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Kind King or Tyrannical Ruler?

An Analysis of Hilary Mantel's Henry VIII in *Wolf Hall* and *Bringing up the Bodies*

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English Literature

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by

Amanda S. Nicholson

December 2020

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Dr. Josh Reid, Chair

Dr. Judith Slagle

Dr. John Rankin

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## ABSTRACT

### Kind King or Tyrannical Ruler?

An Analysis of Hilary Mantel's Henry VIII in *Wolf Hall* and *Bringing up the Bodies*

by

Amanda S. Nicholson

Henry VIII (28 June 1491 – 28 January 1547) served as King of England from 1509 until his death in 1547. A melancholic character, Henry was known for his many marriages, his temper, his bouts of tyranny, and his break with the Catholic Church. Most authors, even those writing contemporary accounts, portray Henry as a villain. Hilary Mantel paints Henry differently. In *Wolf Hall* and *Bringing up the Bodies*, the King is as he has always been; argumentative, sardonic, and excessive. However, Mantel chooses to augment these parts of his character with some of his better traits, giving the King a softer edge that is often lost to his actions and infamy. An analysis of Mantel's writing, as compared to the historical record, sheds new light on Henry VIII and invites readers, through the joy of historical fiction, to be more open in their interpretation of the King.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	2
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
CHAPTER 2. THE HISTORICAL HENRY.....	10
The Arrival and Fall of Anne Boleyn.....	12
Subsequent Marriages.....	14
The Failing Health of King Henry .....	16
Eustace Chapuys.....	17
CHAPTER 3. <i>WOLF HALL</i> .....	20
Henry’s Temperament.....	22
Henry as a Warrior.....	24
<i>Wolf Hall’s</i> Henry.....	25
CHAPTER 4. <i>BRINGING UP THE BODIES</i> .....	26
Henry, Anne, and Jane Seymour.....	26
Henry’s Temperament.....	27
Henry as a Warrior.....	30
<i>Bringing up the Bodies</i> Henry.....	31
CHAPTER 5. CRITICISM AND THOUGHTS ON <i>WOLF HALL</i> AND <i>BRINGING UP THE BODIES</i> .....	33
CHAPTER 6. COMPARING HISTORY AND FICTION.....	35
Summary.....	35
Anne and Henry.....	36
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION.....	41
WORKS CITED.....	42
VITA.....	45

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Henry VIII (28 June 1491 – 28 January 1547) served as King of England from 1509 until his death in 1547. A melancholic character, Henry was known for his many marriages, his temper, his bouts of tyranny, and his break with the Catholic Church. Most authors, even those writing contemporary accounts, portray Henry as a villain. Historical fiction is ripe with tales of Henry's excesses. King Henry, by most accounts, was not a kind man. In 1538, Pope Paul III referred to him as a 'most cruel and abominable tyrant,' a sentiment shared by Martin Luther, Sir Walter Raleigh, and many other notable figures (Crowther 1). Athletic and charismatic in his youth, he was known for his love of food, jousting, and women. As his health declined with age, he became more tyrannical and prone to being upset. Some authors attribute the change in his personality to his failed marriages. Others attribute it to a wound suffered in a jousting accident, believed to have led to chronic pain. Tudor historian, Lucy Worsley, writes, "We posit that his jousting accident ... provides the explanation for his personality change from sporty, promising, generous young prince, to cruel, paranoid and vicious tyrant. From that date the turnover of the wives really speeds up, and people begin to talk about him in quite a new and negative way" (Pain Pathways 1). In addition to chronic pain, King Henry may have suffered from diabetes, syphilis, anxiety, and depression, all of which are known to cause mood disturbances and emotional imbalances (Pain Pathways 1).

Henry VIII's history is as diverse as it is sensational. Having married his brother's widow, Catharine of Aragon, the King was honorable in his youth. Known for making sound decisions, he enjoyed conferring with educated men on matters of politics and religion. Authors and historians believe this may have been due to his own narcissism and vanity. After Anne Boleyn arrived at court in 1527, Henry moved away from his judicious ways. Having fallen in

love with Anne, Henry began to question the validity of his marriage. The King worked to annul his union to Queen Catharine, but as Rome would not allow it, Henry formed the Anglican Church, making himself the head of the Church of England (Hume 68-70). He married Anne in 1533, five months before his divorce from Catharine was final. This greatly affected his reputation as a man and as a ruler.

Henry VIII's marriage to Anne ended with her beheading in 1536. As his jousting accident occurred in January of 1536, four months prior to Anne's trial for treason, historians diverge in their opinions. Some attribute the marked change in Henry VIII's character to chronic pain, while others believe he never fully recovered from his relationship with Anne, as he had a great passion for her. In his extant letters to Anne, Henry writes, "If it please you to do the duty of a true, loyal mistress and friend, and to give yourself body and heart to me, who have been, and will be your very loyal servant – (I promise) that not only the name will be due to you, but also to take you as my sole mistress, casting off all others than yourself out of mind and affection and to serve you and you alone" (Starkey 281). There is also substantial controversy surrounding Henry's health and descent into obesity. In later years, his decisions became more tyrannical and nonsensical. He married four more times, charging his fifth wife with treason, and had several of his close friends beheaded. While he fathered three surviving children from his six marriages, he is believed to have been impotent in the later years of his life (Pain Pathways). A man who liked to be seen as grand, as evidenced in the paintings Henry commissioned with artist Hans Holbein, this likely had a significant effect on his need to be seen as masculine and powerful (Holbein et al. 28).

Much of what is known about Henry and the Tudor court can be attributed to the writings of Eustace Chapuys. Serving as the Spanish Ambassador during the reign of Henry VIII,

Chapuys held Henry in high regard. While he did not favor Anne Boleyn, calling her a great whore and a concubine, he had a great deal of respect for the King and for Mary Tudor. He remained present at court until his health failed in 1545. While his writing is biased, as he held no love for the Queen or the administration during Anne Boleyn's reign, he wrote surviving correspondence, offering a first-hand account of life at court. Upon first meeting the King in 1529, Chapuys described him as open, smiling, welcoming, and pleasant to converse with. Chapuys writes with heavy sensationalism, offering his opinion about people and situations around court during Henry VIII's reign. While Chapuys may not have wanted to show dislike for Henry out of fear of retribution, it would be obvious in his language and tone. "On these points, a strong negative opinion on the character of the King is absent" (Mackay 120-31).

Hilary Mantel, an English author and winner of the Man Booker prize for her historical fiction, paints Henry differently in *Wolf Hall*. As the novel focuses on Thomas Cromwell, the 1st Earl of Essex and chief minister to Henry VIII, the King functions as a secondary character. Placing Henry VIII in a supporting role, rather than focusing entirely on his reign, gives Mantel the freedom to look at the King in new ways. In the *Wolf Hall* novels, the King is as he has always been; argumentative, sardonic, excessive, and a little on the mad side. However, Mantel chooses to augment these parts of his character with his better traits, giving the King a softer edge that is often lost to his actions and infamy. In her novels we see an emotional Henry, a man who is fiery, who loves writing, and who deeply wants to leave an impression on the world.

