, while those on the left are more interested in people lower down the social and political scale” (Cannadine). Because

Mantel's Cromwell novels engage with a powerbroker who comes from the lower social and political ranks, I think David Cannadine's insightful analysis of this binary is relevant:

But for all the admirable work which these two approaches have generated, they pay inadequate attention to the inter-connectedness of things: partly by failing to explore how elites are invariably circumscribed in the exercise of power; partly by giving insufficient attention to the framework of law and authority by which the lower classes were constrained; and all too often (and from both perspectives) by giving insufficient attention to the complexities of social structures and the significance of social interactions. For all its alliterative appeal, few societies in practice have ever been polarised – politically, economically, socially – between two hermetically-sealed and mutually-antagonistic collectivities labelled the “patricians” and the “plebs”. (Cannadine)

Perhaps it is the study of this “inter-connectedness of things” that historical fiction accomplishes so well; certainly, it is an area that Mantel has mastered, as will be explored later. As an influential part of public history (Jordanova 6), the historical novel gains some support as a space for exploring inter-connectedness from Loren Demerath in her 2012 study *Explaining Culture*. Individuals read historical novels—i.e. “participate in cultural forms” (1)—because they are “functional for society (or for a group within a society, even when it is against the interests of the individual him/herself) because they are satisfying to the individual in terms of providing meaningfulness” (Demerath 1). The call for finding such meaningfulness has been raised by historians who warn that “the gulf between a liberal, democratic, secular, collectivist, feminist present, and a non-liberal, non-democratic, non-secular, non-collectivist, non-feminist past grows more impassable by the year” (Vincent qtd. in Cannadine).

Does this mean that traditional academic history and postmodern public history have exorcised myths of nation? In his 2005 analysis of the function of history in our postmodern

society, Beverley Southgate defines a myth as “a story about the past that, by definition, isn’t true. . . . they are stories that may have been believed as ‘true’ in the past” (40). Yet there are those who may purposefully create such myths because—Southgate cites Gabriel Naudé in 1630—there is “scarcely a nation which does not flatter itself about its origins, and take its beginning back to some hero or demigod” (42). Further, Southgate argues that myths like these serve a purpose: to “endow both the past and the present with a surety, a fixity, a stability, that appeals to an evident need for security in relation to the future” (42).

Coming at these foundation myths from another angle, Monserrat Guibernau argues that, in terms of national identity, it is crucial that a nation’s people share a “[b]elief in a common culture, history, kinship, language, religion, territory, *founding moment* and destiny” (my emphasis 11). Indeed, this notion of a shared foundational moment plays into four of the six major dimensions that Guibernau assigns to national identity: a psychological dimension that promotes connection between people; a dimension of antiquity that suggests nations may be older than some theorists suggest (this will be explored in the next section); a dimension of origin that aligns with needs to search and explain genealogy; a dimension of the mass versus elite nature of nation and national identity, often fraught with tension; and a historical dimension that helps to elaborate on those events that contribute to national identity.

More recently, in an 2008 essay that explores the delineation between “‘Scientific’ History” (Lorenz 35) and the making and breaking of myths, Chris Lorenz argues that “we have to face the possibility that ‘scientific’ history is not only engaged in ‘myth-breaking’, but also in ‘myth-making’—a conclusion already drawn by postmodernists” (44). To back up this argument, Lorenz cites anthropologist Joanna Overing’s assertion about the inherent morality in cultural and national myths:

Myths simply express and deal with a people's reality postulates about the world, and mythic truths pertain more to a moral universe of meaning than to a "natural" one (in the sense of the physical unitary world of the scientist). (qtd. in Lorenz 43)

Geography scholar Tamar Mayer also emphasizes the importance of myth in the understanding of the nation by its people. She aligns herself with Anthony Smith's ideas of an organic, essentialist nation. She cites Smith's (1981) definition of the nation as "a glorified ethnic group whose members are often attached to a specific territory" (Mayer 2). Mayer argues:

[The members of a nation] amplify the past and keep memories of communal sufferings alive. They share national symbols like customs, language and religion, and are often blind to the fact that their national narrative is based on myths and on what Etienne Balibar calls 'fictive ethnicity.' *Myth remains in fact essential to the life of the nation, for it is by embracing myths about the nation's creation that members perpetuate not only national myths but also the nation itself.* (my emphasis, Mayer 3)

Consequently, Mantel's affirmation that, from the beginning, she knew her Cromwell novels "would be political but also mythological, since Englishness contained equal parts of both. ("Dead are Real"), reveals her understanding of the importance of myth and of history to the identity of the nation.

2.3 Nation and Nationalism

In his recent *Antinomies of Realism* (2013), Fredric Jameson praises Hilary Mantel's representation of Maximilien Robespierre in *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992) because by "turn[ing] Robespierre into a believable character" (277), far removed from the "satiric weight of political vilification and the caricature of his personality and private habits" (278), Mantel's "intervention in the portrayal of Robespierre" means that "his political program can now again be taken seriously" (278). This program, Jameson warns, offers no insight into "economics in a pre-

industrial capitalism” (278), but rather into a “social and political diagnosis of corruption” (278). A reason to celebrate the relevance Mantel brings to Robespierre’s “political program” can be found in what Jameson sees as the omnipotent presence of business at the centre and in the margins of late capitalism where “the universal tolerance of corruption tells us more about what is apolitical in our societies than any number of party-oriented opinion polls” (279). Not only does Jameson see Robespierre’s “politics of Virtue” (279) a possible alternative in the “current absence of any genuinely socialist politics” (279), but he commends Mantel for “giv[ing] us a possibility of rethinking the uses of the historical novel in a mode distinct from that of hagiography or the legend of martyrs” (279).

Jameson’s analysis of this earlier work of Mantel’s has implications for her Cromwell novels as well. Like Robespierre, Cromwell has been the caricature of evil, from the Holbein portrait of him as possessing “the visage of a ruthless bureaucrat” (Hitchens, *The Man Who Made England* 147), to “the cruel, sly, and greedy servant of an imperious master, the wicked though clever destroyer of a civilization, the unscrupulous builder of a despotism which justly destroyed him in the end” (Elton 128). Swept under the rug of historical interpretation was Cromwell’s “political program” first unearthed by Cambridge historian Geoffrey Elton in the 1950s. However, before this discovery had much effect, “academic fashion . . . moved on and a new generation hated him again” (“Dead are Real”): not Mantel. She found persuasive Elton’s arguments for Cromwell as a

farseeing modern statesman who had transformed the English government from a personal fiefdom of the king to a bureaucratic parliamentary structure that could survive royal incompetence and enact reforms through legislation rather than through fiat. (“Dead are Real”).

Just as Robespierre counters corruption with his “politics of Virtue” (Jameson 279) in the revolutionary governments that emerged after the abdication of Louis XVI, Cromwell counters the corruption he finds in Henry’s court with “cool indifference in destroying the old and perspicacious dexterity in constructing afresh” (Elton 125). Unlike Robespierre, he does not have the philosophies of Enlightenment thinkers to inspire him, but must go head-to-head with the medievalists: Norfolk, Suffolk, and Gardiner. When he turns against Anne, Cromwell aligns himself with these very medievalists, threatening the progress he has made with the nation of England. It is the omnipresent political dimension to Mantel’s work that, along with the historical novel’s traditional link to nation and politics, links *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* so closely with nation and national identity: recall that Christopher’s Hitchens review of *Wolf Hall* was titled, “The Men Who Made England.” At the end of the break with Rome, Hitchens reminds us, was “the beginnings of a serious country called England, which can debate temporal and spiritual affairs in its own language and which will vanquish Spain and give birth to Shakespeare and Marlowe and Milton” (147).

In order to analyze Mantel’s engagement with nation, nationalism, and national identity, a few definitions must be established. For example, how do we distinguish nation from nationalism? What is national identity? What forces contribute to the shaping of these ideas? What are the current theories surrounding the definitions of the two most contentious issues of modernity? I will begin by creating a foundation of terms and concepts with the help of Anthony D. Smith’s *Nationalism*, an overview of not only the concept of nationalism but also the various approaches to its definition, composition, and history. Smith, a respected scholar in the study of nationalism, covers some of the major theorists in the study of nationalism: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann G. Herder, Ernest Renan, Walker Connor, Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, Tom Nairn, and Adrian Hastings. I will then add to this survey by examining more recent theory

of how nationalism can be traced to the Reformation and beyond—to the Middle Ages—based on “the ideal of a nation-state and of the world as a society of nations originally ‘imagined’ . . . through the mirror of the Bible, Europe’s primary textbook” (Hastings 3). Research published by Adrian Hastings, Philip S. Gorski, Diana Muir Appelbaum will contribute to this section, which also includes Gorski’s “Outline of a Postmodernist Theory of Nationalism” (1458).

2.3.1 Nationalism: Fundamentals

Nationalism, according to Smith, is “a sociopolitical movement” (6), “an ideology that places the nation at the centre of its concerns and seeks to promote its well-being” (9), and has three generic goals: “National autonomy, national unity and national identity” (9). The goals of nationalism will take different precedents depending on the particular kind of nationalism and the specific historical moment. On the other hand, defining what constitutes a nation is a more contentious issue that Smith believes can be understood simply by opposing those who define it based on subjective factors such as attitudes, perceptions, and sentiments versus those who privilege objective factors like language, religion and customs, territory, and institutions. Benedict Anderson, for example, offers an objective definition because the “imagined community” (Anderson 6) originally relied on and still relies especially on language—in the form of newspapers, novels, and other media—to imagine that community. Smith introduces the idea of an ethnies, or ethnic community, a term with which he has become associated. Because several ethnies may constitute a nation, Smith’s definition of nation includes those attributes which cannot be applied to ethnies: “a named human community occupying a homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a common public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members” (13). But the definition for nation that Smith gives is influenced by the generic category of nationalism scholars to which he belongs: Ethno-symbolism. For Ethno-symbolists, “nations and nationalism can only be understood through an

analysis of collective cultural identities over *la longue duree*” (83). This strain of scholarship overlaps with the research of Adrian Hastings, a Neo-perennialist who argues that nationalism is less about self-determination and more about the ideas of a collective chosen people. Hastings goes further, arguing that although nations after 1800 may have been created through nationalism, prior to 1800 nations created nationalism. In order to understand these definitions of nation and nationalism, it is necessary to have a look at the generic categories of nations and nationalism.

The most dominant theory today regarding nations and nationalism is the Modernist one. It distinguishes itself by arguing that nations have a common history and a common dominant culture that is elite-oriented. Before the French Revolution, according to Modernists, neither nations nor nationalisms existed because societies required the inauguration of new ideologies, communities, collective identities and polities for which that Revolution was a catalyst. Given that public institutions and culture are part of its requirements, Modernist nation theory privileges objective factors. The theorists associated with Modernist Nationalism include Tom Nairn, Benedict Anderson, Ernst Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and John Breuilly.

2.3.2 Primordialists, Perennialists, and Neo-perennialists

Smith’s understanding of nation thus emerges from six unifying attributes of ethnic communities: “an identifying name or emblem; a *myth* of common ancestry; shared historical memories and traditions; one or more elements of common culture; a link with an historic territory or ‘homeland’; a measure of solidarity, at least among the *élites*” (*Myths* 13). This kind of belief in nation as essentialist, growing from the organic beginnings of a society, is known as a primordialist view: nations have always existed in one form or another. According to this view, the myths of Albina and Brutus circulated in oral form as part of the myth of common ancestry, taking a more fixed form only after Geoffrey wrote it down. Theorists like Hobsbawm and Anderson would see the myth as an invention by Geoffrey, an example of how culture and

politics create nations. Geoffrey's *Historia* "enjoyed enormous popularity, reaching libraries all over western Europe" (Crick) and was likely promulgated by English royalty intent on legitimizing their claim to the throne as well as to link England to the classical authority of Greece—through Albina—and Rome—through Brutus.

Maxwell argues that Benedict Anderson's ideas¹² about how the novel could unite imagined communities into nations evolves from Lukács's idea of how the French first began to feel like a nation in the wake of the Revolution and under Napoleonic rule when "a feeling of nationhood became the experience and property of the peasantry, the lower strata of the petty bourgeoisie and so on. For the first time they experienced France as their own country, as their self-created motherland" (25). The subsequent Napoleonic wars, Lukács argues, brought "a wave of national feeling, of national resistance to the Napoleonic conquests" (25) to other European countries. As Linda Colley argues in *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (1992), this was especially true of England. With his historical novels, Lukács argues, Sir Walter Scott could portray "the totality of national life in its complex interaction between 'above' and 'below'" (49). Lukács goes further, arguing that Scott, in his novels, "sees and portrays the complex and intricate path which led to England's national greatness and to the formation of the national character" (54).

Perennialists believe that nations have existed for a long period of time and that a nation is equated with a race of people. Nations, according to Perennialists, coalesce through the progress of social evolution. They are a natural community, independent of the institutions favored by Modernists. Perennialists argue that France, England, Scotland, and Spain demonstrate continuous perennialism, whereas nations that existed in antiquity and exhibited ruptures and cessations of their nation—for example, Greece—demonstrate recurrent

¹² See *Imagined Communities*.

perennialism. Theorists associated with this strain of nation theory include Ernest Renan and Hugh Seton-Watson.

Like Perennialists, Primordialists believe that nations have existed for a long period of time, but they go further; nations exist before all things, originating everything. This strain of nation theory believes that nations are essentialist and organic, that myths of origin correspond to real biological origins, and that members of nations believe in the primacy of their ethnies and their nation. The theorists associated with Primordialists include Abbé Siéyès, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Clifford Geertz.

Ethno-symbolism privileges subjective elements in its construction of a definition of a nation based upon the persistence of ethnies in the formation of nations and their impact on nationalism. This strain of nation theory is inward looking—as the generic “subjective” might suggest—heavily emphasizing memory, value, sentiment, myth and symbol. As might be expected, this subjective approach suggests another element of ethno-symbolic theory: it is emotionally charged, accounting for the often-fierce attachment to nation by ethnic communities. According to Ethno-symbolists, although there exist various elites within a nation, they are connected to the lower social strata by a framework of “earlier collective cultural identities, and especially of ethnic communities or *ethnies*” (Smith 58). As discussed in the section on myths above, Smith argues that nationalism’s power resides in “the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular *living past* has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias” (*Myths and Memories*, original emphasis 9). Given the cohesiveness of this framework, Ethno-symbolists argue, the analysis of social and cultural patterns over *la longue durée* is critical and demonstrates the complex relationships between a nation’s past, present and future. The theorists who argue this strain of nation theory include Anthony D. Smith and John Hutchinson.

Finally, Neo-perennialists consider the roots of nationalism as subjective, found in the “deep cultural resources” (Smith 99) of language, ethnicity, and religion. Neo-perennialists view the history of nations as a three-stage evolution: from the fifth to the fourteenth centuries there was “a mass of local ethnicities, many of them of a fairly unstable sort” (qtd. in Smith 96) but unified by an oral culture and some written language; the fifteenth century was when “most of the main nations of western Europe can be seen to exist. People regularly spoke of them as such” (qtd. in Smith 96); the “successful English civic and parliamentary model, notably in France” (96) was the primary influence on the revolutionary movement in France—although it had some influence on other revolutions in Europe—that led to the collapse of the French monarchy. Neo-perennialists argue that the sources of national identity can be found in popular sentiments and culture rather than inventions by elite groups.¹³ However, Neo-perennialist Adrian Hastings definition of nation overlaps that of Modernist Anderson in the area of religion.

Whereas Anderson argues that religion was a community imagined “largely through the medium of a sacred language and written script” (13) that predates modern nations, Hastings argues that it was the English translation of the Vulgate Bible—that is the text used by all of Christendom from the fifth century—by John Wycliffe, the fourteenth-century proto-Protestant reformer whose followers became known as Lollards that foregrounded the nation of England. Wycliffe’s version has several allusions to “nacion” (Hastings 16), establishing the use and understanding of this word in England from this early date, through the Reformation. Hastings disagrees with Modernists who argue that there can be no nations without the ideology of nationalism: the ideas of a collective chosen people are more important in defining nationalism than self-determination. Hastings goes further, arguing that although nations after 1800 may have

¹³ See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*.

been born out of a nationalist ideology, before that nationalism was born out of established nations.

Another Neo-perennialist and historical sociologist, John Gillingham, cites the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth, William of Malmesbury, and Giraldus Cambrensis as “clear enunciations of a sense of English nationhood, in opposition to the Welsh and Irish” (Smith 96). In his article on “The Beginnings of English Imperialism”, Gillingham argues for the twelfth-century historian William of Malmesbury as a significant influence in England’s concept of civilized nation (the English) versus barbarian nation (the Irish, the Welsh, and the Scots): “William looked upon English history as a progress from barbarism to civilization—a smug assumption in which he was to be followed by many modern historians of England, from David Hume onwards” (394). Gillingham argues that two generations after the Norman Conquest (1130s-1140s), “the French connexion was no longer a source of national or ethnic tension” (393), making the colonization of Ireland, Wales, and Scotland an early exercise of English imperialism. Whereas the English euphemistically referred to this imperialism as a “civilizing mission” (392), its real face was a brutal conquest “and/or the rapacity of commerce” (392). In order to enact such a process “took a national culture of extraordinary self-confidence and moral rectitude” (392). Imperialism is a motif that runs throughout the myths of England, from the myth of Brutus destroying the giants on Albion to a kind of internal colonization, suggested by Cromwell and promulgated by Henry, that made Catholic England a Protestant nation to the British colonization of Ireland, North America, Africa, and India.

Although the modernists have been the most influential in nationalist discourse, more recently there has been a growing resistance amongst those who see the modernist perspective as essentialist: “They advance definitions that focus on some feature or features of nationalism that they regard as essential, usually having to do with its content or scope, and then use these

definitions to distinguish real nationalism from pseudo nationalism” (Gorski 1461). I would like to turn now to this new wave of nationalism theory, beginning with Leah Greenfeld’s examination of the Bible’s role in ideas of national identity in Early Modern England. Considering the transformation of England from a Catholic country to a proto-Protestant country—a conversion that was never truly finished until Elizabeth took the throne—the role of religion in nation and nationalism is, for England, critical.

2.3.3 Biblical Nationalism

For Leah Greenfeld, the Bible is a critical component to the rise of nationalism, the changing conceptions of nation, and the ideas of national identity in Early Modern England. Yet Greenfeld does not rely on the weight of the Bible alone in her analysis of the Reformation and Henry’s break from Rome as the point of origin from which the nation of England emerges. Greenfeld carefully analyzes the etymology of the word “nation”, from its Latin root as something born (4), to a long-standing meaning as “a group of foreigners united by a place of origin” (4). With the growth of medieval universities, to which students from all parts of Europe flocked, to this ordinary definition was added “the community of opinion and purpose” (4), reflected by the often unique directions and opinions affected by students from distinct parts of Europe. The Medieval Church Council, whose role it was to adjudicate “grave ecclesiastical questions” (4), viewed “nation” as something that differentiated parties of different “secular and religious potentates” (5), thus amending the definition to include space for politics and culture. Following this amendment, which Greenfeld dates from the 1274 Council of Lyon, the meaning of “nation” underwent a “zigzag pattern of semantic change” (5) until the early sixteenth century when England’s concept of “nation” became synonymous with a people and an elite:

This semantic transformation signaled the emergence of the first nation in the world, in the sense in which the word is understood today, and launched the era of nationalism.

(original italics 6).

Greenfeld's chapter on the emergence and growth of nationalism in England considers the changes of the vocabulary: "In the period between 1500 and 1650 several crucial concepts altered their meaning and came into general use. These concepts were 'country,' 'commonwealth,' 'empire,' and 'nation'" (31). In this section, she examines both legal documents—for example, the language of parliamentary documents—and contemporary references—for example, Thomas Elyot's Latin-English *Dictionary* of 1538—to establish the use and understanding of these words. She finds that the land over which Henry VII ruled was more often referred to as "the realm" (36) whereas Henry VIII documents revealed an assumption that Henry's subjects possess a "natural inclination" (36) to contribute to the "publick weal of their native country" (36). As for national sentiment, Greenfeld cites the riot "against foreign artisans resident in London" (42) in 1517 as an example of its emergence. Their presence and contempt for the English, observed by Edward Hall (1497-1547) in his *Chronicles*, fueled the xenophobia of the Londoners, at a time when foreign artisan presence in England was diminishing. Strengthening this inward focus on English culture was a "Chaucerian revival" (43),

The next contributing factor that Greenfeld discusses in England's origins of nationalism and nation go even further back: to Bosworth Field and a battle that paved the way for the Tudor accession to the throne. The English feudal order, already in decline, was eliminated, requiring a "reorganization of the social period along different lines" (44). Greenfeld argues that literary sources from this time allude to "new attitudes toward both the upper and lower strata of society. They were now treated remarkably alike" (45). One of the texts Greenfeld uses to support her argument is Sir Thomas Elyot's *Boke Named the Governour* (1531), in which he "advance[s] a

monarchical political theory” (Lehmberg) but talks about how a “‘publike weale’ is made up of a hierarchic order of degrees of men” (Lehmberg). Greenfeld draws attention to how Elyot’s hierarchical order bore very little similarity to the feudal social structure. Elyot’s criterion for hierarchy was natural intelligence, which “could be cultivated by learning” (Greenfeld 46). When he argues that “[n]obility itself was ‘only the paryse and surname of vertue,’ of which understanding and learning provided the foundation” (46), Elyot is criticizing those of the nobility who disdained learning. As for the democracy component of a more egalitarian social structure, Greenfeld argues that “Tudor rulers of England were time and again placed in a position of dependence on the good will of their subjects” (50). After Henry VII’s triumph at Bosworth Field, he claimed the throne even though “[h]is own claims to the throne were virtually non-existent” (Horrox), compelling him to marry the daughter of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville, niece of Richard III. The biography of Henry VII in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* supports Greenfeld’s argument for this dependence on Henry’s subjects, reporting that after the mid-1850s, and prior to Elton’s generation, moral judgment on Henry VII’s reign became less important:

[T]he moral argument was being bypassed by the assimilation of Henry’s reign to a longer period of ‘new monarchy’, in which assertive rulers restored stability after the Wars of the Roses by repressing self-interested and over-mighty noblemen, and allying themselves with middle-class interests represented by gentlemen justices of the peace, merchants, and bureaucrats. (Gunn)

It is in Greenfeld’s emphasis on the importance of the Reformation and the accessibility to the Bible in English, including both the New and the Old Testaments, that is picked up by Adrian Hastings and Philip S. Gorski for emphasizing the “crucial significance” (52) of the inclusion of the Old Testament in the Bibles that circulated in Reformation England:

[I]t is there that one found the example of a chosen, godly people, a people which was an elite and a light to the world because every one of its members was a party to the covenant with God. . . . the significance of the Old Testament as the *source* of the popular idiom for the expression of the nascent national consciousness should not be overestimated. (Gorski 52)

Reading the Bible, according to Greenfeld, was one example of how a Protestant could practice “the priesthood of all believers” (52), reinforcing in this practice the idea of “rationalist individualism in which the idea of the nation in England was grounded” (52). The resulting growth in literacy, “a religious virtue” (53) within the context of the Reformation, meant “[I]teracy was exceptionally widespread in sixteenth-century England” (54). Greenfeld emphasizes that even those barely literate would read the Bible. Cromwell facilitated this in the wake of the second Act of Succession (1536) by ordering copies of the Bible in both English and Latin and making them available at every parish church (Leithead). Those who attended parish churches were motivated to read those Bibles because “they were encouraged to do so by learned and powerful men who insisted on the right and ability of these common individuals to converse with God” (Greenfeld 54).

Whereas Greenfeld goes on to discuss how the reaction to Queen Mary’s bloody reign—most notably John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*—saw the privileging of nationalism over religion as a means to ensure unification and how scientific discoveries usurped religion’s primacy in the definition of national identity, her focus on the reign of Elizabeth is worth noting. As a part of the literary culture of England, Mantel’s Cromwell novels connect back to the English national literature born during Elizabeth’s reign:

It is commonplace in contemporary literary history to note the remarkable, indeed striking in its omnipresence and intensity, nationalism of Elizabethan literature. . . . The secular

vernacular literature was the conspicuous expression of the national consciousness and identity coming of age in England. It was the realization in written form of the previously formless, new sentiments of the people “intoxicated with the sound of their own voices.”

It was the first, expressive, act of national self-assertion. (67)

Here, Greenfeld argues that the conditions of possibility for a national literature were created during the Henrician Reformation, which some consider the Cromwellian Reformation, given that Cromwell “did more towards promoting the reformation, than any man in that age” (Foxe 193). Mantel’s novels are the descendants of that flowering of Elizabethan literature.

Adrian Hastings takes up Greenfeld’s main assertion that Reformation and religious reform were critical to the emergence of nationalism in England. Hastings’s approach, however, seems a little heavy-handed; he confesses to being “so very much an Englishman” (5) and therefore “it is surely right than an Englishman should explore [English nationalism]” (5): his observations on England and Britain are perhaps a little hyperbolic. Greenfeld, on the other hand, emigrated from Russia to Israel in 1972, has “emerged as a preeminent authority on nationalism” (“Liah Greenfeld”), and Professor of Sociology, Political Science and Anthropology at Boston University.

Whereas Hastings, a professor of theology, quotes and praises Greenfeld’s argument in *Nationalism*, he finds her main idea “seriously misleading” (8) because, firstly, she is still in principle in the modernist camp because she argues that England alone experienced nationalism prior to the French Revolution and that nationalism itself is a “road to modernity” (9). Secondly, he criticizes her for disregarding the medieval influences on nationalism, causing her to “not get English right” (9). What Hastings does offer is the suggestion that the theories of the modernists—“Hobsbawm, Gellner, Breuilly and Anderson” (8)—fail to consider the conditions of possibility that allowed nations to emerge after the French Revolution. Like Smith, Hastings

argues that “certain ethnicities, affected by the literary development of a vernacular and the pressures of the state” (11) were a contributing force in the evolution of nationalism and nations. Finally, Hastings finds the modernists’ disregard of the influence of “the impact of religion in general and the Bible in particular” (12), singling out Anderson in particular for this omission, since Anderson’s “imagined communities” were based on a reading culture.

Hastings goes on to perform an analysis similar to Greenfeld’s, examining the etymology of the word “nation”. In this section, he investigates how the English translators of the Vulgate Bible translated the Latin “natio” into an English version of “nacioun” (16), an evolution Greenfeld also covers. The rest of Hastings’s text explores “England as prototype” (35-65), but reaches back further in history to find examples of nation and nationalism. He then proceeds to examine Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, the United States, and Ireland, before addressing Eastern Europe and Africa. Whereas Hastings has invoked—perhaps even appropriated—Greenfeld’s argument in his attempt to show the medieval foundations of nation, what might this recognition of the influence of religion and reading a sacred text have on our contemporary society?

Greenfeld’s *Nationalism* (1992) and Hastings’s *The Construction of Nationhood* (1997) represent strong arguments against the Modernist theory of nationalism. Philip S. Gorski takes up their anti-Modernist argument in his essay in the *American Journal of Sociology*, acknowledging the “rather substantial literature on the subject of medieval and early modern nationalism” (1432) that has sprung up in opposition to the Modernists. Amongst others, he cites Hastings who, he argues, makes a “similar argument” (1432) to Liah Greenfeld, the only other scholar besides Anthony D. Smith that Gorski recognizes as having advanced “the minority view—the view that there *was* such a thing as premodern nationalism but that it was essentially identical to modern nationalism, or should be treated as such” (1432). Gorski also criticizes Greenfeld for not extending her analysis beyond the early modern example of Reformation England.

In his case study of nationalism in the Netherlands, Gorski invokes “myth”, arguing that early modern Netherlanders believed in their destiny as a chosen people and in their nation as “a new Israel or new Jerusalem” (1429). In addition to this sacred myth, Netherlanders believed in their descent from the Batavi, or Batavians, an ancient Germanic people who had resisted the tyranny of the Roman Empire. Given the similarities between the veneration of the Old Testament and its stories about a nation of chosen people and the originary myths that reach back into antiquity, Gorski argues that “the content and scope of early modern nationalism did not differ dramatically from that of French revolutionary nationalism, the paradigmatic case of modern nationalism” (1429). Gorski first argues against the Modernist position, alluding to the etymology of “nation” and words associated with it—“people”, “state”—much as Greenfeld does. Next, he identifies the historical evidence found in literature: “a wide range of medieval and early modern authors talked about nations and peoples in a wide variety of scholarly and political contexts and in ways that are quite similar, if not wholly identical, to modern usage, and that these discourses played an important role in political legitimation and mobilization” (1430). In his analysis of Modern Nationalism, Gorski identifies two categories that offer the opportunity to distinguish between Modernist theory and other theories: the content of nationalism and the scope of nationalism. Content involves ideology, defining nation similar to Smith’s terms above. Scope, however, includes both the social scope of nationalism and its political scope. The social scope analyzes the depth at which national consciousness may filter; is it limited to certain groups or is also it shared by artisans or craftsmen? The political scope concerns what political movements were in play and if they were “truly or fully nationalist in some sense” (1432).

When Gorski analyzes the social scope of the nationalism in the Netherlands in the early modern era, he draws attention to the proliferation of political pamphlets: “low in price, high in circulation, aimed, as often as not at the ‘man in the street’” (1451). . . . And for those who could

not read, there were various verbal, visual and ritual media such as sermons, paintings, and public prayers” (1541). Thus, it was verbal communication in printed form and oral narratives, visual art and rituals that ensured that most Netherlanders were “wholly [familiar] with the Hebraic and Batavian mythologies” (1451); this emphasizes myth as a critical component in these early modern nationalisms. As for the political scope, Gorski argues that those in power, the Orangists—supporters of the princes of the House of Orange—and the Calvinists—a Reformation sect that preached predestination—demonstrated the kind of nationalist politics the Modernists identify with nations following the French Revolution: “the persecution of internal enemies, the maintenance of a strong military, the reunification of North and South, the defense of the overseas empire” (1451). Finally, Gorski compares the nationalism found in early modern European countries like the Netherlands and England to the nationalism found in revolutionary countries like France. Early modern nationalisms contained more elements of the sacred, were often founded on a divine covenant of their people as chosen, and engaged in the Hebraic discourse of nation. Revolutionary nationalism contains more secular elements, is founded on social contract theory, and engages in democratic discourse. Gorski proposes that the French Revolution, rather than representing the birth of nationalism, merely “usher[ed] in a new *form* of nationalism, and it helped to propagate and popularize nationalist discourse and practices” (1458). He suggests that the next step is to compare early modern political culture and collective action with modern political culture and collective action using a postmodernist theory of nationalism.

2.3.4 Gorski’s “Outline of a Postmodernist Theory of Nationalism”

Given that the Modernist theories of nationalism regard any form of nationalism prior to the French Revolution as protonationalism rather than fully developed nationalism (Gorski 1459), Modernists would disregard Elton claims to “national sovereignty” (Elton 160) based upon the preamble in Cromwell’s *Act of Appeals* (1533): “This realm of England is an Empire, and so hath

been accepted in the world” (qtd. in Elton 160). If Mantel is calling for a new perspective on Thomas Cromwell by drawing attention to the Medieval institutions he tried to reform, while accusing the contemporary British government of “going back to the Middle Ages” (“Cromwell’s Welfare State”), I want to establish that Cromwell’s “revolution” (Elton 160) gave birth to a nation. Mantel reveals her assessment of Elton’s work in a *Guardian* editorial: “The Tudor scholar GR Elton had established Cromwell as a statesman of the first rank, but Elton’s work had done nothing for his popular image” (“Hilary Mantel: how I came to write *Wolf Hall*”). Consequently, I see Mantel’s Cromwell novels as taking up Elton’s argument in an aesthetic form. “Nation” or “nations” are referred to seven times in *Wolf Hall*—for example, when the cardinal is falling from power, Cromwell confides to George Cavendish that he “would like sight of the nation’s accounts” (*Wolf Hall* 264) as a New Year’s gift—and thirteen times in *Bring Up the Bodies*—for example, when Cromwell recalls fighting with the French, he contemplates the various national types who fought alongside him, running from the Spanish, “changing their nation and their names at need” (64). In order to properly explore Mantel’s demand for a new perspective on Cromwell, England must become the nation Mantel’s Cromwell envisions. Philip S. Gorski provides a theory for establishing this.

Instead of the scope and content of nationalism that are favored as yardsticks by the Modernist movement, Gorski favors *intensity* and scope. Intensity can be quantified relatively by the following four components: *discourses* that circulate, invoking the nation or national categories such as the people or the state; *movements* of social, political, or ideological groups that have, for example, the preservation, the purification, or the expansion of the nation as their goal; organized *parties* whose goals are to influence the state in achieving goals for the nation; and a central, controlling *regime* that “strikes out violently against internal and external enemies of the nation” (1459). Scope, on the other hand, examines the social or political classes involved

in the components of “intensity”. Gorski reduces these classes to four categories: the intellectual elite, including both clergy and lay people; political or social elites, including nobles and aristocrats; the “middling sort” (1459), that is professionals, merchants and craftsmen; and the common people, including peasants, artisans and laborers. Using this method of measurement, the lowest level of national mobilization would be found in a nation in which the national consciousness or national movement is limited to the intellectual elite. The highest level of national mobilization, on the other hand, would be the spread of national consciousness or national movement from the intellectual elite all the way down to the common people.

Gorski next devises an extended metaphor to discuss the complex profile of nationalist discourse within any given nation. If the nationalist discourse of a nation taken in its entirety can be “the fabric” (1460), then the nationalist discourses of a certain time or place which make up the subset of this “fabric” are “the threads” (1460) of this fabric. Differentiating those discourses even further are “the fibers” (1460), various narratives of which these discourses are composed. Finally, the categories that hold the narratives together—for example, nation, people, fatherland, state—are “the raw materials” (1460).

The process Gorski describes to undertake a comparison of early modern and modern nations involves two tasks: an analytical examination of the narrative “fibers” that serve or have served as the raw materials for specific discursive threads, testing their coherence, weighing their cultural and political arguments; a historic examination on the integrity of the threads and the fibers, looking especially where threads may be held together by “flimsy historical fictions” (1461).

In my analysis of Mantel’s novel, despite its genre of historical fiction, I would like to see how her novel performs both the analytical examination and, especially, the historic examination of the threads that cover the reign of Henry VIII during the Reformation.

2.4. Historical Fiction

As mentioned above, Mantel has defended the value of historical fiction, especially following her first win of the Man Booker, when she recalled a dream where she had to fight “shadowy people” (“History in Fiction”) from stealing the notes on her novel. Her anecdote served to make a point: “my subconscious is struggling with the notion of being told what I should and shouldn’t be writing” (“History in Fiction”). Mantel is, of course, critiquing the controversy over the number of historical novels in the Booker competition that year and how the term “historical fiction” has become “a stick to beat writers with” (“History in Fiction”) because it is deemed an escapist genre. This controversy forms part of another critique: how the genre of historical fiction suffers from a gendered treatment, something Wallace explores in her examination of women’s historical fiction in twentieth-century Britain and a topic on which Mantel has commented (“Novel Approaches”). By subscribing to “gender-blindness” (Wallace 11) when approaching women’s historical fiction is to “narrow [the] understanding and valuation of literature itself” (Wallace 11), failing to “trac[e] connections between the different uses to which women have put history” (Wallace 15), and adversely affecting public reception of historical fiction by women. Since public reception of novels is critical in spreading the critiques an author might be making, Mantel’s win of the Man Booker is critical in having women’s historical fiction reach more readers. Reaching readers is important because “[l]iterature creates a [public] institution of its own” (Hartman), counteracting public memory and politicized collective memory, “more personal and focused than public memory yet less monologic than the memorializing fables common to ethnic or nationalist affirmation” (Hartman). Yet the “gender-blindness” continues, as evidenced by a recent editorial in the *London Review of Books*.

In 2011, Perry Anderson, Professor of History at UCLA, contributed an essay to the *London Review of Books (LRB)* that explored the roots, evolution, and migration of the historical

novel, relying on Marxist critic Georg Lukács's canonical work *The Historical Novel* for most of his critical analysis. Lukács's work, composed in the winter of 1936-7 in Russia and translated into English in 1962, is often regarded as the most important theoretical text for any serious study of historical fiction. However, many other scholarly studies of this often-underappreciated genre¹⁴ have appeared since, and Anderson fails to consider new extensions of the history of the genre (Maxwell, Wallace) and recent research into its achievements between the world wars and the thirty years following 1945, during which periods many culturally significant historical novels were produced by women (Wallace). Instead, Anderson summarizes Lukács's validation of Sir Walter Scott as the innovator of the genre and the genre's marginalization outside of the ranks of literariness, while focusing his examples on male authors exclusively. Diana Wallace's letter in response to this essay appears online with Anderson's article, criticizing Anderson's glaring omissions while drawing on her own research into the historical fiction of British women in the twentieth century. Given that the *LRB* considers itself a publication that "has stood up for the tradition of the literary and intellectual essay in English" and "has the largest circulation of any literary magazine in Europe" (Day), the assessment of the state of historical fiction by a white, British male scholar that relies on a dated critical source and privileges male writers as the innovators of the postmodern historical novel, emphasizes how gender-biased the reception of the historical novel is. Perhaps it is Anderson's background as an historian that complicates his contribution to a literary magazine at a time when the genre of literary historical fiction has experienced a renaissance that has been noted on both sides of the Atlantic, a "growing ambitiousness and popularity of historical fiction [that] is already challenging the way we think

¹⁴ See A. S. Byatt, *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays*. (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard UP, 2000); Diana Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Mariadele Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Richard Maxwell, *The Historical Novel in Europe, 1650-1950* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009).

about the past” (Harlan 144). For example, in 2007, *Rethinking History*, an academic journal for scholars of history, published a double issue that explores history’s relation with historical fiction. Its editor, David Harlan, observes in that issue that the Princeton historian Sean Wilentz remains the exemplar of how academic historians viewed the historical novel:

Four years ago he wrote a cover piece for *The New Republic* titled “America Made Easy: Adams, McCulloch and the Decline of Popular History.” The article is essentially an attack on popular history, which for Wilentz consists of schmaltzy documentaries, hammy historical novels and comic books posing as history books. Wilentz regards this new history as little more than a sticky-sweet compound of cheap sentimentalism and sappy-eyed spectacle. To the extent that it is history at all it is an intellectually debilitating history: appreciative rather than critical, descriptive rather than analytical, reassuring rather than demanding, a conformist history that regurgitates and confirms the petty platitudes and self-serving mythologies of the dominant culture—in other words, a perversion of “the real thing.” (Harlan 143)

In this context, Anderson’s omissions seem especially blatant when six months earlier in the *LRB* Alan Bennett praised Mantel’s *Wolf Hall*, saying that it is “a tribute to the power of the novel that one discusses it as if it were history or at least biography, with one’s misgivings elusive and lost in the undergrowth of the novel’s intimate conjecturing” (Bennett).

2.4.1 Lukács and the “mediocre, average English gentleman”

P. Anderson’s critical stance is an example of how the historical novel is still misunderstood and the work of its female authors marginalized. This misunderstanding and marginalization begins with Lukács’s monograph, in which Lukács argues that the historical novel “arose at the beginning of the nineteenth century at about the time of Napoleon’s collapse (Scott’s *Waverley* appeared in 1814)” (Lukács 19). Authors of historical fiction writing prior to

Scott's era lacked, according to Lukács, "the specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age" (19). What was particular about the conditions from which Scott's novels emerged was how the French revolution and the ensuing Napoleonic wars, "for the first time made history a *mass experience*, and moreover on a European scale" (original emphasis 23). This "mass experience" impressed upon European nations and peoples the idea of living through events that would be recorded as historical. Compounding the change in the quality of these historical events was their impact upon all citizenry, instead of just the armies that had previously engaged in wars, what Lukács calls "wars of absolutism" (23). This is also the moment of recognition of the nation and nationalism in the lives of all people—in other words, a larger scope of nationalist feeling than ever before—and the development of a collective national conscious that, according to the Modernist School of Nationalism, is the beginning of nations and nationalism. It is also at this time that, according to Lukács, human progress becomes attached to history; indeed, "history itself is the bearer and realizer of human progress" (Lukács 27). Yet it is the historical struggle of the *classes*, Lukács argues, that is the most critical in this new understanding of human progress. In his analysis, Lukács relies on George Freidrich Hegel's ideas found in his *Philosophy of History*, in which Reason rules history and history's seemingly chaotic and destructive forces are steps in a progress towards a freer and more cohesive State.

Another important concept found in Lukács's analysis of the historical novel as exemplified by Scott is the idea of a realistic narrative—as opposed to the Romantic historical narratives that pre-dated Scott—revealed through the point of view of a central figure who is "a more or less mediocre, average English *gentleman*" (my emphasis 33). This central figure functions differently than the heroes found in Romance or epics—Scott gives the example of Achilles in *The Iliad*—because he represents the middle ground, the contact point where the two

opposing forces struggling against each other in the novel intersect with the central figure, a fictional gentleman of the bourgeoisie. The “great historical personalit[ies]” (38) of that gentleman’s era act as metonymies for historical movements or ideas that intersect with the gentleman’s personal life.

Nine years after Lukács’s examination of the historical novel was published in English, John Hopkins’s Professor Avrom Fleishman produces a monograph that took a new look at the historical novel, agreeing with Lukács’s assessment of Scott by calling those novels set in history that were produced before Scott as part of the “pre-history of the historical novel” (22) and that Scott represents the “greatest cultural phenomena of this or any other age” (23). Fleishman diverges from Lukács by naming some of those historical novels that pre-date Scott—Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* (1780), Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800)—while Fleishman takes Lukács to task for ignoring William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Henry Esmond* (1852). Given Lukács’s privileging of realism and disdain for modern experimentation (Lukács, “The Ideology of Modernism”), it is not surprising that, according to Fleishman, he neglects “the great modern novelists” (xvii) Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, and Virginia Woolf. Fleishman also praises the emergence of Mary Renault’s historical fiction in the late fifties and early sixties. His theoretical frame for the historical novel is set out as follows: the novel must be set at least two generations (or forty to sixty years) before the present; it must include as one of its characters at least one “great historical personality”; and it must be set in a realistic background with real historical and public events.

2.4.2 Late-Twentieth and Early-Twenty-First Century Interventions

By the 1980s, further experimentation in the historical novel genre led a Canadian scholar to examine how historical fiction might be a critical part of postmodernism. In a text that sets out

to theorize postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988) introduces her theory of "historiographic metafiction" (5). In an effort to define postmodernism, Hutcheon focuses on "a cultural activity that can be discerned in most art forms and many currents of thought today . . . fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political" (4). Postmodern cultural activities differ from Modern cultural activities, Hutcheon argues, because there is a reversal of Modernism's break with history, resulting in postmodernism's "critical revisiting . . . [and] ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society" (4). This is not, Hutcheon insists, a nostalgic return to a golden age, but rather a critical, often parodic but always ironic, reworking of—in the example of historical fiction—historical events or "great historical personalit[ies]". Because her definition does not rely on any temporal beginnings or endings, Hutcheon sees how postmodernism can be found in works of art that predate even modernism. Yet it is the "resolutely historical" facet of postmodernism that inspires Hutcheon to call novels that engage with the past "historiographic metafiction": "By this I mean those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages. . . . [and their] theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" (5).

One 1990 novel that Hutcheon would have classified as historiographic metafiction is A. S. Byatt's *Possession*. Following the success of that novel, Byatt's next release was a volume of two novels entitled *Angels and Insects* (1992), followed by a collection of essays, many based on a series of lectures she gave about British novels about history. Byatt observes that, while authors are creating historical fiction as cultural artifacts, "the discussion of *why* they are doing this has been confined within the discussions of Empire or Women, or to the debate between 'escapism' and 'relevance'" (3). In her introduction, Byatt explains the style of her essays, how she quotes extensively because of her earlier training under F. R. Leavis, and how those extensive quotes

ought to be received “like the slides in an art historical lecture—they are the Thing Itself, which is in danger of being crushed under a weight of commentary” (6). This technique allows her to thoughtfully analyze long passages, including passages from Hilary Mantel’s *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992) and *A Change of Climate* (1994).

In her conclusion, she sides with Lukács on one of the flaws of modernism, citing the story of Shahrazad as the exemplar of stories:

Narration is as much part of human nature as breath and the circulation of the blood. Modernist literature tried to do away with storytelling, which it thought was vulgar, replacing it with flashbacks, epiphanies, streams of consciousness. But storytelling is intrinsic to biological time, which we cannot escape. (166)

Byatt seems to be arguing for the pedigree of historical fiction on the basis of its ability to tell a good story. She recognizes the various structures postmodern historical fiction can take: “parodic and pastiche forms, forms which fake documents or incorporate real ones, mixtures of past and present, hauntings, and ventriloquism, historical versions of genre fictions” (38). But those postmodern authors Byatt singles out in her essays are Pat Barker and Hilary Mantel because they are “apparently innocently realist . . . [but] do not choose realism unthinkingly, but almost as an act of shocking rebellion against current orthodoxies” (39). In her examination of Hilary Mantel’s French Revolution novel, *A Place of Greater Safety*, Byatt praises Mantel’s “apparently straightforward, realist narrative . . . recreating the intellectual and emotional turmoil of the time both on the grand scale and with precise images of small, local details of pain, excitement, curiosity, terror and desire” (54). After first reading Simon Schama’s *Citizens* (1989), Byatt was so struck by its “imaginative power” (54) that she put off reading Mantel’s novel. What she found in its “innocently realist[ic]” story was an “old-fashioned psychological narrative which is the imaginative form she gives to the lives of real, partially known men” (55). Byatt closely looks

at how this form, how Mantel's "imaginative closeness" (55), succeeds through what seems like a "new and shocking experiment" (55). As for Mantel's use of the present tense (which she also uses in her Cromwell novels), Byatt draws a comparison to Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*. This comparison also works between *Bleak House* and Mantel's Cromwell novels: Mantel's central figure from the working class in both *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, and *Bleak House*'s man of the law, Mr. Tulkinghorn, play a role in the downfall of their masters' wives: Anne Boleyn and Lady Dedlock; Dickens's realistic novel is an intricately-plotted condemnation of a outdated institution—Chancery—with a vast cast of characters whereas Mantel's realistic novel is an intricately-plotted, condemnation of an outdated institution—the Catholic Church—with a vast cast of characters. But Byatt's early comparison of Mantel to Dickens draws attention to another similarity between Dickens's *Bleak House* and Mantel's Cromwell novels; both novels play out in "the tragic note" (Leech 30) by "present[ing] situations in which there is a desperate urgency to assign blame" (Poole 45). It is also important to remember that Aristotle's word for "possible types of tragic plot" (Poole 46) is *mythos*. I will look more at Mantel's engagement with the "tragic note" in the next chapter.

Five years after the appearance of Byatt's collection, Diana Wallace's *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000* responded directly to Lukács's omission of female authors in his survey of historical fiction, especially those that were active in the 1920s and 1930s. Wallace establishes the ambivalence of women towards traditional history:

History, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in... The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all—it is very tiresome: and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention. The speeches that are put into the heroes' mouths,

their thoughts and designs—the chief of all this must be invention, and invention is what delights me in other books. (Austen qtd. in Wallace 1)

Despite the implications of the ambivalence displayed by Austen's Katherine Morland, Wallace argues that the historical novel was "one of the most important genres for women writers and readers in the twentieth century" (3). Wallace argues that the neglect of women in traditional historical narratives and the exclusion of women from scholarly criticism of historical fiction has given the perception that the periods between the two world wars and between 1945-1960 as infertile ones for female authors, neglecting many serious novelists who wrote historical fiction and the rejection of authors of popular historical novels: Naomi Mitchison, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Bryher, H. F. M. Prescott, and Mary Renault. Wallace criticizes Lukács's claim that Scott was the innovator of the genre, citing Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783) as an influence on Scott because, like other historical novels of the time, it is a national tale; it tells the story of the imagined twin daughters of Mary Queen of Scots, brought up in secrecy, at the time of the reign of Elizabeth I. Wallace sees Lee as an innovator, pre-Scott, in "enacting an imaginary recovery or recreation of women's lost and unrecorded history" (16). Most importantly, Wallace recognizes the importance of David Richter's observation that Lee did not see the world-historical individual as the shaping force of history, as found in Lukács and Hegel, but rather as a site of sexual desire (17). Whereas this focus worked against the reception of Lee's novel, her themes of "repeated defeat and lost possibilities is particularly important in the women's historical novel, especially in the 1930s" (17). The romance inherent in this kind of story serves, through the domestic spaces rejected in Lukács's praise of Scott's novels, to bring women into history through their social and familial relationships. By setting the novel during the reign of Elizabeth I, Wallace observes, Lee claims to be setting it during a reign that exemplified romance (18), while invoking the female power Elizabeth I enjoyed, a power that women have since hoped to grasp—at least to some

degree—in their own lives. So if Sophia Lee blazed a trail for studying the binaries of women’s empowerment and defeat, Mantel’s novels can be seen as inheritors of this tradition in the way that she retells Anne Boleyn’s rise and fall.

As for Fleishman, Wallace criticizes his framework theory for the historical novel because it eliminates family sagas—“a very important historical form for women writers” (13)—while his requirement for realistic and public historic events marginalizes women’s historical narratives because their lives are predominantly in the private sphere. As for requiring at least one “great historical personality” in order to qualify as historical fiction, Wallace points out the limitations of this as a necessity to historical fiction because of the tradition of women being confined to private spaces, unlikely to encounter the kind of “great historical personality” valued by Fleischman and Lukács.

Wallace’s close analysis of the work of women authors writing historical fiction—from Sylvia Townsend Warner to Daphne du Maurier, from Jean Plaidy to Mary Stewart to Rose Tremain, Jeanette Winterson, A. S. Byatt and Pat Barker—establishes a female genealogy of historical fiction writers. In response to the above-mentioned essay by Perry Anderson, Wallace chastises Anderson for relying too heavily on Lukács, invoking his analysis to name Scott as the first to write an historical novel, and thereby reinforcing the marginalization of women’s historical fiction by labeling novels produced after 1945 as a “huge mount of trash” (P. Anderson). Wallace again defends Sophia Lee’s *The Recess* as an important influence on Scott, even though her historic events were less on the battlefield and more in claustrophobic domestic spaces. Wallace concludes that, rather than a sudden revival of the genre in postmodernity, the continued production and experimentation with the historical novel between the two world wars and after the second accounts for the evolution of the genre into its postmodern form.

Since Wallace, scholarly explorations of historical fiction have increased. Richard Maxwell's *The Historical Novel in Europe, 1650-1950* (2009) argues for an even earlier historical origin of the historic novel than Wallace suggests—with Madame de Lafayette's *The Princess of Cleves* (1678), but he also significantly links the work of Lukács with Benedict Anderson's groundbreaking analysis of nations and nationalism. Although Anderson cites Walter Benjamin's influence on his thesis, Maxwell finds Lukács's influence in how Anderson "suggests that the realist novel promotes nationalism by encouraging people to think of themselves as the simultaneous members of a great commonwealth—a concept which could not be derived from face-to-face contact" (64). Where Lukács and Maxwell differ from Anderson is in the materialistic changes, "on history as a state of emergency" (64) that, in Anderson, becomes more about how the simultaneous transmission of information (i.e. newspapers) results in "assertions of reality and subsumes actual effects . . . to ideological effects" (64). Like Wallace, Maxwell finds one element of Lukács's theory that has more universal usefulness in assessing historical fiction. When Lukács describes the historical events which take place in the lives of people in history, he talks of how "certain crises in the personal destinies of a number of human beings coincide and interweave within the determining context of an historical crisis" (Lukács 41). Through the concentration and intensity of these crises, narratives arising out of these events can then convince or persuade based upon a particular agenda:

We are to experience, possibly to reenact, the process by which people became what they were under conditions of widespread stress. The coincidence, the interweaving, the mutual recognition—cumulatively, the simultaneity of their lives—creates a compelling presentness, a 'here and now' which the reader too is invited, for the novel's durations, to join. (Maxwell 65)

The implications of this for Maxwell involve a mimetic representation of “a particular psychological condition of the author’s world” (65) within the parameters of a select historical period. This is especially significant in the context of examining Mantel’s novels given Byatt’s praise for how Mantel adopts an “old-fashioned psychological narrative that is the imaginative form she gives to the lives of real, partially known men” (55).

Towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first-century, many British historical authors have limited themselves to the Victorian period, lamenting the disintegration of empire while despairing over the nation’s future. For example, in her exploration of the contemporary British historical novel, Mariadele Boccardi argues that novels published at the end of the twentieth century—for example, A. S. Byatt’s *Possession* (1990) and Graham Swift’s *Ever After* (1992)—were part of an exploration of a time when British expansion was aggressive and its political influence at its peak: the Victorian era. She explains that historical author John Fowles first noted this as an English trait—one of individuals retreating from the public domain in reaction to an historical process out of their control. Boccardi explains further:

It is in this climate of national retrenchment to the literary myth of the garden of England—a case of romanticizing loss and turning it into the foundation of identity which recurs in the [thirteen] novels discussed in the preceding chapters—that Fowles’s essay must be placed. (171)

In Anderson’s assessment, the postmodern historical novel is no longer about “the emergence of the nation, but the ravages of empire” (P. Anderson). This is perhaps why Mariadele Boccardi chose to examine the representation of the British nation and its empire in twelve historical novels, published between 1969 and 2005, set in the Victorian era. Boccardi’s *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire* (2009) engages with Suzanne Keen’s earlier research, *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction*

(2003), in which Keen identifies the trend of sending the protagonist of novels into archives of the, usually Victorian, past. These publications—Keen’s research on the motif of the Victorian archive, Boccardi’s research on the representation of the British empire over a thirty-six year period, and Anderson’s essay on how the historical novel has evolved “From Progress to Catastrophe”—emerge at a time when there is a growing unease in Britain about its cultural diversity, what it means to be British or English, renewed attempts to create distinctive Welsh and Scottish societies, and a Conservative backlash about how history is taught in British schools. All forms of history—academic, public, fiction, film—have become political, establishing new ways of thinking about where Britain has come from and how it has arrived at its current way of being in the world.

2.4.3 Ann Rigney: Historical Fiction and Cultural Memory

In an essay that explores the trend of memory becoming sacred and opposed to secular history, Kerwin Lee Klein identifies Pierre Nora’s introduction to his *Lieux de mémoire*, “Between Memory and History” (1984) as a major contributing force to this shift in usage. Ann Rigney builds on this late-twentieth-century distinction in her 2004 essay “Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans”, using memory as a non-academic “constructive process” (“Portable Monuments” 365) that integrates with cultural memory, a term she uses in place of collective memory “because it avoids the suggestion that there is some unified collective entity or superindividual which does the remembering” (365), and in place of social memory “because it foregrounds what Paul Connerton has called ‘those acts of transfer that make remembering in common possible’” (365). Rigney establishes these distinctions in an effort to explore how “the artifacts and cultural processes through which shared memories are shaped and disseminated in the modern age” (365). Sir Walter Scott’s *The Heart of Midlothian*

(1818) is the case study that Rigney uses to explore how “literary texts work alongside other memorial forms. . . . [and] operate mnemotechnically” (369).

Rigney begins her essay with an overview of how history is represented, how historical fiction has been degraded in favour of academic history and how that relationship has changed in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. Even today, academic historical narratives carry more credibility—the “truth” factor—whereas historical fictions—Rigney cites both novels and film—appeal more across different interest groups and classes, making them more popular. In trying to explain why historical narratives have become so popular, Rigney points to the “ongoing affect of the traumas of twentieth-century history that we are still trying to come to terms with” (363). By-products of this process of reconciliation include the “‘musealization’ of culture and . . . nostalgic tendencies” (363). Yet what effect does this “ubiquitous ‘improper history’” (364) of historical fiction have on a society’s perceptions of identity and, more especially, a society’s concept of memory?

It is Nora, argues Rigney, who relegated history to being classified as stuffy and rational to a fault, turning to memory as “the locus of everything that is missing in history proper. . . . closer to the past experience of ‘ordinary people’” (“Portable Monuments” 365). As a way to mediate this dichotomy, Rigney suggests the term “*cultural memory*” (365) in an effort to represent the many ways the past is communicated through texts or other forms of representation. Rigney elaborates that cultural memory

focuses attention . . . on the multiple ways in which images of the past are communicated and shared among members of a community through publicly accessible media which are sometimes commercially driven. . . . Not so much a reservoir in which images of the past are gradually deposited by some ongoing spontaneous. . . . [but] the historical product of cultural mnemotechniques and mnemotechnologies, from commemorative rituals to

historiography, through which shared images of the past are actively produced and circulated. (366)

Cultural memory is to be distinguished from “communicative memory” (367), which includes the memories of the past that are handed down from one generation to the next. Both work within a “social framework”, a structure that confirms and interprets the processes of individual memory (366). Also known as social *frames*, they also “hel[p] define the relevance of certain topics and dra[w] up a dividing line between what is forgettable and what is valuable for those doing the remembering” (“Fiction as Mediator” 80). Together, these concepts contribute to a “social-constructivist” approach to cultural memory, based on the premise that memories are mediated in various public spheres. As time passes between the events or persons remembered, cultural memory takes over, resulting in greater degrees of textual mediation, but resulting in a broader acceptance of one official story of an historic event.

Because cultural memories are the “product of special acts of communication” (“Portable Monuments” 367), the history of these kinds of memories can be unique to each culture and, at the same time, constantly evolving: “the content of what is remembered will also change... new images will be acquired and past images revised or abandoned in the light of subsequent events” (368). A memory recorded in some archive is not, however, assured of a place in the cultural memory unless it is “recalled in various media by later generations who find [that memory] meaningful... who may find it their duty to keep [that memory] alive” (“Portable Monuments” 368). Given its role as one of the “various media” that may be absorbed by a culture, what role do literary texts play in cultural memory? Or, to use Rigney’s terms, what is the novel’s long-term role in “memorial dynamics” (369)?

Scott’s *The Heart of Midlothian* appropriated the real history of Helen Walker, adapting it to frame a moralistic story in a historical content. Walker becomes Jeanie Deans, a woman whose

virtue forbids her to perjure herself in order to save her sister's life. Instead she walks from Edinburgh to London to obtain a royal pardon for her sister. Scott ties this to another historical event that involves a lynch mob, connecting the two stories with familial ties, rewarding the virtuous Deans with a happy marriage and lots of children. Deans's sister, who marries the leader of the lynch mob, is unhappy and has no children. The rewards reflect the social mores of Scott's time, but the overwhelming and enduring influence this novel had can be found in other historical artifacts unearthed by Rigney: "[a] four-masted sailing ship that arrived in Quebec, in 1843; a hybrid rose with a crimson color; an Australian class of potato; a lounge bar; the steam locomotive which pulled the daily express train from London to Edinburgh in 1900; one fo the paddle steamers plying the Clyde in the 1930s; the geriatric unit in Helensburgh Victoria Infirmary, Dumbartonshire" (361). Each of these artifacts bears the name "Jeanie Deans".

By choosing the novel form to spread the moralistic tale of Jeanie Deans, Rigney argues, Scott took advantage of his immense popularity as a teller of historical stories. Because his narratives invoked local memories, they became a "'social framework' of memory" (373), supporting B. Anderson's idea of how a novel could play a role in forming "imagined communities" (qtd. in Rigney 374). Given the obscurity of Helen Walker's story, Scott's strategy to make her the focus of his novel is an example of how literature can act as a "counterforce" (Hartman qtd. in Rigney 374) to official history. Hartman goes further:

One reason literature remains important is that it counteracts the impersonality and instability of public memory on the one hand, and, on the other, the determinism and fundamentalism of a collective memory based on identity politics. Literature creates an institution of its own, more personal and focused than public memory yet less monologic than the memorializing fables common to ethnic or nationalist affirmation. (Hartman)

One of the most important features of literature as a “counterforce”, Rigney argues, is its potential to “recor[d] details and complexities left out of ‘public history’” (374). Two other features that literature offers in this role are the “literary expressiveness and narrative *skills*” (380). When these are strong in a given work of literature, Rigney argues that they can make a story memorable, they can “help stabilize and fix memories in a certain shape” (381), and “may also contribute to making those stories ‘stick’ in the minds of third parties” (381). Another key ingredient in what Rigney calls “memorability” (380) is associated with value, “the idea that some things are memorable in the sense of ‘worthy of being remembered’ whereas other things may happily be forgotten” (381). This, too, can be influenced by an author simply by their “foreground[ing] certain figures in the past as worthy of being remembered” (381), thus serving to make an example of “exemplariness. . . . because they are somehow meaningful in the present” (381).

As indicated in the title of her essay, Rigney also argues for the novel as a “[t]extual [m]onument” (383), playing a role “in recalling some person or event of yore and in bearing witness to them” (383). The portability of texts differentiates them from *lieux de mémoire* such as gravestones, statues, or historic buildings in that they can be not only read anywhere at any time, but also because they can be translated and read in different parts of the globe at different moments in history. Literary texts are also “valued *as* pieces of verbal art and hence preserved as a recognized part of a cultural heritage and/or because they are fictional and as such not bound to any single historical context” (383), suggesting yet another kind of portability. In addition to the idea of portability is the idea of durability: Scott’s novel is still in print, unlike physical artifacts from Scott’s time, which may have deteriorated or been destroyed. This, of course, has been claimed as the superiority of literature over physical monuments since Shakespeare declared in one of his sonnets, “But thy eternal summer shall not fade / Nor lose possession of that fair thou

ow'st, / Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade / When in eternal lines to time though grow'st" (575).

In the conclusion to this essay, Rigney argues for the “distinctive role” (389) literary works have to play in reviving generations-old memories and, in a similar vein, awakening an interest in the history of groups to which readers may not feel connected. In the case of Scott's novel, the appeal not only reached into England and continental Europe in Scott's day, but also—though with a narrower scope—to twenty-first-century readers of historical fiction.

Four years after her examination of Scott's *Jeanie Deans*, Rigney argues that the recent “‘cultural turn’ in social memory studies” (“Fiction as a Mediator” 79)—for which only public acts of remembrance such as images, stories, rituals, and poems give meaning to the past for groups of people—opens a space where history and memory need not be dichotomized. Instead, all cultural forms of remembrance can be seen as integrated with history. Yet each of those different cultural forms—Rigney lists historiography, historical films, museums, literary canons, theatre, commemorations—“exercise different types of cultural and epistemological power” (“Fiction as Mediator” 80). For example, historiography may possess greater “cultural authority” (80), but poetic representations of history, such as historic films, possess greater influence. Nevertheless, both contribute to rendering an historic event or personality familiar. This familiarity, this memory that has been gleaned from a literary text, creating “the illusion of access to other people's minds as they experience and recall events” (87), can form “prosthetic memory” (Landsberg qtd. in Rigney 87), an experience through vicarious means such as literature or other media. Rigney also suggests that recent novels—she gives the examples of Graham Swift's *Waterland* and W. C. Sebald's *Austerlitz*—demonstrate self-reflection, indicating that novels like Swift's and Sebald's are “as much meditations on memory as they are accounts of particular events” (87). Given Cromwell's obsession with Guido Camillo's *Theatre of Memory* in *Wolf Hall*,

I would like to add that novel to Rigney's examples of a "meditatio[n] on memory" that also explores historical events. While this essay reiterates many of the points made in "Portable Documents", Rigney concludes it by suggesting that she has "retriev[ed] historical fiction from its position as the 'other' of historiography by showing how it has had a constructive role to play within the dynamics of public remembrance" (93).

2.4.4 Mantel on Historical Fiction

Shortly after winning her first Man Booker prize, Hilary Mantel contributed an editorial to *The Guardian* that sought to explain "History in Fiction" ("History in Fiction"). In the wake of her success, Mantel reflects on how this literary competition must always have "a controversy, however fatuous" ("History in Fiction"); for the 2009 competition it was the proliferation of historical fiction. She observes that, while a succinct definition of historical fiction such as that developed by Lukács in the 1930s is no longer so easy, Mantel argues that the term has become "an accusation, a stick to beat writers with: you're historical, you weaselly good-for-nothing, you luxury, you parasite" ("History in Fiction"). Whereas a certain kind of historical fiction, she argues, might warrant such accusations—"chick-lit with wimples" ("History in Fiction")—literary fiction set in the past does not. In the defence of literary historical fiction, Mantel argues that "the past is not dead ground, and to traverse it is not a sterile exercise. . . . the past changes a little every time we retell it" ("History in Fiction"). Those changes, however, are not to be confused with changes in facts. Indeed, Mantel is a perfectionist when it comes to getting the facts right: "you should be drawing the drama out of real life, not putting it there, like icing on a cake" ("Dead are Real"). Whereas her opinions on what makes good historical fiction may not be assembled in a monograph, as are those of the above-mentioned scholars, they can be found in the various interviews, panels, and essays that she has been giving, participating, and creating throughout the course of her career.

At a 2011 conference, entitled *Novel Approaches: from academic history to historical fiction* held at the University of London, Hilary Mantel participated in a panel with historian David Loades. She reflected on the disreputable past endured by historical novels and novelists, the perception that it was a genre for women alone, and the amount of reading and research required to produce a historical novel. Mantel distinguishes her roles as a researcher and as a lover of history from her role as an imaginative author as follows:

What I wasn't prepared for was the silences of history, the erasures, and the gaps. . . . It took me years to learn how to cross the barrier between fact and fiction, or how to fudge that barrier, how to knock it down, how to work around it. . . . My work is the work of synthesis, discrimination, comparing interpretations, choosing between emotions. It's not about original thinking and it's not about primary research, I'm standing on the shoulders of historians and I'm indebted to them. ("Novel Approaches")

As for what research contributes to historical novels besides the chronology of events and material data, Mantel argues that, in order to be "done properly" ("Novel Approaches"), historical fiction must be engaged with the ideas prevalent or emerging in the historical world. For example, Cromwell represents the emergence of the privileging of reason with his cool pragmatism; his knowledge of scripture goes hand-in-hand with his questioning of dogma. Henry VIII, on the other hand, represents the Medieval ideals, demonstrated by his love of jousting and his recorded confessions of love, first for Katherine then for Anne. Mantel reminds us that these two very different men—with different ideologies, coming from glaringly different classes—do share something in common with each other: "We're dealing here with huge archetypes" ("Novel Approaches").

Returning to the editorial Mantel wrote in the wake of winning her first Man Booker Prize, it is interesting to find an insight into readers' reception of historical fiction:

History offers us vicarious experience. It allows the youngest student to possess the ground equally with his elders, without a knowledge of history to give him a context for present events, he is at the mercy of every social misdiagnosis handed to him. The old always think the world is getting worse; it is for the young, equipped with historical facts, to point out that, compared with 1509, or even 1939, life in 2009 is sweet as honey.

Immersion in history doesn't make you backward-looking; it makes you want to run like hell towards the future. ("History in Fiction")

Mantel's insight has something in common with Rigney's idea of "prosthetic memory" (Landsberg qtd. in Rigney, "Fiction as Mediator" 87), suggesting that the familiarity with historical characters, developed through exposure to official history, academic history, and historical fiction, provides young adults with a certain kind of identity and an appreciation of their own historical context. Yet of all Mantel's insights into the writing and reading of historical fiction, perhaps the one that is repeatedly raised with authors and readers alike is the fact-fiction binary. Mantel has been adamant with her dedication to the truth and her debt to academic historians: "I'm standing on the shoulders of historians and I'm indebted to them" (Mantel, "Novel Approaches"). Whereas her editorial in the wake of her winning her first Man Booker Prize makes an argument for the "value of historical fiction" ("History in Fiction"), toward the end of her editorial she does stress that, whereas the skill of an author of historical fiction ought to lie in "imaginative interpretation" ("History in Fiction"), leaving the "processing of the present" ("History in Fiction") to journalists, Mantel warns that, in historical fiction, "the only requirement is for the conjecture to be plausible and grounded in the best facts one can get" ("History in Fiction").

The question of how much truth and how much fiction should reside within a historical novel may likely never be resolved. On the side of a dedication to historical facts is Mantel, who

argues that authors should “dra[w] the drama out of real life, not pu[t] it there, like icing on a cake” (“Dead are Real”).

2.5 Conclusion

The above discussions of myth, of nation, and of historical fiction have done much to further explain the argument outlined in my introduction: in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Hilary Mantel calls for a new perspective not only of the saintly Thomas More as a flawed, tragic hero, but also of Anne Boleyn as a tragic scapegoat, while at the same time laying the foundation for Cromwell’s fall as that of another tragic hero, the victim of a government that slips back into Medieval attitudes and practices, mirroring Mantel’s critique of contemporary Britain’s retreat to the Middle Ages, especially in its welfare policies (Mantel, “Cromwell’s welfare state”). Mantel’s *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* act as a “counterforce” (Hartman qtd. in Rigney 374) to British national, official history and British “prosthetic memory” (Landsberg qtd. in Rigney, “Fiction as Mediator” 87) by rehabilitating the legacy of Thomas Cromwell’s role in Tudor government at the expense of Thomas More’s and by emphasizing how patriarchy silences and defames women whose power give them a public voice. In the above exploration of myth, prophecy and witchcraft, we can understand the power of the originary myths and realize Mantel’s strategy for replacing the primacy of male “memorializing fables common to ethnic or nationalist affirmation” (Hartman) with female “memorializing fables” in which mythical, magical women are given the power of founding a nation (*Wolf Hall* 65-66) or a dynasty (*Wolf Hall* 96). *Bring Up the Bodies*, in particular, is a study of the process of patriarchy defaming a woman, stripping her of her power and her access to a public voice. Throughout the second novel, Mantel draws on the “memorializing fables” that grew from this orchestrated destruction of Anne, as itemized in her editorial on the legacy of Anne (“witch, bitch”). We have seen in the above exploration of academic history, public history, and historical fiction that the lines between each

of these areas of investigation is blurred and the motivation behind the creation of texts that originate from each can be similar: to promote the nation, to honor great historic deeds, and, more recently, to reclaim women's histories.

Nation and nationalism, as outlined above, though predominantly thought to originate in the French Revolution, an event known for its famous men and the violence perpetrated by infamous men, are defined by some as having a much older origin—reflecting the debate on the origin of the historical novel. For the purposes of examining Mantel's Cromwell novels, I will rely on Liah Greenfeld's theories of Biblical Nationalism, contending that the inward focus of England in 1517 prior to the appearance of Anne Boleyn—during which there was a riot “against foreign artisans resident in London” (Greenfeld 42)—the Chaucerian revival during Anne's ascendance, and the subsequent break with Rome her marriage with Henry necessitated, were critical in England's emergence as a nation. In her examination of Pat Barker's *Regeneration* (1991), within her larger examination of women's historical fiction, Wallace argues that Barker examines the stories of principal historical male figures of World War I in order to explore the “unrecorded or misrepresented” (222) voices of working class men, as represented by her character Prior. Like Mantel, Barker had been “known for feminist novels about working-class women's lives” (223), but shifted to a male-centred narrative. Barker defended her choice by responding to an interviewer's critique of a lack of female protagonist by saying, “there *is* a woman on every page—me” (qtd. in Wallace, original emphasis 224). This remark fails to draw attention to an important female character in *Regeneration*: Sarah Lumb. As Prior's love interest, Sarah, who works in a munitions factory making detonators (Barker 89), represents the experience of British women during World War I. I will explore how Barker's inclusion of Sarah and her “Munitionettes” (Barker, original emphasis 87) friends is similar to the women found in Mantel's Cromwell novels. To this theory, I would like to add Gorski's outline of a

postmodernist theory of nationalism. Mantel's narrative strategies suggest that England, at the time of her narrative, was identified by its citizens as a nation, from men in powerful positions like Cromwell¹⁵ to those who participated in the riot against foreign artisans. This scope of support for England's unique identity is one of the components in Gorksi's theory that indicates a high level of national mobilization. The other component, intensity, is composed of circulating discourses about the nation, groups of like-minded people who seek to advance ideas of the nation, organized groups that influence those in power to achieve certain national goals, and a central regime with the ability to defend the nation from internal and external enemies. Mantel introduces the idea of nation early in *Wolf Hall* with a reference to how Henry's appeal to the Pope for an annulment of his first marriage gives "the king's whim. . . . an *international* airing" (my emphasis 26). Since "international" has an etymology that, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, goes back only to the late eighteenth century ("international, adj. and n."), Mantel uses the word anachronistically in a conversation between Wolsey and Cromwell. She seems to suggest that the matter that they are discussing—the king's annulment and subsequent break from Rome—is the significant moment when the meeting of different powers can be deemed between nations. Nation is mentioned in a reflection of Cromwell's about how a woman's ambition is often revealed through her sons: "The example of history and of other nations shows that the mothers fight for status, and try to get their brats induced somehow into the line of succession" (75-76). Earlier in this scene, Cromwell has passed on his wife's gossip, the gossip of the silk merchants: the king has ordered an expensive emerald ring. This seems to indicate a similarity of concern over women's ability or inability to bear children that indicates both their critical role in the nation as well as their marginalized status in their nation. The next time Cromwell mentions

¹⁵ Cromwell's *Act in Restraint of Appeals* (1533) declared England to be an empire with a king as its supreme ruler. In the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of "empire", it cites that Act in its third definition: "A country that is not subject to any foreign authority; an independent nation" ("empire").

“nation” he is in conversation with George Cavendish; Wolsey has just died and Cromwell expresses his desire to see the “nation’s accounts” (264). Nation is not mentioned again until Anne’s coronation day, when Cromwell is in conversation with Jean de Dinteville, the French ambassador. Cromwell tells him that “it appears that with the coronation of this queen, our two nations have reached a state of perfect amity” (466). This statement is ironic, because neither the French ambassador nor his king have any respect for Anne. However, the nations of France and England have long defined themselves as nations in their enmity and competitiveness, as explored by Linda Colley in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. Just as the coronation of Anne Boleyn solidifies the idea of England as a nation in Mantel’s *Wolf Hall*, her removal as a threat to the nation is pursued by a group organized under the leadership of Cromwell. Henry is at the centre of the regime that exterminates Anne as a perceived internal enemy.

Despite Mantel’s assertion in an interview that *Wolf Hall* was a “song of England” (“Dead are Real”), just as her earlier novel, *The Giant O’Brien* was a “song of Ireland” (“Dead are Real”), she has a complicated relationship with the nation of England that ought to be kept in mind when reading her Cromwell novels. Despite having told her interviewer that, with *Wolf Hall*, she had “planted her flag right in the center of Englishness” (“Dead are Real”) by exploring the Henrician Reformation and that “Thomas Cromwell had showed the English how to know themselves” (“Dead are Real”) by establishing a record-keeping system in 1538, her feelings of exclusion from the nation of England seemed clear in her 2009 essay:

As I grew up I came to see that Englishness was white, male, southern, Protestant, and middle class. I was a woman, a Catholic, a northerner, of Irish descent. . . . All these markers—descent, religion, region, accent—are quickly perceived and decoded by those who possess Englishness, and to this day they are used to *exclude*. You are forced off

centre. You are a provincial. You are a spectator. If you want to belong to Englishness, you must sell off aspects of your identity. (“No Passes” 96)

Instead of a novel-sized poetic ode to the English nation—a ballad or a madrigal—*Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* are Mantel’s resistance to the “memorializing fables... [of] nationalist affirmation” (Hartman) and her opposition to “the impersonality and instability of public memory... the determinism and fundamentalism of a collective memory based on identity politics” (Hartman) that define Englishness as “white, male, southern, Protestant, and middle class” (“No Passes” 96). *Bring Up the Bodies* seems to focus on the feelings of exclusion experienced by someone with an accent that excludes them from English identity—Anne’s accent was French, Mantel speaks with a Northern accent—and a sex that excludes them from English identity. Whereas Mantel’s “counterforce” against the traditional, male-focused study of history, with its “quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all” (Austen qtd. in Wallace 1), is less obvious than the reclamation of the history of the working class through Thomas Cromwell, I consider it a critical component of Mantel’s historical fiction narrative.

Finally, I would like to recall Margaret Atwood’s summary of Mantel’s oeuvre: “She’s never gone for the sweet people, and is not a stranger to dark purposes” (Atwood). It is true that Mantel’s oeuvre contains fiction often difficult to read: the child abuser Evelyn Axon and her sociopathic daughter Muriel Axon in *Every Day is Mother’s Day* and *Vacant Possession*, the cruel ghost Morris who makes mystic Alison Hart’s life miserable in *Beyond Black*, and the gothic world of female apartheid found in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*. Consequently, Mantel’s Cromwell novels explore the “dark purposes” of people who are not sweet, but may have “corners of tenderness” (Atwood), making them a “counterforce” for the kind of saccharine-sweet public history that defends England’s greatness. Mantel’s novels are a reminder that when

one investigates England's origins, "[w]hichever way you look at it, it all begins in slaughter" (*Wolf Hall* 66). Mantel's other novels and the themes she explores in her Cromwell novels suggest that she agrees with Cassirer's theory that "the mythology of a people does not *determine* but *is* its fate, its destiny as decreed from the very beginning" (Cassirer qtd. in Schultz 233); the slaughter continues.

Chapter Three: Sir Thomas More, National Hero

My thesis argues that *Wolf Hall* offers new perspectives on both Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell; Mantel subverts the saintly image of More while exploring the ways in which the often demonized Cromwell served his king and country, shaping it into a modern nation. In this chapter I want to look at Thomas More—knight and saint—who I argue is the flawed tragic hero of *Wolf Hall*. Although he is not the protagonist of *Wolf Hall*, his status of saint and martyr has established him in traditional circles, even today, as a hero (as is discussed further, below). Mantel subverts this.

I want to begin with the word I use in my thesis—“perspective”—when describing Mantel’s new approach to the legacies of both of these men. Despite the media’s insistence, with the combined effort of her two Cromwell novels and the Royal Shakespeare Company’s adaptation of those novels,¹⁶ that because of Mantel’s works of fiction, Cromwell “has been dramatically rehabilitated” (Borman), Mantel has clearly stated that she has not rehabilitated him: “Redefine him? Yes. Glorify him or rehabilitate him? No” (“opening up the past”). This is why I have chosen “perspective” as the best way to describe Mantel’s treatment of both More and Cromwell: “a particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; an individual point of view” (“perspective,” def. 9a). But perspective is also an important aspect in the creation of art. During the years depicted in *Wolf Hall*, the artist Hans Holbein came to be associated with Henry’s court, creating many paintings of the powerbrokers of that court, including More and Cromwell. It is Holbein’s perspective on these two men, their solitary portraits a part of the collection of the Frick Gallery of New York, that gives us his “particular attitude” towards More and Cromwell. But what if Holbein’s famous portrait of Thomas More and his family, however,

¹⁶ The Royal Shakespeare Company moved their productions of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* to London from Stratford in May 2014 (Brown, “move to West End”). Performances ended in London 4 Oct. 2014 (Holpuch).

were to be viewed through another perspective? This is where I would like to begin my analysis of Mantel's new perspective of Thomas More.

When Cromwell first visits More's residence in Chelsea, he is greeted, according to Mantel's representation, by an image of the Chancellor's family—*The Family of Sir Thomas More*—created by Hans Holbein. It is one of three paintings¹⁷ over which Mantel lingers in *Wolf Hall*. Holbein had a significant role in the Henrician Reformation, recording the likenesses of many of the major players in the social and political revolution it fostered. According to the literature prepared for the Tate Britain's exhibition on Holbein, on display from September 2006 to January 2007, this artist also brought the "Renaissance in painting from continental Europe to Britain" ("Holbein in England") and inspired a vogue for portraits "to facilitate or celebrate marriage, to cement love affairs and to commemorate the worthy" ("Holbein in England: London 1532-43"). Although the Tate reveals that Holbein painted many portraits of "the worthy", including "a new generation of humanist writers" ("London 1532-43"), it also reveals that he also painted "the wife of a City of London cloth merchant, as well as the King's household servants" ("London 1532-43"). Like Cromwell, Holbein experienced a successful career despite his working class background. More importantly, Mantel seems to be making a point about More's famed humility: why would he have such an elaborate painting made of his family if such portraits were known to "commemorate the worthy"?

Holbein's portraits of Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell reside today on the opposite sides of the fireplace in the Living Hall of New York City's Frick Gallery. Whereas Cromwell thinks reflexively in *Wolf Hall* on his own portrait by Holbein and how it gives him a sinister caste, Holbein's portrait of Thomas More is not alluded to in the novel: Holbein's family portrait

¹⁷ Mantel alludes to other works of art as well: a tapestry of Solomon and Sheba, Liz Wykys's Book of Hours, and, in *Bring Up the Bodies*, a book of poetry in Mary Boleyn's possession but known today as the *Devonshire MS*, edited by Anne and Mary Boleyn's cousin, Mary Shelton.

of More is. *The Family of Sir Thomas More*, according to the Kunstmuseum Basel, is significant for being the earliest group portrait “north of the Alps” (Müller); it was unfortunately destroyed in a fire on the Continent in 1752 (Lewis 12). The Kunstmuseum Basel still has the ink sketch Holbein created in preparation for the portrait. There are also several variant copies of Holbein’s oil portrait by Rowland Lockey; one version is located at Nostell Priory in Yorkshire—a former monastery that became a private residence following Cromwell’s dissolution of the monasteries. The Nostell Priory portrait has been the subject of a debate over a hidden message about the two York princes who disappeared from the under Richard III, later rejected by academics. By alluding to Holbein’s *The Family of Sir Thomas More*, Mantel necessarily brings attention to the Nostell Priory version as well, alluding to the myths surrounding the Princes in the Tower and their role in Henry VII’s—and through him, Henry VIII’s—claim to the throne.

3.1 More’s Family Portrait

Thomas More’s first appearance as a character, rather than an allusion, is in the dense chapter, “An Occult History of Britain” (65-153). The earlier allusions paint a different kind of portrait of More. Although many allusions indicate how Renaissance society reveres More—“a star in another firmament” (39)—Cromwell clearly does not share this attitude. Cromwell’s master, Cardinal Wolsey, instructs those who work for them to pray for heretics, to “bring them to a better state of mind” (22) or else “tell them, mend their manners, or Thomas More will get hold of them and shut them in his cellar: And all we will hear is the sound of screaming” (22). So when Cromwell encounters More on the street in the spring of 1528, Mantel interprets the humility for which More is famous as creating a “shabby” (121) appearance, with a grubby shirt collar. This is the first of a series of verbal sparring matches in which Cromwell and More engage, ending with those that occur in More’s trial. It is this sparring match, over the merits and demerits of William Tyndale’s English Bible, that ends with an invitation by More for Cromwell

to come to his house in Chelsea. When Cromwell visits More, it is the end of summer, 1530; Wolsey has been banished from court and More has become Chancellor. Cromwell arrives at More's house "on a muted, grey day" (226) and he notices that the grounds "are full of small pet animals" (226). More greets Cromwell and leads him into the house where he encounters a painting reputed to be eight feet by thirteen feet (Brown, "500 years on"):



Fig. 1. Hans Holbein, The Younger, Study for the *Family Portrait of Sir Thomas More*, Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland.

Entering the house, you meet the family hanging up. You see them painted life-size before you meet them in the flesh; and More, conscious of the double effect it makes, pauses, to let you survey them, to take them in. The favorite, Meg, sits at her father's feet

with a book on her knee. Gathered loosely about the Lord Chancellor are his son John; his ward Anne Cresacre, who is John's wife; Margaret Gigg, who is also his ward; his aged father, Sir John More; his daughters Cicely and Elizabeth; Pattinson, with goggle eyes; and his wife Alice, with lowered head and wearing a cross, at the edge of the picture. Master Holbein has grouped them under his gaze, and fixed them for ever: as long as no moth consumes, no flame or mould or blight. (227)

The Nostell Priory copy of this portrait emphasizes those “goggle eyes” of Henry Pattinson, More's fool, whom Cromwell calls “a great brawler” (227), a representation that emphasizes the contradictions in More's character because “normally you take in a fool to protect him, but in Pattinson's case it's the rest of the world needs protection” (227).



Fig. 2. Roland Lockey, *The Family of Sir Thomas More* (after Hans Holbein, the Younger), *National Trust Collections*.

Cromwell doubts Pattinson is actually simple because “[t]here’s something sly in More, he enjoys embarrassing people; it would be like him to have a fool that wasn’t” (227). Thus, Mantel’s portrayal of More subverts More’s own “self-fashioning” (Greenblatt 1) as a humanist and a lawyer, but above all a humble man of God, “a dissatisfied layman, impatient with liberty” (Greenblatt 16). In his analysis of More’s self-fashioning, Stephen Greenblatt argues that, through his works, More demonstrated “a lifelong current of contempt for a world reduced in his mind to madness, a rejection not only of all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of men, but of much that he himself seemed to cherish, a desire to escape into the fastness of a cell” (16). Mantel, on the other hand, interprets More as prideful, cruel, and ambitious. The painting that Cromwell surveys acts as a testament to that pride and ambition because Holbein has “fixed [the family] for ever” (*Wolf Hall* 227). The veneration heaped on More following his execution as a martyr, the fame of his writings, and republication of *Utopia* was the foundation to More’s beatification by Pope Pius XI in 1935 and “R. W. Chambers’s masterly biography . . . [of] More’s life and martyrdom as a drama of human freedom under tyranny” (House) in the same year. By the middle of the twentieth century, More was ready for a different kind of close-up; Robert Bolt’s *Man for All Seasons*, a West End play and a Hollywood film that won six Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Actor, and Best Director.

Cromwell not only reflects that Holbein’s More family portrait has “fixed them for ever” (27), he also reflects that this remains true only for “as long as no moth consumes, no flame or mould or blight” (*Wolf Hall* 227). By alluding to the fire that consumed this painting over two hundred years after its creation, making this painting the subject of ekphrasis in this novel suggests the mutability of physical monuments in contrast to the lasting monument of literature.

Rigney discusses this in her examination of the lasting monument created by Scott's novels and how literary works play a "distinctive role" (389) in reviving and re-shaping memories or in awakening an interest in centuries' old history. So while More's fame lives on in the texts he created, the image of his family is less stable. Perhaps Mantel's strategy is to point to the simulations of this image that proliferated in the "several portrait studies" (Müller) that have survived, some of which can be found in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle. According to Lesley Lewis, there is some evidence that Holbein invited Henry to view the painting at More's house. She further speculates that "More was high in royal favour and could have entertained grand people on a grand scale, so that it was possible for the picture to acquire the fame in which it was held by connoisseurs and other artists" (3).

Mantel's pause in the action of her narrative to have Cromwell reflect on the appearance of a portrait is only one example of the ekphrases that are found in her novel. At its most simplistic, ekphrasis is "the verbal representation of visual representation" (Mitchell) most often associated with poetry and with an origin identified as Homer's description of the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*. Ekphrasis can "giv[e] voice to a mute art object" (Mitchell) or "offe[r] 'a rhetorical description of a work of art'" (Mitchell). In his examination of ekphrasis W. J. T. Mitchell argues that "ekphrastic hope" (Mitchell) occurs when imaginative language seems to convey the image, to "make us see" (Mitchell) the artwork being described. The goals of ekphrasis hope can include "that the mute image be endowed with a voice, or made dynamic and active, or actually come into view" (Mitchell). But out of this hope rises "ekphrastic fear" (Mitchell), a distrust of the ability of language to accurately capture or convey the visual, that "[l]anguage might be 'stilled,' made iconic, or 'frozen' into a static, spatial array" (Mitchell). Mitchell's idea of "frozen" is similar to Cromwell's idea of "fixed"; these members of Thomas More's family shall forever be recalled in these positions, assembled in this order. Yet Mitchell

goes further in explaining ekphrastic fear, arguing that a “static, special array” subverts the hope that “the utopian figures of the image and its textual rendering as transparent windows onto reality are supplanted by the notion of the image as a deceitful illusion, magical technique that threatens to fixate the poet and the listener” (Mitchell). In the case of Thomas More’s family portrait, based on a sketch that found its way to Erasmus, the “deceitful illusion” that Mantel’s portrayal of More supports is that the reputation throughout Europe of More’s household as a centre for higher learning disguised a household ruled with an iron fist by a man with a giant ego, a fundamentalist ready to employ any manner of cruelty to those who strayed from his interpretation of the true faith.

Cromwell gazes upon this picture in the context of Sir Thomas More’s Chelsea house, just prior to sitting down for dinner with the subjects of the portrait, with “voyeuristic ambivalence” (Mitchell). More’s pride is evident in the self-reflexive pause enforced by More who is “conscious of the double effect it makes” (227) and because More expects Cromwell and Stephen Gardiner, who has also been invited, to “survey them, to take them in” (227). For Mantel, to recall this portrait to a British reader on the book’s release in 2009 is to allude to the recent “Holbein in England” exhibition at the Tate Britain. In the same year as the novel’s release, the British Library celebrated the five-hundredth anniversary of Henry’s ascension to the throne with “Henry VIII: Man and Monarch”. For others, the allusion to this portrait might send readers to the internet, searching for a copy of the image. These different recollections and reactions best demonstrate how ekphrasis is “stationed between two ‘othernesses,’ and two forms of (apparently) impossible translation and exchange:

- (1) the conversion of the visual representation into a verbal representation, either by description or ventriloquism

(2) the reconversion of the verbal representation back into the visual object in the reception of the reader. (Mitchell)

These two kinds of otherness contribute to a relationship between image, text, and reader that is triangular. Thus, ekphrasis “typically expresses a desire for a visual object (whether to possess or praise), it is also typically an offering of this expression as a gift to the reader” (Mitchell).

Cromwell’s gaze may be ambivalent, but Mantel’s offering of this visual object to her readers aims neither to possess nor to praise, but to demand a reassessment of the dynamics of More and his family. This demand is similarly made in conjunction with Cromwell’s interaction with the two ambassadors of Holbein’s painting, explored further in the next chapter. In this chapter, I intend to look at just how, for Mantel, Holbein’s portrait is a “deceitful illusion”, because historical evidence suggests that More was ambitious, prideful, and cruel. This makes Mantel’s representation of Thomas More, national hero, as a “counterforce” against the “saccharine propaganda of *A Man for All Seasons*” (Hitchens, “The Men Who Made England” 150), rendering him “the arrogant theocrat” (Hitchens 150) he was.

3.2 More’s Ambition

“But ‘tis a common proof / that lowliness is young ambition’s ladder, / Whereto the climber-upward turns his face” (Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* II.i.22)

Ambition, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “[t]he ardent (in early usage, inordinate) desire to rise to high position, or to attain rank, influence, distinction or other preferment” (“ambition,” def. 1). The *OED* definition of ambition cites the above passage from Shakespeare’s tragedy, spoken by Brutus as he reflects on whether Caesar would be corrupted by the power he would acquire should he be crowned king. The characterization of ambition as young could refer to the roots of ambition: in someone’s youth. The invocation of Shakespeare here is especially apt: Mantel read “the dirt-cheap Complete Works of Shakespeare [that] I laid

my hands on when I was 10” (“By the Book”). If diligence and demonstrated—perhaps flaunted—intellect are indicative of ambition, then Mantel’s emphasis on More’s ambition begins with her fictionalized account of Thomas Cromwell’s familial connection to one of Cardinal Morton’s cooks: his uncle John. By creating this connection, Mantel can manipulate the intersection of the life of the son of a blacksmith and brewer with the life of the son of a city barrister and judge. When he is escaping his abusive father by working for his Uncle John, Cromwell hears about the precocious Thomas More:

Each morning and evening the boys earned their keep by running up the back staircases with beer and bread to put in the cupboards for the young gentlemen who were the cardinal’s pages. The pages were of good family. They would wait at table and so become intimate with great men. . . . One of the pages was pointed out to him: Master Thomas More, whom the archbishop himself says will be a great man, so deep his learning already and so pleasant his wit. (113)

In one of its early examples of the use of “ambition”, the *OED* cites a mid-fifteenth century text, “Vicis . . . as pride, ambicioun, vein glorie” (“ambition,” Def. 1), and a late-sixteenth century text, “Ambition is any puft up greedy humour of honour or preferment” (“ambition,” Def. 1). Both of these quotes designate ambition as a vice, a vainglory; Shakespeare’s use of “ambition” is a close cousin to these, suggesting that lowness of circumstance inspires ambition. If that lowness of circumstance were taken to mean lower class, then ambition is for the ungentlemanly lower classes, not patricians like Shakespeare’s Caesar. These are important distinctions of which Mantel, a voracious reader and insightful journalist, would be aware. “Wit” is another word that, like “ambition”, is used differently today than in Cromwell and Shakespeare’s time. So, when the archbishop compliments More on the pleasantness of his wit, he is most likely using “wit” in

an archaic sense to indicate “great mental capacity; intellectual ability; genius, talent, cleverness; mental quickness or sharpness, acumen” (“wit,” def. 5a).

If “lowliness is young ambition’s ladder” and More’s father was a judge and friend to men on two kings’ councils, what need had young Thomas of ambition? Thomas More’s grandparents were wealthy but earned that wealth in trade, a connection he plays up in the epitaph he created for his tomb, that he “was born not of noble, but of honest stock” (House). Through his association with the royal councils, John More gained permission to bear a coat of arms, something Cromwell declines, and formed an alliance with Bishop Morton. The elder More’s rise in stature reveals “young ambition’s ladder”, something he then passes on to his son by enrolling him in a grammar school attested by a contemporary chronicler to produce “the best scholars” (House). From this school, More worked as a page for Morton who then sponsored him at Oxford where Thomas was encouraged by his father to study the law. From his departure from Oxford in 1494 (at the age of sixteen) until the publication of *Utopia* in 1515, More was called to the bar, became intimate with a coterie of humanists centering around Erasmus, wrote many tracts of devotional literature, wrote *History of Richard III*, and received “the first of his many commissions to represent England’s interests in negotiations on the continent” (House). But these steps on the ladder of ambition paled in comparison to the attention brought to More on the publication of *Utopia*.

3.2.1 *Utopia* as Ambition’s Tool

Erasmus was at the centre of the humanist coterie in Europe that praised “More’s engaging personality, his wit, and his brilliant conversation” (House), depicting him in letters as “England's only genius and a man born and framed for friendship. . . . the model humanist, a man of letters, whose deep and sincere piety are salted with a lively wit, More's character became

famous” (House). This is perhaps why *Utopia* “took European readers by storm” (Adams viii) based on the book’s perceived support of religious tolerance, rejection of vices like greed and pride, and the elimination of poverty. Yet *Utopia*, which is Greek for “no place” was never meant to be taken literally, nor was it a facile recipe for a perfect society. Literary critic James Wood—who, like Mantel, argues for a reassessment of More—calls *Utopia* a “beautiful lament . . . the inverted island world . . . [where] divorce is permissible, and the inhabitants can follow any religion they like” (3). Instead of a treatise on an ideal society, Wood argues, “*Utopia* is Saturnalian. It satirically turns custom upside down, so that in our own world we see the pompous altitude of custom, in its arbitrariness” (3). Wood’s interpretation explains much about Mantel’s More, or rather Cromwell’s perception of him: the condescension, the self-centeredness, the pride, and the bullying of the women in his family. Wood admits that it is hard to “reconcile the author of *Utopia*” (4)—where the fictional founder of that country supported freedom of worship because he saw that “religious differences sowed discord” (3)—with the heretic-hunting More. According to Seymour Baker House, More’s biographer in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, the publication of this fictional dialogue between More and a voyager returning to England from his exploration of new lands was published just before More entered court politics. House argues that More, anticipating that he would be an advisor to the court of Henry VIII, wrote *Utopia* “as much to reform as to entertain” (House), but perhaps he also wrote it as much to gain attention as to display his perspicacity.