As the first two novels in the series, *Wolf Hall* and *Bringing up the Bodies*, focus on the early years of his reign, they offer the best view of the diversity of Henry's character. The first novel, *Wolf Hall*, focuses on a short period of time, cataloging Cromwell's life from 1500-1535. Cromwell arrived at Tudor Court in 1532, allowing for a view of Henry in the years prior to the



events of 1536. Mantel's portrayal of Henry as a congenial, yet driven man, aligns with the sentiments of Eustace Chapuys. As Mantel's novel is fictionalized, she takes liberties with conversation, presenting Henry VIII as a romantic, not chauvinistic, and willfully generous, instead of simply withholding and tyrannical with staff. *Wolf Hall* allows for more of a view of everyday life, while being historically based, showing conversations between people that are often dismissed in favor of sensationalism surrounding the King and Queen. Mantel proves her strength in these moments, giving readers an uncommon view of Henry. *Bringing up the Bodies*, focusing more on the period surrounding Anne's beheading, rounds out her portrayal of the King. Covering a time where Henry was going through a great deal of change, the early 1530s through 1536, we see a stronger, more tyrannical king begin to emerge. While still a well-developed character, readers are given a more thorough view of Henry and Anne and how their interests converged and contradicted.

As historical fiction leaves room for interpretation while providing background information about situations and events, my goal with this thesis is to compare Hilary Mantel's portrayal of Henry VIII to the historical record. Using *Inside the Tudor Court*, the writings of Eustace Chapuys, as a strong focal point for comparison, I plan to compare an insider's account of Henry with the way Mantel writes Henry in the *Wolf Hall* novels. Further, I will illustrate the general perception of Henry over time, integrating historical facts about his health, marriages, and general behavior found in journal articles, Henry's love letters to Anne, and the writings of several historians specializing in Tudor England. Finally, I will compare Mantel's portrayal of Henry with the way he is portrayed by Phillipa Gregory, who has drawn him in a less than favorable light, supporting the general view of Henry as tyrannical. As a collective whole, by comparing and contrasting Mantel's Henry with other sources, a more thorough picture of Henry

appears, one that is a more emotional view of Henry, replete with sonnets and introspection.

With it, an invitation to explore historical fiction as a means to revisit historical figures and see what can be gleaned from new interpretations emerges.

## CHAPTER 2. THE HISTORICAL HENRY

Henry VIII served as King of England from 1509 to 1547. During that time and in the years that followed, much has been written about the King. A force of a man, he is often written as villainous and as a larger-than-life figure. As quoted in “The Personality and Health of King Henry VIII (1491–1547),” Gaspard Castillon, the French Ambassador, wrote in 1532, “I have to do with the most dangerous and cruel man in the world” (Keynes 174). He was also referred to as “lustful, vengeful, unstable, and beastly” by notable figures present during his reign (Crowther). While most agree that Henry is best known for his many marriages, having married six times in all, he did much more than marry, kill those who opposed him, and die. Henry VIII was also a learned scholar with a great gift of intelligence. A well-read, self-taught man with an interest in law and religion, Henry commissioned a version of the Bible, assisted with legal matters within the kingdom, and was a lover of the arts, sports, music, and languages. He was a devout Catholic and writer, penning a book against the writings of Martin Luther in 1521, and he was “strongly opposed to radicalism and heresy” (Rex 44). Henry was aware of his own importance. Narcissistic by most accounts and alluding to the art of the day, Henry liked to loom large. He placed himself in the foreground of his commissioned art, appearing to be abnormally big when compared to the rest of the characters and scenery (Holbein et al. 28). It is rumored that he often felt emasculated by the French king, Francis I, and may have harbored an excessive need to prove himself. While this point is open for debate, the King’s grandiosity leaves little room for debate. Susannah Lipscomb, Tudor historian and writer, describes Henry VIII as a figure who both repulses and fascinates us. “His vast girth, larger than life persona, grandeur, pomp, arrogance, and appetites make us strangely proud of this hyper-masculine, fabled monarch” (Lipscomb 1).

In his younger years, Henry liked to joust. Considering himself an avid sportsman, he was an extrovert and capricious, preferring to appear lively and well-mannered. Henry was very charming, having a gift of popularity, and he had a sense of grandeur about him (Keynes 175). It is this grandeur that likely inspired Mantel in her novels, as she leans heavily on the King's personality and ability to control a room with his spirit. He was also considerably handsome. Of his looks, the Venetian Ambassador, Sebastian Giustinian writes, "His majesty is the most handsomest potentate I ever set eyes on; above the usual height, with an extremely fine calf to his leg....and a round face so very beautiful that it would become a pretty woman" (Keynes 175). According to Rex, he was a man who would stand out even in the well-nourished society of early twenty-first-century England. He made well-thought out strategic decisions and liked to dominate the council and the Houses of Parliament (Rex). As he was prone to find undue importance in his opinions, intent on proving them a matter of holy righteousness in most cases, many of the good works of his reign can be attributed to the assistance of his wife and the strength of his counsel. He preferred to have his own way and to make a show of his efforts towards policy. As quoted in *The Wives of Henry the Eight and the Parts They Played in History*, "As long as his opinions were valued, Henry was the easiest man in the world to manage" (Hume 34).

During the reign of Henry VIII, as quoted in *Tudors: The Illustrated History*, "England saw a new religion, the birth of the English Bible, the founding of the Privy Council, the destruction of English monasticism, and the greatest shift in landholding since the Norman Conquest" (Rex loc 729). Henry was also a great fighter. He liked to be at the center of his battles, even against the wishes of his advisors. He wanted to be seen as a fierce leader, throwing

off the tyranny of his father, Henry VII. Described as an expert horseman, he also participated in a lengthy war against France.

For the better part of his reign, from 1509 to 1533, Henry VIII was married to Catharine of Aragon. The daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, the commissioners of the ships that went to the New World, Catharine brought a great deal of class and political power to the Tudor Kingdom. Catharine was first married to Arthur Tudor, Henry VIII's older brother. Arthur died very young. According to Catharine, their marriage was unconsummated, and she and Henry married following Arthur's death in 1509 (Weir 59). There was a good deal of sadness in the marriage. After many attempts to conceive and several still births and children that died in infancy, the couple welcomed daughter Mary Tudor in 1516. When at war with France, Henry named Catharine "Queen Regent, governor, and captain general in his stead" (Roberts). This speaks to the quality of their relationship and the level of trust he held for her during their marriage. It may also lend some credence to the argument that Anne held a power over Henry. Eustace Chapuys states that Henry forgot himself in his desire for Anne. "The King showed great favor for the lady everyday" (Mackay 76). Despite Catharine's many admirable qualities, her social prestige, her religious clout, and her fierce loyalty, Henry's eye turned towards Anne Boleyn near 1525 (Rex 46). The years that followed took a toll on Henry and the Tudor Dynasty and changed the course of English history permanently.

### *The Arrival and Fall of Anne Boleyn*

While married to Catharine of Aragon, Henry is rumored to have kept several mistresses. Women were often brought to court to entertain the King, as he felt it unhealthy to lay with his wife while she was with child. After a long affair with Bessie Blount, with whom he conceived a son, Henry Fitzroy (Hutchinson 58), Henry found his attention pulled towards Anne Boleyn.