When Mantel alludes to *Utopia* six times in *Wolf Hall*, it is never reverential. When he looks at his copy of William Tyndale’s Bible, Cromwell loves the irony of Tyndale inserting “PRINTED IN UTOPIA” (*Wolf Hall* 40) in place of where the printer’s colophon and address should be, reflecting, “He hopes Thomas More has seen one of these. He is tempted to show him,

just to see his face” (*Wolf Hall* 40). When interrogating More at his first place of confinement, Morton’s former residence of Lambeth Palace, Cromwell looks out a window onto the palace gardens and recalls that “[t]his is how the book *Utopia* begins: friends, talking in a garden” (*Wolf Hall* 562). Of course, the position of More as prisoner and Cromwell and Lord Chancellor Thomas Audley as interrogators indicates that not only are the current company not friends, but also suggests that those depicted in More’s book were not friends. After More is moved to the Tower, Cromwell visits him to persuade him to sign the Act of Supremacy, naming Henry the head of the Church of England. Still taking his stand against what he considers heretical, More refers to how heresy leads to Münster where chaos and violence rule. Cromwell responds, “Utopia... is it not?” (*Wolf Hall* 591). There are, however, two other allusions that Mantel makes to *Utopia* that are packed more densely with meaning and interpretation.

In anticipation of putting through a petition through Parliament that “will cut revenues to Rome [and] make [Henry’s] supremacy in the church no mere form of words” (*Wolf Hall* 339), Cromwell, who since Wolsey’s fall has become a councilor, realizes that those in favor of his petition will “have to win the debate, not just knock our enemies down” (340). With this goal in mind, he approaches Christopher St. German, “the aged jurist, whose word is respected all over Europe” (340). Undoubtedly, this is a legal writer that Mantel encountered in her early days as a law student. His first published work, *Doctor and Student* (1523), according to his biography in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, is “surely the most remarkable book relating to English law published in the Tudor period, and quite unlike any book to have come from the pen of an English lawyer before” (Baker). St. German followed this Latin text that explored “the relationship between the principles of English law and conscience” (Baker) with a text in English entitled *The Second Dialogue* in 1530. A “further thirteen chapters concerning the spiritual jurisdiction” (Baker) meant to supplement *The Second Dialogue* also appeared, printed by

Thomas Berthelet: “the intervention of Berthelet, the king’s printer, for the [further thirteen chapters] is doubtless explained by the political significance of such material for the government in the debate leading to the break from Rome a few years later” (Baker). St. German’s engagement with such themes necessarily found him “locked in controversy with Sir Thomas More” (Baker) and aiding legal advisers like Cromwell by “showing how... legal difficulties could be eased aside” (Baker). Such a role at this time in Henry’s reign identifies St. German as “one of the major intellectual forces behind the English Reformation” (Baker). When Cromwell confers with him in *Wolf Hall*, he finds support for Parliament:

There is no man in England, [St. German] says, who does not believe our church is in need of reform which grows more urgent by the year, and if the church cannot do it, then the king in Parliament must, and can.... Thomas More does not agree with me. Perhaps his time has passed. Utopia, after all, is not a place one can live. (340)

By having St. German recognize the impossibility of Utopia, Mantel has one of the “major intellectual forces” of the time identify the problems in *Utopia*. By having Cromwell consult with St. German, she identifies a major contributor behind the Reformation in England who, unlike Henry VIII, More, or even Cromwell, has been sidelined by history.

Wood also argues that More’s satire shares many similarities with Lucian’s *Menippus*, translated into Latin by More before he wrote *Utopia*. The hero of *Menippus* travels to Hades, discovering there an inversion of the social order as a means of drawing attention to hypocrisy; for example, “Philip of Macedon is stitching rotten sandals to earn money, Xerxes is begging” (4) and Lucian’s hero says he saw “those who advocated despising money clinging to it tooth and nail” (4). Utopia, on the other hand, argues Wood, exposes the “pompous altitude of custom” (3) by turning those customs upside down. For example, foreign ambassadors are ridiculed for

wearing gold chains as adornment because Utopians view such things as symbols for slavery.

Consequently, Wood says of More's creation:

[T]he island of Utopia is the comic inversion of the uncomic inversion of rectitude we practise in life. Accordingly, Utopia is not an ideal society so much as a comic one. More did not intend us to live in Utopia, so much as to be logically mocked by it: the Shakespearean Fool is the near equivalent. (4)

This interpretation is alluded to when Cromwell becomes sick with fever (*Wolf Hall* 611) and has bizarre dreams, imagining old travels, the boot step of his dead father, and fantastical images that come from the myths of England told to him by Wolsey. After Dr. Butts gives him a "draught to swallow" (*Wolf Hall* 613), those around Cromwell think he is resting:

But he keeps trying and trying and adding and adding... but in the privacy of his mind little stick figures with arms and legs of ink climb out of the ledgers and walk about... The songbirds for the fricassee refeather themselves, hopping back on to the branches not yet cut for firewood, and the honey for basting has gone back to the bee, and the bee has gone back to the hive.... He can hear his own voice, telling some story in Tuscan, in Putney, in the French of the camp and the Latin of a barbarian. Perhaps this is Utopia? (613-614)

The numbers turning into stick figures that can walk, the birds refeathering themselves, and the honey returning to the bee are all inversions: Cromwell's reflection that he is, perhaps, in Utopia, suggests that Mantel, too, has interpreted Utopia as a comic society that ridicules More's own society and a tool for More's ambition.

3.2.2 Self-fashioning

Shortly after *Utopia* created a stir, More was admitted to the king's council (1518) under the mentorship of Wolsey (House). He was knighted in 1521 and became a close attendant to the king at the time when Henry wrote his anti-Lutheran tract, "with help from Thomas More" (*Wolf Hall* 39; House). From his position as secretary to Cardinal Wolsey, Cromwell sees Thomas More as "a star in another firmament" (Mantel 39), "a scholar revered through Europe" (Mantel 91). Cromwell's recognition of More's eminence is also demonstrated when he and Cavendish are discussing who will be Wolsey's successor in the role of Chancellor after Wolsey's fall. After Cavendish suggests other candidates, Cromwell decisively names More. Cavendish protests: "a layman and a commoner? And when he's so opposed in the matter of the king's marriage suit" (62). In his conversation with Cavendish, Cromwell reflects on his assurance that More will succeed Wolsey: "The king is known for putting his conscience to high bidders" (62). Cromwell, of course, is right in his prediction. Yet what about the man Erasmus says is "dressed simply" (Erasmus 127), is "less fastidious in his choice of food" (Erasmus 127) than his contemporaries, and shuns tennis and dice for the amusement of observing animals?

In his examination of self-fashioning in the Early Modern period, Greenblatt argues that the kind of lavish adornments used in Henry's court were theatrical, using a favorite metaphor of More's:

It would be a mistake, however, to leave the discussion of the theatrical metaphor in More at the level of his inner life, for the metaphor corresponds quite closely to the actual theatricalization of public life in the society dominated by Henry VIII and Cardinal Wolsey. Henry's taste for lavish dress, ceremonial banquets, and pageantry, masque, and festivity astonished his contemporaries and profoundly affected their conception of power. (Greenblatt 28)

According to Greenblatt, More regarded the “stage as emblem of human existence” (27). If you extend the metaphor to Henry’s role as a king, you “conceive of kingship as a dramatic part, an expensive costume and some well-rehearsed lines... to reduce its sacral symbolism to tinsel” (27). So wouldn’t a man who recognizes the power certain kinds of dress invoke, choose his own dress to define his own role? The popularity of Balthazar Castiglione’s conduct book, *The Courtier*¹⁸, during the sixteenth century meant that gentleman were advised on how to dress for the role of courtier. Yet More could not have heeded Castiglione’s advice, even though he “participated in [Henry’s court] as an actor among the rest” (Greenblatt 29) despite an “inner sense of alienation” (29). Erasmus tells us that, even as a boy, More was “very negligent of his toilet” (Erasmus 127). But can we trust this comment, appearing as it does in a preface to *Utopia*? If *Utopia* is a comic society that ridicules More’s own society, could his dress not serve a similar function? Mantel’s Cromwell thinks so. Cromwell’s interpretation of More’s humble role-playing occurs at a dinner, a ritual that Greenblatt tells us More considered an “emblem of human society both in its foolish vanity and in its precious moments of communion” (12). The Italian merchant Antonio Bonvisi, for whom Thomas More is “an old friend” (*Wolf Hall* 193), has made the dinner a “gran[d] occasion” (*Wolf Hall* 189), but this does not prevent Cromwell from verbally sparring with “the great man” (*Wolf Hall* 189). Perhaps it is because Mantel’s Cromwell reveals his own insecurity as an outsider, marked for his low birth and parentage. When Humphrey Monmouth, once one of More’s prisoners, asks Cromwell how he likes being a courtier, Cromwell interprets the “smiles around the table” (*Wolf Hall* 189) as mocking because, while he is the son of a Putney smith and brewer, “More’s people are city people, no grander; but he is *sui generis*, a scholar and wit” (189). Conversation jumps from Cromwell, to counselling a prince, to Wolsey. When More’s rhetoric

¹⁸ The author’s name or the title of the book occur a total of seven times throughout both novels. This count does not include any allusions to the book.

suggests he considers Wolsey should have demonstrated more humility, indicating he was a friend who had tried to counsel him so earlier but was ignored, Cromwell takes offense:

Thomas More here will tell you, I would have been a simple monk, but my father put me to the law. I would spend my life in church, if I had the choice. I am, as you know, indifferent to wealth. I am devoted to things of the spirit. The world's esteem is nothing to me." [Cromwell] looks around the table. "So how did he become Lord Chancellor? Was it an accident? (191)

Wood supports Cromwell's estimate, arguing that More was "lusty for power" (16), in addition to being "cruel in punishment, evasive in argument... and repressive in politics" (16). As for Bonvisi's dinner party, the arrival of Eustace Chapuys deflects any comeback from More, but Mantel's Cromwell has made his point: you do not receive nor accept a royal invitation to become Lord Chancellor without ambition.

The word "ambition" may only be mentioned six times in total in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, but its presence is suggested by remarks like Cromwell's to More at Bonvisi's dinner. More never proclaims his ambition, and neither does Cromwell, admitting only to his "greatest ambition for England. . . . the prince and his commonwealth should be in accord" (70). Anne Boleyn's father calls Cromwell ambitious by reminding him of a public moment when King Henry turned on him (*Bring Up the Bodies* 232), describing it as the moment when Henry "administered a check to your ambition" (235). Thomas Boleyn's criticism reflects an early-sixteenth-century attitude: ambition was considered a sin (*Bring Up the Bodies* 276). This attitude may also explain why More went to such an effort in his manner and attire to appear as though he rejected ambition. However, Mantel's portrayal, supported by the other documentation surveyed above, would indicate that Thomas More's ambition began with his father who placed young Thomas in a grammar school that produced "the best scholars" (House), in the work ethic that

brought him to Oxford, and in his publication of *Utopia* at a critical time in his career. House argues that More, anticipating that he would be appointed as an advisor to the court of Henry VIII, wrote *Utopia* “as much to reform as to entertain” (House), but perhaps he also wrote it so that all of England would know how “deep [was] his learning... [how] pleasant his wit” (113).

3.3 More’s Pride

Mantel’s More is a tragic character. By characterizing him in this way, she departs from established views:

[T]he Catholic church has made him a saint; leading communists have celebrated his book *Utopia* as a visionary fore-runner of their plan to abolish private property; and middle-class liberals have admired his vision of free public education, careers open to talents, and freedom of thought. (Logan, Lewalski, Abrams, and Greenblatt 503)

More’s biographer in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* argues that More’s “negotiating ability and his abiding interest in the relationship of virtue to politics” (House) motivated his participation in Henry’s court. By writing “two extensive works for an English audience” (House), More indicates that his focus was on an English audience in his humanist scholarship. The letters exchanged amongst the humanist coterie headed by Erasmus meant that More was celebrated as a scholar on the continent as well, evidenced by how his execution “shocked Europe” (House). In the centuries since his death, he became an English icon: Elizabethans “were particularly appreciative of More’s wit, and ranked him with Chaucer and Plato” (House); English canonical writers sang his praises, from Ben Jonson to Samuel Johnson; “Michael Drayton referred to him as ‘that ornament of England’” (House); and R. W. Chambers’s 1935 biography of him “framed More’s life and martyrdom as a drama of human freedom under tyranny” (House). Reaching beyond the borders of England was the Fred Zimmermann film, *A Man for All Seasons* (1966), making More “well known on both sides of the

Atlantic” (House). These texts established for More a national memory of a principled man who struggled against tyranny, what Rigney calls a “*cultural memory*” (“Portable Monuments,” original emphasis, 365). Recall that, because cultural memories are the “product of special acts of communication” (“Portable Monuments,” 367), these memories constantly evolve with new “special acts of communication”: “new images will be acquired and past images revised or abandoned in the light of subsequent events” (368). Further, novels can facilitate familiarity with a historic person or event, creating “the illusion of access to other people’s minds as they experience and recall events” (Rigney, “Fiction as a Mediator” 87). Consequently, *Wolf Hall* serves as a “special ac[t] of communication,” displacing past, national images of the contributions made to English history by More and Cromwell, replacing them with Mantel’s images.

As quoted earlier, Greenblatt argues that More had nothing but contempt for those who subscribe to ambition, pride, and cruelty (16). He comes to this conclusion after alluding to More’s interaction with Erasmus and analyzing how Erasmus’s *The Praise of Folly* influenced More’s worldview. For further proof, Greenblatt offers the words that More gave to his daughter, Meg, in the tower: “I assure thee, on my faith . . . if it had not been for my wife and you that be my children, whom I accompt the chief part of my charge, I would not have failed long ere this to have closed myself” (qtd. in Greenblatt 16). Is there not a hint of melodrama to this statement? Given Cromwell’s observation—“More’s letters are beyond the human. They may be addressed to his daughter, but they are written for his friends in Europe to read” (*Wolf Hall* 594)—could More’s words to Meg, like so much of the writing that came out of More’s incarceration, be for the benefit of circulation amongst his peers? If More is a “dissatisfied layman, impatient with liberty” (16) who likely spent four years in a Carthusian religious house without taking a vow, why did he leave that life of seclusion? While in the religious house, More was “lecturing on

English law in Furnivalls Inn” (House) while his legal career was “well in hand” (House). Was the ambition that More demonstrated in his legal career equaled by a spiritual ambition? When did the man who, Erasmus says, was “born and made for friendship” (Erasmus 128) become Henry’s heretic hunter? Potential answers to these questions may lie with More’s hubris, the arrogance and pride usually attributed to the heroes of Greek tragedy. Whereas More has been the hero of the myth created around his genius and in Bolt’s play, Mantel breaks new ground when she explores him as a flawed, tragic hero in the tradition of tragedy.

Christopher Hitchens, in an early review of *Wolf Hall*, identified the “tragic note” (Leech 13) Mantel was playing in the novel: “in Greek-drama style, Mantel keeps most of the actual violence and slaughter offstage” (“Men who Made England” 148). Clifford Leech says of tragedy, “a fall there always is, and the tragic writer is inevitably concerned with how it operates” (38). The fates of three major English national characters are the subject of Mantel’s trilogy: *Wolf Hall* takes a close look at the fall of Sir Thomas More; *Bring Up the Bodies* takes a close look at the fall of Anne Boleyn. Yet to come, Mantel’s last novel in her trilogy, *The Mirror and the Light*, will take a close look at the fall of Thomas Cromwell (Furness). Mantel’s narrative is, of course, just as concerned with the rise of Cromwell, Boleyn, and Jane Seymour, but, as Adam Phillips argues, “[t]ragedy questions our capacity—our wish—to make meaning” (Phillips). For Mantel, More is the tragic figure in this section of the larger tragedy of Thomas Cromwell’s life, just as Anne Boleyn is the tragic figure in *Bring Up the Bodies*. Before Mantel’s interpretation of him, More, like Heracles or Theseus or Achilles before him, became associated with the divine through his canonization in 1936. More’s saintliness is founded on “embodied values which were thought of as heroic, and largely still are: courage, pride, a high sense of honour, especially their own” (Poole 37). Yet, Poole asks, do such heroes really belong in the modern world? Mantel

suggests that, as far as the Catholic propaganda surrounding Saint Thomas More is concerned, he does not. The heroes of Sophocles, Poole argues, share the following:

[T]hey cleave to a high idea of themselves. They are passionate, purposive, resolute, rigorous, indomitable, difficult. They command *admiration*, in an old sense of the term that connotes wonder but not necessarily approval, moral or otherwise. . . . They are exemplary, but they are not necessarily examples to follow. (Poole 37-38)

These similarities between Mantel's More and tragic heroes indicate a conscious subscription on Mantel's part to the genre of tragedy, in prose form. She declares this subscription from the beginning of her novel.

There are several signposts and indications in Mantel's novels that point to her engagement with the tragic genre. The first signpost is the epigraph from a classical work on architecture in Roman theatre by Vitruvius, in which he describes how tragic scenes should appear. Mantel's intertextuality with the myths of England's origin also indicates "the tragic note" (Leech 13) because "higher Greek poetry did not make up fictitious plots, its business was to express the heroic saga, the myths" (Murray). Given Mantel's announcement that her magnum opus will consist of three novels (Furness), she shares a triptych-like form with Greek tragedies because "Greek dramatists were accustomed to the idea of a trilogy of tragic plays" (Leech 13), for example Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Euripides's trilogy on the Trojan War: *Alexandros*, *Palamedes*, and *The Trojan Women*. Even Mantel's title of her first part of the trilogy, *Wolf Hall*, contributes to her subscription to the tragic genre because "[m]an is wolf to man" (Hitchens, "The Man Who Made England" 148) and "human is always menaced by relapse into the animal, so the purity of tragedy as a genre is always under threat from its 'inferiors'" (Poole 5). If *Wolf Hall* can be considered the first installment in a trilogy whose overarching narrative is the rise and fall of Thomas Cromwell, its first volume represents the tragic hero's rise to power while

More's antagonist stance against Cromwell represents Mantel's effort "to stage the points of convergence at which the light and darkness meet, the sacred and secular, divine power and human reason" (Poole 29). Whereas hubris, the "overweening self-confidence that leads a protagonist to disregard a divine warning or to violate an important moral law" (Abrams "tragedy"), is often the attribute of the tragic hero, Mantel also has Cromwell expose for us More's hubris. In other words, just as Shakespeare and his contemporaries provided, through their tragic dramas, "'mirrors' for [their society] to contemplate" (Poole 38), Mantel has Cromwell hold up a mirror to More. If More is assessed as a "star in another firmament" (*Wolf Hall* 39), it is an ironic assessment on Cromwell's part because More is "not necessarily [an] exempl[e] to follow" (Poole 38). What the mirror reflects is a flawed national hero, one whose "wanton insolence" (Cuddon "hubris") brings about his downfall. Mantel goes further in this representation, representing More's insolence as gratuitous, "the deliberate infliction of shame and dishonour on someone else, not by way of revenge, but in the mistaken belief that thereby shows oneself superior" (Blackburn).

As with More's ambition, Mantel goes back to his days at Cardinal Morton's palace, to that fictional intersection between him and Cromwell. As we will see in the next chapter, Cromwell's class defined him in all his dealings: social, economic, emotional. He was defensive about his working class roots, his rough appearance, and his even rougher upbringing. When young Thomas Cromwell worked for his uncle at Lambeth Palace delivering bread to the pages, he encounters More, reading:

Master Thomas said, "Why do you linger?" but he did not throw anything at him. "What is in that great book?" he asked, and Master Thomas replied, smiling, "Words, words, just words." (113-14)

Michael Caines of the *Times Literary Supplement* picked up on this often-repeated phrase in his review of Mantel's novel. Caines observes how Mantel has used the tension between these two lawyers—"both masters of wily precision" (Caines)—as one of the important sites of conflict. As for this early encounter and its repetition: "To neither Thomas could words ever be just that" (Caines). But in this early scene, fourteen-year-old More's condescension makes a lasting impression on Cromwell. The phrase becomes a leitmotif in the novel, reintroduced when More is in the Tower for refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy—also a matter of "words, words, just words"—recognizing Henry as the head of the Church in England. Cromwell tells him, "You have to say some words. That's all" (591), to which More replies, "Ahh. Just words" (591). Cromwell taunts him about how he could actually just write the words down and More could sign the document, then be back on his way to Chelsea, to "Alice's cooking" (592), sarcastically describing an imaginary scene of an amorous Alice seducing More on his return and More flogging himself the day after. More's response is dry:

"You should write a play," More says wonderingly.

He laughs. "Perhaps I shall."

"It's better than Chaucer. Words. Words. Just words." (592)

Cromwell pauses and asks More what book it was that he had been reading, so long ago, in Lambeth Palace. More responds with perhaps the greatest insult: he does not remember the young Cromwell. The phrase is repeated when Cromwell visits More in the Tower the night shortly before More's trial commences and again at its end. The repetition of this phrase serves to remind the reader just how important words are in the conflict between Cromwell and More, but also the importance of word play in tragedy, especially the works of Seneca and Shakespeare (Poole 88). At the opposite of "words, just words" is silence, like that of Hamlet when he dies or

of the raped and mutilated Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* (Poole 88), and like that of More when he is executed.

Arrogance and pride are close cousins; Mantel's fiction of Cromwell and More meeting as youths emphasizes the arrogance that accompanies More's pride. The first evidence of how More's arrogance has endured into his later adulthood is found in the reflection of Cromwell to More, who had worked for Wolsey also before Wolsey's fall. Cromwell, who has spent many formative years on the Continent, has built a successful law practice, benefitted economically from trade, married into the family of a successful cloth merchant, and had three children. Though the boy once awed by More has gained confidence and power, he still exhibits some of that awe when he contemplates More's faith in the face of the great and violent revolutions against the Catholic Church occurring both on the Continent and in England. A synecdoche of this conflict is William Tyndale's English Bible, a copy of which rests in a chest in Cromwell's house (39). His possession of this outlawed book reveals Cromwell's Protestant beliefs in contrast to his wife's refusal to read Tyndale. He reflects on how he does not force his beliefs on his family, as is Thomas More's habit: "he's not, like Thomas More, some sort of failed priest, a frustrated preacher. He never sees More—a star in another firmament" (39). This celestial metaphor suggests both the extent of More's fame and his immutable faith at a time when so many were questioning theirs, but is loaded with irony given Cromwell's reaction to More's affirmation:

[W]hat's wrong with you? Or what's wrong with me? Why does everything you know, and everything you've learned, confirm you in what you believed before? Whereas in my case, what I grew up with, and what I thought I believed, is chipped away a little and a little, a fragment then a piece and then a piece more. With every month that passes, the corners are knocked off the certainties of this world: and the next world too. Show me

where it says, in the Bible, “Purgatory”. Show me where it says relics, monks, nun. Show me where it says “Pope”. (39).

Whereas Cromwell portrays More as arrogant in his refusal to doubt “the certainties of this world: and in the next world too”, there may be latent here too some resentment on Cromwell’s part, that More has reached such a zenith in his career. More’s “star” shines despite his “overbearing behaviour, demeanour or treatment of others” (“pride, n.”), revealed when Cromwell reflects on his role of keeping Wolsey informed “when More and his clerical friends storm in, breathing hellfire about the newest heresy” (40), implying More’s bloodthirsty nature when it comes to heresy when he reflects that Wolsey will burn books, but not men” (40). As for Tyndale, whom Cromwell considers “a principled man, a hard man” (40): “More calls him The Beast” (40). These passages are early introductions to the arrogance that turns More into a monster that persecutes people, both verbally and physically. For example, later in the novel, Cromwell tells Thomas Wyatt:

There was a child in More’s house, Dick Purser, More took him in out of guilt after he was orphaned—I cannot say More killed the father outright, but he had him in the pillory and in the Tower, and it broke his health. Dick told the other boys he did not believe God was in the Communion host, so More had him whipped before the whole household.

(348)

More may be antagonistic toward Cromwell during most of *Wolf Hall*, but Mantel’s Cromwell is not out for his head (588), he is merely following the king’s orders, as he does in the executions of Elizabeth Barton and Bishop John Fisher. Consequently, *Wolf Hall* can be considered the tragedy of Sir Thomas More. Mantel maps this out in several ways. The cruel side of More demonstrates his hubris, his “violation of an important moral law” (Abrams, “tragedy”) to prove his own moral superiority. More’s cruelty will be discussed further in the next section, but it is

important to emphasize the representations of More's pride and arrogance—important components of hubris—Mantel creates in *Wolf Hall* based upon the extensive historical research she has completed. If, in “cultural memory” (Rigney 365), the legacy of Sir (Saint) Thomas More has been that of a brilliant writer, humanist, and martyr, Mantel's novel attempts to redefine “the relevance of certain topics and . . . [the] dividing line between what is forgettable and what is valuable for those doing the remembering” (Rigney, “Fiction as Mediator” 80) within the context of a nation's history. Should the sacrifice of More's life for his religious adherence take precedence in cultural memory over the arrogance and pride that made him a persecutor and torturer? This is the question that Mantel's novel demands we consider.

Mantel's assessment goes further, suggesting that More would compromise his virtue in order to promote his world view. After Henry holds a court of inquiry into the dissolution of his marriage with Katherine, news comes that the troops of Katherine's nephew, the Emperor Charles, have sacked Rome; the year is 1527 and Pope Clement VII, who had tried to “curb the temporal power of the empire” (McLeod), receives Charles's revenge. Mantel's unnamed narrator reveals that, during this siege, the troops have not been paid, causing them to “run wild through the Holy City paying themselves, plundering the treasuries and stoning the artworks” (86). Since the Pope is now Charles's prisoner, the king's divorce must reach a standstill. The unnamed narrator then announces

Thomas More says that the imperial troops, for their enjoyment, are roasting live babies on spits. Oh, he would! Says Thomas Cromwell. Listen, soldiers don't do that. They're too busy carrying away everything they can turn into ready money. (87)

Since More is not supportive of Henry's pursuit of an annulment from Katherine, and even less supportive of the Reformation ideas first promulgated by Luther, it would serve his ideology to represent the chaos that ensues when secular leaders deny the Pope his authority. What “Thomas

More says” is, in fact, gossip: tantamount to lying, forbidden by one of the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt not bear false witness” (Jacobs). By having the unnamed narrator quote “Thomas More says”, Mantel infuses this statement with hearsay: More may say it, but what proof does he have to back it up. Having already established Cromwell’s experience as a soldier and his facility with weapons, the interjection of “Oh, he would! Says Thomas Cromwell” subverts More’s hearsay, emphasizing the binary of Cromwell the pragmatist and More the fanatic idealist.

Closely related to the gossip that More spreads to serve his own ideology is his dissembling when Henry demands that he swear to the Oath of Supremacy. After Cromwell, Cranmer, and Audley have again tried in vain to have More swear to the Oath of Supremacy, the three men discuss More as though they hope to find a way to make him change his mind, even if it means a slight re-wording of the Oath itself. Finally, Cromwell bursts out after Cranmer and Audley recall other opinions that More has made public through the publication of his writing:

More publishes all his letters from his friends. Even when they reprove him, he makes a fine show of his humility and so turns it to his profit. He has lived in public. Every thought that passes through his mind he has committed to paper. He never kept anything private, till now. . . . I suppose he’s writing an account of today. . . . And sending it out of the kingdom to be printed. Depend upon it, in the eyes of Europe we will be the fools and the oppressors, and he will be the poor victim with the better turn of phrase. (*Wolf Hall* 568)

Not only does Mantel have Cromwell predict the martyrdom and eventual sainthood that come to More because of his persecution and death, her representation of Cromwell’s disdain for More’s “fine show of humility” and the hypocrisy of More deciding, for once, to keep his thoughts private suggests Mantel’s own feelings on the subject. Whereas she has been notably silent on

how her representation of More goes against tradition, others have championed her version of More; for example, Hitchens:

Anyone who has been bamboozled by the saccharine propaganda of *A Man for All seasons* should read Mantel's rendering of the confrontation between More and his interlocutors about the Act of Succession. . . . More discloses himself as a hybrid of Savonarola and Bartleby the Scrivener. (150)

Even before the publication of *Wolf Hall*, literary critic James Wood talks about "More's love of power" (16) and his character: "unscrupulous, greasy, quibblingly legalistic" (8). Wood argues that "[t]he darker More eclipses the saint" (5) because his "battle against reform was his obsession" (5) and that the "cold-eyed [literary] scholar" (9) Alistair Fox assessed the evidence of More's political endeavour in his 1982 biography as "so subtle and devious as to set not only Machiavelli, but also Richard III and Iago to school" (qtd. in Wood 9).

The debate over this contradiction between More the Saint and Humanist and More the Heretic Hunter continues, according to Wood, because "the religious defence of More issues from one belief-system, and the secular argument against issues from another, and these two systems of thought are still at war" (13). For the one-belief system, Wood relies on Cardinal Newman's argument that "the Church should control what is known and discussed, because the Church has final authority over truth" (14). For the secular argument, Wood relies on John Stuart Mills's idea that "truth is only tested, and is actually constituted and proved, by its 'collision with error', and that all opinions must thus be admissible" (14). As long as there are systems that lay claim to their "final authority over the truth"—as many fundamentalist religious groups do—More's saintliness will be defended. At risk here, of course, is the dominance of the state: "sanctioned truth must imply the dominance of the Church's truths over the state's, and the Church's struggle to maintain its authority over the state" (Wood 14). One need only look to

Belfast, to the long years of violence known as “The Troubles”, to see this in action. Hitchens argues that the “ostensible pretext for this mayhem is rival nationalisms” (*God is Not Great* 18), but Protestants “wanted Catholics to be both segregated and suppressed” (18-9) while Catholics “desired clerical-dominated schools and segregated neighborhoods, the better to exert its control” (19). The sectarian warfare between these opposing forces, each of which knew their church as “the final authority over the truth”, spilled over into the everyday life of people in London and elsewhere in England, threatening the everyday life of British people and the security of the British nation.

3.4 More’s Cruelty

Wood calls More a “zealous legalist” (2) with an “itchy finesse of cruelty” (2) and a practitioner of “Machiavellianism at court” (2). With the founding of a More project at Yale in 1958, when all of More’s writings became more widely available, there was a great increase in interest in More’s “unyielding activities against heretics and the legalistic, if not politically opportunistic strategies he employed in the defence of his principles” (House). Mantel, through *Wolf Hall*, enters into the above-mentioned secular and religious arguments that have further developed since this wider access to More’s writings. It is perhaps because her hero is a secular-minded bureaucrat with evangelical leanings that hers has been one of the strongest secular explorations of More that “is not acutely an argument with More the historical actor so much as with the category of sainthood” (Wood 13). Wood explores the strategy of a secular argument to denounce More’s sainthood:

The Church says, in effect: this is how More should have acted, and we are well pleased with him, and we can pronounce this blessing [of sainthood] at any moment in providential history because our values are timeless; the secularist must parry: this is not how he should have acted and we must be able to say this at any moment in profane

history because the only ground on which we can denounce More is on the ground that he betrayed certain timeless and universal ideals of secular human conduct. (13)

One of those “universal ideals” is in the justice of punishment; Thomas More was “cruel in punishment” (Wood 16).

3.4.1 Torture

Thomas More visits Cromwell at Austin Friars to attack his part in the dissolution of Henry’s marriage to Katherine by making Henry’s rule above that of the Church. More likens the move to a “breach in the walls of Christendom” (351), comparing it to when the Turks invaded Belgrade and “lit their campfires in the great library of Buda” (351). More’s first reference alludes to how the Ottoman Empire conquered Belgrade, the “rampart of Christianity and the key of defense of whole Hungary” (Belgradenet.com), in 1521; More’s second reference is to the destruction of the Corvinus Library—“a magnet” (Cartledge 68) that attracted Christian humanist “scholars from all over Europe” (Cartledge 68)—in Buda (now Budapest) by the Turks. What is ironic about More’s assessment of England’s situation is that these examples of the oppression of Christians by Islamic Turks have more in common with the “authoritarian intolerance” (Wood 1) of More and his Church than the rule of Henry VIII. More’s recitation of this recent history lesson to Cromwell compels Cromwell to argue that he and Henry are not infidels (351), but More pushes further, leaving Henry out of it—implying Cromwell’s influence—and accusing Cromwell of praying to the “god of Luther and the Germans, or some heathen god you met with on your travels...Perhaps your faith is for purchase” (352). The visit is more than just arrogant words to chastise Cromwell, who asks:

“Are you threatening me? I’m just interested.”

“Yes,” More says sadly. “Yes, that is precisely what I am doing.” (352)

Cromwell, in reaction, reflects, on what Erasmus says of More: “did nature ever create anything kinder, sweeter or more harmonious than the character of Thomas More” (*Wolf Hall* 352).

Cromwell’s ironic interpretation of the Erasmian quote and the interview with the intolerant, authoritarian More serves to set up Cromwell’s reflection on an act of intolerance he witnessed in his youth. This fictional recollection provides Cromwell with his motivation for his dislike for priests (Leithead), but it also provides the reader with a ringside seat at the burning of a heretic.

Cromwell recalls, when he was a lad of “nine or so” (352), that he “ran off into London and saw an old woman suffer for her faith” (352). His memory recalls the day, the taunts of the crowd gathered to watch her suffer, her screaming, the other Lollardes who came later to gather up her remains, and her name, Joan Boughton. She was at least eighty years old, according to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, when she was burned at the stake at Smithfield, 28 April 1494. Cromwell’s witness of her burning is Mantel’s brutal introduction to what a burning was truly like and it recalls Cromwell’s earlier comment:

He keeps the cardinal informed, so that when More and his clerical friends storm in, breathing hellfire about the newest heresy, the cardinal can make calming gestures, and say, “Gentlemen, I am already informed.” Wolsey will burn books, but not men. (40)

The implication here is that More *will* burn men, a truism that Cromwell later uses against More when he tries to protest his own sweet, “harmonious” nature, that he does “nobody harm” (628):

You do nobody harm? What about Bainham, you remember Bainham? You forfeited his goods, committed his poor wife to prison, saw him racked with your own eyes, you locked him in Bishop Stokesley’s cellar, you had him back at your own house two days chained upright to a post, you sent him again to Stokesley, saw him beaten and abused for a week, and still your spite was not exhausted: you sent him back to the Tower and had him racked again, so that finally his body was so broken that they had to carry him in a

chair when they took him to Smithfield to be burned alive. And you say, Thomas More, that you do no harm? (*Wolf Hall* 629)

Bainham is only one example of More's "violation of an important moral law" (Abrams "tragedy") and a "universal ideal" (Wood 16). His reputation for this kind of persecution leads Cromwell to report that Wolsey, when Stephen Gardiner "denounc[es] some nest of heretics" (*Wolf Hall* 22), responds with subtlety:

He will say earnestly, poor benighted souls. You pray for them... and I'll pray for them, and we'll see if between us we can't bring them to a better state of mind. And tell them, mend their manners, or Thomas More will get hold of them and shut them in his cellar. And all we will hear is the sound of screaming. (22)

On the occasion of the deaths of his daughters, struggling with the thought of them in Purgatory, Cromwell reveals his skepticism about Purgatory and reflects on More's response to Tyndale's English translation:

Tyndale says, now abideth faith, hope and love, even these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Thomas More thinks it is a wicked mistranslation. He insists on 'charity'. He would chain you up, for a mistranslation. He would, for a difference in your Greek, kill you. (*Wolf Hall* 152)

When the Marian martyr Hugh Latimer comes to Cromwell to invite him to visit the condemned Bainham in the Tower, Cromwell refuses, but reflects:

More says it does not matter if you lie to heretics, or trick them into a confession. They have no right to silence, even if they know speech will incriminate them; if they will not speak, then break their fingers, burn them with irons, hang them up by their wrists. It is legitimate, and indeed More goes further; it is blessed. (*Wolf Hall* 361)

Erasmus, who had fled from Reformation violence in Basel (*Wolf Hall* 371) in 1529 to the Catholic stronghold of Freiburg (Martin), would likely never have been privy to this darker side of More's reputation. This means he would never have revised the sentiments about More he expressed in a letter to Ulrich von Hutten in 1519, that More was "the most delightful character in the world" (Erasmus 126) and suggesting that he, like Alexander the Great and Achilles, was "worthy of immortality" (Erasmus 126).

Considering the fame, as discussed above, that came to More because of *Utopia* and his work for Henry VIII, it would not be unreasonable to say that early-sixteenth-century European society bestowed on Thomas More a "monstrously or abnormally high stature" ("giant"), a giant in the sense of his power and influence. Recall that, according to the originary myth of England that Mantel's unnamed narrator recites, the murdering Greek princesses who discovered the island that became England mated with demons and produced giants, with whom they also mated to produce even more giants. Brutus defeated these giants when he arrived on the island's shores, discarded its name of Albion in favor of Britain (*Wolf Hall* 65-66). Coincidentally, giants in the Medieval and Early Modern eras were synonymous with evil (Stephens 4) or, at least, "either 'mythical' or historical, but also either good or evil *by definition*" (Stephens, original emphasis 5). Indeed there was power in the figure of the giant because he could represent "diametrically opposed concepts in different societies, or in different social groups of the same society" (Stephens 5). Consequently, as Henry VIII's England undergoes a shift in power with regards to its religious affiliations combined with a shift in power through the ascension of Anne Boleyn, Sir Thomas More's formidable rhetoric, sharp pen, and "authoritarian intolerance" (Wood 1) became "diametrically opposed" to the emerging, reformed society. Mantel's emphasis of these giant-like qualities of More's suggests that Thomas Cromwell, in Brutus-like fashion, defeats an evil giant in *Wolf Hall*.

3.4.2 Ridicule

When Henry's bishops pleaded with More to attend the coronation of Anne, he responded with the following extended metaphor:

Your lordshippes have in the matter of the matrimony hitherto kepte your selves pure virgines, yeat take good head, my lordes, that you keepe your virginity still. For some there be that by procuringe your lordshippes first at the coronacion to be present, and next to preach for the setting forth of it, and finally to write bookes to all the world in defens thereof, are desirous to deffloure you; and when they have defloured you, then will they not faile soone after to devoure you. Nowe my lordes ... it lieth not in my power but that they may devoure me; but god being my good lord, I will provide that they shall never deffloure me. (House)

It is interesting to see here how More uses the metaphor of a virgin and the loss of virginity in his refusal to sign a document he cannot, according to his principles, support. It is ironic that, in the drama to come, the fate of Anne Boleyn rests on whether she came a virgin to King Henry's bed and whether she let other men "devoure" her during their marriage. More uses this metaphor to criticize the bishops for attending the coronation, accusing them of rejecting their state of grace, much as women do when they experience sexual intercourse. By this argument, More implies that both the bishops and virgins who are "defloured" are incapable of the kind of virtue More relied on to defy the king. Thus, despite his practice of educating equally his daughters and his sons, More still sees women as deficient, not the equal of men. Mantel, understanding this, uses the myths and stories, the legends and writings, of Thomas More to reveal how he "betrayed certain timeless and universal ideals of secular human conduct" (Wood 13). Using some of the most famous antidotes associated with More's relationship with the women in his household, Mantel reveals a character whose promotion of education, especially for women, is more about

their performing for his friends and colleagues than it is their own self-improvement. Indeed, despite the reputation of having his daughters as well educated as his son—in particular Margaret, but also his fostered daughters Meg Giggs and Anne Cressacre—these anecdotes betray another history beneath the history of More’s testimony that women and men are “equally suited for those studies by which reason is cultivated and becomes fruitful like a ploughed land on which the seed of good lessons has been sown” (qtd. in House).

When Cromwell encounters More in the spring of 1528, he is struck by his disheveled appearance—More, says Erasmus, has from “boyhood been very negligent of his toilet” (Erasmus 127)—and connects the dirtiness of his shirt collar to the dirtiness of More’s language in his pamphlets about Luther: he “calls the German shit. . . . his mouth is like the world’s anus” (*Wolf Hall* 121). Because Liz has just died, More commiserates, in his own fashion, by suggesting it is just as well that Cromwell not marry again, leading Cromwell to reflect that “[w]hen More’s first wife died, her successor was in the house before the corpse was cold” (*Wolf Hall* 123).

During his visit at More’s Chelsea house, after entering the house and meeting “the family hanging up” (*Wolf Hall* 227), Cromwell and Gardiner sit down to dinner with the family. Cromwell’s attention focuses on More’s daughter, Meg, “[t]he favorite” (227):

She is perhaps twenty-five. She has a sleek, darting head, like the head of the little fox which More says he has tamed; all the same, he keeps it in a cage for safety. (229)

The comparison of Meg to More’s tamed fox suggests her own bestiality, that her father has trained this scholarly young woman despite that bestiality. More uses Alice as an object of ridicule when he draws his guests’ attention to his wife: “That expression of painful surprise is not native to her. . . . It is produced by scraping back her hair and driving in great ivory pins. . . . Alice, remind me why I married you” (*Wolf Hall* 299). While Alice meekly replies that he needed

her to keep house, More announces, “A glance at Alice frees me from stain of concupiscence” (*Wolf Hall* 230). This idea of Alice’s appearance quenching any of More’s desire is not More’s last verbal cruelty to his wife. He also scolds her for drinking: “Alice, I have told you about drinking wine. Your nose is glowing” (*Wolf Hall* 233). The reaction to this criticism ripples through the table as, first, “Alice’s face grows stiff, with dislike and a kind of fear” (*Wolf Hall* 233). Then the other women, “who understand all that is said, bow their heads and examine their hands” (*Wolf Hall* 233). More’s insolence is gratuitous, “the deliberate infliction of shame and dishonour on someone else, not by way of revenge, but in the mistaken belief that tone thereby shows oneself superior” (Blackburn).

More’s daughter-in-law, Anne Cresacre, also receives ridicule. More tells the story of how she craved a pearl necklace: “She did not cease to talk about it, you know how young girls are. So when I gave her a box that rattled, imagine her face. Imagine her face again when she opened it. What was inside? Dried peas!” (*Wolf Hall* 231). This story is repeated in another novel that features More’s foster daughter Meg Giggs as its protagonist, *Portrait of an Unknown Woman*¹⁹, indicating that it, like other pieces of More’s life, was put to the record. This kind of treatment of the women in his family, like his treatment of the heretics he hunted, is further support that Sir Thomas More was “cruel in punishment” (Wood 16).

3.5 Conclusion

Scholars, the legal profession, the clergy—all these groups continue to be divided on the legacy of Sir/Saint Thomas More. Whereas he is considered to be “[o]ne of the most brilliant... [and] compelling figures of the English Renaissance” (Logan, Lewalski, Abrams, and Greenblatt 503) he is also considered to be one of the most disturbing. Some consider him “the hero of people who, given the chance, would (and on occasion did) tear each other apart” (Logan,

¹⁹ See my Master’s thesis, *Renaissance Parables of Duplicity*.

Lewalski, Abrams, and Greenblatt 503), a saint, “a visionary forerunner” (503) in the pursuit to abolish private property, and a vanguard to “middle-class liberals [who] have admired his vision of free public education, careers open to talents, and freedom of thought” (503). Problematizing this respect for More’s intelligence and innovation is the equally well-deserved contempt demonstrated towards More the heretic hunter. Because she has had readers approach her to ask, “Was Thomas More *really* like that?” (“Interview” Bordo), Mantel can be confident that *Wolf Hall* is a “literary tex[t] work[ing] alongside other memorial forms.... operat[ing] mnemotechnically” (Rigney, “Portable Monuments” 369), that she is building a cultural memory that is the “product of special acts of communication” (367). Because these readers also say, “We thought he was a really nice man” (“Interview”, Bordo), then it is possible to say that, because of *Wolf Hall* “the content of what is remembered” (Rigney, “Portable Monuments” 368) about Thomas More has changed. Perhaps this is due to the post-prize success of *Wolf Hall*, “the most popular Man Booker Prize winner since records began, at one point outselling Dan Brown on Amazon” (Allfree).

Mantel does not talk much about Thomas More in her interviews; Thomas Cromwell is always the focus. However, in a 2009 interview for *The New Yorker*, Mantel reveals that, although a “few people don’t like [her] portrayal of Thomas More” (“The Exchange”), she thinks her novel has been “fair to him” (“The Exchange”). As a novelist, she argues, she is not required to be “on his side” (“The Exchange”), revealing that, from Cromwell’s point of view, he is an “opponent” (“The Exchange”). As in other interviews, Mantel is careful to explain that Cromwell’s point of view does not “reflect a neutral truth” (“The Exchange”); this includes his assessment of More. Geoffrey Elton’s reassessment of Cromwell in the 1950s is often alluded to by Mantel when asked about Cromwell’s legacy as the devil to More’s saint: “Elton was interested solely in Cromwell’s political role, not the kind of man he was” (“The Exchange”). Yet

that “political role”, according to Elton, was revolutionary, “a new model of government, no longer controlled by the king through the royal household, but directed by bureaucratic departments of state. . . . For Elton, Cromwell was not driven by religious reform, nor was he a tyrant” (Leithead). It is the shoulders of historians like Elton on which Mantel stands (“Novel Approaches”), helping her to spread the subjective truth of an evangelical pragmatist and to influence readers, making them question the other subjective truth of More’s legacy.

The blending of fiction and nonfiction about More, found in *Wolf Hall*, may be enough to create confusion in the minds of readers as to how to interpret this new profile of More. In a study of the reception of the film, *The Blair Witch Project*, Margrit Schreier found that, mixing fact and fiction in a way that is designed to confuse the recipients with respect to the reality status of the film contributed to confusion as to the film’s genre—fictional movie or documentary—in approximately one-third of those who later discussed the film (325). Whereas Mantel does not deliberately try to confuse her audience about the genre of her novel, the obvious inclusion of so much historical fact likely similarly contributed to confusion in the reader as to what constitutes fiction, what fact. It is between these blurred lines that Mantel’s new representation of More can take hold and become, instead of a “really nice man,” a monster.

Much of More’s reputation in academia rests on his *Utopia*, modern publications of which usually include Erasmus’s letter to Ulrich von Hutten in which he describes More as “the most delightful character in the world” (126), as “worthy of immortality” (126) as Alexander the Great or Achilles. John Colet, according to Erasmus, judged More to be England’s “only . . . genius” (132), despite “that island abound[ing] in distinguished intellects” (132). Even scholar Stephen Greenblatt, who examines how More managed his public image in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, argues that from “William Roper’s early biography to Robert Bolt’s *Man for All Seasons*, we have been led to picture [More’s home in] Chelsea as a kind of ideal suburb—a magical haven of

wit, humanism, and familial tenderness” (75). It was “More’s high office” (75) as chancellor, Greenblatt argues, that shattered More’s previous ability to separate the public and private lives the home in Chelsea had facilitated. In cultural memory, Robert Bolt’s play and Fred Zinneman’s film, *A Man for All Seasons*, has been supported by the many copies of More’s likeness found in churches, places of legal education, and government institutions. In a novel in which literary allusions are rich and plentiful, Bolt’s play exists on the periphery, a cultural memory that Mantel “challenge[s]” (Havely): both the More “established in the public imagination as the saint he was eventually to become, and Bolt’s sadistic Cromwell . . . the villain of the piece” (Havely). In this she achieves something more than choosing themes as critical to contemporary audiences as they were in Cromwell’s time—“the right of the individual to follow his or her conscience in the teeth of the law to political spin-doctoring” (Havely); she “make[s] us see things afresh” (Havely). She has created “new images” (Rigney, “Portable Monuments” 368) of More and of Cromwell; their “past images [have been] revised or abandoned in the light of” (368) what the Man Booker judges of 2009 called “an extraordinary piece of storytelling” (qtd. in Rees). Yet there are those who have refused this fresh re-telling of the opposition between More and Cromwell.

In another review of *Wolf Hall*, Greenblatt grants that *Wolf Hall* is “a startling achievement, a brilliant historical novel” (“Must Have Been”), but compares Cromwell to Josef Stalin’s henchman Lavrenti Beria, finds Mantel’s choice of Cromwell as the hero of her novel poorly made, and sees the opposition between Mantel’s Cromwell and More as the “unchecked power of the secular state” (“Must Have Been”) and a “murderous deployment of terror” (“Must Have Been”). In *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, Greenblatt sees More as the vanguard of “self-fashioning” (1), the new Renaissance understanding that certain codes of public behaviour were needed to govern social, theological, and psychological ways of being; today we call it spin-

doctoring. Within a given cultural system like early sixteenth-century England, More epitomized, according to Greenblatt, the implementation of these codes through his own behaviour, through the literature he created that outlined these codes, and through the literature he created that reflected on these codes. Consequently, More “made himself into a consummately successfully performer.... In the dangerous glittering world of Renaissance politics” (12), opposing the codes he felt epitomized Henry and Wolsey: “bloated vanity, ravenous appetite, folly” (12). He disapproves of Mantel’s More—as seen through “Cromwell’s eyes” (Greenblatt): “distasteful, vicious, and frightening... More, as Mantel depicts him, has the particularly human perversity of religious fanaticism conjoined with sly intelligence” (Greenblatt). Yet even Greenblatt seems to understand and approve of the choice Mantel’s Cromwell has to make between More’s “murderous deployment of terror in the name of salvation . . . [and] the unchecked power of the secular state” (Greenblatt).

In H. E. Marshall’s *Our Island Story*, the Edwardian history that Prime Minister David Cameron and other right-wing traditionalists have promoted as a valuable text for school children, Marshall introduced “a wise and gentle man called Sir Thomas More” (181). As for Henry’s argument with the Pope over his marriage to Katherine, Marshall tells it like this:

Some good and wise men, among them the Chancellor, Sir Thomas More, felt that Henry had been wrong to quarrel with the Pope. They would not acknowledge him as head of the Church, so Henry first put them into prison and then he cut off their heads. (181)

Cromwell barely gets a mention, except as the one who suggests Henry marry Anne of Cleves but who suffered Henry’s “revenge” (182) when Henry discovered “[s]he was not at all pretty” (182). The BBC’s very accessible “History: Knowledge & Learning” website depicts More as a successful lawyer, a scholar, the author of the “first masterpiece of English historiography” (“Thomas More, 1478-1535”), and lord chancellor, an office for which he took responsibility “for

the interrogation of heretics” (“Thomas More, 1478-1535”). As was discussed in the previous chapter, a nation’s history acts as its foundation, influences its concept of national identity, and provides a collective memory to which each member of the nation can subscribe. If, in Mantel’s novel, Wolsey recites to Cromwell the originary myths of the birth of England as a nation, warning Cromwell that “some people, let us remember, do believe them” (*Wolf Hall* 94), what about the myths surrounding Sir Thomas More? If myths are “an undercurrent of feeling shared by many people” (Schultz 233), how do the feelings shared about England and Britain change if the history of England’s “only... [Renaissance] genius” (*Wolf Hall* 132) is revised? The answer lies in a confrontation scene between More and Cromwell that Mantel reimagines. More has been protesting that he has “all the angels and saints” (566) behind him in his resistance to sign the Oath of Supremacy. Cromwell loses his patience with him: “Oh, for Christ’s sake!” he says. “A lie is no less a lie because it is a thousand years old” (566). This protestation, repeated elsewhere in the two novels, seems to speak for Mantel in her challenge to the legacy of Saint Thomas More.

Chapter 4: Thomas Cromwell, Renaissance Man

Sir Thomas More may be the flawed national and tragic hero whose hubris brings him down in *Wolf Hall*, but, in *Bring Up the Bodies*, Cromwell is a hero whose thirst for revenge finds satisfaction in the king's desire to be rid of Anne Boleyn. Although we must wait for the third novel to see it come to its fruition, history tells us that for Cromwell, as for Shakespeare's Hamlet, the actions in which the hero must engage to exact his revenge lead to his corruption and, eventually, his own destruction. If Mantel's portrait of More demands a new perspective on the saintliness of Sir Thomas More, her representation of Cromwell demands a new perspective on the man who, for most of history, was known as "the devil incarnate" (Greenblatt, "How It Must Have Been"). Over the course of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Cromwell grows from abused brat to Cardinal Wolsey's legal counsel; from loyal supporter of the disgraced cardinal to a close advisor of King Henry VIII. Mantel's Cromwell is the man who revolutionizes England, the man remembered as much for his political strategies as for his hospitality and his recollection of the classical texts he reads. Further emphasizing her non-traditional representation of Cromwell, Mantel suggests that Cromwell taps into an information network that consists entirely of women, in a society whose rate of literacy, especially among women, has traditionally been represented as extremely low. Most importantly, Mantel wants us to know that Cromwell had ambitions for England: "the prince and his commonwealth should be in accord" (*Bring Up the Bodies* 70). These ambitions give birth to one of England's most revered institutions: Parliament, Cromwell's "breathing monument" (*Wolf Hall* 22). While she makes it clear it is not her intent to rehabilitate him ("opening up the past"), Mantel admits to finding his story "fascinating" ("opening up the past"): "Whether you take him as hero or villain . . . he ended up as an earl and the king's right-hand man for a decade, one of the most tumultuous decades in history. So, that trajectory, you've got to ask yourself, 'How'd he do it?'" ("opening up the past"). What this

admission does not address, however, is how swift, cruel, and public was his death, by order of the king he had served so well. It is this ending, still to come in the last novel of her trilogy, that suggests the tragic form that Mantel employs because, for her, Thomas Cromwell was the key, that part of her narrative that “came first” (“opening up the past”).

Wolf Hall introduces Cromwell as the mature legal advisor whose work with Cardinal Wolsey first landed him in the history books. When Wolsey began dissolving monasteries, collapsing small or unproductive ones into larger units, and using the profits from the sale of the land for founding his colleges, Cromwell performed the legal work required for the land transfers. From the beginning, Mantel reveals her fascination with this character with his working class background and his ability to reinvent himself when situations become precarious. Her description of Wolsey’s advisor reveals a Renaissance man, “a man who exhibits the virtues of an idealized man of the Renaissance. . . . one with many talents or interests, esp[ecially] in the arts and humanities” (“Renaissance man”). This is ironic considering how Cromwell has been represented as a villain in history and fiction, his “name a hissing and a byword” (Hitchens, “*The Man Who Made England*” 151), while “generations of sentimental and clerical history will canonize More” (Hitchens 151). Early in *Wolf Hall*, Mantel’s unnamed narrator gives us a portrait that seems to compensate for the lack of a textual portrait like the one Erasmus wrote for More:

Thomas Cromwell is now a little over forty years old. He is a man of strong build, not tall. Various expressions are available to his face, and one is readable: an expression of stifled amusement. His hair is dark, heavy and waving, and his small eyes, which are of very strong sight, light up in conversation: so the Spanish ambassador will tell us, quite soon. 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. His speech is low and rapid, his

manner assured; he is at home in courtroom or waterfront, bishop's palace or inn yard. 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 Plato to Plautus and back again. He knows new poetry, and can say it in Italian. He works all hours, first up and last to bed. He makes money and he spends it. He will take a bet on anything. (31)

While all of these qualities are represented in Cromwell's role in Mantel's novels, Cromwell's formidable memory receives noticeable attention. This is emphasized by his interest in the work of Guido Camillo, the Renaissance inventor of a theatre of memory. Cromwell's interest in finding better strategies to store memory is self-reflective on Mantel's part, considering her "hopelessly forgetful modern societ[y]" (Nora 8). One of his discussions of Camillo's work occurs in a critical scene in *Wolf Hall* that warrants a closer look because of its relation to Mantel's demand for a new perspective on Cromwell.

Following the coronation of Anne Boleyn in *Wolf Hall* (2009), Mantel describes a feast held in Westminster Hall, the oldest building in what are today known as London's Parliament Buildings and, according to their website, a building that played a central role in British history. Ironically, it is where the trials of both Sir Thomas More and Anne Boleyn would also take place. The opening of this scene situates Henry VIII in "a gallery, high above Westminster Hall" (470), watching the celebration of Queen Anne's coronation below, "picking at a spice plate, dipping thin slices of apple into cinnamon" (471), despite having "fortified himself earlier" (471). He is not alone; Thomas Cromwell is there, as are Jean de Dinteville and George de Selves, also known as the Bishop of Lavaur. In Mantel's representation, these men appear in the same clothes as those that are handsomely portrayed in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, a 1533 portrait that hangs in the National Gallery. In this small scene, Mantel manages to allude to Henry's gluttony, Thomas More's position as "a scholar revered through Europe" (91), the low opinion the French

have of Anne, and recent news of the Reformation on the Continent. Cromwell also questions de Dinteville and Selves on the latest invention of one of King Francois's protégées: Guido Camillo. Given that Camillo's invention is a "wooden box" (471) or "a theatre" (471) that is meant to be an aid to memory, an "arrayed system of human knowledge. . . . a library" (472), this passage also alludes to memory. By setting the scene in a gallery above Westminster Hall, Mantel also alludes to "the boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity" (Nora 12). But most importantly, for Cromwell, this tableau alludes to a painting famous for its anamorphic skull—that is, the image of a skull that appears distorted, a smear on the bottom of the canvas, until the viewer gains the right perspective to reveal the skull.

This passage not only comes at a critical point in the plot—the coronation of Queen Anne—and a crucial time in Cromwell's career—celebration of the success of his strategies to free the king from Katherine of Aragon—but also situates Cromwell in the company of men made just as famous by their positions of power as by their celebrated images created by Hans Holbein. This scene situates Cromwell in the same small space as four subjects of Holbein: Henry VIII, de Dinteville, Selves, and Cromwell himself. Whereas Henry VIII's Holbein portrait has become the ubiquitous representation of him at the crux of Reformation and divorce, and *The Ambassadors* has been celebrated since its "emergence into public view at the end of the 19th century" (Bossy), Cromwell's portrait has been overshadowed by the Holbein portrait on the other side of the fireplace at the Frick Gallery where it resides: Holbein's Sir Thomas More. By situating Cromwell amongst these portraiture subjects, Mantel is arguing for a new *perspective* on Thomas Cromwell. Sir Geoffrey Elton's attempt at redeeming him failed in the long term, especially when the release of *England Under the Tudors* was overshadowed just a few years later by Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*. By alluding to *The Ambassadors*, Mantel alludes to a portrait that requires a certain *perspective* to appreciate the true meaning of the painting. Thus,

we must attain the right *perspective* to appreciate Cromwell's role in Henry's reign and the revolution that occurred in Tudor government.

4.1 Holbein's *The Ambassadors*



Fig 3. Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*, National Gallery, London, Great Britain.

Hans Holbein the Younger painted Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve, bishop of Lavaur, in 1533; Dinteville was the French ambassador to England while de Selve had acted as

ambassador for the Emperor, the Venetian Republic, and the Holy See (*The Ambassadors*, 1533, Hans Holbein the Younger”). The National Gallery purchased the painting in 1890 then set about restoring it (Wyld). While there was further work done on the painting at various times through the twentieth century, it wasn’t until the preparations for the five-hundredth anniversary of Holbein’s birth (1497-1997) that an extensive restoration of the oil on panel was undertaken using the latest restoration processes to bring the painting back, as close as possible, to its original image and perhaps make clearer its symbolic messages. Most art historians credit Mary F. S. Hervey’s *Holbein’s Ambassadors* (1900) as the work that deciphered the symbols and meanings that appear in this cryptic portrait. However, following the celebrations and exhibition of 1997, John North, an expert in the history of astronomy and mathematics (Bossy), released a book that further interpreted what appears to be a “jumble, of astronomical and time-telling instruments sitting on top of the carpet-covered table on which the sitters/standers are leaning” (Bossy).

In the *London Review of Books*, John Bossy describes Holbein’s subjects as “in their twenties and snappily dressed” (Bossy). What makes the painting unusual are the “three surprising items” (Bossy): an anamorphic “grinning skull” (Bossy), “looking like a guided missile about to hit the floor from somewhere off-right” (Bossy); a small crucifix in the extreme top-left corner of the portrait; and a broken string on the large lute that rests on the bottom shelf of the table that is between the two men. According to Bossy, the portrait had been commissioned by Dinteville and held in his family for one hundred and fifty years. While Bossy warns that North obfuscates much of his explanations with difficult jargon, he says that there are some points “where North’s learning has made a difference”: “the most attractive is his demonstration, with the help of the chronological instruments on the table, that the painting shows the scene at 4 p.m. on 11 April 1533, which was Good Friday” (Bossy), near the time of the death of Jesus

Christ. Significantly, there is also a Lutheran hymnbook open on the shelf under the table, beside the lute. Historical scholar Bossy reveals that Dinteville was a patron to the “non-traditional mystical humanist. . . . Jacque Lefèvre d’Etaples” (Bossy), indicating his openness to Luther’s doctrine, something he shared with Cromwell, Holbein, and Anne Boleyn. Whatever Dinteville’s mission in England, and there are no extant instructions, the day after Good Friday 1533 signaled the end of Lent: the day Anne was given public recognition as virtual Queen. Furthermore, “if the central anamorphic skull is viewed from the correct position” (Walker), Holbein’s distortion is resolved and the sightlines created through the composition of the astronomical and horological instruments “lea[d] the eye to the face of Christ, the Light of the World, on the crucifix partially concealed by curtains at the top left of the picture. To view the painting ‘correctly’, then, is to view it as a powerful meditation on the Crucifixion, upon death, and redemption: the more poignant for taking place at the end of the hour, and on the day, that Christ died exactly 1500 years before” (Walker). Shortly after that, Cranmer declared the new royal marriage legitimate, and Anne was crowned on Whitsunday, 1 June, amid great splendour” (Bossy). In a letter to the editor following Bossy’s review, John Glenn calls attention to the theme of divisiveness:

[There is a] suggestion in the National Gallery catalogue that the Lutheran hymnbook, the lute with the broken string and the little arithmetic book, open at a page that begins with the word *dividirt* (‘divide’), all refer to the rift between the Roman and Lutheran Churches that the Bishop de Selve was anxious to see healed. (Glenn)

This divide is, of course, critical to the tension in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*.

In the pages leading up to the Westminster Gallery scene, Mantel describes the royal recognition of Anne: “On 12 April, Easter Sunday, Anne appears with the king at High Mass, and is prayed for as Queen of England” (443). A few pages later, when Cromwell expresses his wish that Holbein would come to the Tower where rooms are being prepared for Henry and Anne in

conjunction with the coronation, the unnamed narrator says that the “time goes quickly between Easter and Whit, when Anne will be crowned” (448). In Cromwell’s point of view, he regrets that Hans “is painting de Dinteville and says he needs to push on with it, as the ambassador is petitioning Francis for his recall, a whining letter on every boat” (448). Bossy corroborates Dinteville’s request to leave England.

Mantel spares no words in describing the “splendour” (Bossy) in which Anne is crowned: there is the four-day preparation (462-65) and coronation day (465-68). Following the coronation ceremony, Mantel has Cromwell visit six-month-pregnant Anne in her chamber, where he finds her “exhausted” (468) and Mary Boleyn with “dark stains under her eyes” (469) from servicing Henry while Anne is pregnant. This is the scene before Cromwell meets Henry, Dinteville, and Lavour in the Westminster Hall gallery scene; it emphasizes Cromwell’s success in the king’s Great Matter. Furthermore, the scene is loaded with dramatic irony because, while Anne’s fecundity gives hope for a male heir to Henry, Cromwell, the court, and the nation, readers know that Anne carries Elizabeth.

In the critical scene at Westminster Hall, Henry plays the voyeur to the festivities below where “his queen takes her seat in the place of honour, her ladies around her, the flower of the court and the nobility of England” (470-71). Emphasizing this display of sensual indulgence is the line quoted above, how the already “fortified” king picks at a “spice plate, dipping thin slices of apple into cinnamon” (471). Not only does this line emphasize one of Henry’s most widely known vices—his gluttony—it also emphasizes his status and accompanying wealth. Spice plates were a culinary tradition that went back to the middle ages, alluded to in the fourteenth-century chronicles of Jean Froissart as a ceremony between kings and ambassadors (*Our English Home* 72). Early inventories of the kind of plates that would hold the spices describe one belonging to Henry VI as “a great spice-plate of gold with a cover, at the top of which was an eagle, with a

gem pendant in his mouth, and all round the same was encrusted with costly gems” (*Our English Home* 73). As for the content of the spice plate, Richard Fitch, one of the resident food archaeologists at the Historic Kitchens at Hampton Court Palace, explains that spices, in the sixteenth century were prohibitively expensive:

They are truly the preserve of kings and the very wealthy. But they were also very pan-European. It wouldn't matter where you went, which court you visited, throughout the sixteenth century . . . they're all going to be attempting to use the same sort of spices because . . . [spices], in Northern Europe, cost a large amount of money. (*Show and Tell With Spices*)

Fitch also confirms that not only was cinnamon often the “most expensive foodstuff used” (Fitch 2014) at Henry’s table, but it was also recommended as a digestif to “restrayne, fluxes or laxes” (Boorde qtd. in Fitch 2014). The presence of Dinteville and Lavaur in this scene remind us that Henry often entertained Europeans at his court. The allusion in this scene to the Tudor culinary custom of the spice plate emphasizes how Henry kept up with pan-European customs. Cinnamon, in which Henry dips his apple slices, was expensive due to the overland route Arabs used to make the spice available to European markets. The early sixteenth century was a time of increasing demand for cinnamon, leading Portuguese explorers to search for other sources of the spice. They found it on the island of Ceylon (today Sri-Lanka), enslaved the islanders, and profited from the harvest of cinnamon for a century. This likely source of Henry’s cinnamon reveals the latent violence and the beginnings of colonial oppression during this period: “Beneath every history, another history” (66).

When Mantel introduces Dinteville and Lavaur, the unnamed narrator says, “*encore les ambassadeurs*, Jean de Dinteville furred against the June chill, and his friend the Bishop of Lavaur, wrapped in a fine brocade gown” (original emphasis 471). While the French phrase, “still

the ambassadors”, refers to the unanswered pleas of Dinteville to King François for his return, “furred” refers to the ermine-lined coat Dinteville wears in the portrait while the “deep mulberry” (Mantel 471) brocade of Lavaur’s gown can be discerned especially in the lower right-hand of the portrait. By this time in the story, Mantel has established Cromwell’s distinguishing characteristic of pricing out the garments of others. This trait serves to inform the reader of the value of clothing, of Cromwell’s cloth merchant background, and of the shifting focus of this society on capitalism and materialism. Consequently, Cromwell examines “stitching and padding, studding and dyeing; he admires the deep mulberry of the bishop’s brocade” (471). Within the same paragraph, Cromwell’s third-person point of view shifts from clothing to power dynamics: “They say these two Frenchmen favour the gospel, but favour at François’s court extends no further than a small circle of scholars that the king, for his own vanity, wishes to patronize” (471).

Another detail linking Mantel’s scene and the painting can be found in her setting: “from a gallery, high above *Westminster* Hall” (my emphasis 470). In Holbein’s painting, the mosaic floor in the painting is “a copy of the medieval Cosmati pavement in the sanctuary of *Westminster* Abbey, the sacred area in front of the abbey’s high altar, a floor that is similar to the one beneath Michelangelo’s ‘Creation of Adam’ in the Sistine Chapel” (Ridgeway, “Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*”, my emphasis). If that were not enough, she situates the men in a structure, the gallery, that serves to frame them for the people below but also suggests its synonym: space devoted to exhibiting works of art. If this were the only allusion Mantel included in this scene, it might serve to emphasize how England participated in the explosion of the arts and sciences during the Renaissance. Although they lagged behind Italy—symbolized here by the link of the tile pattern in the painting to the tile pattern in Rome’s Sistine Chapel—in embracing this rebirth, art produced under the reign of King Henry VIII has a revered place in art history. Yet Mantel, who once declared herself a European author rather than British one (“No Passes”), also connects

Britain to Europe: Holbein was from Bavaria, the two ambassadors from France, while the allusion to the Sistine Chapel emphasizes England's connection to Rome at the time.

As Bossy reveals in his review of North, Dinteville had Lutheran leanings, indicating their presence at the celebration of Anne's coronation may be supporting more than Henry's new queen. Cromwell finishes this introspection by indicating Henry's triumph at "grow[ing] . . . Thomas More" (471), emphasizing the competition between Henry and François, in their youth confined to sporting matches, in their middle age focused on attracting the most revered minds in Europe to their courts.

Henry interjects with, "Look at my wife the queen. . . . She is worth the show, is she not" (471)? Cromwell replies that he has had "all the windows reglazed. . . . The better to see her" (471). De Selve, the cleric, comments, "*Fiat lux*" (471). The dialogue thus moves from Henry's invitation to participate in his voyeurism to his pride in his latest possession. Cromwell is an accessory to this display, having made sure the sight of Anne will be clearer. The cleric utters a biblical phrase in Latin, reminding us of the pervasive division between England's new religion and Catholicism: Let there be light. It is a pun also, reflecting on the better light afforded by the improved windows. Yet light is also a component that an artist will use for effect in a painting. In the examination of another painting, this time of members of the seventeenth-century Spanish court by Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, Michel Foucault observes that the light that "streams in through an invisible window" (Foucault 6) situated on the right side of the painting "renders all representation visible" (Foucault 6). Foucault's essay has been described as a "bravura essay in art criticism, analyzing Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) as an exploration of the paradoxes inherent in representation" (Brigstocke). Foucault argues, with regards to the composition of *Las Meninas*, that the light that flows from the window not seen in the painting "serves as the common locus of the representation" (Foucault 6). Yet the other meaning of light,

as an illumination to a believer of sacred knowledge, is relevant when considering the light that illuminates *The Ambassadors*, because of the religious controversy surrounding both the symbols found in Holbein's painting and the split from the church that acts as the foundation for Henry's marriage to Anne. Strategically, the scene in the gallery occurs just after Anne is crowned, an event which could not have taken place without the split from the church.

Cromwell then contrasts the festivities below and the "odour of roast swan and peacock" (471) to his awareness that, "[i]n Paris, they are burning Lutherans" (471) before switching to an inquiry for the two ambassadors about Guido Camillo, one of the revered minds of Europe over whom their king fought to acquire. Switching topics with the foreign men, Cromwell asks, "Messieurs . . . do you know of the man Guido Camillo? I hear he is at your master's court" (471)? This prompts brief replies by the two and an interjection from Henry that reveals Erasmus, who did not approve of Camillo's design, has corresponded with the king about Camillo's Theatre of Memory. Cromwell responds:

With your permission [Camillo] intends it as more than [a memory system for the speeches of Cicero]. It is a theatre on the ancient Vitruvian plan. But it is not to put on the plays. As my lord the bishop says, you as the owner of the theatre are to stand in the centre of it, and look up. Around you there is arrayed a system of human knowledge. Like a library, but as if—can you imagine a library in which each book contains another book, and a smaller book inside that? (472)

The king reacts to Cromwell's speech by saying, "Already there are too many books in the world" (472). Given that the Reformation centers on a book and its reproduction, and that the dissemination of all kinds of information thanks to the invention of the printing press—information that may pose a threat to rulers like Henry—this passage draws our attention to the similarity between the information explosion of the early Tudor era and the information

explosion of the early twenty-first century. Sites like Wiki leaks and the recent scandal over Edward's Snowden's release of sensitive information about the scope of America's NSA bugging (Harding) pose threats to Western hegemony similar to those which the circulation of printed copies of Luther's tracts posed to Henry.

In a text that examines memory during the era of Reformation and the printing press, Lina Bolzoni and Jeremy Parzen explain the significance to people like Thomas Cromwell of Camillo's theatre of memory:

Inside its complex structure the memory of human scientific knowledge (and of literature) is entrusted to a system of images—painted by great artists like Titian and Francesco Salviati.... Camillo's theatre is the incarnation of the myths of the century: it unites repertoires of words and images; it utilizes both the mechanism of the logical and rhetorical diagram and the magical fascination of the icon; all of this, in turn, is entrusted to memory and its capacity to give new forms to the things that it preserves. (xvi)

So at this point in the narrative, Cromwell reflects on a "mnemotechnique" (Rigney, "Portable Monuments" 366) for recalling not only the speeches of a revered Roman legal philosopher but also scientific knowledge and literature using images like the one to which Mantel alludes in this scene: *Holbein's Ambassadors*. This painting displays scientific instruments new to that society as well as the literature of a new perspective on the world as emphasized by the anamorphic skull. Yet even these achievements are mutable, suggested by the *momento mori* symbolism of the skull. By including this and other images in her Cromwell novels, Mantel also connects the explosion of images through art like Holbein's in the sixteenth century to our own über-visual culture in which various forms of media bombard us daily with a myriad of images.

As was discussed in the last chapter, this "verbal representation of visual representation" (Mitchell) is known as ekphrasis. The painting, however, isn't being described so much as it is a

hybrid of ekphrasis and allusion; the description of the clothes of de Dinteville and de Selve, first by the unnamed narrator then by Cromwell, perfectly match their appearance in the portrait. What Mantel has done through her allusion and ekphrasis is to “endo[w] . . . the mute image with a voice . . . ma[k]e it dynamic and active” (Mitchell), “a gift to the reader” (Mitchell). Just as Mantel’s ekphrasis in Cromwell’s point of view of the Holbein portrait of More and his family, combined with the ensuing dinner conversation, suggests a plea for a reassessment of the dynamics of More and his family, Holbein’s painting of the foreign ambassadors and its emphasis on perspective suggest a plea for a new perspective on Thomas Cromwell. Also to be considered in this example of ekphrasis is the contest, as first observed by Plato, “between poetry and painting [that] derives from this idea of getting as close as possible to the real thing” (Cheeke 25). First, the tableau of the ambassadors and the instruments, books, and sacred symbols that surround them were carefully arranged by the artist, as explored in Vanora Bennett’s *A Portrait of an Unknown Woman*, undermining the *veritas* behind the deceptively casual stance of the two subjects; one of the “paradoxes inherent in representation” (Brigstocke). Another paradox, explored by Foucault in his examination of *Las Meninas*, involves “that which . . . the figures within the painting are looking at so fixedly, or at least those who are looking straight ahead” (Foucault 8). Foucault especially focuses on the mirror, “its position more or less central” (7) to the representation of the artist in his studio, painting a representation of the Infanta Margareta Teresa. That mirror reflects the parents of the Infanta: Philip IV and Maria de Austria (*Las Meninas, or The Family of Felipe IV*). The images in the mirror reflect “that which all the figures within the painting are looking at so fixedly” (8). While there is no mirror to reflect Holbein’s presence outside the representation of de Dinteville and Lavour, the models (Foucault 5) both look fixedly, “straight ahead”, at what is invisible to us, the spectators. Rather than insert himself into this representation of two representatives of the opposing religious forces of the

Reformation (de Dinteville) and Catholic Church (Lavaur), Holbein chooses to represent something else invisible to the human eye: death itself. I have already discussed how the spectator must achieve the right perspective in order to make the skull visible as a skull, rather than as “a guided missile about to hit the floor from somewhere off-right” (Bossy). Holbein’s arrangement of the scientific instruments symbolize the increased popularity of scientific inquiry in the early sixteenth century while the open book alludes to the explosion of printed text in that society. The symbolism of the crucifix, located in the top left-hand corner of the painting, is quite obviously the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross, but, according to North’s exploration of the painting, also connects, “with the help of the chronological instruments on the table, that the painting shows the scene at 4 p.m. on 11 April 1533, which was Good Friday” (Bossy), near the time of the death of Jesus Christ. The lute’s broken string is also an allusion to the break between Reformers and the Catholic Church, but it also represents the Renaissance revolution in instruments. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance*, the production of instruments during the era was inspired by the “natural distribution of sound amongst human voice (soprano, alto, tenor, bass)” (Campbell, “musical instruments”). Accordingly, Renaissance craftsmen would create families of instruments, consisting of different sizes, “allow[ing] for a more homogeneous sound both in purely instrumental ensemble music and later when voices and instruments were combined” (Campbell, “musical instruments”). In this painting that celebrates the advances of Renaissance ingenuity, Holbein uses a skull to symbolize death, not only as a reminder of mortality but also of the contentious ground between these two religious men²⁰, thus creating an “unstable superimposition” (Foucault 8) because the manipulator of this

²⁰ The existence of purgatory, “the place and the state of temporal punishment, where those who have died in the grace of God (i.e. not in mortal sin) and are therefore eligible to progress to heaven are detained until they have expiated the guilt of their venial sins and suffered any pains still owing due to mortal sins that have been forgiven” (Campbell, “purgatory”), was a highly contested issue between Reformers and Catholics. Reformers denied its existence.

representation—Holbein himself—and the object of the gaze of de Dinteville and Lavaur are equally invisible. This “action of representation consists in bringing one or . . . two forms of invisibility into the place of the other. . . . providing a metathesis of visibility that affects both the space represented in the picture and its nature as representation” (Foucault 8). Mantel seems to be duplicating this kind of “unstable superimposition” in her novels, in which truth (one form of invisibility), history (another form of invisibility due to its incomplete traces), and fiction (a work of representation) share one space. If truth and history are invisible, like the mirror and the people observing the painter at work in *Las Meninas*, then Mantel’s novels provide a “metathesis of visibility,” creating a representation of the visible (the novel as a work of art) and the invisible (the truth about the past and the reliability of history). The truth about the “Men Who Made England” is what Mantel explores, subverting the saintly representation of More equally with the demonic representation of Cromwell.

If Mantel’s representation of More contradicts Greenblatt’s insistence that he rejected ambition, pride, and cruelty, her representation of Cromwell similarly contradicts traditional representations of him as evil, his name a “hissing and a byword” (Hitchens 151). Like More, Cromwell possesses ambition, as evidenced by his rise from blacksmith’s son to Henry’s councilor, and pride, as evidenced by his refusal to attach his name to the genealogical history of a more noble Cromwell family (*Wolf Hall* 218; *Bring Up the Bodies* 10). Like More, Cromwell’s pride has a dark side to it: vengeance, especially demonstrated in *Bring Up the Bodies*. However, in place of cruelty, Cromwell possesses generosity. Like many of the actions More undertakes in Mantel’s novel that can be corroborated by historical record, Cromwell’s generosity (*Wolf Hall* 315), for example his distribution of food among the poor near his home, can also be found in historical record (Leithead). I would like to analyze Mantel’s Cromwell using an approach

similar to that which I used to analyze Thomas More. Instead of ambition, pride, and cruelty, however, I will examine Cromwell through the lenses of ambition, pride, and generosity.

4.2 Cromwell's Ambition

Months have passed since Wolsey was removed from York palace and since Cromwell's daughters have died when Anne Boleyn invites Cromwell to visit her at York palace. She is curious about him, she says, because "the king does not cease to quote Master Cromwell" (201). She refers to the series of events, beginning with Cromwell acquiring a seat in Parliament, that leads to Cromwell gaining the attention of the king. It begins with talk of military strategy at a battle that took place in the French town of Th rouanne; Cromwell admits to having been there. The king questions him on his argument in Parliament, seven years previously, that England could not afford a war. In particular, Henry asks him how he came up with the amount of "one million pounds in gold" (183) as the figure to which, Cromwell claims, Henry has access.

Cromwell's reply:

"I trained in the Florentine banks. And in Venice."

The king stares at him. "Howard said you were a common soldier."

"That too." (183)

Common soldiers do not usually train in Florentine banks. But this was Cromwell's journey, as he recalls on his first visit to Anne Boleyn in the spring of 1530.

The memories stirred by his visit to Anne take Cromwell back to Florence, to the kitchens of the Frescobaldi house where he had taken a position to leave behind soldiering. He is called to the upstairs section of the house. Complying, young Cromwell removes his apron, the symbol of his position. On his way up the stairs he encounters a young boy singing a song in Italian about going to war, symbolizing the life Cromwell is leaving behind as he ascends the stairs. Cromwell recalls that the apron "[f]or all he knows . . . is there still" (206) because, after going upstairs, he

had “never come down again” (207). The metaphor of the stairs for Cromwell’s ascent up the social ladder is clear. Now he has impressed the king with the knowledge he gained in those financial houses and is ready to impress Anne and her women:

He sends those ladies some flat baskets of small tarts, made of preserved oranges and honey. To Anne herself he sends a dish of almond cream. It is flavoured with rose-water and decorated with the preserved petals of roses, and with candied violets. (206)

Just as in his days in Italy, when Cromwell situates himself well by removing himself from the battlefield and into the Friscobaldi kitchens, before he proves himself and rises to the next level, Cromwell situates himself well in the wake of the Wolsey’s fall with a seat in Parliament. It may be Mantel’s imagination that has Cromwell forward the tarts and preserves, but it is consistent with a man who pays attention to small details. Historical record, according to the entry on Cromwell in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, has little on Thomas Cromwell’s Putney years, more about his father’s drunkenness and disregard for authority. His life on the continent is only slightly better known, including joining the French army and fighting with them in Italy. He left the French army to enter the household of merchant banker Francesco Frescobaldi followed by work in Venice and Antwerp as a trader and legal adviser. But what influences might have inspired this ruffian from Putney?

Before Anne’s coronation, Cromwell is “pester[ed]” (*Wolf Hall* 450) by his servant, Christophe, for information on Cicero. Cromwell says, “We lawyers try to memorise all his speeches. If any man were walking around today with all of Cicero’s wisdom in his head he would be. . . . Cicero would be on the king’s side” (450). This is only one of the many allusions to Cicero in *Wolf Hall*; because there are no references to Cicero in *Bring Up the Bodies*, and because Cicero’s “skepticism . . . eschews dogmatic certainty” (S. A. White), as we saw in More in the previous chapter. These allusions—there are nine in which Cicero are named—indicate

Cromwell's respect for the man, but also remind us that Mantel first studied for the law at the London School of Economics, until she discovered "that training as a barrister required money that she didn't have" ("Dead are Real"). Cromwell's ambition to memorize all the verses of Cicero (106-43 BC) may also be a strategy of Mantel's to draw comparisons between Cromwell and a Roman philosopher who became the "foremost advocate of the age" (S. A. White), despite his obscure birth (S. A. White), and achieved the position of consul, Rome's chief executive office. Like Cromwell, he tumbled briefly from the height of power when he was exiled in 58 BC, but later found profound influence through his subsequent philosophical writings. Cicero was assassinated during the unstable times in Rome in the wake of Julius Caesar's assassination. The extant works Cicero left behind are enormous: over fifty speeches, nearly a thousand letters, works on rhetorical theory and practice and twelve works on philosophical topics.

Before Cromwell tells Christophe about Cicero, Cromwell flashes back to his voyage with Henry and Anne to Calais, and how he met Christophe. While in Calais, Cromwell has "private business to transact" (402), taking him to a "low sort of place" (403) that, despite its lowness, has a mirror on one of its walls, surprising Cromwell with a glance at his own image. The three old men in long gowns that approach Cromwell, he believes, are alchemists—"he hates alchemists" (403)—but his interest in having an audience has to do with Camillo. This flashback serves to not only to give Christophe a background, it also emphasizes the ambition Cromwell has to perfect his memory because of the latent power in his unfinished sentence to Christophe: "If any man were walking around today with all of Cicero's wisdom in his head he would be..." (450). The incompleteness of this sentence, followed by Cromwell's assurance that such a man would be "on the side of the king" may imply a goal of power, because the king's side was winning its fight against Rome's influence in England, but may just as easily imply that "wisdom"—i.e. anyone who promotes "liberal education, republican government and rationalism

in religion and ethics” (S. A. White) in the same way that Cicero did—inspired men to pick the king’s side. But where might Cromwell have begun to realize the value of this wisdom? This gap in history gives Mantel an opportunity to imagine Cromwell’s motivation in a strategy that also serves to increase the tension between Cromwell and Thomas More.

If any member of Henry’s Council could pierce the formidable armor Cromwell erects around his working-class persona it is Sir Thomas More. In order to emphasize the hostility and resentment Cromwell might have harbored against More, Mantel imagines a meeting between young More as a student in Cardinal Morton’s residence, Lambeth Palace, and Cromwell, whose uncle is Morton’s cook. Young Cromwell, participating in the delivery of beer and bread to the youths who served Morton as pages, has More pointed out to him and is told that the archbishop “says [More] will be a great man, so deep his learning already and so pleasant his wit” (113). On the day it was his turn to serve More, he dares to question the young scholar about knowledge:

One day he brought a wheaten loaf and put it in the cupboard and lingered, and Master Thomas said, “Why do you linger?” But he did not throw anything at him. “What is in that great book?” he asked, and Master Thomas replied, smiling, “Words, words, just words.” (113-14)

The contrast between boy servant and young scholar is sharp; the irony in More’s refusal to share knowledge with a servant when we know he will become a father whose children are the best-educated in Europe is equally sharp. This encounter foreshadows similar displays of condescension between More and Cromwell: for example, Cromwell recalls More’s greeting during his days still serving the cardinal: “Still serving your Hebrew God, I see. . . . I mean, your idol Usury” (91). The condescension More demonstrates to Cromwell at Bonvisi’s dinner is similarly disparaging (189-90). Moreover, while Cromwell sponsors young boys like Rafe Sadler and raises them as apprentices, teaching them the law or accounts (*Wolf Hall* 177; *Bring Up the*

Bodies 49), More only takes guardianship of two girls—one a rich heiress, one not—and educates them with the rest of his family. The rich heiress he marries to his son, the other to another scholar. The fame of his learned household spread through Europe after Erasmus visited them. In both the portrait and the dinner Mantel imagines, Dame Alice has a pet monkey. Considering that the humanists revived Classical literature and both Pliny and Plautus refer to how monkeys “amused the household with tricks they had been taught” (White and Hornblower), perhaps More saw the graduates of his home-schooling project as being trained to entertain his humanist friends. By teaching his children the classical languages and texts, More was a guiding light to other schools of humanist thought in the Renaissance. But Cromwell, too, was learning. According to David Loades, Cromwell was “skilled in several languages and in merchandising” (*Thomas Cromwell* 15) and “had a good working knowledge of Latin, which he appears to have developed by memorizing large chunks of the Erasmian version of the New Testament” (15). These historically recorded attributes can also be found in Mantel’s representation of this Renaissance man. The continental schooling Cromwell received after he quit the army provided him with the confidence and educational foundation he would need when he had to bring Thomas More to trial for treason.

When More is imprisoned for not supporting Henry’s marriage to Anne, Cromwell reminds him of the “words, just words” episode from their youth, recalling he was only seven, More fourteen. But More does not recall the incident. Cromwell’s memory may trump More’s, but More’s condescension and obliviousness to a young servant is more likely the reason why his memory never filed the encounter as an important one to remember. Embarrassed by his lack of memory or, more likely, still considering himself far superior to Cromwell, More chooses to disbelieve Cromwell’s story. But the phrase, “words, just words”, both as a synecdoche for the incident and a reminder of the centrality of words in law, comes back to haunt More at a critical

moment in the interaction between these two opponents. When Cromwell again visits More's cell, he elaborates on the difference between the two of them, that More's mind is "fixed on the next world" (635) because he sees "no prospect of improving this one" (635). More counters, "And you do" (635)? Cromwell replies by launching into an ironic speech about how English weather might be to blame for the sorry case of the contemporary world, that he might be able to come to terms with the cesspools of humanity around him, if not for the rain:

The spectacles of pain and disgrace I see around me, the ignorance, the unthinking vice, the poverty and the lack of hope, and oh, the rain—the rain that falls on England and rots the grain, puts out the light in a man's eye and the light of learning too, for who can reason if Oxford is a giant puddle and Cambridge is washing away downstream, and who will enforce the laws if the judges are swimming for their lives? (635)

Thomas More says, "How you can talk" (636); Cromwell recalls, "Words, words, just words" (636). The oath that More refuses to sign is also "just words", but he will not sign it. Mantel's representation of this scene reinforces More's outward persistent arrogance and condescension—his "dogmatic certainty" (S. A. White)—toward the blacksmith's son who once served him bread and beer, but More's paucity of words in his reply suggests that, inwardly, he is surprised by the sophistication of the former servant's response. For Cromwell, his ambition has paid off. He has won the war of words with More.

4.3 Cromwell's Pride

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Mantel's narrative follows the tragic form, with More and Anne Boleyn the tragic characters of the first two novels. Cromwell's character arc is also tragic, but his narrative consists of three novels. Consequently, the pride we see in the first novel regards his family and his achievements in the world before turning into something less benevolent. In the case of Thomas More, I have discussed how More's pride fed his high opinion

of himself, was synonymous with his *hubris*, and fed his arrogance. Cromwell, on the other hand, is represented by Mantel as having the kind of pride that is a self-conscious assessment of one's own self-worth, making one worthy of the position or lifestyle one has acquired. I think Cromwell epitomizes this—at least in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. Without ever referring to his pride he demonstrates pride in his family and pride in how his achievements have raised his position and made him a man of substance and power. Mantel pits many adversaries against Cromwell who attack this self-esteem he has earned through the challenges he has faced. These are the occasions that feed the dark side of Cromwell's pride: his thirst for vengeance. In the case of Thomas More, there is an underlying sense of vengeance when, despite Cromwell's attempts to reason with More, the celebrated author of *Utopia* continues to denigrate Cromwell, right up until his execution. In *Bring Up the Bodies*, Cromwell finds satisfaction in the case of the four courtiers who ridiculed Wolsey in an entertainment performed for the court shortly after the cardinal's death. Predating all of these is an incident in Cromwell's youth that might account for his revulsion for priests and his willingness to help Wolsey dissolve some of the unprofitable religious houses in order to pay for his colleges. His transactions for Wolsey, of course, pave the way for the dissolution of the monasteries set to occur in the last novel of this trilogy, tentatively entitled *The Mirror and the Light*. Like More's *hubris*, Cromwell's vengeance is a form that pride takes when that pride—more often a concept of honor—has been attacked from someone who becomes an enemy. Like the trope of the flawed hero whose *hubris* leads to his downfall, “tragedy always deals with toxic matter bequeathed by the past to the present. . . . But within the confines of the single play there may not be time to lay the living dead to rest” (Poole 35). Consequently, the “toxic matter” of Wolsey's downfall and those who hastened or celebrated it contribute to the “living dead”—i.e. Wolsey—that Cromwell must lay to rest. He does not

complete this task until the second novel, because there is not enough time “within the confines of the single [novel]”.

4.3.1 Pride in His Family and Position

In the first scene after Cromwell’s escape from his father to the Continent, Cromwell visits Cardinal Wolsey, his master. A tapestry, belonging to the cardinal, depicting Solomon and Sheba, hangs behind Wolsey as he instructs Cromwell on the impossible task the king has set out for him: secure a divorce from Katherine so he can remarry and father a son to reign after him. A draught hits the tapestry, the movement distracts Cromwell from his conversation, drawing his eyes to Sheba and finding in her a resemblance to a young widow with whom he lodged during his Antwerp years. He reflects, “Since they had shared a bed, should he have married her? In honour, yes. But if he had married Anselma he couldn’t have married Liz; and his children would be different children from the ones he has now” (*Wolf Hall* 23). Although Mantel pursues this line of thought no further, it is easy to recognize it as the reflection of a man who loves his family and would not trade them for another. Cromwell’s pride in the members of his family, and his extended family, are revealed in reflections like these. In the case of his eldest daughter, Anne, it is his boast of her achievements to Mary Boleyn that reveal his pride and love for her (138).

When we first meet Liz Wkys Cromwell, she is welcoming Cromwell home from his long visit to York and his recent interview with Wolsey. He assesses his wife, finding her looking well if “worn by her long day. . . . She is wearing the string of pearls and garnets that he gave her at New Year” (35). Liz’s jewelry attests to Cromwell’s generosity, but also denotes an affection on Cromwell’s part that is supported by the grief he experiences when she dies. His pride in his wife’s accomplishments is demonstrated when he reflects on her industry:

She does a bit of silk-work Tags for the seals on documents; fine net cauls for ladies at court. She has two girl apprentices in the house, and an eye on fashion; but she complains,

as always, about the middlemen, and the price of thread. “We should go to Genoa,” he says. “I’ll teach you to look the suppliers in the eye.” (35)

This is an example of how Mantel manages to bring the women of this time period out of the background setting, into the social network of the time. She claims space for a married woman in the sixteenth-century London network of craftsmen as well, demonstrating that it was not unheard of for women of the City to be employed.

The first time Cromwell meets Mary Boleyn, he asks about her children. She replies to this but then expresses her sympathy over the recent death of his wife and asks after his children. Cromwell relaxes, pleased with the question because “no one ever asks me that” (137), relaxing too because of the attraction he has for Mary. He replies:

I have a big boy . . . he’s at Cambridge with a tutor. I have a little girl called Grace; she’s pretty and she has fair hair, though I don’t . . . My wife was not a beauty, and I am as you see. And I have Anne, Anne wants to learn Greek. (138)

When Mary expresses her surprise at a young woman learning Greek, Cromwell tells her that Anne says, “Why should Thomas More’s daughter have the pre-eminence?” (138). Anne is alluding to Margaret More, making this protestation on Anne’s part also a comparison of father-daughter relationships. Whereas More boasts to all of Europe about the achievements of his children, having them perform for Erasmus like Dame Alice’s pet monkey, Cromwell boasts modestly to Mary Boleyn of his daughter’s talents. Privately, he shows his pride in Anne’s achievements through his reflection on her. Cromwell similarly reflects on his daughter’s superiority when he reflects on Mary Tudor, the king’s first daughter. “[T]he diminutive Mary” (82) according to Cromwell, is “about the size of his daughter Anne, who is two or three years younger” (82). He then considers his daughter’s temperament:

Anne Cromwell is a tough little girl. She could eat a princess for breakfast. Like St. Paul's god, she is no respecter of persons, and her eyes, small and steady as her father's, fall coldly on those who cross her; the family joke is, what London will be like when our Anne becomes Lord Mayor. (*Wolf Hall* 82)

As for his "big boy", Cromwell is more ambiguous. He takes great care seeing that he has a tutor in Cambridge and has placed him in houses where Gregory can learn from books as well as the manners practiced by a higher social class than Cromwell ever belonged to. It is clear that Gregory sometimes fails to meet his father's expectations, yet, Cromwell reflects, "When people tell him what Gregory has failed to do, he says, He's busy growing" (37). His sister-in-law points out to him that "Gregory will never make a man of business" (132), to which Cromwell concedes. Johane then points out that, due to the education his father bought him, he is a gentleman, and suggests he find Gregory a wife with excellent social connections.