According to Eustace Chapuys, the Spanish Ambassador and close friend to the Tudor family, Catharine handled the matter with class and dignity. Anne, unlike her predecessors and fellow court ladies, refused the King until marriage. Chapuys writes, “She requested Catharine’s position and possessions without any regal matters, composure, or experience” (Mackay 131). As Henry leaned towards his own self-importance, believing himself right in most matters, Anne’s refusal made a great impression. Henry VIII requested a divorce from the Roman Catholic Church, an issue he called his “great matter.” The issue was a political and moral one. Henry believed his marriage to Catharine was invalid, as she had been his brother’s wife, using their failure to produce male issue as proof of his claim. When Pope Paul III refused, as it would be unwise to shame the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, Henry declared himself the Supreme Head of the Church of England. The Act of Supremacy of 1534 followed, confirming the King’s status as the head of the Anglican Church. Henry required all nobility to swear an oath recognizing his supremacy, and act most deemed tyrannical (Catholic Encyclopedia). By 1538, Henry had broken with Rome, seized all assets of the churches’ assets, and had been excommunicated by Pope Paul III over his divorce from Catherine of Aragon (Rex).

Henry’s subsequent marriage to Anne Boleyn changed England, the disposition of the King, and the tenure of Henry’s queens. Marrying in 1533 and giving birth to Princess Elizabeth shortly after, Anne’s ability to supplant a well-loved queen left her in an unfavorable position within the kingdom. Given her ability to assert such influence, Anne was rumored to have dabbled in witchcraft (Hui 98). Dubbed a great whore by Eustace Chapuys, he felt her to be, “the person who manages, orders, and governs everything, whom the King does not dare oppose” (Weir 54). Thomas Cromwell, the subject of Mantel’s *Wolf Hall*, declared Anne to be “unkind and ungrateful, believing the King deserved a more favorable wife” (Weir 55). According to

Tudor Historian, Phillip Starkey, she was cruel towards Catharine, argued with Henry in public, and she held ill will towards the princess, Mary Tudor. Starkey feels that Anne, a protestant reformer, was the motivating factor behind Henry's desire to break with the Catholic Church. Given his posture on all things religious and political prior to his marriage to Anne Boleyn, I am inclined to agree.

Henry's personality changed in his late thirties after meeting Anne and suffering in a jousting accident. A once jovial and charismatic man, Henry became suspicious, savage, temperamental, and became prone to mood swings and outbursts. Suffering from what Keynes dubs "extreme selfishness," a character trait few historians dispute, he also suffered from multiple health problems. After Anne, who also suffered a pair of miscarriages and failed to produce a male heir, Henry engaged in an extravagant amount of self-pity. In his increased tyranny, Henry ordered Anne's beheading in 1536. Charged with treason and fornication, likely a ploy falsified to remove her from her position, Henry married Jane Seymour two weeks later (Starkey 578). Susannah Lipscomb argues that Henry accused Anne of sleeping with more than a hundred men. To protect his reputation and virility, Henry wrote a written tragedy about his life, declaring Anne a whore and a witch, offering that he was unfairly blinded and seduced. Henry's refusal to accept responsibility for his relationship with Anne or his behavior towards Catharine show his selfishness and coldness, a point few historians disagree on.

### *Subsequent Marriages*

After producing his heir, Edward IV, and marrying Jane Seymour, Henry married three more times; Anne of Cleves in 1540, Catherine Howard in 1540, and Catherine Parr in 1533. Though Henry married six times in all, he asserted that Jane was his favorite wife, as she was the most chaste, obedient, and produced a surviving male child. In his subsequent marriages, Henry

seems to continue to grow increasingly tyrannical. Marrying Anne of Cleves in 1540 after the death of Jane Seymour, Henry declared her unacceptable when she did not arrive as promised. Sending a painter to Germany to capture Anne's portrait, the artist offered a creative rendering of Anne, capturing her best features, but failing to create a true likeness. Henry never consummated the marriage and demanded that she be removed from court. Anne of Cleves, understanding Henry and his temper, agreed to an annulment. Perhaps the wisest of Henry's wives, Henry provided for Anne and deemed to call her "my beloved sister." After discarding yet another suitable and formidable wife, Henry married Catherine Howard. Many years his junior, Catherine began an affair with Thomas Culpepper, a member of the King's court, and was, like Anne Boleyn, beheaded for treason. His final marriage to Catherine Parr, an older widow, also nearly ended fatally. As a protestant reformer, Catherine attempted to educate others on the Bible and other religious writings. Word reached Henry of her behavior and there were talks of treason. Catherine declared her folly due to her weakness as a woman, winning Henry's forgiveness, and likely preserving her own life. She cared for Henry in his old age, becoming a force in the lives of Princess Mary and Elizabeth Tudor. After restoring Mary to the succession at the urging of Jane Seymour, Henry became more forceful in his relationships. Refusing to accept any behavior similar to Anne Boleyn's, as seen in his marriages to Catherine Howard and Catherine Parr, the extent of Henry's tyranny also included his personal household (Starkey). In addition to his six wives, Henry is believed to have had more than twelve mistresses and many affairs. Kelly Hart, researcher and historian writes, "In a way Henry was the most romantic of kings. He wasn't content with just having a lover in the bedroom and a wife on the throne – he wanted his queen also to be his love" (Hart). The King was rarely alone in his thirty-eight years on the throne, perhaps owing to his power and looks, but it was also unwise to refuse the King.



Stephen Roberts, a Tudor researcher, writes of Henry, “He was a gout-ridden, malevolent, piggy-eyed monarch with a penchant for philandering and executions” (Roberts).

### *The Failing Health of King Henry*

Once a young and virile man, Henry later developed multiple health problems. Along with the influence of Anne, his reputation likely suffered from the pain he experienced. Suffering from a severe attack of smallpox in 1514 and malaria in 1521, Henry was prone to sinusitis and migraines. A big man, he also liked to consume large meals. Among meats common at Tudor court were brawn, beef, mutton, bacon, veal, and lamb (historyextra). The King also consumed large amounts of wine, a factor likely contributing to his poor health. Thought to be diabetic by modern accounts, the King developed ulcers that would not heal, and he suffered from bloating and obesity (PainPathways). Consuming more than six meals a day, his waist circumference increased yearly. By 1536, his waist and chest had increased by five inches. Six years before his death in 1541 when Henry was fifty years old, his chest measured fifty-seven inches and his waist measurement was a hefty fifty-four inches. In addition to the larger wound on his thigh sustained by jousting in 1536, Henry had ulcerative ankle sores, an issue common amongst diabetics. This made dressing and other activities painful (Keynes 178). He may have also suffered a pulmonary embolism. According to recent interpretations of a letter written by the French Ambassador on May 14, 1538, heart and lung issues were likely. “The King has stopped one of the fistulas in his legs, and for ten or twelve days the humors which had no outlet were like to have stifled him, so that he was sometime without speaking, black in the face, and in great danger” (Keynes 178). His fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, once remarked about the odor coming from the King’s wounds, a fact mentioned by others in surviving accounts of court life. He may have also suffered with an advanced case of metabolic syndrome and erectile dysfunction later in

life. Combined, these diseases and maladies would have made life hard for the King, a man who enjoyed his reputation.