Unlike his daughter Anne, when Cromwell compares his son to Thomas More's son, he finds more similarity than difference. When he and Stephen Gardiner return from Chelsea together on Gardiner's barge, Gardiner asks if Cromwell thinks that More is "disappointed in his boy" (235) because he "shows not talent for affairs" (235), adding, "I hear you have a boy like that" (235). Cromwell's reaction is to consider the two boys together, in silent agreement with Gardiner's estimation, reflecting that it was true: "John More, Gregory Cromwell what have we done to our sons? Made them into idle young gentlemen—but who can blame us for wanting for them the ease we didn't have (235)? In *Bring Up the Bodies*, however, Cromwell's estimation of his son changes. When they have retired to their room in Wolf Hall on a visit there with the king, Cromwell considers how his son, despite neither taking to Latin nor the "great authors", possesses many of the attributes that are valued in a gentleman:

Gregory is a fine archer, a fine horseman, a shining star in the tilt yard, and his manners cannot be faulted. . . . He knows how to bow to foreign diplomats in the manner of their own countries. . . . He doesn't slouch around with his jacket off one shoulder, or look in windows to admire himself, or stare around in church, or interrupt old men, or finish their stories for them. (*Bring Up the Bodies* 24)

As for his adopted son, his nephew Richard Williams, Cromwell compares his archery expertise against the king's. Richard's grandfather, ap Evan, Cromwell thinks, "was an artist with the bow" (*Wolf Hall* 254). When he studies the king, however, Cromwell is "satisfied that [the king's] great-grandfather was not the archer Blaybourne, as the story says" (254). This is an ambiguous thought because it is not clear why Cromwell is satisfied. Given the myth that Henry Tudor's real great-grandfather was an English archer named Blaybourne, he might be satisfied that Henry's royal blood is pure. Alternatively, he may be satisfied because of his pride that his adopted son's ability with the bow surpasses Henry's ability.

When Mantel lays out Cromwell's abilities that have been wrought out of his Continental experience, she does not have Cromwell reflect on these things. By having the unnamed narrator summarize Cromwell's progression in life, Mantel seems to remove from his character any claim to overweening pride, such as we see her criticize in *More*. Instead, we have a presumably objective voice tell us:

Thomas Cromwell is now a little over forty years old. He is a man of strong build, not tall. . . . It is said he knows by heart the entire New Testament in Latin. . . . His speech is low and rapid, his manner assured; he is at home in courtroom or waterfront, bishop's palace or inn yard. 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 Plato to Plautus and back again. He knows new poetry, and can say it in Italian. (31)

Mantel has her unnamed narrator do something similar in *Bring Up the Bodies*, beginning with “Thomas Cromwell is now about fifty years old” (6). But the description has shifted slightly: due to his success his “labourer’s body... [is] running to fat” (6) and his hair “greying now” (6). Myths about his origins abound, including tales about the sorcery he learned from Wolsey. Yet, in the king’s service, “he knows his worth and merits and makes sure of his reward” (6). This description suggests that Cromwell is proud of his accomplishments; he values them, and makes sure that those who pay him value them equally.

4.3.2 Attacks and Vengeance

Mantel’s portrait of Cromwell highlights his working-class roots; this represents just one aspect of her revision of standard views of a character with whom she has been intrigued for quite some time (“Dead are Real”). As a member of the working class who had to ditch a career in law because of a lack of funds, it is easy to understand how Mantel would be intrigued by this other working class legal advisor who enjoyed a meteoric rise in a society barely out of the feudal era and at a definitive moment in English²¹ history. In her representation of Cromwell, Mantel shows how his working-class roots truly define him and how the discrepancy between himself and the peers within the King’s Council Chamber makes him the target of their condescension and disregard. For example, the Duke of Norfolk—who continually insults Cromwell and, as a symbol of the not-so-distant Middle Ages, resents his upward mobility—warns Cromwell, that the king can distinguish Cromwell from his other courtiers only because he protested against Henry’s plans to go to war against France due to the expense. Norfolk has a medieval understanding of war as an exercise in a country’s honor, a notion that he thinks Cromwell cannot possibly comprehend:

²¹ Since the Act of Union that formed the Kingdom of Great Britain took place in 1707, it is English history that is affected by the Protestant Reformation. Significantly, the publicly funded organization that promotes history in the United Kingdom is known as “English Heritage”. See www.english-heritage.org.uk.

“How can a butcher’s son understand—”

“*La gloire?*”

“Are you a butcher’s son?”

“A blacksmith’s.”

“Are you really? Shoe a horse?” (164)

The interrogation goes on for another page, with Cromwell protesting that wars are too expensive and the invincible duke using slang terms like “[b]y the Mass” (164), “Johnnie Freelance” (164), and “Switzers” (164), leaving the impression that this important nobleman of Henry’s is a buffoon. This is especially evident when comparing Cromwell’s witty responses to Norfolk’s version of condescension. For example:

“I was a soldier myself.”

“Were you so? Not in any English army, I’ll be bound. There, you see.” The duke grins, quite without animosity. “I knew there was something about you. I knew I didn’t like you, but I couldn’t put my finger on it. Where were you?”

“Garigliano.”

“With?”

“The French.”

The duke whistles. “Wrong side, lad.”

“So I noticed.” (164)

This is just one example of how Mantel makes the noble—and not so noble—men around Henry appear as elitists, parvenus, or buffoons. Yet this interrogation reveals that Cromwell does not prevaricate. In the same way that he rejects adopting the history of a more illustrious branch of Cromwell, he admits to fighting as a mercenary for England’s enemy. Men like Norfolk and Brandon represent the medieval, the era that Renaissance thinkers delineate from their own era of

new understandings of art and science. Cromwell, on the other hand, represents the Renaissance thinkers, the humanists, even though his working-class origins are often ridiculed or used by other courtiers to reinforce their superiority. Perhaps due to the violent past to which Cromwell often refers, vengeance emerges in Mantel's Cromwell as a reaction to wrongs he sees committed against those he respects, like Wolsey, or committed against himself. Whereas this trait does not bring Cromwell any negative consequences in *Bring Up the Bodies*, because this plot concerns itself with how Anne's *hubris* hastens her downfall, vengeance may be the flaw—perhaps combined with a *hubris* that grows with Cromwell's power—that contributes to Cromwell's own downfall in *The Mirror and the Light*.

Shortly before his dialogue with Norfolk, Mantel shows Cromwell at Wolsey's side when the cardinal falls from favor; Cromwell is faced with some difficult decisions. In a scene that relies on George Cavendish's biography, Mantel represents Cavendish coming upon Cromwell crying. Although Cavendish assumes Cromwell's tears are either for how Wolsey's downfall has affected Cromwell's position or for Wolsey himself, Mantel interprets them as Cromwell reflecting upon his wife's book of hours, imagining the ghostly traces of his daughters' fingers there. It is his grief over their death that compels him to take action, organizing Wolsey's household at Esher and believing in a day Wolsey will be restored (156-7). Cromwell also has a plan for that restoration:

“When [the servants' pay has been arranged], I shall leave you. I shall be back as soon as I have made sure of a place in the Parliament.”

“But it meets in two days . . . How will you manage it now?”

“I don't know, but someone must speak for my lord. Or they will kill him.”

He sees the hurt and shock; he wants to take the words back; but it is true. He says, “I can only try. I'll make or mar before I see you again.” (157)

Is this plan satisfying Cromwell's ambition, or tending to the needs of his master? The closing scene of this chapter suggests the manner of Wolsey's downfall and the desperation it brought to those who supported and worked for him will lead to consequences.

"It is Cicero who tells this story" announces the unnamed narrator after a brief summary of the poet, Simonides, and his experience at a banquet in Thessaly given by Scopas. In his appearance as a poet, "Simonides incorporated verses in praise of Castor and Pollus, the Heavenly Twins" (157). Scopas was not impressed, giving Simonides only half of his fee, charging him to get the rest from the Twins (157). Shortly thereafter, a servant fetches Simonides outside, saying two young men await him. Outside, Simonides could find no one:

As he turned back, to go and finish his dinner, he heard a terrible noise, of stone splitting and crumbling. He heard the cries of the dying, as the roof of the hall collapsed. Of all the diners, he was the only one left alive. (158)

On that day, "Simonides invented the art of memory" (158) because he had to identify the unidentifiable corpses, something he did by recalling where each sat at the table. By attributing this passage to Cicero, Mantel privileges this passage in Cromwell's mind, suggesting that the actions that follow Cromwell's oath to "make or mar" will react to the memory Cromwell has of Wolsey's humiliation. The events surrounding Wolsey's downfall, especially that of the courtiers sent to arrest him, is the "toxic matter bequeathed by the past to the present" (Poole 35). As Cromwell suspects, Wolsey does die and he must digest the conflicting "duties, loyalties, passions, and injuries" (Poole 35) that arise out of his ascendance in Henry's court and his self-fashioning submission to the derision of those same courtiers who helped take down Wolsey.

I've used the terms "revenge" and "vengeance", alluding to their connection with the Greek tragic form that Mantel uses as a framework in these novels. Are the two terms synonymous? The *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* defines revenge as the "intentional infliction of

punishment or injury in return for a wrong to oneself or one's family or close friends" (Solomon). Vengeance, on the other hand, is the "satisfaction of such an intention" (Solomon), while to avenge means to "take revenge on behalf of someone else who cannot do so for him—or herself" (Solomon). Given Mantel's adaptation of Greek tragedy, it is interesting to consider that, in Homeric Greece, "'revenge' and 'justice' were more or less equivalent" (Solomon). Whereas the Hebrew Bible prescribes "an eye for an eye" (qtd. in Solomon), indicating that the punishment should fit the crime, the Christian Bible promotes forgiveness, leaving any vengeance in the hands of God. Modern philosophers consider revenge a passion, in opposition to rational thinking. However, for the early Greeks, "revenge was not a problem but a solution. It was a form of necessary repayment" (Burnett xvi) and was often represented in myths and tales as "action in its most extreme form, that of blood vengeance" (Burnett xvii). Recall that the thirty-three Greek princesses who murdered their husbands and were set adrift at sea in a raft without a rudder by their father.

In this section, I plan to look at three particular acts of revenge that Cromwell executes against those who have either crossed Wolsey, Cromwell himself, or those whom Cromwell thinks are vulnerable.

4.3.2.1 Revenge against Priests

Cromwell is historically documented as having a low opinion of the clergy (Leithead). Mantel uses a conversation between Cromwell and the king to emphasize this attitude. When Henry gives Cromwell permission to elaborate on his "loathing of those in the religious life" (218), Cromwell's diatribe against the corruption of "those in the religious life" includes his defence of the poor and their children:

I have seen monks who live like great lords, on the offerings of poor people who would rather buy a blessing than buy bread, and that is not Christian conduct. . . . The monks take in children and use them as servants, they don't even teach them dog Latin. (219)

Is Mantel's representation of Cromwell's "loathing of those in the religious life" critical to her narrative? Or is she, perhaps, alluding to contemporary issues that might cause one to loath "those in the religious life"?

Scandals surrounding the Catholic clergy in relation to sexual acts committed against children in their care had been brewing long before *Wolf Hall's* publication. A special interview conducted by *60 Minutes'* correspondent Bob Simon with Dublin Archbishop Diarmuid Martin records how seriously disillusioned Catholic parents have taken these allegations. Before this interview, Martin told *The Guardian* in early 2009 that an imminent report would "shock us all" (McDonald) on how deeply involved Irish priests were in the global sexual abuse scandal. Martin is quoted as saying that "thousands of children or young people across Ireland were abused by priests" (McDonald). Martin, appointed to Dublin in 2003 (Byrne), was seen as one of the church's "most able bishops . . . [who could] resolve the perceived crisis in the Irish church, which has been rocked by scandals culminating in the resignation of two bishops in the past decade" (Byrne). Although Mantel has written what she calls a "song of Ireland" ("Dead are Real") in her novel *The Giant, O'Brien* (1998), that novel did not explore the "loathing of those in religious life".). In her self-reflective essay, "No Passes or Documents Are Needed", Mantel also describes how her writing has engendered a "great sadness about the loss . . . of the Irish language. I was aware my mouth was empty, but I was aware also that my brain was crammed with newly minted myth" (101). In the same essay, she claims to have never had feelings of Englishness: "I was a woman, a Catholic, a northerner, of Irish descent" (96). Of her Catholicism, Mantel asserts that she lost her faith at a young age and, as Christopher Hitchens observes, is "not

sorry to be shot of it” (*“The Man Who Made England”* 150). I think these are important components in the context of Mantel’s writing, influencing how she portrays priests in *Wolf Hall* as manipulative, oppressive, and opportunistic in the episode of Elizabeth Barton, a prophet known as the Maid of Kent. Barton, who prophesized Henry’s death, is imprisoned in the Tower while those priests who brought her to the attention of the aristocracy are interrogated. When Cromwell suggests to Bishop Fisher that, had Barton prophesized Anne’s succession to the throne, Fisher “would have called her a witch” (*Wolf Hall* 544), Cromwell is actually criticizing the Catholic church’s polemics and how its interests in supremacy outweigh the interests of their flock. Given that the corruption of church, and especially its priests, was a critical factor in the Reformation, perhaps Mantel is suggesting that contemporary Ireland should follow the same religious path of Reformation England.

Although Mantel does not shy away from Cromwell’s engagement with pride and vengeance, by invoking Greek tragedy Mantel seems to be reminding her readers of how such an act was considered noble by the Classical philosophers, especially Plato. From *Wolf Hall*, we know that Cromwell can “quote you a nice point in the old authors, from Plato to Plautus and back again” (31). For the Greeks, revenge’s intention was “to restore the broken outline of self suffered in an unprovoked attack from a member of one’s own class or group” (Burnett 2). As discussed in the previous chapter, Mantel’s Cromwell saw a Lollard woman burned to death, when he was “a child, nine or so” (*Wolf Hall* 352). Joan Boughton, who has an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, was nearly eighty years old when she was burned at the stake at Smithfield, 28 April 1494. Lollards were originally those who followed John Wycliffe (1328-1384), an early proponent for reform of the Catholic Church. One of the Lollards’ key principles was the right of each person to read the Bible, the “sole source of authority in religious matters” (Campbell, “Lollards”). After Wycliffe was expelled from Oxford, the

movement was squelched in aristocratic circles, but lingered on “amongst yeomen farmers and artisans” (Campbell). These were, for the young Cromwell, his “own class or group”. One of the female members of the crowd assembled at the burning instructs young Cromwell to watch so “he always goes to Mass after this and obeys his priest” (*Wolf Hall* 353). Mantel describes this woman as having “a shrill voice like a demon” (354). Young Cromwell asks, “But what’s her sin” (353). The shrill-voiced woman tells him the old woman believes “God on the altar is a piece of bread” (353) instead of the body of Christ (transubstantiation) and that worshipping statues of saints is like worshipping “wooden posts” (353) (idolatry). The anticipating crowd was equally shrill, with catcalls and whistles directed at a woman bound with chains; she looked so old that Cromwell took her to be a “grandmother, perhaps the oldest person he had ever seen. . . . Her hair seemed to be torn out of her head in patches” (353). Cromwell reports hearing the crowd cheering as the fire began to roar: “They had said it would not take long but it did take long, or so it seemed to him, before the screaming stopped. Does nobody pray for her, he said, and the woman said, what’s the point” (355). Instead, the woman informs him, “You get a pardon for your sins just for watching it. . . . any that bring faggots to the burning, they get forty days’ release from Purgatory” (353). Only the priests could have given these simple people that kind of information. Undeterred, Cromwell prayed for her. Whereas this scene is an example where Mantel’s imagination fills in the blanks of extant history on Thomas Cromwell—creating a motivation for his dislike of the clergy—it also serves to foreshadow the public execution Cromwell himself will experience in the final novel of the trilogy. In the words of one biographer, Cromwell “suffered a particularly gruesome execution before what was left of his head was set upon a pike on London Bridge as the usual warning to traitors” (Leithead).

When the crowd disperses, Cromwell stays because he is afraid to return home to his brutal father. Consequently, he witnesses the retrieval of Joan Boughton’s remains by other

Lollards—foreshadowing the retrieval of his own head from the scaffold. Cromwell lends a hand. In farewell, one of the women dips her fingers into the remains she has collected in her bowl and marks him with the ash: “He has never forgotten the woman, whose last remnants he carried away as a greasy smudge on his own skin” (357). By including this flashback in the novel, Mantel can convey the human suffering endured when More condemned a Protestant to death by burning and establish Cromwell’s antipathy toward monks and support of the Reform movement. There may be another strategy behind this story’s inclusion: it provides Cromwell with another act of vengeance, one that takes “a whole lifetime. . . . [and] is wrought in time, by the disciplined will of an angered individual” (Burnett 2), “a private deed of violent retaliation” (Burnett xv), “collecting a reparation that was owed” (xvi). Could Mantel be exploring this kind of motivation as she depicts Cromwell working with Wolsey to dissolve unprofitable, corrupt monasteries into other, better run monasteries, then using these assets to support Wolsey’s colleges?

In tragedy, revenge and ghosts often appear together; for example, in *Hamlet*, his father’s ghosts orders Hamlet to revenge is murder. In *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell’s occasional interaction with the cardinal’s spirit—for example, after Anne is crowned and Cromwell reflects on how “the clergy own a third of England” (533), he returns home to find “the cardinal waiting for him in a corner” (533)—in *Wolf Hall* foreshadows the revenge he will take on those who participated in the slanderous play, “The Cardinal’s Descent Into Hell” (266). These link between ghosts and revenge, argues Poole, can be found in the “judgement and retributive justice” (34) associated with tragedy. In tragedies like *Hamlet*, the living (Hamlet) must act for the dead (his father) (Poole 34); in *Wolf Hall*, the living (Cromwell) must act for the dead (Wolsey), because “tragedy always deals with toxic matter bequeathed by the past to the present” (Poole 35).

4.3.2.2 Revenge against More

Mantel's portrayal of Cromwell not only revises conventional views of the man himself, but also affords a key vantage point to revise perceptions of More. In all of his dealings with Thomas More, Cromwell deflects the man's insults. For example, when he reflects on a recent encounter with More early in the novel, he recalls that More greets him with "Still serving your Hebrew God, I see. . . . I mean, your idol Usury" (*Wolf Hall* 91). He refers, of course, to the medieval Catholic laws against lending money at interest, laws to which Jews were not subjected. Cromwell deflects this pejorative remark by reflecting on how More, who may be "a scholar revered through Europe" (*Wolf Hall* 91), awakens each morning to conduct "prayers in Latin" (*Wolf Hall* 91), whereas Cromwell's awakens each morning "to a creator who speaks the swift patois of the markets; when More is settling in for a session of self-scourging, he and Rafe are sprinting to Lombard" (91). These thoughts reflect how Cromwell considers the two of them opposites, different characters with opposing values and choices. Indeed, when their mutual friend, Italian merchant Antonio Bonvisi, begs Cromwell to assure him that "no one will hurt [More]" (588), Cromwell protests: "Why do you think I'm no better than he is? Look, I have no need to put him under pressure. His family and friends will do it. Won't they" (588)? Bonvisi persists, however. Cromwell is forced to remind him that More will be spared, "[i]f the king allows" (588). The former reply does nothing to indicate Cromwell's leniency toward More while the latter reply indicates that Cromwell's treatment of More is under the direction of the king. Historical record is ambiguous on this point, perhaps accounting for Mantel's own ambiguity here. If, however, Mantel's plot follows the form of a Greek tragedy, then Cromwell's strategies regarding More in the novel are motivated by revenge. For example, More's persecution of men in the City—men whom Cromwell knows well—his scatological writings against Martin Luther, his stubborn refusal to sign the Oath of Supremacy, and his unceasing letter-writing during his

imprisonment, the content of which, Cromwell knows “may be addressed to his daughter, but they are written for his friends in Europe to read” (*Wolf Hall* 594). Most importantly, Thomas More, as the Lord Chancellor is the first to sign “all the articles against Wolsey” (180), adding to those articles the a most peculiar charge:

The cardinal is accused of whispering in the king’s ear and breathing into his face; since the cardinal has the French pox, he intended to infect our monarch. (180)

Cromwell’s reaction to this charge is contemptuous, but he knows that the realm in which More has a charge printed up and in which the charge is circulated is a place where “people will believe anything” (180). But Cromwell does not want More’s head (566); he recognizes what More’s death will cost the realm.

Before More is imprisoned in the Tower, he is first held at Lambeth Palace and interrogated by Cromwell, Thomas Audley and Thomas Cranmer. But More will not budge on his refusal. Cromwell’s frustration erupts as he compares the drama of convincing Thomas More to Swear to the Act of Succession to a play:

He swears under his breath, turns from the window. “We know his reasons [for refusing to swear the oath]. All Europe knows them. He is against the divorce. He does not believe the king can be head of the church. But will he say that? Not he. I know him. Do you know what I hate? I hate to be part of this play, which is entirely devised by him. I hate the time it will take that could be better spent, I hate it that minds could be better employed, I hate to see our lives going by, because depend upon it, we will all be feeling our age before this pageant is played out. And what I hate most of all is that Master More sits in the audience and sniggers when I trip over my lines, for he has written all the parts. And written them these many years.” (*Wolf Hall* 563)

By comparing More's refusal to budge to a play, Mantel emphasizes More's role-playing. Yet it is his role as "England's only genius" (Trapp) that Mantel's Cromwell recognizes will trump More's vices and turn him into a martyr.

Whereas, historically, the nasty record of More's heretic hunting is overshadowed by *Utopia* and "the saintly Thomas More, who died for his conscience" ("Dead are Real"), Mantel emphasizes that "other people died for his conscience, too" ("Dead are Real"). Historical record for More's acts of persecution relies heavily on John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, "at once both the most important narrative source for the English Reformation and a work that helped to shape its later development" (Freeman). In his twelve-volume work (*The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*), Foxe records the details of the martyrdom of John Tewkesbury, John Petyt, James Bainham, Richard Bayfield, and John Frith, all of who died at the behest of Thomas More. Scholars are still at odds with how to reconcile More, the heretic-hunter and torturer, with the other More, the humanist and author of *Utopia*. In a review of two new biographies on More, Morean scholar J. B. Trapp observes that the religious controversy into which More became enmeshed "often offers aspects that are repellent to modern liberal notions and to modern literary tastes, and involves ideas and their history – has been less popular with English historians and critics" (Trapp). Each of these martyrs appears in *Wolf Hall* and Cromwell reflects on the torture of Bainham: "men he knows, the disgraced and broken Bainham, the monk Bayfield, John Tewkesbury, who God knows was no doctor of theology. That's how the year [1531] goes out, in a puff of smoke, a pall of human ash hanging over Smithfield" (335). Trapp confirms that More did "str[i]ve to win such young men as John Frith to the faith again by argument, or bring others to see the error of their ways after (illegal) detention and interrogation in his house" (Trapp). Despite the anti-Lutheran tracts More wrote, "nearly a million words in half a dozen years, for half of which he was Lord Chancellor" (Trapp), biographers like Peter Ackroyd have paid little

attention to “the incoherent and frantic tattoos that More beat out in the enormous anti-Lutheran tracts” (Wood 2). These young men whom More tried to convince back to the Catholic Church are men that Cromwell knows. In his own household, Cromwell employs a boy, Dick Purser, whom More “whipped before the whole household” (348) for announcing that he did not believe that “God was in the Communion host” (348).

Larissa “Dead are Real”, in a 2012 profile of Mantel in *The New Yorker*, observes that, in her initial approach to writing *Wolf Hall*, Mantel “was never going to sentimentalize, as Robert Bolt did, Cromwell’s enemy, the saintly Thomas More, who died for his conscience and made sure that other people died for his conscience, too” (“Dead are Real”). It is the dark side of More that Mantel is interested in exposing in *Wolf Hall*, but she knows that she is up against the “saccharine propaganda of [Bolt’s] *A Man for All Seasons*” (Hitchens, “*The Man Who Made England*” 150). Consequently, Mantel has Cromwell drive home the portrait of Thomas More from his own perspective, beginning with More’s claim to a stronger majority of opinion than Cromwell because he has the legacy of all the faithful of the Catholic Church:

“Oh, for Christ’s sake!” [Cromwell] says. “A lie is no less a lie because it is a thousand years old. Your undivided church has liked nothing better than persecuting its own members, burning them and hacking them apart when they stood by their own conscience, slashing their bellies open and feeding their guts to dogs. You call history to your aid, but what is history to you? It is a mirror that flatters Thomas More. But I have another mirror, I hold it up and it shows a vain and dangerous man, when I turn it about it shows a killer, for you will drag down with you God knows how many, who will only have the suffering, and not your martyr’s gratification. You are not a simple soul, so don’t try to make this simple.” (566)

As Mantel has often stressed, she carefully makes this portrait one that appears in Cromwell's mirror, making the image one from Cromwell's point of view. She reminds that history has flattered Thomas More, but that flattery has been through another mirror—another perspective. But probably the most impressive point Cromwell makes for a reconsideration of More's sainthood is his claim that Thomas More is “not a simple soul”, even though history has often simplified him.

A further emphasis of the kind of revenge enacted against More by others—i.e. not solely by Cromwell—is alluded to when Cromwell anticipates his trial. In 1526, More “descended on the German merchant colony of the Steelyard in London” (Trapp), men of the City whom Cromwell knew. Cromwell includes them in his reflection, on the eve of More's court appearance, as to how More will be judged:

More will face his peers; Londoners, the merchants of the livery companies. . . . They have seen enough, as all Londoners have, of the church's rapacity and arrogance, and they do not take kindly to being told they are unfit to read the scriptures in their own tongue. They are men who know More and have known him these twenty years. They know how he widowed Lucy Petyt. They know how he wrecked Humphrey Monmouth's business, because Tyndale had been a guest at his house. They know how he has set spies in their households, among their apprentices whom they treat as sons, among the servants so familiar and homely that they hear every night their master's bedside prayers. (638)

At his day in court, Thomas More appears, to Cromwell, “keyed up, combative” (640) and the memory of his condescension returns again to Cromwell: “Words, words, just words” (640). But Cromwell is no longer intimidated: “He thinks, I remembered you, Thomas More, but you didn't remember me. You never even saw me coming” (640). Cromwell's careful construction of the case against Thomas More is significant as one of the vengeful acts he commits in Mantel's

narrative, one that satisfies the intent to inflict “punishment or injury in return for a wrong to oneself or one’s family or close friends” (Solomon).

4.3.2.3 Revenge Against Four Courtiers

Although More still meets the executioner in the finale to Cromwell’s revenge, Cromwell’s pursuit of More’s death lacks the passion with which he pursues four young courtiers who performed a play at court that mocked the cardinal. If the actions in which the hero must engage to exact his revenge lead to his corruption and his own destruction, the conviction of More for treason—convicting him when he slips up on his own words with Solicitor General Richard Riche (632)—is a small corruption compared to the conviction Cromwell contrives for George Boleyn, Henry Norris, Francis Weston, and William Brereton: “men who are guilty. Though perhaps not guilty as charged” (330).

Three years before Anne’s coronation in 1533, Cromwell had become a fixture at Henry’s court. Mantel describes this successful rise for Cromwell in a chapter called “Entirely Beloved Cromwell” (198-271). The chapter begins with Cromwell’s first interview with Anne and another passage of ekphrasis: a tapestry of Solomon and Sheba. This tapestry first appears in the narrative’s first exchange between Cromwell and Wolsey: “Behind the cardinal is a tapestry, hanging the length of the wall. King Solomon, his hands stretched into darkness, is greeting the Queen of Sheba” (21). After Wolsey’s fall, the king reclaimed the tapestry; it is re-hung in Wolsey’s former residence but now the backdrop to Anne Boleyn, whose role in Wolsey’s downfall is attested to by George Cavendish: because Wolsey prevented her from marrying Henry Percy, “[Anne Boleyn] said that if she could work my lord cardinal any displeasure, she would do it” (*Wolf Hall* 79). Consequently, Henry’s desire to rid himself of Anne provides Cromwell with an opportunity to enact his revenge on Anne.

Whereas with Wolsey the Solomon and Sheba tapestry represents two iconic figures from the Old Testament, announcing Wolsey's religiosity, with Anne the tapestry alludes to the sensuality found in the myths surrounding this brief Biblical parable on the success and wisdom of diplomacy (Meyers). Although Cromwell is a supporter of diplomacy over war, he reacts to the facial image of Sheba in the tapestry because it resembles a former lover, Anselma; he imagines, as a draft moves the tapestry, that she "eddies towards him, rosy, round" (199). Whereas the sensuality of this biblical story is attributed to later legend (Meyers), the multiple layers of meaning Mantel endows in this re-appearing tapestry include the Biblical parable, the later myths, the artistic rendering of the story, and the instability of representation, both in two-dimensional art as well as in texts. Images become simulations of originals (Baudrillard 2) and stories representing a noble principle like diplomacy become mired in the titillation of sexual liaisons. Anne, of course, is about to enter into a sexual liaison with Henry. But the tapestry's allusion to sensuality serves another purpose: to foreshadow the charges of sexual liaisons brought against Anne in *Bring Up the Bodies*. Cromwell will use the sexuality associated with queens like Sheba to build a case against Anne when the king wishes to be rid of her. That case will be built around those four young men who are known to be close to Anne and whom Cromwell blames for ridiculing Wolsey before the entire court.

In Cromwell's first private meeting with the king (217-220), he begs the king's indulgence on behalf of the cardinal and asks for money for him. Prefacing this meeting, Cromwell reads correspondence from Wolsey in which Wolsey calls him "my entirely beloved Cromwell" (217). This is also the title of the chapter (198-271) in which Cromwell visits More's Chelsea house (230) and the chapter in which Wolsey dies (260). It is after Wolsey's death that the play that will doom the lives of its actors is staged at Hampton Court: "The Cardinal's Descent into Hell" (266):

The entertainment is this: a vast scarlet figure, supine, is dragged across the floor, howling, by actors dressed as devils. There are four devils, one for each limb of the dead man. The devils wear masks. They have tridents with which they prick the cardinal, making him twitch and writhe and beg. (266)

Cromwell looks around the great hall and observes the Duke of Norfolk and Anne laughing and applauding the farce while Henry “sits frozen by her side” (266). When the play is done, Cromwell follows the actors offstage, behind screens that block them from the audience. The devils remove their costumes to reveal themselves: Boleyn, Norris, Weston, and Brereton. The “vast scarlet figure”, Cromwell discovers, is Sexton, Master Patch, Wolsey’s former fool, who later precipitates his own downfall when he “jested about Anne and called her a ribald” (214), an insult that is as good as calling her a whore. In response, Henry “lumbered across the hall and clouted him, banged his head on the paneling and banished him the court” (214). Because “within the confines of [a] single play there may not be time to lay the living dead to rest” (Poole 35), Cromwell’s revenge against Norris, Weston, Boleyn, and Brereton will be satisfied in *Bring Up the Bodies* when they are accused of being Anne’s lovers, as is Mark Smeaton, for whom Cromwell bears a personal grudge.

In the year before Wolsey’s death, Cromwell overhears Smeaton criticize both him and the cardinal, in Flemish. Cromwell hears the boy, confident no one can understand his native tongue, not only express his relief at leaving the service of a man he says “any day the king may behead” (168), but also his estimation of Cromwell:

Yes, for sure the lawyer will come down with him. I say lawyer, but who is he? Nobody knows. They say he has killed men with his own hands and never told it in confession. But those hard kinds of men, they always weep when they see the hangman. (168)

Smeaton goes further, anticipating his preferment to Lady Anne by Wolsey, boasting, “So when I am with Lady Anne she is sure to notice me, and give me presents” (168-69). Smeaton’s interlocutor is indiscernible to Cromwell, but Smeaton’s answers keep coming, laying one of the initial slurs against Anne that Cromwell will later use against her: “She is no maid. Not she” (169), says Smeaton: “Could she be at the French court, do you think, and come home a maid?” (169). Smeaton’s is one of the first of Mantel’s characters to accuse Anne of uncontrolled sexual behavior, laying a foundation for the charges Cromwell will lay against the queen. Smeaton, who is the only accused lover to have confessed (Loades, *The Boleyns* 160) to sexual relations with Anne (Loades, *The Boleyns* 159), “had been mooning over the queen for some time, and had been unwise enough to give voice to his obsession” (Loades, *Thomas Cromwell* 119-20). As a character in Mantel’s Tudor tragedy, Smeaton is the first scapegoat in a political agenda that would rid Henry of a woman whose “tantrums and . . . political interference” (Loades, *The Boleyns* 134) the king now found intolerable. Because of Smeaton’s vulnerability—his youth, his lack of connections, his humble birth—Cromwell knows he can extract a confession from Smeaton easier than from the other, more noble suspects, who disparage Cromwell for his own humble origins.

For Cromwell, Wolsey is “not yet fully dead, but liv[es] on in the hear[t] and min[d] of” (Poole 34) Cromwell. Although Cromwell recalls the cardinal’s influence several times in *Bring Up the Bodies*, that his presence haunts Cromwell becomes clear at the end of that second novel, in the chapter that begins with Henry asking Cromwell, “What happened to her clothes?” (403). Cromwell has retired to his desk, reflecting on how “[p]aper is precious” (406) in Early Modern England, “[i]ts offcuts and remnants not discarded, but turned over, reused” (406). It is because of this Early Modern form of recycling that Cromwell encounters “Wolsey’s hand” (406). He has not reflected on it in the narrative that precedes this page, but after the execution of Anne, the

four courtiers, and Smeaton, Cromwell returns to his books to reflect on the first time he came across the late cardinal's writing: "When he first, in this fashion, turned up Wolsey's hand after his death—a hasty computation, a discarded draft—his heart had clenched small and he had to put down his pen till the spasm of grief passed" (406). Coming at the end of the novel, after the executions of those who had humiliated Wolsey, Mantel emphasizes Cromwell's passion for revenge for the cardinal. His act of revenge is motivated by "not one year's grudge or two, but a fat extract from the book of grief, kept since the cardinal came down" (330). It is this revenge on behalf of the cardinal that constitutes the actions in which Cromwell must engage that lead to his corruption and, eventually, his own destruction.

Wolsey's haunting appears early in *Bring Up the Bodies*, when Henry's disenchantment with Anne leads to his pursuit of Jane Seymour during their visit to Wolf Hall, anticipated at the end of the first novel. Henry becomes tired of Anne, disappointed that there has been no son, and weary of her political maneuvering (Loades, *The Boleyns* 156); he bids Cromwell to look into the matter of dissolving his second marriage. Cromwell feels "the years roll away: he was the cardinal, listening to the same conversation: only the queen's name then was Katherine" (*Bring Up the Bodies* 56). Initially, Cromwell's plan to remove Anne by nullifying her marriage to Henry (*Bring Up the Bodies* 249) motivates him to interview Lord Wiltshire (Thomas Boleyn). When he comes, Wiltshire soon understands "where this is tending" (253) and that Anne will be put aside. George, who has tagged along, announces his disgust and threatens Cromwell. As if to remind her readers of the slanderous play about Wolsey, after the Boleyns leave, Wriothesley, who has witnessed the interview, recalls "a certain play at court, after the cardinal came down" (253). Cromwell admits to Wriothesley that he went behind the screen and saw the devils unmask themselves. When he asks Wriothesley why he hadn't followed him behind that screen, so he could see for himself, Wriothesley says, "I did not care to go behind that scene. I feared you

might confuse me with the players, and for ever after I would be tainted in your mind” (253).

Wriothesley’s assessment in a scene that occurs long after Henry’s first request for Cromwell to dissolve his marriage (56) and closer to the interrogations of the other three courtiers from the play, suggests that Mantel’s Cromwell is motivated in this scene to add George to the list of Anne’s lovers.

“The Cardinal’s Descent Into Hell” (266) is specifically identified once more when Cromwell goes to the Tower to interview Henry Norris, “left forepaw” (331). At the beginning of his scene with Norris, Cromwell reflects on how Norris is “a living illustration of the art of *sprezzatura*” (original emphasis 324), an allusion to Baldassare Castiglione’s book *The Courtier*, in which is “sketched a portrait of the ideal courtier, one whose accomplishments in literature, music sport, conversation, and the art of war should be presented modestly, in accordance with the ideal of *sprezzatura*” (Campbell, “Castiglione, Baldassare”). Cicero’s ideal of restrained and modest behaviour is credited as inspiring this “courtly aspiration to measured nonchalance with respect to artistic accomplishment” (Campbell, “*sprezzatura*”). Cromwell displays his disgust for this kind of role-playing when he observes that Norris “has grown rich, as those about the king cannot help to grow rich, however *modestly* they strive’ (my emphasis 324). Norris’s confident claims of innocence are not initially shaken when Cromwell asks him to “take your mind back.... Recall an entertainment, a certain interlude played at court. It was a play in which the late cardinal was set upon by demons and carried down to Hell” (329):

The four of them tossing the scarlet figure, tumbling him and kicking him. Four men, who for a joke turned the cardinal into a beast; who took away his wit, his kindness and his grace, and made him a howling animal, groveling on the boards and scrabbling with his paws. (329)

When Norris defends the play as mere “entertainment” (329), Cromwell reacts with venom: “I concede that others behaved worse. But you see, none of you behaved like Christians. You behaved like savages instead, falling on his estates and possessions” (330). Norris’s features, which formerly displayed indignation, now display “a look of blank terror” (330); he now knows “where this is tending” (253).

In order to better analyze this scene and Cromwell’s relationship to Norris, Anne Pippin Burnett’s outline of how Aristotle defines revenge is helpful:

[R]evenge is a self-engaged and retrospective action taken privately against an equal who has injured one’s honor. Its purpose is not to get rid of someone who is in the way, or to harm someone who succeeds where the avenger has failed, for it is not a mode of advancement or even of self-defense. Its intention is rather to restore the broken outline of self suffered in an unprovoked attack from a member of one’s own class or group.

(Burnett 2)

This section of the definition fits how Cromwell nurses his vengeance and then privately approaches Norris, whom he considers his equal, to accuse him of defaming Wolsey, who is from Cromwell’s class. The word “equal” here is important, because both novels make it clear that those courtiers with distinguished ancestry do not consider Cromwell their equal. For Cromwell, the equality can be found in Cromwell’s respect—or disrespect—for the general character of the man. Cromwell does not consider Mark Smeaton, the musician who criticized Wolsey and Cromwell, his equal, but rather a dandy who “does naught and gets more bonny each time I see him” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 74), someone easily broken, as is demonstrated when Smeaton is interrogated at Cromwell’s house (272-79). His disrespect for George Boleyn first appears in Wolf Hall; in an interview with Anne, Cromwell reflects on how George and Wiltshire have gotten rich “from the cardinal’s fall” (237). More often, he reflects on George’s vanity, how he is

“too proud, too singular, unwilling to bridle his whims or turn himself to use” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 337). Cromwell groups George together with Francis Weston—“it is hard to imagine Gregory or any member of his household to be such a fool as this young [Weston] has been” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 337)—when he considers the new, young men that Henry has added to his “privy chamber rota” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 38), filling out the group of old friends with whom Henry “stick[s]” (38), but who are “still as arrogant as satraps and with the mental refinement of a gatepost. And now there is a new litter of pups, Weston and George Rochford and their ilk, whom Henry has taken up because he things they keep him young” (39). Neither does Cromwell respect Brereton, who is the “dominant royal servant in Cheshire and north Wales” (Ives), but his stewardship is corrupt, bringing “into contempt . . . the king’s justice and the king’s name” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 332).

In her continuation of Aristotle’s definition of revenge, Burnett’s description fits how Cromwell’s act—“not one year’s grudge or two, but a fat extract from the book of grief, kept since the cardinal came down” (330)—is neither instantaneous nor open, but rather “covertly repaid to him who has unfairly injured you or someone close to you” (Burnett 2):

Such vengeance is the correction of an imbalance rooted in the past, a calculated harm returned for an intentional, shameful injury or insult gratuitously given by an unrepentant equal. This return is wrought in time, by the disciplined will of an angered individual, and according to its own rules it is good when it is appropriate and timely. (Burnett 2)

Cromwell only asks Norris to reflect on “The Cardinal’s Descent into Hell”; he asks no other “demon” to “take your mind back” (329) to that performance. This is because Cromwell considers Norris—who, like Cromwell is a smart man who made the most of his opportunities to become rich—his equal. Consequently, Cromwell’s vengeance against Norris “end[s] as sharply as [Norris’s trespass] began” (Burnett 2). Finally, Cromwell completes his vengeance by making

certain Norris knows why Cromwell has extracted it: “once the debt is paid in full [. . .] it will be ideally complete only when its victim knows by whom and for what he is injured” (Burnett 2).

In Classical Greece, the revenge that occurs in tragedy—the killing of another because of sullied honour—is not considered heinous, it is considered so in Western society today. Unfortunately, this idea of the need for revenge for a betrayal of honour has become notorious with the rise of “honour killings” (Shafak) in multicultural cities. It is not a far distance to travel from the killing of five Early Modern men because they sullied the honour of another man to the perception of sullied honour that occurs when one member of a culture steps outside that culture’s moral or social codes. Since London has become “the multicultural centre of Europe” (Shafak), it might seem odd that honour killings would occur in a place “where there is . . . relatively better integration, harmony and coexistence than anywhere else today” (Shafak). Yet recent reports have revealed that “honour-related incidents” (Shafak) within the United Kingdom “are concentrated in London, the West Midlands and West Yorkshire” (Shafak). In 2010, nearly three thousand “honour abuse” (Shafak) incidents were reported, up forty-seven per cent from the previous year. One researcher discovered that “women who are closest to the victims can at times support the decision to kill or remain indifferent to what is taking place” (Shafak). This significant fact also fits in the case of Anne Boleyn: the women around her seemed oblivious or indifferent as to why Cromwell was interviewing them. It is this case of revenge that sets the stage for Cromwell’s fall in the last novel because the end of *Bring Up the Bodies* is the beginning of that descent: “There are no endings. If you think so you are deceived as to their nature. They are all beginnings. Here is one” (407).

4.4 Cromwell’s Generosity

While Mantel characterizes Cromwell in *Bring Up the Bodies* as a classic tragic hero bent on revenge, she balances his vengeful nature with a surprising amount of compassion with those

who are most loyal to him. Many of these loyal supporters are women, and it is through them that Mantel continues the project she started by retelling the story of Albina: placing women “at the heart of the elite” (Wogan-Browne 312), but also forming, in the words of Cromwell’s wife, “half the people in the world” (38).

As mentioned earlier, Cromwell admires Cicero and admits to Christophe, “We lawyers try to memorise all his speeches” (450). But perhaps Mantel emphasizes this connection with Cicero for reasons other than its political or legal connotations. In the wake of Wolsey’s ignominious departure from York Place, Cromwell is worried about his future. According to George Cavendish’s biography of Wolsey, he finds Cromwell crying. Mantel turns this anecdote into Cromwell’s expression of grief over the loss of his wife and daughters. In a small section (157-158), following Cromwell’s scene with George Cavendish, the unnamed narrator recites the previously-mentioned story of Simonides of Thessaly who attended a banquet. While situating this story at the end of the chapter in which Wolsey is brought low suggests that Cromwell will remember well those who took part in Wolsey’s humiliation, there is also available the implication that Cromwell will remember his family—his wife Liz and daughters, Grace and Anne—in the same way he remembers the entire testament and the speeches of Cicero. Unlike the ways we remember our loved ones who died through photographs and video, Cromwell will remember his family by the traces they have left: Liz’s book of hours, the wings Grace wore in the Christmas play, and Anne’s sharp intelligence.

Cicero also demonstrates “a profound faith in the natural goodness of humanity and the power of reason to direct and improve human life” (S. A. White) and extols friendship built on integrity and loyalty. Cromwell’s loyalty toward Wolsey in *Wolf Hall* is representative of Ciceronian values. In Mantel’s novel, Cromwell’s acts of generosity, so contrary to the brutal life

Mantel imagines he experienced in his father's house, seem to be inspired by the writings of Cicero.

An affinity with Cicero's writings can be seen in other beliefs expressed by Cromwell. For example, when Cromwell reflects on More's certainty in his belief system, he compares that certainty to his own doubts:

[W]hat I grew up with, and what I thought I believed, is chipped away a little and a little, a fragment then a piece and then a piece more. With every month that passes, the corners are knocked off the certainties of this world: and the next world too. (39)

This confession of Cromwell's is in alignment with Cicero's argument that knowledge "requires certainty, but that certainty is neither attainable nor necessary for the rational conduct of life" (S. A. White). More importantly, by linking Cromwell to Cicero, Mantel also provides a possible inspiration for how Cromwell conducted his public and private affairs. Cicero's dialogues evaluating the political institutions of Rome at the time "champion political liberty, rational debate and rule by law" (S. A. White). Together with the writings of Marsilius of Padua, as argued by David Loades in his recent biography of Henry's servant (*Thomas Cromwell* 256-57), Cromwell was inspired to improve and solidify the role of Parliament in England. If the colleges Cromwell helps Wolsey establish are the cardinal's "breathing monument" (*Wolf Hall* 22), then Cromwell's "breathing monument" is Parliament, as first argued by Geoffrey Elton. It is in this aspect of Mantel's fictional portrayal of Cromwell that the novel most critically engages with the idea of England—and as a consequence Great Britain—as a nation. The Greek tragic form that Mantel adopts has at its heart a great man who diligently improved one of England's most revered institutions, Parliament. This contribution belongs under "generosity" because, while Cromwell's efforts also served to make him a rich and powerful man, by improving Parliament Cromwell could improve the lives of all of the subjects of the realm. One of the best examples of

the combination of Cromwell's generosity and his pursuit of legal and constitutional reform can be found in his Poor Law, which I will discuss when examining his other generousities to the poor. It is also an example of how Cromwell's administration focused on the nation as "the centre of its concerns" (Smith 9), sought to "promote its well-being" (Smith 9), and pursued three goals: "[n]ational autonomy, national unity and national identity" (Smith 9). Mantel's novel explicitly shows how Cromwell sought to rid England of the foreign domination of the Roman Catholic Church and sought to keep Henry out of expensive wars in order to improve the country's economy, the consequence of which was to promote national unity. Less explicit in the novel are Cromwell's other strategies that brought a revolution in government. David Loades more fully explains what those strategies were in his recent biography, *Thomas Cromwell, Servant to Henry VIII*. Loades's book is one example of a spike in interest in Cromwell that has arisen out of the success of Mantel's novels. Loades, who has written over thirty books on the Tudor era, sat on a panel with Hilary Mantel during a 2011 conference at London's Institute of Historical Research, University of London. Previously, Loades has focused his biographies on the aristocracy and the monarchy; this is his first book on Cromwell.

Loades, who was supervised on his PhD research by Geoffrey Elton, argues that Cromwell was "a statesman with a vision of how the kingdom should be run" (251). But it is in his "dealings with Parliament" (253), Loades argues, paraphrasing Elton, that "he was responsible for a genuine revolution" (253). One of his approaches was to build upon the 1485 acceptance of Parliament as "the representative institution of the realm" (254). Before 1485, law had only been added or revised through judicial interpretation, after 1485 statute, "which represented the consent of the king, Lords and Commons, was a true vehicle of legislation" (254). Before Cromwell entered royal service, statute was never used to "legislate on matters of the faith, such as the authority of the papacy" (254). Cromwell defied this tradition, most especially,

according to Loades, in his 1533 Act in Restraint of Appeals. Mantel alludes to this bill shortly before Anne is crowned Queen; Cromwell brings the pregnant Anne a gift: “some majolica bowls.... Inside are pictures of plump blond-haired babies, each with a coy little phallus” (439-40). Anne says, “Your bill is not passed yet. Tell me what is the delay” (440). Cromwell reflects that she alludes to the bill “to forbid appeals to Rome” (440). This act builds on the fourteenth-century Acts of Provisors and Praemunire, legislation produced to protect England and “particularly royal interests in the appointment and taxing of the clergy against papal interference” (Elton, “England”). The Lollardy movement, led by John Wycliff and alluded to in *Wolf Hall* when young Cromwell witnesses the burning of a Lollard, was an influencing factor in the passing of this act. The Act in Restraint of Appeals forbidding any appeal to Rome had two objectives: “to allow Cranmer to give a ruling on Henry’s marriage to Katherine of Aragon which could not be appealed, and to intimidate the pope generally” (Cannon). It is the preamble of this act, “largely the work of Thomas Cromwell” (Cannon) that further establishes Cromwell’s objective of national autonomy. It is also, according to Loades, the “best clue to his political thinking” (258). Loades argues that Cromwell’s patronage of William Marshall’s translation of Marsilius of Padua’s *defensor Pacis* in 1535 not only gives insight into Cromwell’s political ideology but provides the model upon which much of Cromwell’s statues were based: “Marsilius held that the state is autonomous and the church subject to it, which was the foundation doctrine of the Royal Supremacy, and an indication that [Cromwell] had read *Defensor Pacis* long before 1535” (257). But the Act in Restraint of Appeals demonstrates Cromwell’s application of Marsilius’s theories to a particular moment in English history by emphasizing “not the power of Parliament to make the king Supreme Head of the Church, but the fact that he always had been such by virtue of ‘divers sundry old authentic histories and chronicles’”(Loades 258).