In addition to these health issues, which would be enough to make one unpleasant, the King fell in a jousting accident at the age of forty-four. The wounds he suffered affected him for the rest of his life. Attending a tournament at Greenwich Palace on January 24, 1536, Henry, in full armor, was thrown from his horse. The horse, also armored, fell onto him as he was discharged. The King was unconscious for two hours (Independent). Thought to be fatally injured, as the wounds were significant, many felt the King would not recover. He did recover, but as advances in medicine were not available, Henry relied upon the little knowledge doctors had in 1536. Bleeding a wound was common when trying to eliminate infection. As his leg wound would become enlarged, his physician would lance it and treat it with herbs. This process was incredibly painful, and it kept the wound open for the remainder of his years. Prone to infection, some believe that the pain and inflammation he suffered led to bouts of ill temperament and changes in his personality.

### *Eustace Chapuys*

The writings and thoughts of Eustace Chapuys, the Spanish Ambassador during the reign of Henry VIII from 1529-1545, are captured by Lauren Mackay in *Inside the Tudor Court: Henry VIII and His Six Wives through the Writings of the Spanish Ambassador*. A solid presence amongst the Tudors and a family friend of Catharine of Aragon, Chapuys' thoughts on Henry VIII provide a first-hand account of court life. Chapuys' opinions are historically accountable, making them beneficial to any study on the Tudors. Chapuys was an opinionated man. As a devout Catholic and a friend to Catharine, he thought little of Anne Boleyn and was vocal about his disapproval. A benevolent spy, Chapuys took great interest in the happenings at court. As his

health failed him in later years, suffering from an extreme case of gout, Chapuys often relied on his assistants to help him move around and obtain information (Spartacus). His thoughts on Henry are mostly favorable. He describes Henry as a lover of the hunt. “On my arrival...I found that the King had already gone to a place upwards of 60 miles distant, where he generally spends his time in hunting” (Mackay). He also describes the King as kind, smiling, and welcoming. (Mackay 124).

As a devout Catholic, a Spanish subject, and a close friend of Catharine of Aragon and Mary Tudor, many of the ambassador’s opinions are subject to errors of judgment. He was a friend to Henry VIII, but his main role at court was to ease diplomatic relations between England and Spain. His fondness for Catharine, while genuine, may have stemmed from her Spanish heritage. The marriage between Catharine and Henry was a political alliance between two countries. While there was genuine love between Henry and Catharine, Catharine was betrothed to Arthur when she was three years old (Weir 59). Chapuys also had a distaste for the French, as France and Spain were at odds with each other. When Anne entered Tudor England and supplanted the Queen, the tone of Chapuys’ sentiments changed. Writing at length about Anne Boleyn, Chapuys offers commentary against her French clothing, audacity, mannerisms, and style, facts that may have changed his opinion of the King (Mackay 159). In calling Anne the great whore, the concubine, and refusing to disavow Queen Catharine and Princess Mary Tudor, Chapuys’ shows a lack of respect and a defiance towards the King’s judgment. He writes, “Though the King is by nature kind and generously inclined, the Lady Anne has so changed him, he does not seem the same man” (Mackay 158).

His religious and legal backgrounds are also an issue. In 1515, Chapuys received a degree in civil and law canons. He was ordained two years later, began working in legal aid, and as a

humanist, he held a sympathy for the disadvantaged. Compassionate and close to Rome, it would be impossible to look at Henry, post Anne Boleyn, impartially. Chapuys also took fault the way the King handled his divorce. As he dated Anne openly and publicly while still married to Catharine, Chapuys considered the King an adulterer and the ordeal in poor taste (Mackay 60). This, in addition to his Spanish heritage, his legal background, and his position as a Catholic, leave his assessments open for conjecture and debate. His positions on Henry, from beginning to end, are largely mixed.

### CHAPTER 3: *WOLF HALL*

Hilary Mantel, author of the *Wolf Hall* trilogy, is a two-time Man Booker prize winner for her novels, *Wolf Hall* and *Bringing up Bodies*. In the *Wolf Hall* novels, Mantel chronicles the life of Thomas Cromwell, Chief Minister of Henry VIII from 1532 to 1540. A central figure in the Tudor story, Cromwell is the driving force behind many of the events that happened during Henry's reign. A time most notable and significant in English history, the novel addresses the period surrounding Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn and her subsequent beheading for treason. While the novels focus on Cromwell, he functions as a Chapuys-like character, offering new ways of looking at the lives of the Tudor family. Henry VIII struggles to find a new history, one in which he can be seen with a wider eye. A dichotomous character, Henry is often portrayed or described as he was in later years, obese, tyrannical, haughty, ill-tempered, and menacing. Paintings of Henry are typically those he commissioned, showing him as a larger-than-life figure with a penchant for largess. He is always central in his portraits, with all others existing as supporting, yet smaller, characters. Henry's image has long been tarnished by his own actions, his failure to accept responsibility, and his inability to extend kindness where it was due. Mantel's portrayal of Henry is softer. As a rounded secondary character, Henry appears as an emotional yet pensive man. Frequently offering his thoughts through conversation and explanations of his dreams and desires, Henry VIII becomes more than a tyrant. He becomes a man and a person readers can relate to.

Beginning in 1500, we first see Henry in part two of the novel, *Paternity*. As Henry and Anne's courtship began near 1525, Mantel presents their history beginning in 1527, at the start of the King's talks of his great matter. Desiring a divorce from Catharine of Aragon due to his love for Anne Boleyn and the weight of his conscience having married his brother's widow, King

Henry has petitioned the Pope for an annulment based on religious grounds. As religion was the law of the land in the sixteenth century, everything went through the Catholic Church and was presented to the Pope for agreement. Mantel presents Henry first in his younger years and offers the reader an inside look at his relations with members of his household, cabinet, counsel, and his friendships. Henry is a jovial King, a good friend, and a supporter of those who work for him. However, he is insistent upon getting what he wants. Mantel illuminates Henry's thoughts through carefully placed conversations. Staying true to the history surrounding the time period, Mantel includes most of the key players that were present in Tudor times, using their opinions and stories as background to what is happening with Thomas Cromwell.

Prior to the wedding of Anne and Henry, Mantel presents the King in a pensive moment with Wolsey, a thing she does quite often. Speaking of his desire to marry again, the author describes the king as melancholy, alluding to what the King's thoughts may have been in real time. Denying that he had ever married to Queen Catharine, Henry speaks to Wolsey about his desire to own the Church's property. 'The wealth of twenty-nine monasteries has gone to those foundations – suppressed by permission of the Pope, on the conditions that proceeds were used for colleges. I am beginning to care very little for the Pope and his permissions" (Mantel 201). By having Henry discuss his feelings, the reader is given more than just his actions. Here, we begin to see the seeds of distrust that will lead to Henry's desire to break with Rome. While his motivations, according to Mantel, may have also been political and financial, Henry's break with the Church comes over the Pope's failure to grant him a divorce. Mantel presents the break with Rome as Anne Boleyn's doing, suggesting she had the King's ear on the matter. However, by understanding how Henry feels slighted by Rome, we know that his pride may have also been injured.