To return to Cromwell's generosity and the inspiration provided to him by Cicero and Marsilius, one of Cicero's last works, *On Duties*, focuses on how men of "high station" (S. A. White) balance the integration of personal ambitions with social obligations. In Cromwell's case, his recorded generosity to the poor contributes to this balance of ambition and obligation. But Cromwell goes further, extending his economic and personal generosity to his extended family, to his enemies, and, especially, to women.

4.4.1 Cromwell's Generosity to the Poor

In his recent biography of Cromwell, Loades calls his July 1529 will "a generous document, making several bequests to the poor and to the marriage of poor maidens, and it enables us to get closer to the human side of Cromwell" (43). Historical record is ambiguous as to when Cromwell began to draw up the will, but Mantel imagines it—as Loades supports—in the wake of his wife and daughters' deaths, perhaps bringing him face to face with his own mortality. In this document, he leaves "[m]oney to his servants. Forty pounds to be divided between forty poor maidens on their marriage. . . . Ten pounds towards feeding poor prisoners in the London gaols" (*Wolf Hall* 148). This is just one example of his generosity to the poor. In another example, Mantel alludes to his household's habit of giving out food to the poor of their community: "At Austin Friars he has beer and bread sent out to the men who stand at the gate: broth as the mornings get sharper" (321).

Within the same paragraph, Mantel shows how Cromwell's generosity extends to the young boys in his employ. He refers to them as "*garzoni*" (321), recalling his own work in the kitchens of Frescobaldi. Emphasis of this past comes in Cromwell's hopes for these young men: "One day they must be able to walk upstairs, as he did, and take a seat in the counting house" (321). But he goes further, seeing to the boys' warmth:

All must have warm and decent clothes, and be encouraged to wear them, not sell them, for he remembers from his days at Lambeth the profound cold of store rooms; in Wolsey's kitchens at Hampton Court, where the chimneys draw well and confine the heat, he has seen stray snowflakes drifting in the rafters and settling on sills. (321-322)

As mentioned earlier, Cromwell's generosity to the poor extended beyond domestic situation. He strove to put into place a poor law that would require parishes to support their poor. In *Bring Up the Bodies*, Cromwell reflects on this law when he reports that, in March 1536, "Parliament knocks back his new poor law" (204). In Mantel's imagining of this working-class minister's response to the rejection of his law, Cromwell's disgust with the courtiers and noblemen around him is apparent:

It was too much for the Commons to digest, that rich men might have some duty to the poor; that if you get fat, as gentlemen of England do, on the wool trade, you have some responsibility to the men turned off the land, the labourers without labour, the sowers without field. England needs roads, forts, harbours, bridges. Men need work. It's a shame to see them begging their bread, when honest labour could keep the realm secure. Can we not put them together, the hands and the task? (204)

Once again, Cromwell yokes together the generosity to the poor that he sees as every citizen's obligation with the security of the realm.

Loades reveals that the first Tudor poor law was enacted in 1531, replacing a statute from 1495 that "'idle rogues' were to be set in the stocks for three days . . . then ordered out of the town where they had been caught begging" (Loades 262). This law distinguished between "those unable to work and those deemed to be unwilling. The first were to be licensed to beg . . . the latter were to be punished as before" (263). According to Loades, Cromwell did pass an act that addressed the realm's, and especially individual parishes', social responsibility towards the poor.

Its new principle was “the legal obligation of every parish to care for its own poor” (263). It ordered “that the officers of every administrative unit from shires down to parishes should ‘succour, find and keep all and every of the same poor people’ by means of voluntary alms collections” (263). Although Mantel leads us to think that Cromwell is unsuccessful in promoting his poor law, she does suggest not only his tenacity with this legislation but also his optimism that he will achieve it in this reflection:

He will keep trying; sneak it past them when they’re off their guard, start off the measure in the Lords and face down the opposition... there are ways and ways with Parliament, but there are times he wishes he could kick the members back to their own shires, because he could get on faster without them. (205)

Whereas this passage may be meant to indicate the persistence that Cromwell had to apply in order to push through this law, it also indicates a growing arrogance towards those who thwart Cromwell’s vision for the realm of England. Mantel’s objective here may be to further complicate Cromwell’s complex character, taking him from supplicant servant of Wolsey and Henry to a man corrupted by power: the preface to his downfall.

Cromwell’s record of generosity to the poor is equaled to his generosity to his extended family. Whereas his relatives were not poor, none achieved his financial and political success. Consequently, after his wife dies (101-2), Cromwell’s house becomes a haven for many of his relatives. Liz’s sister Johane, her husband, and her small daughter Jo move into the house so that Johane may take care of Anne and Grace. But then, two years later, his daughters die (151-52) and his sister Kat and brother-in-law Morgan Williams also die. As 1529 ends, “two orphans are added to his house, Richard and the child Walter” (170). Together with his son Gregory, these boys become Cromwell’s sons, demonstrated by Richard and Walter’s adoption of Cromwell’s

name, even though his association with the fallen cardinal at that time made the Cromwell name less auspicious.

4.4.2 Cromwell's Generosity to Women

In her profile of Hilary Mantel and *Wolf Hall* in *The New Yorker*, "Dead are Real" says Mantel's Cromwell does not "underestimate women—neither their usefulness as informants nor their cunning as enemies" ("Dead are Real"). Perhaps this judicious assessment of women is integral to Cromwell's generosity to women. In Mantel's narrative, she makes the women in Cromwell's private life caring and supportive, from his sister Kat who aids young Cromwell after he has been beaten by his father (*Wolf Hall* 5-13) to his wife Liz with whom he seems to have a loving, respectful relationship. Since Cromwell never married after his wife's death, Mantel suggests that Cromwell's grief was genuine and deep, leading him to ask Liz's sister Johane and her family to move into Austin Friars to help him take care of his children instead of marrying again, as Thomas More did.

In Mantel's narrative, Liz Wykys Cromwell is a sixteenth-century woman who owns her own business, is literate, and has a strong opinion on Henry's proposed divorce. Cromwell marries her because "he wanted a wife with city contacts and some money behind her" (43). Liz "does a bit of silk-work . . . [and] has two girl apprentices" (35), so when his wife complains "about the middlemen, and the price of thread" (35) Cromwell offers to take her to Genoa where he will teach her to "look the suppliers in the eye" (35). As a consequence of her business, Liz has a network of women with whom she associates and whose gossip keeps her informed about such things as the new emerald "as big as her thumbnail" (35) commissioned to be set in a ring from a friend's master jeweler husband. The value of such an item, Lizzie argues, means the buyer "must be the king" (36). She also argues that it "isn't for the queen" (36); she asks her husband if he knows the identity of its recipient. This is the first representation of women's

networks that Mantel uses to imagine how information circulated in a society whose rate of literacy, especially among women, has been represented as extremely low. Always discreet, Cromwell does not respond to Liz's queries. Finally, when they are in bed, she tries again to extract the name of the "emerald lady" (38). At his refusal to speak, she says:

If he tries this... then half the people in the world will be against it. . . . All women everywhere in England. All women who have a daughter but no son. All women who have lost a child. All women who have lost any hope of having a child. All women who are forty. (38)

Mantel suggests in this passage Cromwell's love and respect for his wife, perhaps influencing his attitude to all women, never underestimating them, "neither their usefulness as informants nor their cunning as enemies" ("Dead are Real"). Mantel imagines Cromwell's relationship with his daughters as equally close and loving, a relationship that Loades confirms (*Thomas Cromwell* 44).

Beyond his private life, Mantel's Cromwell develops close relationships with the women of Henry's court, beginning with Mary Boleyn. When Cromwell first encounters Mary Boleyn, "he is at court on the cardinal's business" (135). Mary runs to him, "her skirts lifted, showing a fine pair of green silk stockings.... still dazzlingly pretty; fair, soft-featured" (135). She stands close to him, "one hand against the paneling . . . the other against his shoulder" (135). They talk of her father, her brother, and their distaste for the cardinal and Cromwell; Mary does not seem to share their distaste. Indeed, Cromwell finds her "reckless" (137) in the way she reveals what is in the letters between Henry and her sister and how she has been Henry's mistress and yet not provided for. This leads Cromwell to ask her if she is short of money. She responds by saying, "No one has even asked me that before" (137), before admitting that she is. She asks after his children before telling him of her need for a new husband, one who "frightens" (139) her family. At this point, in a sensual moment Cromwell will refer to or reflect on again, Mary hints that

Cromwell might make a good husband for her. He replies, “They’d kill you” (139), putting her off. Cromwell, nevertheless, does his best for Mary, later writing a letter to her father to get her the money she needs. Their relationship remains somewhat close, though Mary never again hints at an alliance for them. She is his informer on Anne’s relationship with Henry and someone on whom he reflects frequently, sometimes with sympathy, sometimes with derision.

In addition to taking in many of his extended family members under his roof, Cromwell provides work and a home for a young woman named Helen Barre, whose abusive husband has disappeared. She appears in his hall in Austin Friars in 1533, before Anne’s coronation. Her appearance triggers Cromwell’s reflection of how the “neighbours are always coming at him with parish problems. Unsafe cellar doors. A noisome goose house. . . . He tries not to fret if these things cut into his time, and he minds Helen less than a goose house” (*Wolf Hall* 419). This reflection attests to Cromwell’s generosity among his parish in other ways than simply feeding the poor who show up at his gates. Helen wants Cromwell to find out if she is a wife or a widow. When Cromwell asks how she supports herself, Helen reveals that she had been “stitching for a sailmaker” (420), but in London could only hire herself out by the day: “I have been in the laundry at a convent near Paul’s, helping at the yearly wash of their bed linen. They find me a good worker, they say they will give me a pallet in the attics, but they won’t take the children” (420). Helen’s story provides Cromwell with another example of “the church’s charity” (420): in other words, the church’s hypocrisy. He reflects that he “runs up against them all the time” (420). He invites Helen to work in his house, even “picks up the younger child, who flops against his shoulder and falls asleep with the speed at which someone pushed falls off a wall” (422). She later becomes wife to Cromwell’s protégé, Rafe Sadler, who Cromwell took under his wing as a young boy. The son of a steward, Sadler rose to become Henry’s principal secretary and a privy councilor.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter's analysis of Thomas Cromwell as he appears in the pages of Mantel's fiction against the historical record has emphasized Mantel's primary objective in her trilogy: a new perspective on the career of Henry VIII's most loyal servant. This idea of perspective is emphasized by her allusion to Holbein's famous painting with the anamorphic skull that requires a certain perspective for its image to become clear. By interrupting critical moments of Cromwell's present with his reflections about his past, Mantel also argues for the importance of the past for the present. Cromwell's fascination with Guido Camillo emphasizes the importance of memory in modern society—a theme that has exploded in our computer-based world. Mantel effectively argues for a repositioning of Thomas Cromwell as a man more worthy of remembering as an historical character who “was a statesman with a vision of how the kingdom should be run” (Loades, *Thomas Cromwell* 251). With that vision, Cromwell saw Parliament as the institution for which he could effect “a genuine revolution” (Loades 253). His success can be compared to the metaphor Cromwell gives to Wolsey's colleges, “his breathing monument” (*Wolf Hall* 22); this comparison emphasizes the skills in diplomacy Cromwell learned from Wolsey and the skills he developed through converting monasteries from diminishing assets for the Church into lucrative assets for the Crown. Replacing Thomas More with Thomas Cromwell as a national hero, together with Mantel's representation of virtually all of the aristocracy as vain buffoons, defies the convention of placing the aristocracy or the monarchy at the centre of British history. Whereas More was neither, his father was also a lawyer, not a brewer and brawler like Walter Cromwell. This is perhaps the most defiant aspect of Mantel's persuasive argument, to subverting history as “[t]he quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all” (Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Ch. 14) by placing a working-class hero at the pinnacle of national power.

When considering how Mantel's Cromwell novels influence modern ideas about England (or Britain) as a nation and its foundational history, Cromwell's own words in the preamble to the Act in Restraint of Appeals are significant in understanding the intertextuality that Mantel incorporates in her novels:

Where by divers sundry old authentic histories and chronicles it is manifestly declared and expressed that this realm of England is an empire, and so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one supreme head and king, having the dignity and royal estate of the imperial crown of the same, unto whom a body politic, compact of all sorts and degrees of people divided in terms and by names of spirituality and temporality, be bounden and ought to bear, next to God, a natural and humble obedience; he being also institute and furnished by the goodness and sufferance of Almighty God with plenary jurisdiction, to render and yield justice, and final determination to all manner of folk, residents or subjects within this his realm, in all causes, matters, debates and contentions happening to occur, insurge or begin within the limits thereof, without restraint or provocation to any foreign princes or potentates of the world. (*The Act in Restraint of Appeals*)

I will begin with how “old authentic histories and chronicles” became critical to establishing Henry's supremacy over the Catholic Church. In the summer of 1530, Henry established a “think tank” (Loades, *Thomas Cromwell* 58) to find a solution to his “Great Matter” given the obstinacy of the papacy towards annulling his marriage to Katherine. Unable to find any documentation in Rome to support this supremacy, his advisors turned their attention to England's own archives and found a letter known as *Leges Edwardi Confessoris* (Loades, *Thomas Cromwell* 59):

[T]he so-called *Leges Edwardi Confessoris*, which purported to have been written by the second-century Pope Eleutherius to King Lucius of Britain, declar[ed] that all jurisdiction belonged to him as a Christian king, including that over the Church. That King Lucius

was a myth and the letter a forgery was not appreciated by anyone at the time. (Loades 59)

Underlying this critical document is another myth, and a forgery. Whereas Mantel only alludes to this document once in her novels, in “An Occult History of Britain” (*Wolf Hall* 65-153) she demonstrates how so much of British history is based on myth. By including the critical component of this the *Act in Restraint of Appeals*—“This realm of England is an Empire... governed by one Supreme Head and King” (425)—draws attention how a document so fundamental to Henry’s argument for Supremacy had its foundation in myth. Mantel does not seem to ridicule this idea of a nation’s history based on so many myths; recall that Smith argues that nationalism’s power resides in “the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular *living past* has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias” (*Myths and Memories*, original emphasis 9). The author also admits that she necessarily explores the mythological along with the historical “since Englishness contained equal parts of both” (“Dead are Real”). So, like Cromwell, Mantel is creating a document—a literary novel—that uses myth for its foundation to establish a modified version of the British cultural memory (Rigney, “Portable Monuments” 367) of the English Reformation, one that takes into account the contributions of the working-class.

In the case of the myth of Saint Thomas More, Mantel subverts his “saccharine” (Hitchens, “*The Man Who Made England*” 150) legacy. Consider what Cromwell says to More during the interrogation at Lambeth Palace, when he becomes frustrated with the man’s rhetoric about how “the angels and saints are behind me, and all the company of the Christian dead” (*Wolf Hall* 566): “Oh, for Christ’s sake. . . . A lie is no less a lie because it is a thousand years old” (566). Although Cromwell refers here to the hypocrisies found within Catholicism, his response could also be interpreted as attacking the myths surrounding the saintliness of Thomas More.

Extending Mantel's use of myth, More can symbolize a giant in the myth of England under Henry VIII, vanquished for his "representatio[n] of otherness" (Stephens 6) because he symbolized the Catholic "peri[l] that had to be overcome in order for [English] culture to be born and thrive" (Stephens 32), making Cromwell Brutus to More's Gogmagog.

As for the rest of the preamble to the *Act in Restraint of Appeals*, it is worth reconsidering Philip S. Gorski's "Outline for a Postmodernist Theory of Nationalism". Gorski's first measurement of the presence of nationalism in a nation is intensity, as measured by four components: *discourses* that circulate, invoking the nation or national categories such as the people or the state; *movements* of social, political, or ideological groups that have, for example, the preservation, the purification, or the expansion of the nation as their goal; organized *parties* whose goals are to influence the state in achieving goals for the nation; and a central, controlling *regime* that "strikes out violently against internal and external enemies of the nation" (1459). His second measurement of the presence of nationalism is scope, measured by the degree of involvement by the social or political classes. Gorski reduces these classes to four categories: the intellectual elite, including both clergy and lay people; political or social elites, including nobles and aristocrats; the "middling sort" (1459), that is professionals, merchants and craftsmen; and the common people, including peasants, artisans and laborers. Cromwell's statute certainly qualifies as one document in a series of discourses that discuss the potential for the English state to maintain independence from other foreign states like the Roman Catholic Church. The heretics hunted by Thomas More, people who came from many class levels, represent a social movement that seeks the preservation and purification of the nation as its goal. Henry's think-tank and other groups of Reformers that thrived in Reformation England represent an organized effort to affect what they saw as an improvement in the sovereignty of their nation. The *Act of Restraint of Appeals* itself is just one example of how Henry's controlling regime "str[uck] out violently

against internal and external enemies of the nation” (Gorski 1459). Because Reformation England followed a form of Biblical Nationalism, its scope extended through all the classes. This is not to say that all people of England agreed to the rejection of the Pope’s authority in England; Thomas More’s stand against Luther and the Protestants is the most famous example of that. But the heretics hunted and burned by More, the history presented in Cromwell’s fictionalized experience with Lollards, and the working class roots of William Tyndale himself, indicate a movement across classes.

Mantel may allude only once to the *Act in Restraint of Appeals*, yet she has admitted to focusing on the psychological and private aspects of Cromwell’s life—the area fiction can best explore. *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, as literary works, “have a distinctive role to play in reawakening eroded memories” (Rigney, “Portable Monuments” 389) of the events that contributed to the birth of a nation five hundred years in the past. For those whose cultural past is not British, these novels “may have a role to play in arousing interest in histories which are *not* one’s own, in the history of groups with which one has hitherto not identified” (389). In his Cromwell biography, Loades insists upon a reading of the novels that is limited to the personal and the private:

A word should also be said about the fictitious Cromwell portrayed in Hilary Mantel’s prize-winning novels, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*. These are naturally concerned with him as a man rather than a public figure, portraying his relationships with his son, his servants and his friends in a lively and realistic fashion. They are careful to respect the known facts about his career, and steer carefully between the conflicting theories about his role, operating (as it were) in the interstices of the established evidence. Together they constitute a fictional tour de force, but do not amount to a biography. The Cromwell they present is humane, intelligent and devout, closer to the man portrayed by Elton than to

Merriman's austere and corrupt figure, but they are essentially concerned with his private life, about which the authentic record is usually and infuriatingly silent. (288)

Mantel's novels are, of course, not biographies. But I would disagree with Loades that these two novels, rather than "steer[ing] carefully between the conflicting theories about his role, operating (as it were) in the interstices of the established evidence" (288). Instead, they explore the significance of "the interstices of established evidence"; by alluding to historical documents and art, these novels direct attention toward their creation and their symbolic importance to the nation. More importantly, these works "are capable of arousing interest in the history of *other* groups and hence in creating new sorts of affiliations based on 'discontinuous' and cross-border memories" (Rigney, "Portable Monuments" 389), potentially reaching the diverse, multi-cultural groups that make up the modern British nation.

Chapter 5: Anne Boleyn, National Matriarch

Diana Wallace argues that women's "exclusion from recorded history, whether as subject, reader or writer, is a serious business" (2). It has meant, she argues, that "in women's hands the historical novel has often become a political tool" (2), either as a removed temporal setting in which to discuss taboo themes or "offering a critique of the present through their treatment of the past" (2). Whereas Wallace borrows Linda Anderson's term for how women historical fiction writers "re-imagine" (qtd. in Wallace 2) "the unrecorded lives of marginalized and subordinated people, especially women" (2), Mantel has made it clear that it is not her objective to go into "maudlin feminist mythmaking.... She doesn't believe in inventing greatness or significance where none exists" ("Dead are Real"). This does not mean, however, that Mantel supports, in her Cromwell novels, the caricature of Anne as a femme fatale, a victim, or a witch. Instead, Mantel depicts a complex women whose ambition ultimately changed history.

Portraits with documented provenance that act as a record of the appearance of historical characters can form part of that "greatness or significance." However, given the many references to artistic images in Mantel's novel, it is significant that Anne alone, of the major players of this tragedy, seems to be "exclu[ded] from [visually] recorded history" (Wallace 2). In an editorial after the publication of *Bring Up the Bodies*, Mantel confirms that "there is no reliable contemporary likeness of Anne" ("witch, bitch"). In the case of Thomas More, Thomas Cromwell, Georges de Dinteville, or Georges de Selve, provenance supports the belief that their portraits are true representations, whether it is the More-Cromwell opposing portraits hanging in New York's Frick Gallery, the drawing of the family of Thomas More at Basel's Kunstmuseum, or Holbein's *The Ambassadors* in London's National Gallery. Although the subjects of these Holbein portraits are the main focus of public attention, one biographer of Anne Boleyn argues

that “Anne’s greatest contribution to English culture was the early patronage she gave to Hans Holbein the younger” (Ives).

Linking Anne to *The Ambassadors* is her role as Holbein’s first royal patron “when he returned to England from Basel in 1532” (Ives). Not only did Holbein “design an arch for Anne’s coronation procession (paid for by the Hanse merchants)” (Ives), he also produced during this time *The Ambassadors*, in which the pavement beneath its two subjects “is a specific allusion to the sanctuary floor of Westminster Abbey where Anne was crowned. The symbolism in the painting closely reflects Anne’s known religious views and contains a reference to the date of her recognition as queen” (Ives). Additionally, Holbein produced a miniature, currently in the Royal collection, *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, likely commissioned by Anne and presented to Henry. There is a recurring motif of a tapestry depicting Sheba entering Solomon’s court, as discussed in the previous chapter. It is not clear if Mantel is making any connections between Anne, the tapestry, and Holbein’s drawing of Solomon and Sheba, but it needs to be considered that, in Reformation England, the Queen of Sheba “is a traditional type for the church” (Tate 569). Consequently, the depiction of Sheba submitting to Henry in Holbein’s version can be interpreted as the submission of the church in England to Henry’s supremacy as head of the church (Tate 569). Sheba also alludes to the spice plate discussed in the previous chapter—the plate given to Henry prior to the scene above Westminster Hall; according to the Bible, Sheba gives spice to Solomon: “there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the Queen of Sheba gave to Solomon” (I King’s 10:10 qtd. in Tate 566). Mantel does not restrict the mythological²² characters that she associates with Anne to Sheba; both the specific characters Jezebel and Albina are either claimed by Anne or suggested as symbolic of her character, as is the more general

²² Mythological encompasses those female characters from the Bible as well as from folklore.

character of the witch. I will address these associations further below, in the section “Myths of Female Sinfulness.”

Whereas my exploration of Mantel’s Cromwell novels focuses on More as a flawed, tragic hero and these novels as an allegory for contemporary Britain’s slip into Medieval practices and inequalities, it is important in my argument for Anne as a tragic scapegoat to note the irony in Anne’s patronage of Holbein (Ives), the man who created the most famous portraits of Henry’s court, and the absence of any verifiable image of Anne. Given the 2006 *Holbein in England* exhibit at London’s Tate Britain, attendees would have come face-to-face with the miniature depicting Henry as Solomon, welcoming a submissive Sheba to his court.

Unfortunately, the female characters in this Tudor drama have not been as assiduously recorded as the males, either their images or records of their lives. Of the extant portraits claimed by various scholars as true representations of Anne, there are often an equal number of scholars arguing against. In Anne’s case, the public fascination with her story contributes to her importance in historical record, whether the representation is as bitch and temptress or as reformist and proto-feminist. In this chapter, I would like to examine the elusiveness of Anne Boleyn—her image and her story—and how Mantel uses this elusiveness—in the same way she uses the scant information about Cromwell’s life—to “re-imagine” the complex interaction between Anne and Cromwell. Mantel’s interpretation of Anne Boleyn’s rise to and fall from power in Henry’s court, she is quick to remind her interviewers, reflects “how [she] might have appeared if you were standing in the shoes of Thomas Cromwell” (Bordo, “Susan’s Interview with Hilary Mantel”). From Cromwell’s vantage, Mantel seems to find many similarities between Cromwell and Anne, emphasizing how men who react by attacking an ambitious woman’s sexuality perceive ambition in women as a flaw.

5.1. The Anne Boleyn Portrait



Fig. 4. *Anne Boleyn*, The National Portrait Gallery, London, Great Britain.



Fig. 5. Hans Holbein, *Portrait of a Woman*, Royal Collection, Windsor, Great Britain.



Fig. 6. *The Chequers ring*, Collection of Chequers Court, Chequers Trust, Buckinghamshire, Great Britain.

In the National Portrait Gallery, there is a painting of Anne Boleyn by an unidentified artist that is often discounted as a true portrayal because of its late-sixteenth-century dating. Roland Hui draws attention to the gown worn by the woman in the portrait, one he argues was fashionable for the period in which Anne lived, and is Anne's favored color of black. The headdress is described as a "French hood with pearled billiments" (Ridgway) and recognized as a favorite headdress of Anne's. Perhaps the strongest support for this portrait as the true image of Anne can be found in the country estate of the Prime Ministers of Britain: Chequers. In an article that appears on Claire Ridgway's website, *The Anne Boleyn Files*, historical author Sandra Byrd reveals that Elizabeth I acquired a ring ca. 1575 that consisted of a locket with two miniatures inside: one of Elizabeth I and one of a woman that bears a distinct similarity to the National

Portrait Gallery portrait of Anne. Byrd says that “there were only two pieces of jewelry that Queen Elizabeth I was reliably said to have never removed: her coronation ring . . . and her ruby and pearl locket ring” (Byrd). Ives argues that the Chequers locket ring is the key to “a resolution of this pictorial game of ‘find the lady’” (qtd. in Ridgway): “the face mask is quite clearly that of the sitter in the Hever and National Portrait Gallery paintings” (Ives qtd. in Ridgway).

Claire Ridgway has created an internet site she calls *The Anne Boleyn Files* in which she examines, among other issues, the conflicting theories about the extant images we have of Anne Boleyn. During her own research for a book on Anne, Susan Bordo comments on what was, for Ridgway, once a blog but had grown into something more. Ridgway, argues Bordo, grew into “an investigative historical journalist whose blog—recently made available in book form—is more rigorous than that of many professional historians” (Bordo, *Creation of Anne Boleyn*, 250). This website’s page, “Anne Boleyn Portraits—Which is the True Face of Anne Boleyn?”, explores various assessments of seven different visual representations of Anne. The image that most seriously subverts the nearly universally accepted two images of Anne is “Portrait of a Woman” by Hans Holbein, a drawing that has been inscribed, “Anna Bolleyn Queen”. Ridgway cites the argument given by historians David Starkey and John Rowlands that Edward VI’s tutor Sir John Cheke, who would have known Anne, added this inscription, making it a true representation of Anne. The best argument against this portrait as depicting Anne comes from one of her biographers, Eric Ives. He argues that Cheke “was incorrect in several of his identifications of other portraits, so ‘the Cheke story is suspect’” (Ridgway) and argues that a portrait medal created in 1534, during Anne’s lifetime, reflects a “long and oval face with high cheekbones, features that just aren’t there in the sketc[h]” (Ridgway).

The relevance to the above academic debate about a true representation of Anne’s physical likeness is similar to the on-going debate about a true representation of Anne’s character.

Whether or not the National Portrait Gallery portrayal of Anne is correct and the Holbein wrong or vice versa is not the concern of this chapter; the portrait debate simply mirrors the ambiguity surrounding Anne's character. Mantel observes this ambiguity in an article she wrote for *The Guardian* at the time *Bring Up the Bodies* was published.

Anne Boleyn is one of the most controversial women in English history; we argue over her, we pity and admire and revile her, we reinvent her in every generation. She takes on the colour of our fantasies and is shaped by our preoccupations: witch, bitch, feminist, sexual temptress, cold opportunist. (“witch, bitch”)

Whereas Anne, like Thomas More, is depicted in Mantel's novels through the point of view of Thomas Cromwell, there are suggestions that Mantel views Anne more as a national matriarch than a “witch, bitch”, despite Mantel's recognition that Anne is also “one who patrols the nightmares of good wives; she is the guilt-free predator, the man-stealer, the woman who sets out her sexual wares and extorts a fantastic price” (“witch, bitch”).

5.2 Ambition

It is Cromwell whom Mantel credits for observing Anne's “intelligence and spirit” (“witch, bitch”), an assessment that can also be found in the pages of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. Mantel's Cromwell subverts this praise when he tells Thomas Wyatt, “Anne is not a carnal being, she is a calculating being, with a cold slick brain at work behind her hungry black eyes” (*Wolf Hall* 350). A “cold slick brain” suggests someone who is able to separate emotions from their decision-making process, a valued trait in successful professionals. Yet successful professionals who are women are not as well appreciated as those who are male. As Sheryl Sandberg reports, based on a Harvard Business School study, “success and likeability are positively correlated for men and negatively correlated for women” (40). Since the focal character in Mantel's Cromwell novels is male, we need to take some of his assessments of Anne

as suspect. Cromwell may be the tragic hero of Mantel's trilogy, but her representation of Henry's ambitious secretary is underpinned by Mantel's feminism. Evidence of Mantel's engagement with a feminist sensibility can be found in her own personal history as well as her critical writing. In one interview, Mantel's history of professional (male) misdiagnoses of her endometriosis compels her to respond to contemporary women refusing to claim feminism:

The only reason they can say ["I'm not a feminist"] is that they're standing on the shoulders of their mothers, who fought these battles, I think for a woman to say 'I'm not a feminist' is [like] a lamb joining the slaughterer's guild. It's just empty-headed and stupid. ("Accumulated Anger")

This quote supports Mantel's awareness of how Anne Boleyn's intelligence and political outspokenness would not have been "positively correlated" with acceptance among sixteenth-century courtiers.

Although Mantel recognizes that, in order to achieve her ambitious goals, Anne would need a "cold slick brain", the feminist in her is aware that contemporary accounts of Anne come almost exclusively from men: for example, Eustace Chapuys and George Cavendish. Mantel may argue that the assessment of Anne Boleyn found in her novels is filtered through the gaze of Cromwell, but it is clear that Mantel is also drawing a comparison between Cromwell and Anne, suggesting several similarities between these two ambitious historical characters: both Cromwell and Anne are strategists (*Bring Up the Bodies* 204), especially in the case of positioning themselves to be noticed by Henry and successfully gaining his trust; both were known for their intelligence; both are Reformers; both were literate and well read; both love small dogs (*Wolf Hall* 34, 200); both made an advantageous marriage to a spouse of higher social rank and wealth; and both eventually lose their lives because they lose Henry's trust. By emphasizing these similarities, Mantel suggests that Anne may have been more than "the guilt-free predator, the

man-stealer, the woman who sets out her sexual wares and extorts a fantastic price” (Mantel, “witch, bitch”).

5.2.1 Strategist

When Anne Boleyn comes to Whitehall in 1536 to celebrate the feast of St. Matthias, February 24, she has miscarried the last child she will conceive with Henry. Jane Seymour is in ascendance and Anne’s reign over the king has ended. Cromwell describes the change in her:

Anne Boleyn comes up to Whitehall to celebrate the feast of St. Matthias with the king. She has changed, all in a season. She is light, starved, she looks as she did in her days of waiting, those futile years of negotiations before he, Thomas Cromwell, came along and cut the knot. Her flamboyant liveliness has faded to something austere, narrow, almost nun-like. But she does not have a nun’s composure. Her fingers play with the jewels at her girdle, tug at her sleeves, touch and retouch the jewels at her throat. (*Bring Up the Bodies* 203)

A sense of despair is latent in this description of Anne, defeating her former “flamboyant liveliness” and replacing it with primness. Cromwell sees something else, though, telling Richard Cromwell that “[s]he is on the offensive. She is like a serpent, you do not know when she will strike” (204), suggesting a cornered animal waiting to defend itself from its attacker. This is the last thought that precedes Cromwell’s overarching estimation of Anne’s abilities:

He has always rated Anne highly as a strategist. He has never believed in her as a passionate, spontaneous woman. Everything she does is calculated, like everything he does. He notes, as he has these many years, the careful deployment of her flashing eyes. (204)

By employing the word “strategist” to describe Anne’s abilities, Mantel chooses a word that is associated with military operations, games, or business plans. A strategist is one versed in the “art

of a commander-in-chief; the art of projecting and directing the larger military movements and operations of a campaign” (“strategy,” def. 2d), someone who, when faced with “circumstances of competition or conflict” (“strategy,” def. 2d), is capable of forming “a plan for successful action based on the rationality and interdependence of the moves of the opposing participants” (“strategy”). This description portrays Anne, through Cromwell’s eyes, as an intelligent, rational being—attributes rarely given to women living in the society of Tudor England. This assessment also reflects on Anne’s carefully orchestrated rise to the position of Henry’s consort.

Speculation on why Henry chose Anne as the woman he wanted to bear his son is vast. Recently, Bordo has argued that, “Henry had been thinking about a divorce from his first wife long before Anne Boleyn entered the picture” (*Creation* 21). Citing from Henry’s letters and papers edited by J. S. Brewer, Bordo notes that Henry, upon the birth of Mary in 1516, said that he and Katherine were “both young; if it was a daughter this time, by the Grace of God the sons will follow” (qtd. in Bordo 21). This indicates the royal obsession with the birth of a son to ensure an uncontested Tudor succession, influencing Henry’s reflection on Leviticus when Katherine’s next pregnancy resulted in a stillbirth (Bordo 21). Henry’s confidence that he could father a son stems from the boy born to him by his mistress, Elizabeth Blount (Bordo 22). “It is only in theory, and for humble people,” Mantel reminds us in an editorial, “that marriage was for life” (“witch, bitch”) in the sixteenth century. European rulers usually sought annulments, “for a price, from sympathetic popes” (“witch, bitch”). These precedents might also have been a source of Henry’s reflection on Leviticus and rejection his marriage to Katherine. However, Mantel reminds us, when young Anne arrived at court in 1521, she brought with her an “alluring strangeness” (“witch, bitch”) thanks to the time she had spent at the French court. How might she have reacted to her first encounter with Henry?

There is no evidence of an immediate attraction between Henry and [Anne]. But if, when she danced in that first masque, she raised her eyes to the king, what did she see? Not the obese, diseased figure of later years, but a man 6'3" in height, trim-waisted, broad-chested, in his athletic prime: pious, learned, the pattern of courtesy, as accomplished a musician as he was a joustier. She saw all this but above all, she saw a married man. ("witch, bitch")

Consequently, despite the less favourable, later portraits of Henry, there may have been a physical attraction that Anne may have experienced. As for Anne seeing, "above all . . . a married man" when she met Henry, her time at the French court would have given her the opportunity to learn about the precedent of royal annulments.

In 1514, Mary Boleyn was summoned to accompany Henry VIII's sister, Mary Tudor, to France to be wed to Louis XII, a fifty-two-year-old who had had Pope Alexander VI annul his marriage to Jeanne of France (Campbell, "Louis XII"; Mantel, *Wolf Hall* 84) in 1498. Anne was also invited to attend Mary Tudor but arrived in France several months after Mary (Weir, *Mary Boleyn* 58). On the day after Mary Tudor's wedding, Louis XII dismissed all of Mary's English attendants save the youngest—Mary Boleyn stayed—and installed French noblewomen, among them Françoise de Maille, Madame d'Aumont, who had once served Jeanne de France.

Consequently, both Mary and Anne would have had the opportunity to learn of the annulment of Louis's first marriage. Mantel alludes to this when she has Mary Boleyn, during her first intimate conversation with Cromwell, say, "When the king turned his mind to Anne, he thought that, knowing how things are done in France, she might accept a . . . a certain position, in the court" (*Wolf Hall* 136). Whereas Mary more obviously refers to the mistresses held by François, it indicates that both Boleyn sisters know "how things are done in France" and may be an allusion to Louis XII's earlier annulment. So just as Cromwell's experience on the continent gave him skills that would further his advancement and success, Anne's experience at the French court

consequently provided Anne with more than just an “alluring strangeness”; the first time Anne crossed paths with Henry, “a man 6’3” in height, trim-waisted, broad-chested, in his athletic prime” she possessed the kind of ambition, intelligence, and experience that marks the Anne we see in Mantel’s novels through the point of view of Thomas Cromwell.

“The lady appeared at court at the Christmas of 1521, dancing in a yellow dress” (66), Mantel writes in *Wolf Hall*, corroborating this fact in her editorial on Anne: “Twice in her life at least she wore a yellow dress: once at her debut at court in 1521, and again near the end of her life, on the frozen winter’s day when, on learning of the death of Henry’s first queen, she danced” (“witch, bitch”). There has been much debate on the significance of the color yellow, especially in conjunction with Katherine’s death, when it has been claimed that Henry also wore yellow. In another website dedicated to Anne Boleyn, *On the Tudor Trail*, Natalie Grueninger documents a “rigorous investigation into the historical meaning of the color yellow” (Bordo, *Creation* 252). Whereas Alison Weir claims that the yellow worn after Katherine’s death was “a mark of respect” (qtd. in Grueninger) in *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, she later reverses that assessment in *The Lady in the Tower*, stating, “It is a misconception that yellow was the colour of Spanish Royal mourning” (qtd. in Grueninger). David Starkey and Antonia Fraser assess the choice of color after the death of Katherine to be “the colour of rejoicing” (Fraser qtd. in Grueninger). One consideration that I have not come across in work by critics was the link of the colour yellow to Spanish heretics. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, in its definition of “Auto-da-fé”, describes how “[h]eretics were dressed in a yellow gown and mitre” (Bowker). Recall that Cromwell witnesses an auto-da-fé as a young boy (*Wolf Hall* 352-57). Whereas yellow might also denote the richness of gold or the light of the sun—the sun denoting Jesus Christ—the wearing of yellow might also have been an act of defiance against the Catholic Church and its pursuit of heretics. Whereas this dissertation is not concerned with proving or disproving the

symbolism to which Anne subscribed regarding this color, I think it is important to consider its symbolism when examining Anne's strategies. If Anne should be taken seriously as a proponent of religious reform, as she was in Howard Brenton's recent play, *Anne Boleyn*, perhaps her choice of yellow was a subtle statement of her religious allegiances. If she meant to catch a king's eye, perhaps the symbolism of the richness of gold or the light of the sun was deployed. Certainly at the time of Katherine's death, if yellow signifies allegiance with the heretics suffering the Inquisition, Anne could have donned the colour in celebration of the defeat of one of Catholicism's staunchest defenders in England. Given Cromwell's experience of an auto-da-fé in *Wolf Hall*, I interpret Mantel's Anne, dancing in a yellow dress on the day of Katherine's death, as a supporter of religious reformation, symbolically rejoicing in the death of one of the most powerful Catholics in England.

In *Wolf Hall*, Mantel depicts Anne as an exotic woman: following her stint in the "Burgundian court . . . and more recently Paris . . . Now she speaks her native tongue with a slight, unplaceable accent, strewing her sentences with French words when she pretends she can't think of the English" (67). Soon, this exotic creature has "a little trail of petty gentlemen following her" (67) until she catches the attention of a "not so petty gentleman. The rumour spreads that she is going to marry Harry Percy, the Earl of Northumberland's heir" (67). Thus, Mantel sets up the conflict between Anne and Wolsey: Wolsey instructs Thomas Boleyn that his daughter is intended for "the Butlers' heir" (67) in Ireland. Mantel depicts the confrontation between Wolsey and Boleyn through Cromwell's eyes, later depicting a meeting between Cromwell and Cavendish in order to integrate the historical source, Cavendish's biography of Wolsey, into the novel. It is Cavendish who reports that the Lady Anne, who "liked [Percy's] title" (78), did not like Wolsey's interference: "she said that if she could work my lord cardinal any

displeasure, she would do it” (*Wolf Hall* 79). With Wolsey out of the way, Anne would have total influence over Henry and persuade him on the issue of church reform.

In the space between Wolsey’s instructions to Boleyn about his daughter and Cavendish’s recital of Anne’s displeasure, Mantel depicts a conversation between Cromwell and Wolsey on the topic of Mary Boleyn, mistress to the King of France and to Henry: “Mary is a kind little blonde, who is said to have been passed all around the French court before coming home to this one, scattering goodwill, her frowning little sister trotting always at her heels” (74). Unlike the king’s other mistress who bore him a son, Elizabeth Blount, Mary Boleyn’s issue were never recognized by the king, though she likely bore him at least a son—she also had a daughter—before he cast her aside. In Mantel’s representation of these liaisons, Mary’s disposability could also have provided Anne with a reason to deny the king sexual intercourse; she held out for a much bigger prize.

It is interesting to note here that, like Mantel’s integration of Mary Boleyn into Henry’s history of sexual relations, she also suggests that Thomas Wyatt was not only the first lover in Anne’s history of sexual relations, but also her first involvement with a married man. Mantel weaves this into her narrative, first having the musician, Mark Smeaton—who will later confess to his own carnal involvement with Anne—retell the gossip he has heard about the two within Cromwell’s hearing:

Besides, Tom Wyatt has had her, and everybody knows it, down in Kent. I have been down to Penhurst with the cardinal, and you know that palace is near to Hever, where the lady’s family is, and the Wyatts’ house an easy ride away. (*Wolf Hall* 169)

Mantel’s Cromwell returns to the subject of Wyatt frequently: when he questions his friend Antonio Bonvisi after his dinner party in Spring 1530 (194); he reflects on how Anne “tortures” (200) Wyatt during his first visit to her; and he hears from the Duke of Suffolk that Wyatt is to

return from his diplomatic mission, causing Suffolk to wonder if he should tell Henry, the “[p]oor devil” (223). After Cromwell has become a father figure to Thomas Wyatt, Wyatt explains his relationship with Anne:

If Anne is not a virgin, that’s none of my doing... I was sick to my soul to think of any other man touching her. But what could I offer? I am a married man, and not the duke or prince she was fishing for, either. She liked me, I think, or she liked to have me in thrall to her, it amused her. We would be alone, she would let me kiss her, and I always thought... but that is Anne’s tactic, you see, she says yes, yes, yes, then she says no. (*Wolf Hall* 347-349)

Cromwell reacts:

[Cromwell] says, brutal as a butcher, “So how many lovers do you think she has had?” Wyatt looks down at his feet. He looks at the ceiling. He says, “a dozen? Or none? Or a hundred?” (349)

Perhaps Mantel suggests a relationship between Anne and Wyatt—Anne’s first with a married man—as further proof that Anne was a woman who could manipulate men because of the sexual thrall in which she held them. But there is another reading available for this above exchange: the shared confidences of men spurned by two women from the same family. By this point in the narrative, Cromwell had been proposed to and then rejected by Mary Boleyn while Wyatt had spent a considerable amount of time on the continent supposedly getting over Anne.

Like Anne, Wyatt was known for his evangelical religious views (Burrow), likely increasing their compatibility, but “[b]y about 1520 Wyatt had married” (Burrow). If, as Mantel depicts in her novel, Anne did not return to court until 1521, then the neighbor in Kent that Anne allegedly flirted with, Wyatt, was married, making him the first married man with whom she had a relationship. According to Bordo, it is from George Cavendish and George Wyatt that “we get

the stories of Anne's early romances with Henry Percy and Thomas Wyatt" (*Creation* 142). Bordo argues that Wyatt was "one of the first at court to develop an infatuation for Anne" (34), citing as evidence a line from one of his poems in which "he describes his beloved's eyes as 'sunbeams to turn with such vehemence, / To daze men's sight, as by their bright presence'" (qtd. in Bordo, *Creation* 34).

If Anne's relationship with Wyatt is Anne's first experience of a flirtation with a married man, Anne's near marriage to Henry Percy, the heir of the Earl of Northumberland, is her first experience in gaining the affections of a man from a higher social rank than herself. As Wolsey reminds Thomas Boleyn in the wake of Percy's declaration that he wishes to marry Anne:

The Percy family comprise, I do think, the noblest in the land. Whereas, notwithstanding your remarkable good fortune in marrying a Howard, the Boleyns were in trade once, were they not? A person of your name was Lord Mayor of London, not so? Or have I mixed up your line with some Boleyns more distinguished? (70)

Like Thomas Wyatt, the name of Henry Percy appears frequently in the narrative as a reminder of this questionable relationship that shadowed Anne's marriage to the king: when Wolsey is "newly disgraced" (76), George Cavendish playacts with Cromwell the exchange between Percy and Wolsey (77); Harry Percy is the one who arrests Wolsey (260); Cromwell reminds Anne that she would be married to Percy had Wolsey not intervened (344); Percy's wife, Mary Talbot, has made public her husband's announcement that he was married to Anne Boleyn (373); and Cromwell finally tells Percy that he was "never pre-contracted" to Anne (379), threatening him with his own vengeance as well as that of the Howards and the Boleyns should he discuss "Lady Anne's *freedom*" (379). Just as Cromwell's experience shutting down unprofitable monasteries so that income from the lands could be channeled toward Wolsey's colleges became the foundation for the Reformation work he would do with Henry, Anne's experiences with a

canonical poet and one of the most eligible aristocrats of her generation provided her with foundational experience she could draw on in order to lure a king to be her husband. If Cromwell's ambition led him to pursue work in the banking houses of Italy, leading to a traditional male career of finance, law, and service to a king, Anne's ambition and the experience she received on the Continent led her to pursue the only "career" available to her at the time: wife. Her ambition made her choose a powerful monarch.

The marriage between Anne and Henry is, of course, what all the fuss was about. When it finally came, it was quiet:

Twenty-fifth of January 1533, dawn, a chapel at Whitehall, his friend Rowland Lee as priest, Anne and Henry take their vows, confirm the contract they made in Calais: almost in secret with no celebration, just a huddle of witnesses of intent forced out of them by the ceremony. (425)

Cromwell has anticipated this day, observing Anne the strategist as she absorbs the investment of her new title of Marquess of Pembroke, reflecting:

She is almost there now, almost there, her body taut like a bowstring, her skin dusted with gold, with tints of apricot and honey; when she smiles, which she does often, she shows small teeth, white and sharp. She is planning to commandeer Katherine's royal barge, she tells him, and have the device 'H&K' burned away, all Katherine's badges obliterated. (387)

Despite his later respect for Anne as a strategist, his reliance on her good will to secure him an "official place in the [king's] household" (*Wolf Hall* 346), and the implication that this near achievement of her goal becomes her, this excerpt shows that Cromwell nevertheless considers her a predator with "small teeth, white and sharp", eager to eradicate all historical traces of Katherine.

Given Mantel's respect for Anne's abilities as "a power player, a clever and determined woman" (Mantel, "Royal Bodies"), it goes without saying that this cleverness was foundational to her politics and her ambition. Since no woman in Henry's realm attended the universities so valued by Wolsey, where might Anne have developed the intelligence she would need to ascend the heights of power? In Early Modern Europe, the degree of a woman's intelligence was often the result of her reading habits. The importance of the reading habits of Early Modern women as a strategy in female self-fashioning has been explored elsewhere, especially in Edith Snook's *Women, Reading, and the Cultural Politics of Early Modern England*. Snook suggests that Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Pembroke, Montgomery (1590-1676), is an exemplar of not only a woman reader, but also the daughter of a reader: Margaret Clifford (1560-1616), Countess of Cumberland (Spence). Margaret Clifford seems to have been inspired by her aunt, Mrs. Elmes, into exploring "wide-ranging scholarly interests" (Spence, "Clifford, Margaret"), but she was also "a zealous puritan" ("Clifford, Margaret") who, like Anne Boleyn, "attracted dedications, especially from puritan writers" ("Clifford, Margaret"). It was Margaret who, when her husband "excluded Anne [Clifford] from his inheritance... amassed documentary evidence" ("Clifford, Margaret") to successfully reclaim her inheritance. Lady Anne Clifford inherited an immense estate but always considered her own mother an "exemplar" (Spence, "Clifford, Anne"). Like Anne Boleyn, Margaret Clifford was a patron of the arts, inspiring her daughter Lady Anne to follow suit. The reverence in which Lady Anne held her mother can be seen in the large triptych, "The Great Picture", currently on display at the Abbot Hall Art Gallery in Cumbria, in which three stages of Anne's life are depicted. On the left side, shows Anne as a young girl of fifteen ("The Great Picture"). The large, middle panel shows Margaret pregnant with Anne:

[She is holding] a book of Psalms in her hand near her pregnant belly (an image that startlingly aligns maternity, poetry, and faith), while on a shelf near her head rest the

Bible, the works of Seneca, and a manuscript entitled ‘Alchemist Extractions, of Distillations and excellent Medicines,’ compiled by the Countess Herself. (Snook 1)

The right side panel shows Lady Anne at fifty-six years of age. Snook argues that, for Early Modern women, reading was not seen as a replacement for education but rather that “[e]ducation supplements literacy with power” (10) in the lives of men, providing them with a “humanist education and the study of classical languages and literature—and . . . the social and political power that attended that kind of learning” (11). Women were considered “uneducated” (10) and “unlearned” (10). Yet, as can be seen in the histories of Margaret and Anne Clifford, a broad and deep reading practice could provide women with the intellectual power they needed in a patriarchal society.

On a smaller scale, Anne Newdigate (1574-1618) was another “uneducated” woman who demonstrated an intellectual power thought to have come from her reading habits. Anne’s husband, Sir John Newdigate, is known to have “found time for a strenuous programme of improving reading” (Larminie). His reading and her own ability to “write effectively and to move confidently in the circles of nobility and gentry to which her birth gave her access” (Larminie) suggest a reading programme of similar depth as her husband. Anne Newdigate’s informal learning through reading made possible, similar to Margaret Clifford’s efforts for her child, her successful appeal to the master for the wards for the guardianship of her son on her husband’s death in 1610. After this, Anne remained a widow, raised her children and used the “same resources of written persuasion and useful friends . . . to prosecute litigation, market agricultural produce, and seek marriage partners” (Larminie) for her two eldest children. Her success in directing her family’s business was evident when, in 1618, she died, leaving an estate that “passed smoothly to William Whitehall, her chief executor” (Larminie). The foregoing strongly supports Anne Newdigate as a strategist, like Anne Boleyn.

Consequently, Mantel's depiction of Anne as an avid reader denotes her intellectual power. "His niece, is always reading," (*Wolf Hall*, 163) reflects the Duke Of Norfolk to Cromwell, suggesting that this is "why she is unmarried at the age of twenty-eight" (163). According to Mantel, Anne might have quarreled with the king—"Henry and Anne had worn their quarrels like jewels" ("witch, bitch")—and "made jealous scenes" (Mantel, "witch, bitch"), but she was also a "bible reader, who told the women in her household to dress and behave soberly; cultured, she was a patron of scholars, and keenly interested in the reform doctrines that Henry himself would not embrace" (Mantel, "witch, bitch"). Anne also received "the dedications of a number of evangelical works" (Loades, *The Boleyns* 130). She was "a power player, a clever and determined woman" (Mantel, "Royal Bodies"). In addition to her engagement with biblical literature, Anne was part of a coterie of "full or part-time versifiers" (Mantel, "witch, bitch") who practiced the "love poetry of the era attest[ing] to skirmishing in the sexual undergrowth, to histories of frustration and faithlessness" (Mantel, "witch, bitch"); Thomas Wyatt was a member of that group. Yet Anne, in Cromwell's assessment, was not likely involved in such a coterie in search of flattery because, as Cromwell senses, "from his glimpses of her . . . she is unlikely to be moved by anything so impermanent as beauty" (*Wolf Hall* 194), suggesting Anne's pursuit of an intellectual challenge. Indeed, biographer Alison Weir attests that because Thomas Boleyn "was a cultivated man... [who] plainly cared about education, seeing it as the pathway to success" (*Mary Boleyn* 48), he saw to it that "at least one of his daughters [was] tutored to a high standard. That was Anne, whom Lord Herbert states was so 'singular' in 'towardness' that her parents 'took all possible care for her good education'" (*Mary Boleyn* 48). It was due to this "acute intellect" (*Mary Boleyn* 53) that Anne was chosen to go to the court of Margaret of Austria, "regarded as one of the finest finishing schools in Europe" (*Mary Boleyn* 54). Mantel suggests that Anne's reading may have extended to Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (1375) when

Cromwell defends his sending of a present to Jane Seymour after hearing about how Sir John Seymour seduced his daughter-in-law at Wolf Hall:

“It is not as if it is tales out of Boccaccio.”

She laughs. “They could tell Boccaccio a tale, those sinners at Wolf Hall.” (297)

This interchange both serves to remind us that Cromwell’s cultural and economic education was acquired in Italy and that Anne has read what is considered “a masterpiece. . . . a classic of Italian and world literature. . . . seminal to the development of the short story genre” (Krstovic 1). It also suggests that Anne’s reading choices were not restricted to conservative, religious tracts, but also to what was, for the time, lurid tales of corruption. Several themes and strategies that appear in Boccaccio’s *The Decameron* (1348-53) both expand on the depth of meaning behind Anne’s allusion and the depth of meaning behind Mantel’s allusion. These canonical tales are set during the 1348 plague in Florence, told by ten Florentines over a period of two weeks, “consists of a hundred *novelles* about cuckolds, randy friars, acquisitive merchants, foolish painters and lascivious abbesses, with the odd tale of shipwreck, tragic love or noble love thrown in. . . . full of rumpy-pumpy” (Burrow “Protest”). The added taint of incest in the Wolf Hall tale is what Anne suggests might add to Boccaccio’s collection. But *Decameron*, as an “epic of the merchant class” (Burrow “Protest”), also “suggests the attitudes of the refined bourgeoisie of [Boccaccio’s] time. . . . as well as the concerns of mercantile culture, which was at the time spreading across Europe” (Krstovic 2), thus alluding to Cromwell’s milieu and to Anne’s genealogy. The themes connecting Boccaccio’s frame narrative emerge through “stories [that] deal with various degrees of moral and social corruption” (Krstovic 2), emphasizing the “degrees of moral and social corruption” in Henry’s court as well as those found at Wolf Hall. Whereas, in our society, Anne’s reading of *Decameron* would make her a reader of canonical literature, in Anne’s society, her reading of *Decameron* would indicate inappropriate reading on the part of Anne, a salacious

activity someone like Eustace Chapuys would see as further proof of Anne being worthy of the title “concubine.”

In a recent exploration of the life of Anne’s older sister Mary, Alison Weir looks closely at the education of both Mary and Anne. She establishes Thomas Boleyn’s “gift” (*Mary Boleyn* 8) for languages and cites the description Erasmus gives of Boleyn: “outstandingly learned” (qtd. in Weir, *Mary Boleyn* 8). As for Cromwell’s implications that Anne was cold and calculating, Weir acknowledges that Boleyn himself was known to “be chillingly dispassionate, brusque, and even insolent” (*Lady* 8). But worse than these estimations of Boleyn’s character is the assertion Weir takes from J. S. Brewer’s 1884 examination of Henry’s reign: “Thomas Boleyn’s besetting vices—by all accounts—were selfishness and avarice; ‘he could not risk the temptation of money’” (8). It is interesting to note here that Weir does not indicate that Boleyn’s cold behavior is a vice—as it would be in a woman—but that selfishness and avarice are. Nevertheless, despite these questionable traits, Boleyn did gain a reputation for being “at the forefront of innovation in having at least one of his daughters tutored to a high standard” (*Mary Boleyn* 48). This is somewhat in line with his reputation as having an “intellectual side” (Hughes): “He employed a humanist scholar, Gerard Physius, who commissioned on his behalf from Desierius Erasmus three works which established the Boleyn family’s humanist and pietistic credentials” (Hughes). It was Anne, Weir argues, that received the kind of education that won her a position in the court of the Archduchess Margaret of Austria, Regent to the Netherlands (*Mary Boleyn* 53), as a process of completing her female education. Scholars tend to agree²³ that Anne was “highly intelligent... possess[ing] a mind of her own” (Loades, *The Boleyns* 77)—traits which would not “have endeared her to the average early Tudor nobleman” (Loades 77)—and Henry’s

²³ See also Bordo, “The Creation of Anne Boleyn”; Weir, *Mary Boleyn*, and Mantel, “Anne Boleyn: witch, bitch, temptress, feminist”.

“intellectual equal” (Loades 77). In his examination of the Boleyn family, Loades summarizes Anne’s relationship with Henry:

Anne . . . was a woman with a mind of her own, and her own political agenda, more suitable in many ways for the council chamber than for the boudoir. She had held her lover’s attention through the interminable years of their courtship by her intelligence and her temper. She had steered Henry’s politics when he had seemed uncertain which way to go, she had led her family based faction, often in spite of her father, and she had not hesitated to tell her lover what she thought of him when he attempted to stray. (*The Boleyns* 134).

Whereas it was her influence on the king that would have motivated Cromwell to approach Anne, or her sister, for a position in Henry’s council, it was Anne’s evangelical beliefs that first united these two strategists.

5.2.2 Religious Reformist

Loades reveals that Anne’s evangelical beliefs, likely picked up from Margaret of Angouleme or one of her circle in France, were “broadly classed as Christian humanist” (Loades, *The Boleyns* 127), like those beliefs proposed by Jacques Lefevre d’Etaples, and “very widespread among the French aristocracy of that period (1515-1525)” (127-28). According to one of Anne’s biographers, the Bible text Anne used was d’Etaples’s version (Ives). Isolated as she was at the French court with Queen Claude and her sister Renee expressing their sympathies with these reform beliefs, Loades argues that Anne underwent an epiphany:

Indeed it is quite possible that she underwent some kind of spiritual awakening, because she was highly intelligent and the burning issue of the day was the nature of religious experience. (Loades, *The Boleyns* 128)

One of the French habits she retained on her return to England was reading the scriptures in French (128), no doubt the inspiration behind her support for an English version of the Bible. These beliefs, not wholly Lutheran because Anne still believed in Catholic doctrine “on such key issues as justification²⁴”, resulted in an alignment of Anne’s political position with Henry’s insistence on Royal Supremacy. The uniqueness of the role of the monarchy in England, a role “for the excellency thereof doth far pass and excel all other estates and degrees of life” (William Latymer qtd. in Loades 128), establishes what Loades calls “the ‘*praemunire* tradition’ of the English monarchy” (129). Loades of course refers to the 1353 Statute of Praemunire created during the reign of Edward III that prohibits any foreign ruler, like a pope, to operate either illegally or financially within England without royal consent. It acted as the foundation to the Act of Restraint of Appeals, written by Cromwell shortly after the king’s secret wedding to Anne, the preamble of which states “*This realm of England is an Empire, and so has been accepted in the world, governed by one Supreme Head and King*” (qtd. in Mantel, *Wolf Hall*, original italics 426). The early camaraderie between Cromwell and Anne is represented in *Wolf Hall* in the moments of reflection Cromwell has after his first interview with Anne. He has left York Place, distracted by the birdsong of starlings, aware of pleasure seeping into the moment:

[T]hat something almost extinct, some small gesture towards the future, is ready to welcome the spring; in some spare, desperate way, he is looking forward to Easter, the end of Lenten fasting, the end of penitence. There is a world beyond this black world. There is a world of the possible. A world where Anne can be queen is a world where Cromwell can be Cromwell. (205)

²⁴ “The action whereby human beings are freed from the penalty of sin and accounted or made righteous by God; the fact or condition of being justified in the eyes of God” (“justification, n.”).

This epiphany, Cromwell realizes, “is fleeting. But insight cannot be taken back” (205). Because of the religious context of this passage, its reference to Easter and the forty-day fast that precedes it, known as Lent (Bowker), it is possible to interpret this passage as the moment Cromwell aligns himself with Anne for motives beyond career advancement. Since his interview with Anne follows a dinner party at Bonvisi’s, a close reading of this scene (188-93) will reveal the difficult position in which Cromwell finds himself because of Wolsey’s fall, motivating Cromwell’s alliance with Anne and giving birth to the hope that he feels in the above-quoted passage.

When Cromwell appears at the home of his friend, the merchant Antonio Bonvisi, it is Spring 1530, three years before Anne is crowned Queen. The dinner party, which held for Bonvisi’s guest and friend Thomas More “a rich significance . . . [an] emblem of human society both in its foolish vanity and in its precious moments of communion” (Greenblatt, *Self-fashioning* 2), is attended by a diverse assembly of men. Along with More and his accompaniment of “lawyers and aldermen” (189) is Humphrey Monmouth, “whom More once locked up” (189), whom Bonvisi “seated well away from the great man” (189), and some city merchants. As Cromwell initially suspects, it is a gathering typical for Lent in that the guests are “cross and hungry” (188), required to eat only fish for protein; “even a rich Italian with an ingenious kitchen cannot find a hundred ways with smoked eel or salt cod” (188). The presence of More and his entourage make the dinner “a grander occasion than [Cromwell] had thought” (189). When More catches sight of Cromwell, he abruptly ends his conversation, suggesting to Cromwell that the discussion had been about him. This causes Cromwell to react, joking how Charles Brandon calls him “a Jewish peddler” (189). They discuss Henry without discussing Wolsey or Anne—as per More’s stated preference—but digress to talk of the Bible when More compares his relationship with Henry to “Jacob wrestling with the angel” (190):

“And who knows,” [Cromwell] says, “what that fight was about?”

“Yes, the text is silent. As with Cain and Abel. Who knows?” (190)

This allusion to Jacob’s struggle may allude to More’s fractious relationship with Henry, but it could also allude to More’s struggle with heretics. If Cromwell interpreted the comment as referring to the latter, his response might be critiquing More’s harsh treatment of heretics, fellow guest Monmouth being one of them. However, this Biblical parable also refers to patient and constant lovers—Jacob agreed to work for Rachel’s father for fourteen years in order to marry her (Delahunty and Dignen)—thereby alluding to Henry and Anne. This conversation is diverted when a draper asks Cromwell about Stephen Vaughan and the conversation turns to “import duties and bonded warehouses” (190). But More is not deterred and begins criticizing the Cardinal; Cromwell responds, “ready for this fight” (191). Cromwell is attacking More’s hypocrisy of becoming Lord Chancellor while he cultivates a persona that rejects wealth and ostentation when the Emperor’s Ambassador Eustace Chapuys’s arrival brings an end to Cromwell’s “fight”. When the party breaks up, More announces his assessment of Cromwell:

Master Cromwell’s position... is indefensible, it seems to me. He is no friend to the church, as we all know, but he is friend to one priest. And that priest the most corrupt in Christendom. (193)

That he is “no friend to the church”—and More means the Catholic church—indicates Cromwell’s involvement in the Reform movement, already indicated by his possession of a copy of Tyndale’s Bible (39). But through More, Mantel demonstrates how much of an outsider Cromwell had become as a result of Wolsey’s fall, making Anne’s overtures that much more welcome and sympathetic.

Elsewhere in the novel, Cromwell questions other practices associated with Catholicism and known to be questioned by supporters of the Reformation (Campbell, “purgatory”). For example, the Catholic idea of purgatory and the tradition of paying priests to pray for souls

suffering in that place are critiqued by Cromwell (*Wolf Hall* 39, 152). If the world in which Anne is queen is a world where “Cromwell can be Cromwell”, Mantel suggests an affinity between these two on the subject of religious reformation. Anne’s support of reformation, of course, has been well documented (Loades, Bordo). For example, similarly with other reformers, Anne “did not want to abolish the religious houses but to see them converted to educational purposes” (Ives). However, her “focus on personal response to the Bible was deeply subversive of much in the thinking and practice of late medieval Christianity” (Ives), contributing to the creation of space for heresy to flourish.

If their support for religious reformation was one of the similarities between Anne and Cromwell that drew them together, on one part of that reformation they differed: transubstantiation. During the Catholic Eucharist, the bread given by the priest to the worshipper is said to *be* the body of Christ. When Cromwell witnesses the auto-de-fé, he asks after its victim: “What’s her crime? He said, and they said, she is a Loller. That’s one who says the God on the altar is a piece of bread. What, he said, bread like the baker bakes” (*Wolf Hall* 353)? This major difference in interpretation of the taking of bread at the Eucharist was Henry VIII’s “test of sound belief” (Ives). In the first conversation he has with Cromwell in the novel, Thomas More tries to trick Cromwell into revealing himself as a heretic, a supporter of the Reformation and a reader of the writings of Luther and Tyndale. While Cromwell proves too clever for More’s leading questions, this interrogation results in several reflections on Cromwell’s part that reveal his reformist leanings. For example, Cromwell reflects on how “Tyndale says a boy washing dishes in the kitchen is as pleasing to the eye of God as a preacher in the pulpit or the apostle on the Galilee shore” (123). Since Mantel portrays Cromwell as having worked in at least two different kitchens, this allusion to Tyndale’s religious theory further indicates Cromwell’s support. When the topic of Humphrey Monmouth comes up—he that was a guest at the Bonvisi supper—

Cromwell's reflections turn to how More raided Monmouth's house and, despite finding "neither books nor letters that link him to Tyndale and his friends" (125), took him to the Tower. At the end of this reflection, More says to Cromwell, "Still breaking dry bread in cellars? Come now, my tongue is sharper than you deserve. We must be friends, you know" (125). Given the previous interrogation and the referral to Monmouth, this reference to bread and tongues must be understood as More's suspicion that Cromwell worships in the anonymity of a cellar.

Although there is no exploration in the novels regarding Anne's opinion about the bread used in the Eucharist, Mantel pointedly refers to this religious ritual before Anne's execution: "She had taken the Eucharist, declaring on the body of God her innocence" (*Bring Up the Bodies* 392). Historical scholars confirm that, although Anne Boleyn played an "important part" (Ives) in the early Reformation:

She was not a protestant. Such a label would be wholly anachronistic in the confusion of religious ideas in Henrician England. Despite traditionalists' hatred of her, Anne's evangelical position was not heretical. In particular she was wholly orthodox on what Henry VIII saw as the test of sound belief, the issue of transubstantiation. The last night of her life was spent praying before the sacrament. (Ives)

Whereas this "test of sound belief" meant that Anne's religious reformation ideas were not, in all cases, the same as Cromwell's, their shared objective of removing England from the influence of Roman popes was, from the beginning, a strong bond. Whereas Mantel shows that these reformist tendencies were shared by Cromwell and Anne, she stops short of representing another trait they shared: goals to improve poor relief.

Cromwell may be celebrated for his 1536 poor relief legislation, "which made parishes responsible for measures to combat local poverty" (Leithead), but Anne is perhaps less well remembered for having been the dedicatee of William Marshall's 1535 "account of the way poor

relief was set up at Ypres, and inviting her to persuade Henry to set up a similar system in England” (Ives). Marshall was the one who “drew up for Cromwell plans for poor relief” (Ives). Sadly, the statute was not able to resolve the poor problem, but “it nevertheless marks the first occasion on which an English government had recognized a responsibility to those on the fringes of society” (Leithead). Anne’s support of such legislation can be found in “the extent of her personal charity [and] also for her involvement in attempts to alleviate distress by providing opportunities for work” (Ives). It is not clear why Mantel did not represent this other similarity between Cromwell and Anne, instead having Cromwell reflect, after Anne miscarries her last child and after Parliament “knocks back his new poor law” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 204), on how to “provid[e] opportunities for work”:

England needs roads, forts, harbours, bridges. Men need work. It’s a shame to see them begging their bread, when honest labour could keep the realm secure. Can we not put them together, the hands and the task? (204)

The creation of a poor law is in itself a symptom of the Reformation: “The reform of poor relief and the Reformation coincided in a number of continental towns and in England” (Wandel). Although Protestantism was not a direct cause of the reform of poor relief (Wandel), it was the “Protestantization of political authority” (Wandel) and the autonomy from Rome it wrought that brought poor relief under a central umbrella: secular government. Whereas the English Protestant regime’s centralization of the administration of poor relief resulted in “more efficient and rational” (Wandel) programs, Protestant policies often prohibited any begging, formerly “an essential gesture of Catholic piety” (Wandel). Yet the long-range effect of Protestant poor relief programs was to silence the poor and, in the case of undeserving and immoral poor like prostitutes or gamblers, to ignore them. In England, at least, historical record establishes Thomas Cromwell as the first member of a governing body to introduce a reform for poor relief. Anne Boleyn’s part in

this reform may precede its passing, but in 1535 in Mantel's novel Cromwell's focus is wholly on Thomas More. By the time Cromwell is bringing down Anne, he is not reflecting on her good works with the poor. Perhaps, in the final installment of this trilogy, when Cromwell faces the executioner, Mantel may have her untraditional tragic hero reflect on the similarities he shared with the tragic queen who, like him, lost Henry's trust.

5.3 Losing Henry's Trust

Anne Boleyn's loss of Henry's love and trust brought about her downfall. Although the reasons behind Henry's wish to rid himself of Anne were complex, Mantel's representation of Anne as an ambitious woman who is not afraid to argue—even publicly—with Henry or promote causes she deems important—like religious reform—depicts a woman who does not conform to sixteenth-century ideals of womanhood. The “most popular conduct book for women during the Tudor period” (Wayne), Juan Luis Vives's *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, was commissioned by Katherine of Aragon (Wayne) for her daughter's benefit. The English translator of this book, Richard Hyrde, was a member of Thomas More's household and, in his dedication to Katherine, Hyrde emphasizes More's appreciation of this conduct manual that warned young women to, above all, guard their virtue. Indeed, it was an age that was “unwholesomely preoccupied with women's sexual goodness” (Wayne). Another popular conduct book of the era was published in Rome in 1528: Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (*The Book of the Courtier*). Although it is the 1561 English translation by Sir Thomas Hoby that influenced the court culture of Elizabeth I, especially Sir Philip Sidney (McAuley), Mantel makes it the subject of a discussion between Cromwell and Henry's illegitimate son, the Duke of Richmond. While *Il Cortegiano* was, first and foremost, an instructional book on conduct for courtiers, the exchange between Cromwell and the young duke alludes to its ideology on “men of base degree” (*Wolf Hall* 400) and “gentlewomen and their qualities” (400). By inserting this discussion, Mantel

reminds us that Cromwell's regular interaction with the Continent would have already exposed him to this book and that the instruction of courtiers as young as thirteen empowered them with the an idea of belonging to a higher order, despite the fact that the overturning of the medieval order subverted aristocratic power (Kelly-Gadol 176) and the power that medieval ladies had enjoyed through the practice of courtly love.

In the area of public behavior, Vives also instructed young women to be silent: "All maydes and all women folowe you [the Virgin Mary]: for she was of fewe words: but wonderous wise" (qtd. in Wayne). In another publication by Vives, *Office and Duty of a Husband*, the author instructs men to be teachers to their wives, quoting Juvenal:

Let not thy wife be overmuch eloquent, nor full of her short and quick arguments, nor have the knowledge of all histories, nor understand many things, which are written. She pleaseth not me that giveth herself to poetry, and observing the art and manner of the old eloquence, doth study to speak facundiously. (qtd. in Wayne)

As has already been discussed, Anne Boleyn not only failed to follow the instruction of silence, but also read poetry and, if Cromwell's praise for the "intelligence and spirit with which Anne defended herself" ("witch, bitch") at her trial is an indication, Anne both observed and spoke with eloquence (facundity).

In a recent lecture published in *London Review of Books*, Mary Beard discusses the history of silencing the public voices of women, citing the first record in Homer when Telemachus tells Penelope to "go back up into your quarters, and take up your own work... speech will be the business of men, all men, and of me most of all; for mine is the power in this household" (qtd. in Beard). Whereas the patriarchal nature of Ancient Greece is well known, Beard goes on to examine how this moment of silencing in the *Odyssey* relates to "some of the ways women's voices are not publicly heard in our own contemporary culture, especially in our

own politics, from the front bench to the shop floor” (Beard). Beard warns that, with today’s social media, the silencing comes with “threats of rape and decapitation” (Beard), citing an example found on Twitter after women “publicly sp[oke] out in support of a female logo on a [British] banknote” (Beard). In this compelling lecture, Beard cautions that today women, “even when they are not silenced, still have to pay a very high price for being heard” (Beard). Like Juvenal, Anne of France (also known as Anne of Beaujeau), who acted as regent for her brother Charles VIII (Bordo 39), whose reign preceded Louis XII, supported the virtue of silence in women when she advised her daughter, in *Lessons for My Daughter*, that even a queen “should never speak” (Bordo, *Creation* 40). The connection between Anne of Beaujeau and Anne Boleyn lies in the latter’s service to Mary Tudor in the French court of Louis XII.

It is important to consider how Mantel herself discovered the cost to women of making a public critique when she attempted to condemn how the monarchy and the media exploit women’s bodies for their own gain. In early 2013, Mantel suffered attacks from the British tabloids (Infante) over a February 2013 lecture she gave at the British Library about royal brides like Anne Boleyn. The publicity preceding this event indicated “she would riskily view the Duchess of Cambridge as another lovely bride in the tradition of Anne Boleyn, Marie Antoinette and Princess Diana, all three of whom suffered violent, untimely deaths” (Dugdale). “Fifteen days after Mantel’s lecture, five after its [online] publication” (Dugdale), Britain’s daily newspapers deliberately misinterpreted Mantel’s argument and turned it into an opportunity to disparage Mantel as a jealous woman who bashed Prince William’s wife, Kate. From front page attacks in the *Daily Mail* and *Metro International* weeks after Mantel’s public appearance to British Prime Minister Cameron quoted opinion that “[Mantel is] completely misguided and complete wrong” (Freeman), and to side-by-side photos of the duchess and the award-winning author, Mantel’s appearance and reputation came under attack. As one contributor to *The*

Guardian's book blog observed, the *London Review Books*, known as “the leading journal in the West edited by a woman” (Dugdale), has “provoked the biggest rows” (Dugdale) when female authors have written editorial pieces for the journal because “their sex gives the press a double stereotype to pounce on: not just bookish types straying dreamily into columnists’ domain, but also... female intellectuals (snooty, sheltered, embittered, etc.) who supposedly despise less brainy women” (Dugdale).

Some rational, female journalists have responded to this attack on Mantel. For example, *The Guardian's* Hadley Freeman criticizes especially the *Daily Mail* for responding to what was, in fact, an attack on that kind of publication “with its obsessive, prurient fascination with Kate” (Freeman) and its assessment that “Mantel is ‘infertile’ and ‘dreams of being thin’” (Freeman). While Freeman acknowledges, “one of the tenets of the fourth wave of feminism... is that women should not criticise one another’s life choices” (Freeman), she counters that with caution:

This kind of open-ended tolerance is all well and good, except when it then results in people attacking another woman for expressing an opinion about an industry that exploits their own as invariably happens when a woman discusses, say, Page 3 girls or strip clubs. (Freeman)

Mantel’s lecture represents a feminist political reaction in the public realm to what the author considers the transgressions of two corrupt British institutions. Similarities can be drawn between the reactions of the British tabloids and public to the lecture, the theme of the monarchy’s appropriation of female bodies, the cost to Mantel of voicing in public her political opinions, and the rise and fall of Anne Boleyn. Mantel argues in her lecture, “But with the reign of King Bluebeard, you don’t have to pretend. Women, their bodies, their reproductive capacities, their animal nature, are central to the story” (Mantel, “Royal Bodies”). With the installation of Anne as the new queen came with it Tudor England’s perception of the “royal lady [a]s a royal vagina.

Along with the reverence and awe accorded to royal persons goes the conviction that the body of the monarch is public property” (Mantel, “Royal Bodies”). Consequently, Tudor England would have speculated on Anne’s fertility, just as speculation was publicized in British tabloids about Kate’s pregnancy on the days leading up to Mantel’s lecture. But through this kind of speculation, Mantel argues, “Cheerful curiosity can easily become cruelty. It can easily become fatal. . . . Adulation can swing to persecution, within hours,” (“Royal Bodies”). This is where curiosity and fascination become voyeurism. Closely related to this is a public fascination for the grotesque and obscene. Cromwell alludes to this in *Bring Up the Bodies* after he, Rafe, and Wriosthesley have play-acted out Cromwell’s interrogation of Jane Rochford, stopping short of summarizing her lurid charge that Anne and George are sexually intimate. It is here that Cromwell reflects that, by revealing such an act “as I never thought to hear in a Christian country” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 271), he feels as though he were “one of those men who shows a freak at a fair” (271). His reflection on how this transaction is performed, of how such men would offer, for an extra price, to show “a sight to make hardened men quail” (272), in this context reveals his awareness of the public’s desire for the grotesque and how he can use that desire to get rid of Anne. One of the reasons Anne was a burden to Henry, apart from the failure of her body parts to produce an heir, was her outspokenness. Loades reveals that Anne, who “was a politician as well as a queen” (*The Boleyns* 156), had also “spoken out publicly against” (156) a bill that would allow Henry to “confiscate the property of the smaller religious houses” (156). Her argument was for the revenues of these lands to be “recycled to other religious purposes” (156). It was because of this disagreement, Loades argues, that Cromwell shifted his allegiance from Anne to Jane. By voicing her political opinions, Anne lost Henry’s love and trust before she lost her life.

5.4. Myths of Female Sinfulness

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Mantel aligns female mythological figures with Anne. In each case, the mythological figure associated with Anne emphasizes a negative characteristic of Henry's second wife: a seductress, sexually voracious, or in league with the devil. I want to look closely at how these mythological characters come to be associated with Anne, both in Mantel's novels and in Anne's legacy. For example, Mantel explores the myth of Albina, the matriarch of Albion, the land conquered and renamed by Brutus, the legendary founder of Britain. The influence of myths of female sinfulness found in both folktales and Biblical parables played an important role in Henry's justification that his distrust of Anne was well founded. During the era in which Henry grew to adulthood and married Katherine of Aragon, women in mythological narratives were depicted as possessing either "strong evil [or] weak goodness" (Wayne). If the exemplar of an evil woman is Jezebel, who influenced King Ahab to reject his religion, then the exemplar for a weak one is Eve. Whereas Vives uses a similar distinction in his advice, reflecting "typical humanist attitudes" (Wayne), the distinction is repeatedly affirmed in the canonical literature of the following century. For example, Milton succeeded Vives's argument for women's moral weakness:

Almost 150 years after [Vives] wrote, Milton would make a similar distinction between Adam, formed for "contemplation" and "valor," and Eve, for "softness and sweet attractive Grace," and he would show how woman's weak reason might be persuaded to evil action. (Wayne)

Lesley Hazleton argues in her analysis of the Jezebel legend that Shakespeare uses Jezebel as "the prototype of . . . Lady Macbeth, who challenges her husband's masculinity in order to spur him to murder" (112-13). Just as Jezebel taunts Ahab by asking, "Are you not the ruler of Israel" (112), Lady Macbeth asks if Macbeth "want[s] to be 'a coward in thine own esteem'" (113).

Whereas Eve, the matriarch of Judeo-Christian genealogy, does not appear in Mantel's novels, the matriarch Albina does. The important point that Mantel is making about these associations, I believe, is that they are still invoked as a critique against women today, especially those who voice their politics publically.

5.4.1 Anne Boleyn and the Myth of Jezebel

Anne Boleyn admits to being Jezebel (*Wolf Hall* 362), but, at the same time, she draws Cromwell into her allegory of the Biblical parable by calling him “the priests of Baal” (362). There are several similarities between the Jezebel parable and the story of Anne and Henry; Mantel emphasizes these in subtle ways—Anne's little dog, Purkoy, is likely thrown from a window to his death (106); Jezebel was pushed out of a window and torn apart by dogs—and not so subtle ways, for example Anne's claim to be Jezebel.

The invocation of the Jezebel parable can be found in a reflective narrative, a scene in which one of Anne's supporters, Hugh Latimer—recently released from imprisonment by More—meets with Cromwell. Cromwell's reflects on how More has secured James Bainham in the Tower prior to Bainham's execution and on More's approach to all heretics:

More says it does not matter if you lie to heretics, or trick them into confession. They have no right to silence, even if they know speech will incriminate them; if they will not speak, then break their fingers, burn them with irons, hang them up by their wrists. It is legitimate, and indeed More goes further; it is blessed. (*Wolf Hall* 361)

From there, Cromwell reflects on how a “group from the House of Commons” (361) dines with priests; together they spread the word that “anyone who supports the king's divorce will be damned” (361). Cromwell becomes more specific, reflecting on a Greenwich friar named

William Peto, of the Franciscan order²⁵, who “preaches a sermon before the king” (*Wolf Hall* 362) featuring the story of Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab built Jezebel a “pagan temple and gave the priests of Baal places in his retinue” (*Wolf Hall* 362). Baal, a god of the Canaanites and condemned by prophets—especially Elijah—from the Old Testament, became associated in Christianity with demonology and Hell: a devil (Delahunty and Dignen). Consequently, Peto recalls to Henry, a king like Ahab, how “the wicked Jezebel” (362) influenced Ahab into forsaking his religion. The consequences for this in the biblical parable, as told by Mantel, are violent:

The prophet Elijah told Ahab that the dogs would lick his blood, and so it came to pass, as you would imagine, since only the successful prophets are remembered. The dogs of Samaria licked Ahab’s blood. All his male heirs perished. They lay unburied in the streets. Jezebel was thrown out of a window of her palace. Wild dogs tore her body into shreds.

(362)

In the next paragraph after this summary, Anne repeats the accusation made against her, that she is Jezebel; implicating Cromwell as a priest of Baal, emphasizing the religious affinity between Anne and Cromwell. Its placement within this scene, thematically charged with persecution, suggests Mantel’s assessment of these criticisms of Anne, found in many contemporary documents, as persecution also. The author further emphasizes the attacks with Anne’s confession to Cromwell:

“I am Jezebel. You, Thomas Cromwell, are the priests of Baal.” Her eyes are alight. “As I am a woman, I am the means by which sin enters this world. I am the devil’s gateway, the cursed ingress. I am the means by which Satan attacks the man, whom he was not bold enough to attack, except through me. Well, that is their view of the situation. My view is

²⁵ This order practices a strict vow of poverty. See John Cannon, “Franciscans”, *A Dictionary of British History*.

that there are too many priests with scant learning and smaller occupation. (*Wolf Hall* 362)

Whereas Anne recognizes and elaborates on the assessments of those priests and men from the house of Commons, she fights back by wishing “the Pope and the Emperor and all Spaniards... in the sea and drowned” (362) and suggesting that she would like to throw Katherine and her daughter Mary out of the window. Ironically, these words come back to haunt her when, early in *Bring Up the Bodies*, her favorite dog, Purkoy, falls from a window (or is thrown) to his death.

In a recent examination of the story of Jezebel and the subsequent invocation of her name for two millennia, Hazleton argues that the name Jezebel has always been “hurled, always spat” (2). This woman’s original name, according to Hazleton, was Itha-Baal, meaning “woman of the Lord” (2) in Phoenician, her native tongue; the authors of the Hebrew bible changed it to “I-zevel, or ‘woman of dung,’ which was latter written as Jezebel in Greek and so also in English” (2). With this re-naming, the legend of Jezebel was set: “She is the prototype of the evil woman, the original femme fatale” (3). She has been invoked in fiction, drama, and film (Robins, Slaughter, Shoham, and Wyler); in the United States, “[‘Jezebel’] is still used to condemn women seen as sexually promiscuous” (4). The condemnatory nature of this name has strong roots in the Bible’s Jewish scriptures where, according to Hazleton, “Jezebel gets more ink than any other woman, Eve and Mary included” (4). In Revelations, Jezebel is portrayed as “the epitome of evil” (4) and yoked together with the Whore of Babylon. When Jezebel, formerly Itha-Baal, first came to King Ahab’s court, she was a “princess royal of the most sophisticated civilization of her time: the Phoenician city-state of Tyre” (5). It is easy to see why Mantel has Anne compare herself to this woman in a scene that emphasizes persecution and defamation. Even the setting is similar: Jezebel’s story appears in “Kings” in the Bible:

It features evil schemes and underhanded plots, war and treason, false gods and falser humans, and all with the fate of entire nations at stake. A grand opera, in short. And at its center, one man and one woman: Elijah, whose Hebrew name Eliyahu means “Yahweh is my God,” and Jezebel, the “woman of the Lord.” (Hazleton 5)

If theirs is the “original story of the unholy marriage of sex, politics, and religion” (6), it is easy to see why Mantel describes the events that took place in Henry’s court as involving “huge archetypes” (“Novel Approaches”). But it is not just the archetype of the whore that Mantel sees in Anne’s story, not the “archetypal contrast between the whore and the virgin” (Scurr, “revolutionary acts”), with Jane Seymour as the contrast. Anne’s story, like Jezebel’s, is one “written by those in passionate opposition to everything you believe in” (Hazleton 6):

Everything becomes twisted; every action, every gesture, becomes not only suspect but turned on its head. The wildest rumors are passed off as fact. Inconvenient facts are ignored or edited out, relegated to oblivion, until all we are left with is not a real person but an image, a morality-tale character, which is how Jezebel would become a kind of wicked witch of the east. (6)

Like Jezebel, Anne too has become known as a whore and associated with witchcraft.

It is uncanny to review the story of how Itha-Baal became Jezebel and find so many similarities between her transformation and Anne’s: an accomplished, pious, and intelligent woman marries royalty and becomes a “witch, bitch, feminist, sexual temptress, cold opportunist” (Mantel, “witch, bitch”). Just as the veracity of Jezebel’s story lay in its place in a revered text, the Bible, Hazleton reminds us that her story was written “by specific men in specific times and places, for specific reasons” (6). In Anne’s case, not a word was written about her during the rest of Henry’s reign (Ives); much was written to blacken her name under Mary’s Catholic rule, an approach unmediated under Elizabeth’s long reign. In Anne’s lifetime and shortly thereafter, men

like Eustace Chapuys and Nicholas Sander contributed to the image of a “heretical seductress who had corrupted Henry and let loose all the evils which had then befallen the faith” (Ives). Even by the time secular historians turned a serious focus to uncovering Anne Boleyn, J. A. Froude and A. F. Pollard reduced Anne’s role in history “to her appeal ‘to the less refined part of Henry’s nature’ and her guilt accepted on the argument that such a king would only have acted on ‘some colourable justification’” (Ives). Finally, just as Anne’s story was sensationalized within the narrative of the Henrician Reformation, Jezebel’s story was sensationalized in order to provide an historical origin and parable explaining the disappearance of the northern kingdom of Israel (once part of southern Judea). Those who wrote Kings needed to make their story memorable; it had to “grasp the imagination” (7) through a tale of divine punishment. The story of Anne Boleyn, whose “rise is glittering, [whose] fall sordid” (“witch, bitch”), is made just as memorable: “God pays her out. The dead take revenge on the living. The moral order is reasserted” (“witch, bitch”).

5.4.2 Anne Boleyn and the Myth of Albina

Albina, the murdering, eldest princess who named the land on which she and sisters washed up, is another figure of female wickedness; Mantel subverts this wicked legacy, linking her with Anne and other important female historical characters to strengthen their role as national matriarchs. Whereas I will first explore the late addition of the Albina story to the original Geoffrey of Monmouth chronicle (Cohen, *Tradition of the Giant* 177), I will then draw attention to how a Medieval English noblewoman appropriated the Albina story to promote her daughters genealogy during tough economic times for their family.

The critical importance of Mantel’s early chapter, “An Occult History of Britain” (65-153), cannot be over-emphasized. It serves not only to introduce Albina and Brutus, linking England’s genealogy to Ancient Greece and Rome accordingly, but also covers the appearance of

Anne at court, her early contract with Harry Percy, and Wolsey's eradication of their alliance, Anne's professed resentment against the cardinal, Katherine's history with Henry, the cardinal's history of the Tudor succession, the cardinal's struggle to obtain Henry a divorce, and Cromwell's loss of his wife and two daughters. Albina and Brutus are not the only mythological components in the cardinal's history of the Tudor succession. He also refers to "the kings who rode under the tattered banners of Arthur and who married women who came out of the sea or hatched out of eggs, women with scales and fins and feathers" (*Wolf Hall* 94), arguing that these kinds of matches make Henry's with Anne look "less unusual" (94). The length of the chapter and ambitious coverage of the major events of the centuries of England before Henry's reign serve to emphasize the significance that the characters of this novel—and the historical characters as well—invest in the "Occult History of Britain". Its placement near the beginning of the novel suggests its foundational influence on the land in which these players act. But these myths tell another important story: the role that women played in the foundation of England.

Anne Boleyn's entrance into the novel in her yellow dress significantly follows the summary that Mantel provides of the originary myths of England, written first by Geoffrey of Monmouth as beginning with Brutus but augmented later with a prologue about Albina and her sisters by an anonymous author. By describing the history as "occult", Mantel signifies that the history given of England within the chapter is "[o]f or relating to magic, alchemy, astrology, theosophy, or other practical arts held to involve agencies of a secret or mysterious nature" ("occult," def. A1b). At the same time, the history alternately recited by the unnamed narrator or Wolsey himself may be "communicated only to the initiated" ("occult," def. A1b) or even "beyond ordinary understanding or knowledge; abstruse, mysterious, inexplicable" ("occult," def. A1b). These ideas of magical, mystical, and privileged history are reinforced by how Mantel's depicts Wolsey as sharing these tales with Cromwell as one might with a privileged colleague or

friend. Its unreliability, however, is emphasized by how characters alter historical record. For example, Cromwell forces Harry Percy to deny any previous arrangement he may have had with Anne (*Wolf Hall* 377-379) while Henry executes a virtually complete erasure of the history of Anne Boleyn from the British realm after her execution (Loades, *The Boleyns* 164). Mantel's strategies of retelling myths, but situating the retelling close to Anne's first appearance at court, encourages a comparison of the mythological figure of Albina—the eldest of “thirty-three princesses” (*Wolf Hall* 65) from Greece who landed on an island “home only to demons” (*Wolf Hall* 65)—to Anne as examples of matrilineal origin; the former represents the origin of England while the latter represents the origin of Henry's split from Rome.

Many British foundational myths rely on the post-1066 history commissioned by the Norman conquerors, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Geoffrey begins with Brutus colonizing an island named Albion, defeating the race of giants that were its sole inhabitants, and naming the island for himself: Britain. He and his men colonized the island, erecting structures in which they could live and harvesting the food they found on the island. Geoffrey is also responsible for the legend of King Arthur, a powerful myth used by King Henry VII to ensure his first-born son's place on the throne and invoked by Henry VIII and his courtiers through their practice of the ideals of courtly love and knightly honor through jousting. The Arthur legend also appears in Gregory Cromwell's hands, “*Le Morte d'Arthur* . . . the new edition” (*Wolf Hall* 221). Cromwell's mockery of these myths aligns his character with Reason, privileged by humanists like Thomas More and the intellectual force that supplanted medieval romantics. In order to understand the link between Albina and Anne, I will examine Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* and the anonymous prologue that introduces Albina into the tale in an effort to understand why Wolsey found its message so powerful.

As Wolsey tells Cromwell, “you must go back” (94) to the creation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* (ca. 1136-1138), which “enjoyed enormous popularity, reaching libraries all over western Europe” (Crick). The myths found in this chronicle were understood throughout the middle ages, well into the sixteenth century, as true history (Drukker). After Geoffrey, other chroniclers would rely on *Historia* to fashion their own chronicles, usually beginning with the Brutus myth; collectively this “vast array of French, Middle English and Latin re-workings that followed Geoffrey of Monmouth’s account” (Wogan-Browne 301) has come to be known as the *Prose Brut* (Biggs) or simply *Brut*. The versions created at the beginning of the fourteenth century, composed in the “French of England” (Wogan-Browne 301), influenced greatly both clerical and lay audiences and established “*Brut*” as an invocation of “the whole identity and history of Britain and the changing successions of peoples and lineages in it” (Wogan-Browne 301-302). One such version can be found in the Auchinleck Manuscript (ca. 1330-1340), held in the National Library of Scotland. What makes this chronicle unique from the earlier texts is that it includes a prologue about the naming of Albion by Albin or Albina and its form is rhyming, rather than prose as in the original *Brut*, hence its name: *Riming Chronicle*. Its prologue is similar to Mantel’s retelling:

[A]n unnamed, militarily victorious king of Greece had twenty fair daughters whom he marries to various men of renown. . . . Incensed at the strictness of her husband, the eldest daughter, Albin, convenes her sisters and announces that he has ‘betreyd’ her by not allowing her to speak. . . . Her sisters confide similar complaints and agree that their husbands are unworthy to be married to women of so high a lineage of themselves. Albin declares that they will hide knives under their pillows and, on an appointed night, stab their spouses as they sleep; they will then hide the corpses ‘in a foule diche.’ (Cohen, *Tradition of the Giant* 177)

The history found within this “Anonymous Riming Chronicle” is “more fully told elsewhere” (Cohen 176), accounting for what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen calls “the intense inattention which the poem has attracted” (176) at the time he wrote, first, his dissertation (1992) and, then, his monograph (1999). Cohen reveals that the giant is an archetype that appears not only in European folktales and histories, but also in the Bible. The archetype of the giant within, especially, Anglo-Saxon culture served to unify a society—i.e. Anglo-Saxon Britain—against outside threats to their “integrity and self-definition, the hybrid body of the monster became a communal form for expressing anxieties about the limits and fragility of identity” (*Of Giants* xvii). But the giant also acted as a foundational trope for medieval societies: “from his body, the earth is fashioned and the world comes into being” (*Of Giants* xvii).

There are other manuscripts that diverge from the Auchinleck manuscript’s story. For example, the daughters are from the king of Syria, they number thirty-three, the king is unhappy with them because their husbands complain of their shrewishness, the murders are committed because the youngest daughter does not tell the king, and instead of mating with the devil, the sisters mate with an incubus. The physical size of the sisters increases because of the plentiful food they find on Albion. Of the seventeen extant manuscripts that narrate the Albina story, fifteen include the tale “abridged and appended as a prologue to the French prose *Brute Chronicle*” (180). Yet another version of this myth, *Des Grantz Geanz*, takes the story from yet another manuscript (MS BM Cotton Cleopatra D.ix), dating from 1333 or 1334. The *Geanz* deviates from the other copies because it goes into detail about the character of the giants, “stress[ing] their proud and quarrelsome nature” (Brereton qtd. in Cohen, *Tradition of the Giant* 181). The daughters, thirty in this version, are “slightly less despicable” (181) because enough narrative is devoted to their hard work on the open sea, earning “them a small measure of sympathy, and Albin’s spunk is not always synonymous with gender transgression” (181-82). The author of the

Geanz clearly considers giants “symbols of sexual violation” (182) and so the author aligns the procreation of these giants—the progeny of Albina and her sisters—with the “strongest taboo: the male first generation begets children upon their own mothers, the thirty Greek sisters. A cycle of historical repetition through incest is then set into motion” (182-83).