Mantel's portrayal of Anne augments her portrayal of Henry, as the two seem to play off one another. Anne also has a back and forth with Cromwell that makes for fun reading. Few are a fan of Anne, and the author highlights her negative points. Making her French mannerisms and flat breasts a point of contention and mockery, Mantel points to a weakness in Henry's character. The whole Kingdom is talking about Anne negatively, inviting the readers to wonder where Henry's sense has gone. "Some say she wants to be the new wife, which is laughable, Wolsey says, but the King is infatuated, so perhaps he doesn't demure, not to her face" (Mantel 78). Henry gives all to Anne, including jewels and the gift of his time. She is also his closest confidant. When Henry argues with Catharine, he goes to Anne for sympathy (Mantel 188). As unorthodox as that is, the pair function as friends in Mantel's novel, much as they were in life. Mantel's Anne is harsh, cruel, prone to speaking in French, and antagonistic. She looks down on those around her and seems to enjoy tormenting her sister, Mary. Henry's loyalty to her may show an error in judgment, as suggested by those around him, but it also shows the extent of his emotion and desire. A deeply feeling man, he is not often swayed by opinion or rhetoric.

### *Henry's Temperament*

Henry's temperament in the novel is a mixed continuum and varies from one issue to the next. However, unlike in most fictional and historical portrayals, he is a deeply thoughtful man. Like a spoiled child, he fails to see what he has done wrong in any issue, inferring that all things are the faults of those around him. While explaining that Henry cannot be led, as he takes too much stock in his own opinions, he seems to be emotionally driven a great deal of the time. The author highlights several places in the novel where the temperament of the King is a central issue with the book's characters. Mantel writes, "The King had a high voice for a big man, and it rises when he is angry to an ear-throbbing shriek" (Mantel 313). However, she also writes him as a

kind king, offering a sentiment by Lady Rochford, “Henry has a tender heart, does he not? (*Bringing up the Bodies* 145). Unlike in historical accounts, Mantel’s Henry’s moods seem to change with cause. While he is prone to being pompous and loves grandiose speech, he is less tyrannical. His outbursts, when they occur, suit the occasion and are not the result of irrationality. Though his thinking may be wrong to a modern eye, the King is convinced he is right. When speaking of Queen Catharine, he says, “I do not want to hear the word *dispensation*. I do not want to hear you mention what you call my marriage. The pope has no power to make incest licit. I am no more Katherine’s husband than you are” (Mantel 409). However, when in court, the King would often speak on Catharine’s behalf. Though he called her “The Princess Dowager,” it led his close confidants to wonder whose side he was on. Chapuys was always against the King’s marriage to Anne Boleyn. In *Wolf Hall*, he offers that Henry was under an enchantment when it came to her, “his wits scattered and fleeing, his soul turning and twisting like a hare under the eye of a hawk” (Mantel 298).

Henry’s temperament is also highlighted in his thoughts on others. When speaking of Stephen Gardiner, Henry shouts, turning the room cold and the conversation fearful. To diffuse the situation, the King is reminded of his honor, something that figures prominently with him (Mantel 314). The King does not like Gardner in Mantel’s novel, which seems to greatly affect his candor and generosity. He pays Anne’s gambling debts, however, suggesting that the way to get the King’s favor is to do what he likes (Mantel 319). He also does not like to have his authority questioned. In another conversation with Chapuys, one more contentious, Chapuys questions his marriage to Anne Boleyn, arguing that there is no guarantee the pair will have a son. In rebuttal, the King rears up with tears in his eyes and offers, “Why would I not? Am I not a man like other men? Am I not?” (Mantel 416). This points to a sensitivity and a passion in



Henry. Having made the King cry, Chapuys backs off and returns the conversation to a more even footing (Mantel 416). When questioned on the legitimacy of the Princess Mary, Cromwell urges the King to restore Mary to the succession. The King, turning, irate, suggests that he take the issue to Anne, then pregnant, and if her upset causes a miscarriage, Cromwell's head will pay the price (Mantel 484). "I keep you, Master Cromwell, because you are as cunning as a bag of serpents. But do not be a viper in my bosom. You know my decision. Execute it" (Mantel 585). Henry is emotional about his children and his legacy.

Mantel's Henry is also a dreamy romantic. A poet, albeit not a great one, Henry is fond of singing and writing. "His majesty's verses can be a little repetitive, not to say self-centered" (Mantel 322). Having commissioned a version of the Bible, a fact true to history and mentioned in the first of the novel, Henry fancies himself in most matters. He says, "I am a Prince known for my munificence" (Mantel 528). While his greatness, in Mantel's novel, does extend to his writing, it does extend in a small way to his life on the battlefield.

### *Henry as a Warrior*

Also featured through conversation with members of his counsel, Mantel's Henry likes to discuss issues of war and politics. He feels that the chase prepares him for war, liking to take hunt with Charles Brandon and others. Henry believes he belongs at the head of his army, offering, "And so have I. At the head of my army.... You said I should not fight because the taxes would break the country. What is the country for, but to support its prince in his enterprise?" (Mantel 168). He feels the county and its resources are his own. Mantel suggests later in the novel that Henry, while maintaining a great desire to fight, has little skill with a bow and arrow. He was not a born archer, shooting like a gentleman amateur, but he wants to believe himself proficient enough to teach. He feels his subjects would love to see him play, and he

becomes giddy over the idea of posing a fight for a crowd (Mantel 235). Henry's largess propels him to do things that are otherwise unsound. Refusing to accept his age as a deterrent in his jousting, he fights until he becomes severely injured, a fact that will change his life and personality.

### *Wolf Hall's Henry*

The first novel, *Wolf Hall*, offers insight into Henry and his relationships with others. Using clever conversation and the introduction of other sides of the King's personality, including talk about his feelings and dreams, the reader is given a look into Henry's mind that is not otherwise offered in history. He is melancholic, prone to upset, and a little narcissistic. He seems to have little qualm about killing when it is necessary, as he likes a good fight, and he enjoys his reputation above all. Henry wants to be seen as generous in all matters, fair to a fault, and strong. He presents himself as the absolute authority on all things, refusing to be contradicted by the Pope or his counsel, and is easily angered when his orders are not followed. Henry is easily led by false women, leaving a solid long-term marriage for Anne Boleyn, a woman who proves to be unfaithful and haughty. He also considers himself a true warrior, even though the novel's evidence does not support that identity. A writer and a poet, Henry likes to think of himself in romantic terms, and he believes he is a talented writer. A fiery and diverse character, Mantel's Henry offers a change in perspective on the King. In *Bringing up Bodies*, we see the arc of Henry's character shift over changes in his country and his failed marriage to Anne Boleyn. His health also begins to deteriorate.

## CHAPTER 4: *BRINGING UP THE BODIES*

*Bringing up the Bodies* continues the story of Thomas Cromwell as he navigates his way through Tudor life. Beginning in 1535, just prior to Anne's beheading and his marriage to Jane Seymour, we see Henry and Anne as they continue to work towards their heir. Mantel creates more of a changing framework for Henry in the second novel. While he is still young in *Bringing up the Bodies*, Henry is losing patience with Anne over her inability to conceive a male child. He is also falling in love with Jane Seymour, a courtship that will bring an end to Anne and her time as Queen. The stress of breaking with the church has also taken a toll on Henry, as he now finds himself in new territory. Being the head of the Church of England and being known as a King who will not tolerate dissent, Henry must take an "all or nothing" approach to his leadership. As many, including his own daughter, are displeased with the idea of taking the oath, fortifying Anne's place as Queen and her children as the rightful heirs to the throne, Henry is forced to make tough decisions. While Mary Tudor relents at the advising of others, fearful for her own life, Thomas More, the King's personal friend and a devout Catholic, refuses. More is hanged for his refusal to take the oath, effectively martyring himself and leaving a lifelong impression on the King. The public impression of the King is also beginning to change, as the people start to question his leadership. Referring to Henry as "cruel and ungodly," many feel as Spain feels. The Spanish Emperor, Charles, is angry that Henry Tudor set aside Queen Catharine to marry a woman whom the people on the streets call a "goggle-eyed whore" (*Bringing up the Bodies* 9).

### *Henry, Anne, and Jane Seymour*

Henry's budding romance with Jane Seymour is at the front of his mind. Introducing her early in the novel, his discontent with Anne grows as his love for Jane increases (*Bringing up the Bodies* 26). Jane is a demure figure. Not of significant beauty or intelligence and staunchly

obedient, Henry finds her company pleasing. When juxtaposed with Anne, a fiery combative force in Henry's life, Jane seems almost Madonna-like. Mantel describes Jane well, offering her in contrast to Henry as they walk side by side. "Henry is a massive figure and Jane is like a little jointed puppet, her head not up to the King's shoulders. A broad high man, Henry dominates any room" (*Bringing up the Bodies* 27). Referring to Jane as a puppet early on sets the stage for her character. Having learned well from Anne and her mistakes, Jane is intent on pleasing the King. As with all his subjects, friends and family alike, Henry likes obedience. He finds this in Jane and it endears her to him. "Her little hands. Her little paws, like a child's. She has no guile in her. And she never speaks. And if she does, I have to bend my ear to hear what she says.... she has nothing....she expects nothing" (*Bringing up the Bodies* 209). Jane is a central figure in *Bringing up the Bodies*. As the novel ends with Anne's beheading, placing Jane in position to become Queen, Henry is contrasted by two very different women. Jane, a placid and loving force that brings out a softness in him, and Anne, who seems to cause him anger and frustration. From this, we see that Henry prefers gentle company. He is taken aback by Jane's goodness, and it inspires a pensiveness and a softness in him.

### *Henry's Temperament*

As the King's life begins to shift after the Act of Succession and his marriage to Anne Boleyn, we see more of a duality in Henry's character. While he is still softer and more pensive than history allows, Mantel displays more of his anger and frustration. This has a humanizing effect and endears the reader to Henry's plight. It is easy to picture the King as a figurehead, one who is swept up in the work of running a Kingdom. Henry, as in *Wolf Hall*, seems very taken by his personal relationships. While not his sole focus in the novels, the activity surrounding Henry converges around his marriages. By painting Anne as a villainous character and Jane as soft and

good-natured, the reader longs to see Henry happy. By going with the general consensus and turning away from Anne, Henry becomes more likeable by contrast.

Though tempered by his love for Jane, Henry is increasingly callous in *Bringing up the Bodies*. Caught between his new love for Jane and his wives, Anne, who has his ear and Catharine, who is still living, Henry speaks of Catharine coldly. As in *Wolf Hall*, once the marriage ended and he began his life with Anne, he held no further use for the Queen. Referring to her as his brother's wife, he offers, "What use is Katherine's life to her now? I am sure she is tired of contention. God knows, I am tired of it. She were better to join the saints and the holy martyrs.... I picture the lady dying. She will be making speeches and forgiving me. She is always forgiving me. It is she who needs forgiveness. For her blighted womb" (*Bringing up the Bodies*, 94). Anne, who is present for the conversation, has nothing to say, suggesting she supports and condones Henry's harsh treatment of Catharine of Aragon. The King has also turned callous with Anne. When she is with child, Henry usually takes mistresses out of fear of hurting the baby. Though Anne tries to keep his interest with conversation, he is abrupt with her, giving her the cold shoulder (*Bringing up the Bodies* 158).

Later in the novel, as his marriage to Anne deteriorates, there is a great deal of dialogue concerning the Queen and her behavior. Here we see Henry's callousness, but also his naivete. Refusing to accept any responsibility for his situation, as represented in the first novel, Henry places the blame on Anne and the way she presented herself. "When I look back, so much falls into place. So many friends lost, friends and good servants. The woman I called my wife practiced against Wolsey with all her ingenuity, with every weapon of slyness and rancor" (*Bringing up the Bodies*, 314). Interestingly, Mantel seems to support Henry's claim. Writing that Henry was led forth by Anne, ruining his good judgement and robbing him of his innocence,

his frustration towards her seems almost justified (*Bringing up the Bodies* 316). He does, however, speak of her so coldly it seems as if his feelings turn quickly from one subject to another, suggesting an inability to form lasting bonds. He accuses Anne of trying to poison his children, Henry Fitzroy and Mary Tudor. When speaking to his son, Fitzroy, he explains that Anne was too wicked to produce a true heir, and that God had abandoned her (*Bringing up the Bodies* 317).

While Henry is clearly narcissistic and primarily focused on his own self-interest in both novels, there is more mention of the folly of his own behavior in *Bringing up the Bodies*. An educated man, Henry thought himself a writer. From his love letters to Anne Boleyn, which were juvenile and hard to read at times by today's standards, historians feel that Henry was simply in love with Henry. Mantel's inclusion of his writing in her novel is used as Henry attempts to explain his culpability in his failed marriages. After his divorce from Catharine of Aragon, Henry penned parts of a small book called *A Glass of the Truth*. When his marriage to Anne fell apart, he again turns to his writing. Presenting a little black book to Cranmer, he explains, "It is a book in the making. I have written it. It is a play. It is a tragedy. It is my own case" (*Bringing up the Bodies* 315). Going on to explain that Anne had betrayed him with more than one hundred men, including her own brother, Henry suggest that she failed to sleep with him, possibly to deflect his culpability in their inability to produce a male child (*Bringing up the Bodies* 316). At times, we see Henry sitting and reading his own book. As he clearly knew the contents, having written it himself, Mantel shows the reader Henry's self-indulgence (*Bringing up the Bodies* 317). Was he trying to convince himself of the book's contents, or did he simply enjoy reading about himself?

Unlike the first novel, in *Bringing up the Bodies* we begin to see Henry's anger as he becomes increasingly uncontrolled. Frustrated by his failing marriage to Anne and his inability to

be in complete control of the situation, he unleashes his feelings on those around him, especially those who attempt to defy him. In a scene with Cromwell and Chapuys when speaking of the Spanish Emperor, Henry becomes unhinged over the Emperor's interest in his family affairs. As the Emperor is displeased with Henry for his mistreatment of Catharine of Aragon, Spain is threatening war with England. Henry, careful to protect his honor, yells at Cromwell, demanding an apology from Charles I. "Cromwell, make him understand! It is not for the Emperor to make conditions to me! It is for him to make apologies to me" (*Bringing up the Bodies* 231). He also personally threatens Cromwell, insulting him and making him feel inferior in front of others. Believing the Emperor treats him like an infant, despite his recent behavior, he becomes so enraged over Spain's refusal to accept his marriage to Anne Boleyn, he spits when speaking to Cromwell. Fearful for his own life, Cromwell places his arms across his chest, wishing the King well, and gently leaves the room (*Bringing up the Bodies* 230). We see similar explosions when Henry speaks to Mary Shelton after the death of his baby. When attempting to explain that the baby had the appearance of a male, about fifteen weeks gestation, he insults the lady and makes her cry, lost in his own anger. He apologizes after the fact, showing some remorse over his behavior, uncommon when it comes to the King (*Bringing up the Bodies* 181).