Mantel’s version incorporates various components of each of these Albin/Albina variants: her princesses number thirty-three, they come from Greece, as recorded in the Auchinleck, they are “killers” (65), “cast adrift in a rudderless ship” (65), and arrive on an island they name “Albion”, in favor of the eldest sister. Mantel leaves out the Auchinleck’s version of the princesses “forag[ing] for food in the wilderness and, like parodic Amazons or Diana figures” (Cohen, *Tradition of the Giant* 178) until the “devil appears and copulates with them” (178). Cohen argues that the princesses’ indulgence of their appetite for meat fuels their desire for men while making them realize “the inadequacy of Albin’s dream of a self-sufficient matriarchy” (Cohen 178). Mantel collapses these plot points, making a swift progress from hungry princesses to princesses “avid for male flesh” (65) and mating with demons (65). Neither does Mantel make use of the *Geanz* version’s emphasis on the giants born of the princesses as “symbols of sexual violation” (Cohen 182) as the precursor to mating with their mothers. Although there is incest reported in the first novel at Wolf Hall, the home of the Seymours, the Auchinleck version makes no mention of it. Like Mantel, the Auchinleck version gives a space of eight hundred years between Albina’s arrival and the arrival of Brutus and his Trojans. Mantel describes it this way:

The great-grandson of Aeneas, Brutus was born in Italy; his mother died in giving birth to him, and his father, by accident, he killed with an arrow. He fled his birthplace and became leader of a band of men who had been slaves in Troy. Together they embarked on a voyage north, and the vagaries of wind and tide drove them to Albina’s coast, as the sisters had been driving before. When they landed they were forced to do battle with the

giants, led by Gogmagog. The giants were defeated and their leader thrown into the sea.

(*Wolf Hall* 65-66)

The myth of Brutus, then, is about killing off the inhabitants of an island who look differently than their conquerors in order to establish a new civilization based on the model of an older, familiar one—Brutus called his city “New Troy” (Cohen, *Of Giants* 31).

Just as Jezebel’s story was embellished to justify the disappearance of northern Israel, the archetype of the giant was used again in the Bible “to justify the Israelite colonization of Canaan” (Cohen, *Tradition of the Giant* 163). This archetype was again used in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, interpreted by Horace as a political allegory (Cohen 163). Consequently, Cohen argues that both Geoffrey’s chronicle and the Albina story are examples of how myths are “reshaped into national histories” (161) that make use of the archetype of the giant as “part of a literary call to expansionism, and an aid to the promulgation of nationalism” (161). As Mantel so succinctly puts it at the end of her re-telling of the Brutus myth, “[w]hichever way you look at it, it all begins in slaughter” (*Wolf Hall* 66).

In a more recent examination of a version of the Albina prologue, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne examines a case in which Albina’s tale was invoked by an English noblewoman during the Middle Ages as a means of arguing for the purposes of “dynastic creation and maintenance” (298). In “Mother or Stepmother to History? Joan de Mohun and her Chronicle”, Wogan-Browne examines the recent publication of an extant fourteenth-century Chronicle, edited by Dr. John Spence. Because she had no sons, nor any male relatives to ensure the continuation of the Mohun name, Joan sought to promote her daughters genealogy in the face of the “increasingly shaky hold the Mohuns had on their property, which was repeatedly mortgaged by this financially declining family” (310). The *Mohun Chronicle* contains the only Albina version that “specif[ies] the site of the [Greek princesses’] landfall” (308): Dartmouth and Southampton, the

“two major medieval ports of the south west coast” (308). Just up the river from Dartmouth is Totnes, “site of Brutus’s landfall in Britain. Dunster is equidistant from both these south coast ports” (308). Consequently, Wogan-Browne argues a vision for Joan’s chronicle:

Joan de Mohun’s vision for her chronicle may have involved affirming, through the representation of their place and topography in the great founding history of the *Brut*, that the Mohuns belonged by ancient right at the heart of the elite (312)

Using this strategy, Joan establishes a “properly ancient past of female foundresses” (312) for her daughters, especially Elizabeth de Mohun, who had just married William Montagu, the second Earl of Salisbury (1349). The Albina section of the *Mohun Chronicle* thus becomes a “political tool” (312), “turning to the past to affirm present prestige and to try to build a future” (312).

Wogan-Browne identifies this practice as making use of “family texts” (297) as part of that family’s agency and “in particular of the political imagination of its women” (297), a practice “increasingly recognized by scholars of medieval history and literature” (297). The *Wigmore Chronicle* is a similar, contemporary example of women using “family texts” in their agency to “construc[t] and kee[p] memory” (298); the author instructs on the responsibilities of females to record family history:

Failure to listen and to commit to memory the noteworthy and beneficial deeds of antiquity is *the stepmother and destroyer of virtues* and the understanding of them rooted in the memory of the wise together with the following of their example is *the mother and nurturer of good customs*. (qtd. in Wogan-Browne 297).

Wogan-Browne’s interpretation of Joan’s use of her family’s history in an attempt to increase its “present prestige” and prepare for its future could also be applied to Mantel’s project of reclaiming the legacy of Thomas Cromwell. Mantel uses her “political imagination” and the history of a member of her class—the working class—who became a major power broker in the

early Tudor era to increase the “present prestige” of the working class. In the case of Anne Boleyn, Mantel does not necessarily seek to increase the “present prestige” of British women through Anne’s history so much as critique both Anne’s patriarchal society and her own for their manipulation and exploitation of women. Mantel’s “political imagination” draws our attention to the similarities between Anne and Cromwell, illuminating the shift that took place as society moved from its medieval roots to a Renaissance: the power that women could appropriate under the medieval order disappeared with the ascent of humanism and capitalism, further silencing whatever voice women had had in public (Kelly-Gadol 177).

The foregoing analysis of the originary myths of England has illuminated how Mantel establishes a link between Albina and Anne Boleyn. Albina protests that her strict husband has betrayed her “by not allowing her to speak” (Cohen 177), so she punishes him. As was discussed earlier, unlike other women of the early Tudor era, Anne was not demure and silent, but rather outspoken and intelligent. It has also been established—both in the novel and in history—that Anne and Henry had verbal battles. Given Henry’s choice for his third wife—the demure and silent Jane Seymour—it is not unlikely that he may have directed Anne to act more demurely, to be silent. According to her trial, Anne had betrayed Henry with at least four men, linking her to Albina and her sisters’ sexual promiscuity. Finally, the charge of incest, with her brother George, brought against Anne serves as another link to Albina through this “strongest taboo” (Cohen, *Tradition of the Giant* 182).

5.4.3 Anne Boleyn and the Myth of the Witch

Mantel invokes the archetypal image of the witch in both novels, beginning as a mere slight against an ambitious woman, escalating to an epithet towards an unwanted queen. She uses the label as well in an editorial she wrote for *The Guardian* (“witch, bitch, temptress”), once again drawing attention to how women are subjected to patriarchal names devised to keep

outspoken, intelligent women in their place (Beard). Through her familiarity with Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Mantel knew that, with the epithet "witch" in early Tudor England, came the association with the devil and devil-worship; witchcraft became another form of heresy that could be used against women.

Further strengthening the connection between Anne Boleyn and Albina in Mantel's novel are the shifts in late-medieval society's attitudes toward witchcraft and incest. In Thomas's *Decline of Magic*, a book highly praised by Mantel ("Magic"), Thomas explains about a shift in attitudes toward witchcraft in Europe and England leading up to Henry's reign:

This [new element... added to the European concept of witchcraft] was the notion that the witch owed her powers to having made a deliberate pact with the Devil. . . . the essence of witchcraft was not the damage it did to other persons, but its heretical character—devil-worship. Witchcraft had become Christian heresy, the greatest of all sins. (Thomas 521)

Albina's "pact with the Devil" is through the demons with whom she and her sisters copulate. In Mantel's novel, it is Mary Tudor who establishes Anne's "pact with the Devil" when she spurns Anne's efforts to establish a motherly relationship with her after Katherine's death. Mary considers any association with Anne on her part would "degrade herself. She would not hold hands with someone who has shaken paws with the devil" (*Bring Up the Bodies* 151). Another similarity between the myths of Albina and Anne involve incest, the consequences of which, it was believed in Tudor England, came in the forms of "ill-health and monstrous births" (Thomas 125). Thus, the consequence of Albina and her sisters' incest with their demon children is a race of giants; the consequence of Anne's incest with her brother George, according to those who believe the tale, is a malformed, stillborn child (Bordo, *Creation* 92; Mantel "Queen for a Day").

Whereas Renaissance humanists have been credited as being strong promoters of a rational society based on the principles first debated by Classical philosophers—an ideology

seemingly at odds with myths and witches—their prolific writings embracing classical ideology meant an achievement of “a veritable ‘renaissance’ of the outlooks and practices of classical Athens, with its domestic imprisonment of citizen wives” (Kelly-Gadol 177). As Joan Kelly-Gadol argues, this shift from Medieval to Humanist attitudes about a woman’s place in society and her sexual role—especially as outlined by Castiglione in *The Courtier*—in that society stripped women of whatever power they had had in Medieval society:

Renaissance ideas on love and manners, more classical than medieval, and almost exclusively a male product, expressed this new subordination of women to the interests of husbands and male-dominated kin groups and served to justify the removal of women from an ‘unladylike’ position of power and erotic independence. (Kelly-Gadol 197)

Mantel recognizes this shift in *Bring Up the Bodies* in Cromwell’s reaction to Jane Rochford’s complaint that her husband George is “always with Anne” (264). Cromwell’s initial reaction is to inform Jane that it is not a crime for George to be a “fond brother and a cold husband” (265), but on further reflection he empathizes with Jane’s frustration and unhappiness:

For what can a woman like Jane Rochford do when circumstances are against her? A widow well-provided can cut a figure in the world. A merchant’s wife can with diligence and prudence take business matters into her hands, and squirrel away a store of gold. A laboring woman ill-used by a husband can enlist robust friends, who will stand outside her house all night and bang pans, till the unshaven churl tips out in his shirt to chase them off, and they pull up his shirt and mock his member. But a young married gentlewoman has no way to help herself. She has no more power than a donkey; all she can hope for is a master who spares the whip. (265)

Coincidentally, the shift in attitudes toward women that occurred as the writings of the Christian humanists proliferated also coincided with a shift in the assessment of the “heretical character” of

witchcraft. Mantel's Anne foolishly forgets this assessment when she is arrested. On the barge approaching the Tower after her arrest at Greenwich, Anne makes one last attempt to defend herself from the charges that Cromwell, Lord Chancellor Audley, and Treasurer Fitzwilliam have laid against her. She pleads that Archbishop Cranmer be called so that he might defend her. Her own uncle, Norfolk, squashes that avenue as an option. Anne panics:

“I am the queen and if you do me harm, then a curse will come on you. No rain will fall till I am released.”

A soft groan from Fitzwilliam. The Lord Chancellor says, “Madam, it is such foolish talk of curses and spells that has brought you here.” (298)

Mantel creates a sense here of Anne feeling that she had nothing to lose, that she might actually intimidate them with the magic powers so often attributed to her. But Anne forgets that Cromwell does not believe in magic or witches or superstition.

Those who believe Anne to be a witch are either foreigners who owe their allegiance to a Catholic power broker, like George Cavendish and Eustace Chapuys, members of the aristocracy that still remember Bosworth field, like the Duke of Norfolk, the romantic young men, like Gregory Cromwell, or the man who fears Anne has made him appear a fool to all of Europe, Henry. For example, the first time Anne is accused of being a witch occurs shortly after Wolsey's eviction from York Place and Sir Henry Norris has confided in Wolsey that “the king only appears displeased, but is not really displeased . . . that this show of force is only to satisfy those enemies” (*Wolf Hall* 58) of the king and of Wolsey. As Cromwell and George Cavendish—whose biography of Wolsey influences much of what we know about Anne—speculate on who might succeed Wolsey's they also reflect on the nature of Henry's displeasure, Cavendish says:

What do you think Norris *meant*. . . . How can the king be in two minds? How can my lord cardinal be dismissed if he doesn't want to dismiss him. . . . Isn't the king master,

over all the enemies. . . . Or is it *her*? It must be. He's frightened of her, you know. She's a witch. (original emphasis 63)

Cromwell, who regularly disparages magic and witches²⁶, answers, "don't be childish" (63), but George is adamant: "she is *so* a witch: the Duke of Norfolk says she is, and he's her uncle, he should know" (63). Norfolk later confirms his belief when Anne is brought to trial, "Well, you all know she is a witch. And if she witched him into marriage . . . it was null, is my understanding" (*Bring Up the Bodies* 391). Situating Cavendish's observation to Cromwell shortly before she introduces the Albina legend strengthens the link Mantel makes between Anne and Albina. Having Anne's uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, as one of those who labels her a witch foreshadows Norfolk's later betrayal of Anne.

Another heavily relied upon source for the historical record on Anne is Eustace Chapuys (Bordo 7), the ambassador of Emperor Charles V, whose dispatches to his master significantly contribute to the mythology that surrounds Anne and "pop Tudor history" (Bordo, *Creation* 7). In both novels, Chapuys frequently interacts with Cromwell, who reflects on the veracity of Chapuys reports to Charles: "Chapuys is never stuck for something to put in dispatches. If news is scant he sends the gossip. There is the gossip he picks up, from dubious sources, and the gossip he feeds him on purpose" (*Wolf Hall* 358). When Cromwell invites Eustace Chapuys to dine at Austin Friars in the fall of 1531 Cromwell is loyal to Anne, earning him Chapuys's contempt:

Chapuys: You advise her, Lady Anne?

Cromwell: I look over accounts. It is not much to do, for a dear friend.

²⁶ For example, when Wolsey alludes to the myths of origin that "go back before Albion" (*Wolf Hall* 94), to the triumph of Edward Plantagenet who saw "three suns r[i]se in the sky" (95) as a portent for his victory, and to Edward's marriage to a woman who "claimed descent from the serpent woman, Melusine"(96), Cromwell asks him, "And the Boleyns? I thought they were merchants, but should I have known they had serpent fangs, or wings"(97).

Chapuys laughs merrily. “A friend! She is a witch, you know? She has put the king under an enchantment, so he risks everything—to be cast out of Christendom, to be damned. . . . I have seen him under her eye, his wits scattered and fleeing, his soul turning and twisting like a hare under the eye of a hawk” (323).

Chapuys then suggests that Anne has also enchanted Cromwell, warning him to “Break the enchantment, *mon cher ami*. You will not regret it” (323). But the next time Chapuys invokes the witch in their conversation, Cromwell is no longer loyal to Anne. Katherine has died and Anne has lost her third child, when Cromwell meets with Chapuys, who reveals to Cromwell that he hears “the king tal[k] of witchcraft. . . . He says that he was seduced into the marriage by certain charms and false practices. . . . If this is so, if he entered into the match in a state of entrancement, then he might find he is not married at all, and free to take a new wife” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 202).

In order to represent the widespread belief that Anne Boleyn was a witch, Mantel has a group of English working-class children and a youth from the streets of Calais indicate their beliefs to Cromwell. When Cromwell makes his first visit to Anne after she has moved into Wolsey’s former residence, York Place, he observes some children bringing fresh rushes to the place and “gives each of them a coin” (198). The children stop their labour to say, “So, you are going to the evil lady. She has bewitched the king, you know? Do you have a medal or a relic, master, to protect you” (198). Cromwell tells the children that he had had a medal but lost it, referring not only to the closing of the first chapter when young Cromwell left England to become a mercenary soldier but also Cromwell’s rejection of Catholicism. When he is in Calais with Henry and Anne, Cromwell acquires a youth of the streets, Christophe, who also links Anne to the devil: “I was told as a child about diabolists in England. There is a witch in every street. Practically” (*Bodies* 161). This observation is part of a reflection that Cromwell has after a series

of events involving Anne and Henry have him questioning “what else [he has] always believed, believed without foundation” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 160). As an epiphany, this passage acts as a turning point for Cromwell, suggesting to him a path to bring down Queen Anne.

Gregory Cromwell acts as a Romantic foil to his rational father because, whereas Rafe Sadler and Thomas Wrisothesley try to emulate Cromwell, Gregory reveres Arthurian legend (see above) but is unable to impress his tutors with any deeper wisdom. Mantel further emphasizes their ideological differences when Cromwell encounters Gregory, after his meeting with the king and Cranmer over the loss of Anne’s child, who tells him stories about the queen’s dark practices, that she is “toasting cobnuts” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 191-192)—known to us as hazelnuts and associated with the occult (MacKillop)—over a fire in her chamber with the intention of “mak[ing] poisoned sweetmeats for the Lady Mary” (192), but informs the king the cobnuts are for the “poor women who stand at the gate and call out their greetings to me” (*Bring Up the Bodies* 192). Cromwell asks Gregory how such a thing could have happened if Anne is at Greenwich and Henry at Whitehall:

No matter. . . . In France witches can fly, latten pan and cobnuts and all. And that is where she learned it. In truth the whole Boleyn affinity are become witches, to witch up a boy for her, for the king fears he can give her none” (192).

Henry, who fears he has been made the laughing stock of Europe over his affair with Anne, seeks to account for his actions in her regard, telling Cromwell that he was “dishonestly led into this marriage” (*Bodies* 184), adding to Cranmer:

I was not in my clear mind then. Not as I am now. . . . It seems to me I was seduced . . . that is to say, I was practiced upon, perhaps by charms, perhaps by spells. Women do use such things. And if that were so, then the marriage would be null, would it not. (184)

Whereas Henry's claim, in Mantel's retelling, seems like a fiction created to allow a desperate man his escape from an unwanted marriage, Cromwell reacts to his king's fiction by applying his new epiphany—"what else [he has] always believed, believed without foundation" (160)—to Anne's reputation. In other words, instead of the pious, intelligent strategist image of Anne that Cromwell promotes in *Wolf Hall*, her image becomes that of a manipulative seductress, bent on the destruction of her husband.

In the second chapter, we saw that the *Malleus Maleficarum* states: "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable" (qtd. in Garry and El-Shamy 166). By accusing Anne of bewitching him, something that occurs when "someone with magic power enchants or transforms a person" (Garry and El-Shamy 166), Henry alludes to this carnal lust and to the negative effect usually associated with bewitching. The repetition of the witch epithet to Cromwell, despite his disbelief in magic, suggests an hypothesis on Mantel's part: Cromwell, who grew into a man on the continent and whose close ties to the markets of the continent suggest he would have familiarity with the *Malleus Maleficarum*, received Henry's suggestion that Anne bewitched him knowing the contemporary association of witches with carnal lust. As discussed above, the Albina originary myth confirms that witches, who mate with demons, also commit incest, giving Cromwell the inspiration to turn Jane Rochford's complaint that her husband is always with Anne into a carnal story of incest.

Although witchcraft was not part of the charges brought against Anne, adultery was. In the French court, where she would have learned the medieval practice of courtly love, Anne also embraced the gospel, something she was known to have brought back with her to England. Mantel's novels seem to suggest that, if we are to believe that Anne was pious and had learned from her sister's experiences to avoid male exploitation of her body, then Cromwell's efforts to

bring the queen down attacked what others had “always believed” by attacking the foundation of what they had believed: Anne’s virtue. Ironically, since many had “always believed” that Anne was a witch, his careful construction of the case built on her witch-like attribute of carnal lust, Cromwell knew that charges of multiple adulteries against Anne would encounter little resistance.

5.5 National Matriarch

In his recent examination of Anne Boleyn’s family, David Loades reminds us in his preface that, had Anne not given birth to Elizabeth and “if the accidents of mortality had not brought Anne’s daughter to the throne” (*The Boleyns* 7), the Boleyns’ political legacy would have languished “among the wreckage of Tudor politics” (7). But they did not languish there, instead experiencing a rebirth in the last half of the sixteenth century:

Although not a Boleyn by name, Elizabeth was very much a Boleyn in her behavior, and particularly her sexuality. She reigned in the way which no king could have done, and left a dazzling image to posterity. (7)

Ironically, Elizabeth’s sex at the time of her birth was considered “a set back for the whole [Boleyn] clan” (*The Boleyns* 108); that changed when she came to the throne in 1558. The Boleyn bloodlines also survived in Mary Boleyn’s children, Henry Carey and Catherine Carey Knollys (Loades 58). Whereas Elizabeth never spoke of Anne (Loades, *The Boleyns* 201), “she promoted her Carey relations” (201); Henry Carey, who “was treated as a royal kindred almost from the start” (177), became one of Elizabeth’s most trusted councilors, while Katherine “evidently maintained a close friendship—one probably begun in childhood—with Princess Elizabeth, who sent her a farewell letter signed *cor rotto* (‘broken heart’) when she and her husband went abroad” (Varlow) during Queen Mary’s Catholic reign. Loades argues that Elizabeth “had her mother’s genes, and they included not only her deviousness and acute political intelligence, but also her sexuality” (101). Elizabeth invoked that sexuality at the “war games of

the tilt and the tournament” (211), participating fully as the “Queen of Fairie” (111), expecting “every courtier to wear her favour in the lists” (211). In other words, she invoked the “tropes of courtly love” (211) at her court in the same way that her mother had done in the face of Christian humanism and its opposition to such practices. Although her strategies differed from Elizabeth’s because of her subjective status to the king, Anne nevertheless “put her sexuality to the service of her political agenda” (*The Boleyns* 235) and, Loades argues, she proved to be a “remarkable politician” (237). Loades compares Anne’s “fatal flirtation with Henry Norris” (235) to Elizabeth’s risky flirtation with Robert Dudley as examples of how “[c]ontemporary culture made the sexual peccadillos of women more important than those of men, because a woman’s honour was bound up with her chastity in a way which was not true of men” (236). Although Mantel argues that Anne realized too late the danger she was in because of the courtly-love games she played and “tried to limit the damage” (Mantel “witch, bitch”) by espousing piety and acting as a patron to scholars, she could not reverse the negative opinion her behaviour had generated. As for Elizabeth’s dangerous flirtation, Loades argues that she “got a grip on herself in time” (235), put aside Dudley, and turned her own chastity into a “symbol for the inviolable sovereignty of her realm” (236), the “Virgin Queen”. Given these links of Anne with Elizabeth and despite the secondary role Anne takes in Mantel’s Cromwell novels, I do not believe Mantel wants readers to consider her role—in history or in the novel—as that of a minor character or simply a femme fatale, but rather as a complex woman whose ambition ultimately changed British history. Why then make the authorial decision to tell this story from the point of view of a man from the working class?

In the wake of the success of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, *New Statesman* journalist Sophie Elmhirst interviewed Hilary Mantel but also sought out the opinion of critically

and commercially successful (Ellam) British author Sarah Waters on Mantel's seemingly meteoric rise in critical acclaim and popularity:

Well, it's tempting to be cynical about it and note that, after a respectable but underappreciated career of writing mainly about women, she was finally recognized as a literary heavyweight once she produced a novel that was all about men. . . . Maybe it's more simple—maybe it's just that, with *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Mantel has hit her stride as a novelist; that her writing, now is too good for anyone to ignore.

(“Unquiet Mind”)

Waters's cynicism may have some truth to it; Mantel's first book, *A Place of Greater Safety*, was virtually all told from male points of view, but she failed to find a publisher for it until almost twenty years after she wrote it. Like *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, *A Place of Greater Safety* is a large novel that examines an important historical revolution; unlike the Cromwell novels it follows the points of view of not one but three historical characters at the heart of that revolution: Camille Desmoulins, George Danton, and Maximilien Robespierre. Like the main characters in *Wolf Hall*, Desmoulins, Danton, and Robespierre are tragic figures, but, instead of creating a trilogy, Mantel combined a similar tragic arc—the death of two opponents of the main tragic figure, Robespierre²⁷—in which Desmoulins and Danton face the executioner at the end of the novel. Unlike the Cromwell trilogy, assuming Mantel follows through with some of her hints at what the last novel will be like, Robespierre does not die at the end of *A Place of Greater Safety*, but rather, “in Greek-drama style, Mantel keeps most of the actual violence and slaughter offstage” (Hitchens, “*The Man Who Made England*” 148). Mantel has only one other novel, *The Giant O'Brien*, which presents predominantly male points of view. Consequently, Mantel's

²⁷ My thanks to Prof. Pamela McCallum for bringing to my attention the similarities between Robespierre and Cromwell.

depiction of Anne Boleyn, which may appear on the surface as that of “a predatory calculator, brittle, anxious, and cold” (Bordo, *Creation of Anne Boleyn* 212), is much more complicated than that. Significantly, until the emergence of *Wolf Hall*, Mantel’s historical fiction “[d]id] not fit either mainstream or feminist accounts of contemporary fiction in immediately obvious ways” (Wallace 211). Addressing further this issue of Mantel’s ways being less than obvious is Mantel’s agent, Bill Hamilton, who alludes to the complexity in her writing in Elmhirst’s interview:

Hamilton is sure that once people have caught up with [*Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*], once they’ve twigged that every sentence has a parallel text, once people reread them and grasp the extent of her achievement, then she will be acknowledged as a “first-rate writer who will be read and studied for ever, I think”. (“Unquiet Mind”)

Consider also that, throughout all of her novels, Mantel has “never gone for the sweet people, and is no stranger to dark purposes” (Atwood) and has been called the “master of ugliness in general” (Acocella). The themes in her other novels include isolation, madness, murder, revenge, dark humor, and the dark side of the metaphysical world—a world always lurking in her novels. Given the foregoing, I argue that Mantel’s Anne Boleyn, the Anne of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, is a national matriarchal figure for her contribution to England’s rejection of the power of Rome and for giving birth to one of its most revered monarchs. Anne is the counterpoint to Cromwell as national patriarchal figure, the man responsible for the legal statutes behind the separation of England from Rome and the modern foundations of Parliament.

Mantel does more than just suggest Anne’s role as a national matriarch; she delves into England’s matrilineal genealogy. For that, she must go far back into history, as Wolsey tells Cromwell:

You can't know Albion, he says, unless you can go back before Albion was thought of.

You must go back before Caesar's legions, to the days when the bones of giant animals and men lay on the ground where one day London would be built. (*Wolf Hall* 94)

For Wolsey, the history begins with Brutus and his men defeating the giants, followed by the legends of King Arthur, who married “women who came out of the sea or hatched out of eggs, women with scales and fins and feathers” (94), Henry V, who married a French princess (also named Katherine) whose “father was insane” (94). Their child, Henry VI, “ruled an England dark as winter, cold, barren, calamitous” (94). Wolsey then slows down the pace of his narrative to savour the successes of Edward, duke of York, who saw “three suns r[i]se in the sky” (95) as a portent for his victory. One of his supporters, Richard Neville, the earl of Warwick, saw Edward's impulsive marriage as a subversion of that victory.

Like Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth Woodville's marriage to Edward IV, of the house of York, was made without “foreign advantage” (*Wolf Hall* 95). She was a widow of a knight who fought for the Lancastrians—in opposition to the Yorkists—and, according to Wolsey, “claimed descent from the serpent woman, Melusine” (96). In fact, Elizabeth's mother, Jaquetta, who “belonged to the house of Luxembourg, one of the greatest European families that included Holy Roman emperors” (Hicks), first married Henry V's brother before making her second marriage to Richard Woodville, a mere knight. Elizabeth also had two marriages: one to Sir John Grey that produced two sons and one to Edward IV that produced ten children, including Henry VII's wife Elizabeth and the princes who died in the Tower. Mantel's invocation of Melusine is significant; she was a mythological figure from a fourteenth-century French folktale (Foubister), a “fairy Queen” (Foubister), credited for having mothered the King of Cyprus, the King of Armenia, the King of Bohemia, the Duke of Luxembourg, and the Lord of Lusignan (Foubister). This “parallel text” sheds light on the cryptic story Wolsey gives for Melusine:

Melusine faked her life as an ordinary princess, a mortal, but one day her husband saw her naked and glimpsed her serpent's tail. As she slid from his grip she predicted that her children would found a dynasty that would reign for ever: power with no limit, guaranteed by the devil. (96)

Jacquetta's legacy of witchcraft—"her serpent's tail"—stems from the charges brought against her in 1470 (Pascual) in which it was claimed:

[S]he had fashioned images of lead representing Warwick, the king, and the queen, for use in witchcraft and sorcery. The implication was that Jaquetta had used magical powers to enchant Edward IV into marriage, a claim revived in 1483 by Richard, duke of Gloucester, to support his usurpation of the throne by invalidating Edward's marriage. (Pascual)

These charges were levied by an esquire of Richard Neville's, who resented Jaquetta and the Woodvilles' rise to power (Pascual). Unlike the witchcraft charges that circulated around Anne's case, the charges against Jaquetta were heard "in the great council" (Pascual).

As for Elizabeth Woodville's romance with Edward IV, it is Sir Thomas More—also the biographer of Richard III, Edward's younger brother—who wrote about their meeting. Elizabeth had to petition Edward for the estate of her late husband because her mother-in-law would not release it to her. Edward is said to have tried to have sexual relations with Elizabeth who fought him off with a knife, not willing to surrender her virtue to him. Edward subsequently married her in a secret ceremony. After Edward's death, the Duke of Gloucester (later Richard III) declared Elizabeth Woodville's marriage invalid because Edward had been previously contracted to a French aristocrat; Woodville's children were consequently rendered illegitimate, just like Anne's Elizabeth. This, then, is the matrilineal genealogy of England that Mantel alludes to, the "parallel text" of the "Occult History of Britain" and of Anne's meteoric rise to and fall from power. The

similarities to Anne's story are remarkable. Just as Anne's marriage to Henry would bear a female whose reign would be recalled as a Golden Age, Elizabeth's marriage to Edward would bear a female who would have a son whose reign would be recalled for its infamy.

In an interview that reveals Mantel's fascination with the story of—to paraphrase Christopher Hitchens's book review of *Wolf Hall* (Hitchens, "*The Men Who Made England*")—*The Women Who Made England*, she says, "No wives, no story" ("Dead are Real"); Mantel might have also added, "No Anne, no Reformation," "No Anne, no Elizabeth," "No Elizabeth, no defeat of the Spanish Armada." The daughter Anne Boleyn bore Henry VIII became one of England's most revered monarch's, her reign often considered a Golden Age, in part because of the flowering of English literature under her rule. Loades argues that, "[w]ithin a few months of coming to the throne [Elizabeth] had . . . accepted an image and a vision of England's destiny created by a small but vociferous group of gentry and divines" (*Politics and Nation* 5). This image and vision that Elizabeth managed during her reign required that she "retain control over the dynamic politics which this vision had created" (Loades, *Politics and Nation* 5). Elizabeth's reign, as summarized by Loades, recalls Gorski's theory of how the presence of nationalism in a nation is composed of circulating discourses, the agitation of social, political, or ideological groups, parties organized around national goals, and a regime in control and able to respond to internal and external threats to the nation. But what does the idea of nation mean to Mantel? More importantly, who, according to Mantel, forms part of the nation?

In an anthology edited by Zachary Leader, the contributors to which are some of the best-known names in British literature, Leader attempts to create a profile on the status of British fiction at the turn of the twenty-first century. Of the seventeen contributors, only six are female; one of those is Hilary Mantel. In her essay, Mantel explores ideas of her national identity:

As I grew up I came to see that Englishness was white, male, southern, Protestant, and middle class. I was a woman, a Catholic, a northerner, of Irish descent. . . . All of these markers—descent, religion, region, accent—are quickly perceived and decoded by those who possess Englishness, and to this day they are used to *exclude*. (“No Passes” 96)

Although the rest of the essay explores ideas of Englishness, Irishness, and Britishness, Mantel’s feelings of exclusion led her to believe that she must “sell off aspects of [her] identity” (96) in order to be accepted. When she began to write her first book—begun in 1974—she identified herself as a “European writer” (97). It wasn’t until she traveled to Botswana with her husband in 1977 that she came to accept an English identity, she says, “because I was told I was English” (98) by the expatriate community in which she found herself: “When you go abroad, a caricatured version of your nationality is waiting for you, the product of other people’s myths” (98).

Given Mantel’s establishment of an English matrilineal genealogy in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, evidenced by her allusions to the myth Albina, the allusion to the perversion of Jacquetta’s role in Elizabeth Woodville’s marriage to Edward IV, and the carefully constructed male-oriented representation of Anne Boleyn, mother of Elizabeth I, I interpret Mantel’s novel as accomplishing more than a rehabilitation of Thomas Cromwell, more than establishing him at the centre of a revolution in government as first suggested by Sir Geoffrey Elton. *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* reminds us of the critical role Anne Boleyn played in England’s Reformation and subsequent ascendance as a sovereign nation.

5.6 Conclusion

Anne Boleyn, Mantel says, is “one of the most striking female presences in English history” (Mantel, "Queen") and we obsess about her rise and fall:

[H]er character has archetypal force. The story is of its time and place, but also universal. She is the young fertile beauty who displaces the menopausal wife. She is the mistress whose calculating methods beguile the married man; but in time he sees through her tricks and turns against her. (Mantel, "Queen")

Yet Anne's "striking female presenc[e]" is conspicuously missing from the iconic, verifiable portraiture of the era: Holbein's *Portrait of Sir Thomas More*, his various portraits of Henry VIII, his *Portrait of Thomas Cromwell*, and his cryptic portrait of two French dignitaries known as *The Ambassadors*. Holbein even painted Cromwell's protégée, Ralph Sadler (Holbein, *Portrait of a Man [Sir Ralph Sadler]*), yet there is no painting of Anne for which all critics can agree is a true likeness. Anne's image, like her persona, is an enigma. In other historical novels that reclaim female history, images have played a critical part. For example, Tracy Chevalier reimagines the life of a subject of a painting by Johannes Vermeer in *Girl with a Pearl Earring* and a tapestry created in a Medieval workshop in *The Lady and the Unicorn: A Novel*; Stephanie Cowell reimagines the life Claude Monet and his muse, wife, and subject, Camille in *Claude & Camille*; and Vanora Bennett has claimed one of Holbein's sketches for her protagonist, Margaret Giggs, in *Portrait of an Unknown Woman*. Yet Mantel has insisted that she will not subscribe to "maudlin feminist mythmaking" ("Dead are Real"). Instead, in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, she reminds us of the dearth of verified portraits of women of that era through her meditation on those portraits of the period in which men were identified while linking Anne through a matrilineal genealogy to other women who represent "archetypal force": Albina, Jaquetta de Luxembourg, and Elizabeth Woodville.

As a woman whose ambition—within the confines of what an early-sixteenth century woman could set as her goals—was to reach a powerful position, perhaps to promote her religious reformation agenda or perhaps for personal aggrandizement, Anne Boleyn differed only

from other ambitious courtiers by being a woman. Her father, Thomas Boleyn, was of critical importance in developing her ambition because he “was a cultivated man... [who] plainly cared about education, seeing it as the pathway to success” (Weir, *Mary Boleyn* 48), he saw to it that “at least one of his daughters [was] tutored to a high standard” (48). But early-sixteenth-century English society, still influenced by centuries of Catholic dogma, saw ambition as sinful; humility was praised. Cromwell, too, was punished for his ambition, as Mantel will explore in her final novel. Yet there is a contemporary critique in the downfall of Mantel’s ambitious Anne: “success and likeability are positively correlated for men and negatively correlated for women” (Sandberg 40) because of stereotyping: “Our stereotype of men holds that they are providers, decisive, and driven. Our stereotype of women holds that they are caregivers, sensitive, and communal” (Sandberg 40). Mantel’s third-person-point-of-view narrative is focalized through the point of view of a man—Thomas Cromwell—who aligns himself with Anne’s political agenda when his career needs rescuing because a “world where Anne can be queen is a world where Cromwell can be Cromwell” (205). When her political agenda begins to diverge from Cromwell’s, he is ready to use gossip, innuendo, even superstition, to effectively rid his master, the king, of his “a predatory calculator, brittle, anxious, and cold” queen (Bordo, *Creation of Anne Boleyn* 212). Mantel makes clear in her *Guardian* article that Anne Boleyn “is one of the most controversial women in English history; we argue over her, we pity and admire and revile her, we reinvent her in every generation. . . . Today, we are still scrapping over the how and the why of her rise and fall” (Mantel, “witch, bitch”).

If Henry began to wish himself rid of Anne because of her inability to produce a son or her interference with his political sphere of power, Thomas Cromwell provided Henry with the stories that made him distrust Anne. Suggested by the gossip that circulated about court, Henry could fall back on the foundational myths of female sinfulness that were latent in Tudor society.

Mantel has Henry go so far as to make his case against Anne a national agenda; he says, “All men should know and be warned about what women are. Their appetites are unbounded. I believe she has committed adultery with a hundred men” (*Bodies* 317). The myths of female sinfulness that underlie such sweeping statements—myths of Jezebel and of witches, of Jaquetta and Elizabeth Woodville—focus on bodily transgressions by these infamous, legendary women. Metaphorically, Mantel also depicts these Renaissance women of Henry’s court as physically trapped within the expectations their society placed on them, because “[c]ontemporary culture made the sexual peccadillos of women more important than those of men, because a woman’s honour was bound up with her chastity in a way which was not true of men” (Loades, *The Boleyns* 236). This, combined with the expected role of females (to become mothers and to give birth to heirs), meant that the government of women’s own bodies, if they submitted to society’s demands, was in the care of others. This corporeal entrapment is similar to Mantel’s own entrapment in a body that limits her movements and her ability to have children.

Mantel has a long history of suffering from endometriosis—a painful disease in which the tissue that normally lines the uterus grows outside the uterus, in the pelvic region and sometimes other parts of the body—a disease that ultimately deprived her of her own fertility. Her frustration with the predominantly male medical profession of that time is clear when, as she discusses in her memoir, her excessive vomiting compelled her to seek out her doctor who “did what you do when someone says she is vomiting: send her to a psychiatrist” (*Ghost* 163). The psychiatrist, in turn, diagnosed her symptoms as signs of “stress, caused by over-ambition” (*Ghost* 163). Eight years and many antidepressants later, Mantel lost her uterus to the disease. At the time of her hysterectomy, Mantel was twenty-seven:

[A]n old woman, all at once. I had undergone what is called a ‘surgical menopause’ or what textbooks of the time called ‘female castration.’ . . . It used to be fashionable to call

endometriosis ‘the career woman’s disease’: the implication being, there now, you callous bitch, see what you get if you put off breeding and put your own ambitions first. (*Ghost* 192).

Perhaps this experience lies behind Mantel’s sympathy with Katherine and her resentment of “the young fertile beauty who displaces the menopausal wife. . . . The mistress whose calculating methods beguile the married man; but in time he sees through her tricks and turns against her” (Mantel, “Queen”).

Finally, there is the argument for Anne Boleyn as national matriarch. If Mantel’s early interest in the early part of Henry’s reign was not only because of Cromwell but also because “No wives, no story” (“Dead are Real”), she is reaching into the importance of women in this critical moment in English history: the beginning of a Tudor dynasty that would claim its sovereignty, reject Rome’s dominance, and experience a Golden Age at its end through Elizabeth I. It is true, as Waters said, that Mantel was “finally recognized as a literary heavyweight once she produced a novel that was all about men” (“Unquiet Mind”), but *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* are not “all about men”; they are presented via a male point of view. The women are burdened with emotional, intellectual, and physical oppression—concepts with which Mantel has had acquaintance—because Mantel has “never gone for the sweet people, and is no stranger to dark purposes” (Atwood) and has been called the “master of ugliness in general” (Acocella). The limitation of women’s ambitions and the silencing of their voices by Western societal attitudes: this is Mantel’s contextual critique, her “dark purposes” readers will discover in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* if they pay attention to the man, Cromwell, “with his crown of women around him!” (Mantel, “What a man this is, with his crowd of women around him!”). Suggesting that Anne Boleyn is an important female figure in England’s—and Britain’s—rise to world power is an ambitious agenda, and one yet not taken up by critics. I consider Anne’s support of

Cromwell when his career was failing, her influence in the religious reformation that broke Rome's hold over England and Henry, and her role as mother to the future Queen Elizabeth I establishes her as that important female figure: a national matriarch. With this establishment, Mantel fulfills the feminist agenda of other "women writers to re-imagine women's history in order to recover a matrilineal genealogy which has been erased from what Austen call 'real solemn history'" (Wallace 227).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the conclusion to her exploration of the effects the work of Sir Walter Scott had on the cultural memory of the various towns, streets and public venues named after Sir Walter Scott's novel, *Waverley*, in places that were once part of the British Empire, Ann Rigney reflects on Scott's other novel, *Old Mortality*, in which the eponymous late-eighteenth-century character travels the country's graveyards to re-chisel effaced inscriptions on tombstones:

As a meta-comment, the figure of Old Mortality is also a refraction of Scott's own role in taking up the baton where the old man left off. Where the latter had kept the memory of the Covenanters alive by chiseling out their names in stone, *Old Mortality* would offer an immaterial and eminently portable memorial in the form of a book in which the events at the close of the seventeenth century are imaginatively reconstructed. (Rigney, *Afterlives*)

Rigney's metaphor of a portable monument to a certain historical time period can also be applied to Mantel's still-in-progress monument to the life of Thomas Cromwell. Whereas Scott's creation of *Old Mortality* "evok[ed] the ghosts of a traumatic conflict that was still quite resonant at the time of writing" (Rigney), Mantel's monumental achievement not only re-imagines a critical time period in the formation of England as a nation, it explores in a political allegory the "struggle between prudence and folly" ("John Skelton"), as well as the struggle between good and evil, and how each of these struggles produces good or bad rule, in much the same way as John Skelton's drama, *Magnificence* does; Mantel's allusion to this drama in her *Wolf Hall* epigraph is no coincidence. Unlike Rigney's example of *Old Mortality*, Mantel's narrative is a story that has been re-inscribed for both academic and public audiences, in various forms of media, repeatedly, over several hundred years. Consequently, while Mantel's two novels can be considered "portable monuments," they can also be considered as revisionist history, a focus on English history that comes from the working class. As such, it imbues the major players in this Tudor

drama with demotic assessments of characters heretofore either idolized or demonized. This is important, for in creating her “document of English self-knowledge” (“Dead are Real”), Mantel’s assessment of fiction’s ability to persuade is greater than her assessment of history texts to do the same. As a result, according to Mantel, she finds the people continue to ask her “Was Thomas More *really* like that? We thought he was a really nice man!” (qtd. in Bordo, “Interview with Hilary Mantel,” original emphasis). It is interesting that in her own exploration of the myths of Anne Boleyn, Susan Bordo criticizes Mantel for “paint[ing] Anne through Cromwell’s eyes as a predatory calculator, brittle anxious and cold” (*Creation of Anne Boleyn* 212) and for proposing that it was Cromwell who “played the leading hand in cooking up the ruthless plot that cost Anne her life” (212). But Bordo does appreciate Mantel’s “responsible middle ground” (230) when it comes to walking the tightrope between truth in history and truth in fiction. Bordo quotes from her interview with Mantel in her book on Anne: “But (again, for the sake of honesty) you constantly have to weaken your own case, by pointing out to people that all historical fiction is really contemporary fiction; you write out of your own time” (qtd. in Bordo, *Creation of Anne Boleyn* 231).

The epigraphs found in the beginning of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* reinforce that Mantel “write[s] out of [her] own time.” *Wolf Hall*’s epigraph is Vitruvius’s description of the “decorations” (xxiii) for tragic, comic, and satiric plays, emphasizes the tragic nature of Mantel’s character, Thomas More, as seen from a twenty-first-century perspective because “[t]ragic scenes are delineated with columns, pediments, statues and other objects suited to kings” (xxiii). The second *Wolf Hall* epigraph lists the names of the players in John Skelton’s only extant drama, a morality play entitled *Magnificence*. Skelton’s oeuvre lies “[o]n the margins of the canon” (Perkins), whose significance over the years between 1430 and 1530 has been contested by two opposing assessments: “he has been characterized as exemplifying or resisting the perceived

movement from medieval to renaissance writing” (Perkins), reinforcing the theme of the clash between medieval and renaissance attitudes. *Magnificence* is an allegory that explores the meaning of “magnificence”: “On a literal or narrative level, the character named Magnificence ceases to be prudent, invites corrupt conspirators to his court, loses his power, and struggles to regain his authority” (“John Skelton, 1460-1529”). Whereas Skelton wrote the play sometime between 1516 (“John Skelton”) and 1520 (*Wolf Hall* xxiii) to critique Wolsey and the young men Henry had invited into his court, Skelton’s drama also acts as a didactic sermon on how the path of the “Aristotelian golden mean” (Leithead) leads to a successful reign, a “political allegory about good and bad rule” (“John Skelton”). As such, the play consists of “a mix of moral debate and tragedy” (“John Skelton”) within the court of “Magnificence,” symbolically Henry VIII. These themes that Mantel highlights with her epigraph support my argument about Mantel’s call for a new assessment of More as a “corrupt conspirator[r]” (“John Singleton”) whose influence over the “prynce” (Scattergood) must be overthrown in order for the “prynce” to “regain his authority” (“John Singleton”). From Thomas Cromwell’s point of view, Anne Boleyn was also a “corrupt conspirator[r]” whose power over Henry had to be overthrown in order to “regain his authority.”

Mantel’s epigraph to *Bring Up the Bodies* does something similar: “‘Am I not a man like other men? Am I not? Am I not?’ Henry VIII to Eustace Chapuys, Imperial Ambassador” (*Bring Up the Bodies* xvii). In *Wolf Hall*, these questions are asked of Eustace Chapuys after the ambassador has pressed Henry about Katherine, suggesting she might not be past childbearing age. The irony of the king’s demands in a scene in which heirs are discussed is that, although Henry wants to be like other men who have sons, we know that the child Anne is carrying is a girl, Elizabeth. In *Bring Up the Bodies*, the epigraph reinforces Henry’s exemplarity, not as the magnificent ruler John Skelton (Henry’s tutor) had set out to fashion him, but rather as an

“intolerable ruffian, a disgrace to human nature, and a blot of blood and grease upon the History of England” (Dickens). Henry’s growing perversity undermined his reign in a way that Skelton had feared—another tragic figure. Yet Mantel uses this epigraph to remind us that people in power are susceptible to “Counterfeit Counterance, Crafty Conveyance, Cloaked Collusion, Courtly Allusion, Folly” (*Wolf Hall* xxiii).

I have explored how Mantel’s version of Cromwell’s rise to power subverts More’s saintly image, making him a figure of tragedy and a victim of his own *hubris*. I have also explored how Cromwell’s solidification of his power requires that he make a scapegoat of Anne, a vulnerable target because of her sex and her own *hubris*. Mantel thus “re-imagines” (Wallace 2) Anne as caught between the cross hairs of Cromwell’s ambition and Henry’s inconstancy. Cromwell’s own rise to power, I have emphasized, coincides with the birth of England as a nation:

This realm of England is an Empire, and so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one Supreme Head and King having the dignity and royal estate of the imperial Crown of the same, unto whom a body politic, compact of all sorts and degrees of people divided in terms and by names of Spirituality and Temporality, be bounden and owe to bear next to God a natural and humble obedience. (*Act of Appeals*, qtd. in Elton 160-161)

Writing out of her own time, Mantel revises British history, skewing it to fit the focus of the working class, raising questions about the saintly status of Thomas More just as much as she raises questions about the fate of powerful, political women in patriarchal societies. She exposes how the *hubris* of power brokers can lead them to form alliances with “corrupt conspirators” (“John Skelton”), placing at risk their authority.

With these narrative strategies, Mantel explores the “struggle between prudence and folly” (“John Skelton”), but also the struggle between good and evil, and how each of these struggles

produces good or bad rule: a true “document of English self-knowledge” (“Dead are Real”) for twenty-first century power brokers. We must wait for Mantel’s third installment in this trilogy to see, as is suggested by these first two installments, if her critique extends to power brokers who risk their authority by engaging with revenge.

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