### *Henry as a Warrior*

As Henry is aging in *Bringing up the Bodies*, there are less instances of war and more personal struggles. Becoming injured in a jousting tournament, Henry develops a wound that will cause him to suffer for the rest of his life. Earlier in the novel, Mantel writes about Henry's insistence upon being the strongest man on the field. While he is not the most gifted fighter, as mentioned in *Wolf Hall*, he likes to offer a strong presence to the Kingdom (*Bringing up the Bodies* 152). He is also not as quick as he was in his youth. Against the advising of his council,

he would hide his face and joust incognito (*Bringing up the Bodies* 25). Explaining that Henry was gifted in finding new ways to die, Mantel presents Henry as reckless and immature at times. Henry's immaturity and disregard for the advice of his counsel often leads him into political and legal foibles. While he is an asset in matters of state, the gift of his presence is dependent upon whether the issue will fall his way. While the jousting accident features in the novel, it is not prominent enough to determine if it was the cause of his increased temper. We do, however, see him in many emotional battles over Anne, Catharine, and his issues with the church.

### *Bringing up the Bodies' Henry*

In Mantel's second novel, *Bringing up the Bodies*, Henry becomes more argumentative and less jovial, likely attributable to the difficulties in his marriage to Anne Boleyn. As no one approves of the marriage, including the Kings of the surrounding Kingdoms, Henry is constantly at war with himself. Frequently engaging in arguments with members of his staff, Henry pushes Cromwell and others until he gets what he wants. As in the first novel, Henry is generous with those he has affection for. He gives a love letter to Jane Seymour in the middle of the novel, again positioning himself as a writer. She refuses it, hoping to win his ardor by being demure, a personality trait Mantel plays on and uses to create a beautiful illustration of opposites (*Bringing up the Bodies* 212). Anne, haughty and outspoken, has failed to give the King a son. While Henry blames this on her wickedness, he has also grown tired of the marriage. Being a man of honor, it did not sit well with his conscience to have his friends hanged for treason. As he tends to see their ghosts lingering in his sleep, the reader is left with the impression that these men and women were important to him; Catharine, Wolsey, and Thomas More, although he refuses to speak of them with any spiritual generosity.



As in the first novel, *Wolf Hall*, Henry is plagued with legal and marital problems. In the first novel, Henry tries to divorce his first wife, Catharine of Aragon. As they were devout Catholics and Catharine was the Aunt of the King of Spain, divorce would have been a political and social problem. After divorcing Catharine and marrying Anne Boleyn, Henry suffers with the ire of the Spanish Emperor, having insulted his trust and damaged the political alliance between their two kingdoms. His marriage to Anne ending in the second novel, Henry's frustration turns to his budding love for Jane. Jane is in the second novel who Anne was in the first, the younger woman who will affect Henry's life and change history. Anne, through supplanting a well-loved Queen and causing England to break with Rome. Jane, through the birth of Edward IV, giving the king the heir he has desired. Henry still takes mistresses, his temperament with women unchanged. However, the way he talks of and is smitten with Jane is unlike anything we see elsewhere in the novels. He has a genuine softness for her, and his ruminations over his love provide Henry with a softer edge. In *Bringing up the Bodies*, we are also reintroduced to Henry's writing and how he feels about his works. Self-indulgent and focused on himself as the victim, Henry likes to write and read his own stories. He also likes to make others aware of his poetry, his books, his love letters, and his love of music.

*Bringing up the Bodies*' portrayal of Henry VIII is similar to the first novel. While presenting a more in-depth view of the king and his court, he is still a likeable albeit dangerous character. As Mantel writes, "You can be merry with the king, you can share a joke with him. But as Thomas More used to say, it's like sporting with a tamed lion. You tousle its mane and pull its ears, but all the time you're thinking those claws, those claws, those claws" (*Bringing up the Bodies* 209).

CHAPTER 5: CRITICISMS AND THOUGHTS ON *WOLF HALL* AND *BRINGING UP THE BODIES*

*Wolf Hall* and *Bringing up the Bodies* do an exemplary job of articulating Tudor history. While the novels accentuate the roles of certain characters, eliminating others, all the central players are featured prominently, and their relationships are showcased in a humanizing and relatable way. As quoted in *World Culture Magazine*, "I try not to judge my characters. I ask my readers to walk a mile in their shoes, which is quite difficult when you're looking at a monarch like Henry who seems such a distant figure" (*World Culture*). Drawing upon the softer sides of Henry, a feat rarely done in fiction or historical accounts, Mantel gives Henry a common edge that makes the novel enjoyable. Henry is a complex character, not simply the tyrannical boar we have come to see in modern history books. He was also a lover, a fighter, a generous friend, a poet, a singer, and a fierce and educated leader. Pensive to a great degree, as most of Mantel's characters are, Henry comes to life through conversation and argument. Mantel's characters are not one-sided. Each has depth and each brings something significant to the story. There is also a fair bit of romance. While not central to the novel, given that the story focuses on Thomas Cromwell, the reader is given insight into what may have caused the king to marry six times and what the flaws in his marriages may have been. One who has never heard of King Henry or his six wives could pick up Mantel's novels and enjoy them, learning about Tudor England as they become engrossed in the drama between the kings and queens.

Mantel includes a timeline and a cast of characters at the beginning of each novel. These prove useful to the reader, as it is easy to forget elements of history. She also explains where she has omitted characters and events from her stories, which may appease those who read the novels and disagree with events and timelines. Given that Anne Boleyn was removed from position

rather suddenly, there was great a great effort to remove all mention of her from the kingdom. Her engravings and symbols were replaced by those of Jane Seymour within two weeks of her death, and she was branded a whore by the king and the kingdom, leaving much of her history obscure. Mantel uses what is known about Anne, drawing on the qualities she was most infamous for, and creating a character that plays well against Henry's largess. She is not Catharine, a classy and educated queen, but she is also not Jane, quiet, selfless, and demure. Mantel shines in her character development, giving life to people long dead but infamous.

Without using the scandal common to writers of historical fiction, Mantel does make sexual references when speaking about several of the characters. However, she keeps her story clean and without undue commentary. This made the more intimate parts of the novels relevant to the times and left a great deal to the imagination. She also writes conversation well. Without the use of undue words or an emphasis upon the angrier parts of the novel, Mantel can articulate the mood of the characters. *Bringing up the Bodies* and *Wolf Hall* are well-written, well-structured, and a gift for a lover of Tudor history to read. As Mantel states, "Nobody else has this monster king, of whom we are perversely proud" (*World Culture*).

## CHAPTER 6: COMPARING HISTORY AND FICTION

### *Summary*

Henry VIII, king of England from 1509-1547, has an interesting and diverse history. A ruler infamous for his poor health, tyrannical behavior, and multiple marriages, Henry advanced the history of England and changed the country by breaking with the Catholic Church and fathering Mary and Elizabeth Tudor and Edward VI, all of whom went on to rule the country. While Henry sat on the throne for more than thirty-eight years, Hilary Mantel's books, *Wolf Hall* and *Bringing up the Bodies*, focus on the years surrounding the king's "great matter," his divorce from Catharine of Aragon, his marriage to Anne Boleyn, and Anne's subsequent fall and beheading. Spanning from 1500-1536 with nine years dedicated to before Henry's reign, Mantel's history aligns with actual historical dates and timelines. Hoping to stay true to the history itself, with the addition of only one fictional character, Christian, an aide to Thomas Cromwell, Mantel creates commentary and conversation to illuminate what the members of the Tudor court may have been thinking during these pivotal years. As quoted by Janet Dickinson in her review of the *Wolf Hall* novels, "The Tudor court was a small world of confined spaces and intimate relationships, an intense environment in which remarkable events took place. We can now add an imaginative reconstruction of that world, grounded in careful detail accrued from the years of research carried out by Mantel." While it was never her intention to write a history, she spent more than twenty years engaging in research and preparation for *Wolf Hall* and *Bringing up the Bodies*. In her discussion with David Starkey on Henry VIII, Mantel offers, "What I hope I have is a scrupulous respect for the sources. I only make things up when I have to. Writing historical fiction, you gather the best evidence you can. We know what people did, but what they thought – to me and to a historian, is like the dark side of the moon" (BBC).

Mantel's characters, given that they are factually based, are written allying with classical stereotypes and what is commonly known about each player. As Henry, Anne, Catharine of Aragon, Thomas Cromwell, Jane Seymour, and those closest to Henry feature most prominently in the novels, they are the most strongly developed characters. Hilary Mantel has taken liberty with the characters, as she is attempting to create a story from people long dead. Also, as her stories focus on the life of Thomas Cromwell, he is central to the novels. Henry, Anne, and others are secondary characters, allowing for more depth and multiple points-of-view.

### *Anne and Henry*

Mantel's Henry and Anne are the most interesting diversions from type, as she has created new scenarios for them, allowing each to shine differently than they have in other novels. Creating a more emotionally diverse Henry and a cruel Anne, Mantel's writing invites the reader to take a second look at the history surrounding these monarchs. Were they cruel and tyrannical, or has history stereotyped them into being such?

Anne Boleyn reigned as queen of England from 1533-1536. Anne is a complicated character historically. Outside of stereotypes and modern dramas, little is known of Anne herself. The writings of Eustace Chapuys, as written in *Inside the Tudor Court*, paint Anne with a villainous brush. A close personal friend to Queen Catharine of Aragon, a devout Catholic, and the Spanish Ambassador, Chapuys accounts of Anne are never favorable and have to be looked at within the limits of his role. Calling her the "whore" and the "concubine," Chapuys remains close to Mary Tudor and Catharine of Aragon despite the change in leadership. Arguing that Henry has lost all common sense and believing that Anne had much control over the King, Chapuys rarely makes an unkind remark about Henry. "Though the King is by nature kind and generously inclined, Anne has so changed him that he does not seem the same man" (Mackay

124-127). Historically, there is little proof that Anne held such power. Anne, having supplanted Queen Catharine, angering the Pope and the Spanish nobility, created a history based on rumor. As Henry destroyed all trace of her after her beheading and refused to speak of her, most of Anne's history died with her. As such, writers and historians have clamored for many years to create versions of the queen. From historical accounts, we know that Anne was dark-skinned, flat chested, not particularly beautiful, and not what would have been considered fair for the times. The tradition in Tudor England was for women to be pale. Anne was sophisticated, having spent a considerable amount of time in the French court, she spoke French quite well, and she had a mind for religion (Rex 66). As the King loved a good conversation, this is likely what drew him to her.

Hilary Mantel draws upon these few known facts and crafts an Anne much like Phillipa Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl*. While the writing style is less inflammatory, both characters are cruel and dripping with self-interest. Eustace Chapuys often felt that Anne had the absence of character necessary to poison Princess Mary and have Queen Catharine murdered. In his writings, he questions the safety of the royals. Many fictionalized renditions of these events give Anne credit for the queen's death. However, there is no historical evidence to support the poisoning of Catharine of Aragon. Mantel uses the idea in *Bringing up the Bodies* in a conversation between Henry VIII and Henry Fitzroy, his child with Elizabeth Blount. "She would have poisoned you and your sister, Mary, both of you, and made that little blotch she spawned the heir to England" (*Bringing up the Bodies* 316). Mantel also plays with other theories about Anne, such as the rumor she slept with her brother and the idea that she slept with others before she married the King. Mantel does this creatively. While not attributing these things directly to Anne, she addresses them through rumor. When confronted about the idea of

the Queen's infidelity, Henry agrees that Anne could not resist her brother (*Bringing up the Bodies* 315). Henry also takes fault with Anne's amorous nature (*Bringing up the Bodies* 289). In a conversation between members of the court, people speculate about how many lovers Anne has had. Thomas Wyatt, rumored to have been Anne's lover at one time, says he thought Anne cold and driven, and she is said to have been both (*Bringing up the Bodies* 269). In *Wolf Hall*, there is a scene where Anne takes wardship over Mary Boleyn and Henry VIII's son, also Henry Fitzroy (131). While this story originated in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Henry only claimed one bastard son and there is no historical proof that Mary had a son with Henry. Anne's beheading plays as history suggests, though it focuses more on the execution and does not include Anne's speech to the crowd (*Bringing up the Bodies* 395). Mantel's portrayal of Anne, while including historical rumors and accounts, is a mix between facts and fiction. She leans on the cruel side, allying with most accounts, and creates an Anne that plays well against Henry. She seems to be the driving force behind matters that require a venomous hand.

Unlike with the history of Anne Boleyn, mired in mystery and recreations, Henry's history is more well-known. Ascending the throne in 1509, Henry married Catharine of Aragon early in his reign. Mantel's novel begins speaking of Tudor history in 1527. As his marriage to Catharine had begun to expire at this time, much of the focus of the story is on his relationship with Anne and acquiring a divorce. Anne arrived at court in 1526, and the king failed to secure a divorce until 1533. During that time, The King broke with the church of England, declaring himself the Supreme Head of the Church, and sanctioned his own divorce. He also dismantled the Catholic churches and acquired their resources for other use. Mantel uses these facts in *Wolf Hall* and *Bringing up the Bodies*. She also includes the executions of Thomas More, the fall of Cardinal Wolsey, the death of his brother, and other events that played on Henry's conscience in

his later years (*Wolf Hall* 603, 121). Illuminating these attacks of conscience through dreams and conversation, Mantel creates a likeability with Henry (*Wolf Hall* 254). She writes a pensive Henry, one who is more thoughtful than history would suggest. She also draws on his intellectual nature. Mentioning his writing in *Wolf Hall* and *Bringing up the Bodies*, Mantel's Henry is deeply charismatic and likes to have his story known. He refuses to accept responsibility for any of the injuries of his life, but his indulgence and self-absorption are well-known.

While Henry was a fighter and a jouster, Mantel paints him as not a particularly gifted one. When speaking of Henry's love of sports, she writes that he is not as quick as he once was (*Bringing up the Bodies* 152). His grandiosity remains unchanged however, "I know you counselors think I should take to the spectator's bench. And I will, I promise. It has not escaped me that a man of my age is past his best. But you see, Crumb, it is hard to give up what you have worked at since you were a boy" (*Bringing up the Bodies* 163). The statement almost hints of humility, but it is countered elsewhere in the novel when the King describes his own vanity. "Yes. I am not often wrong. Vanity, that's all it is" (*Bringing up the Bodies* 254). Afterwards, he begins singing, describing himself as a daisy (254). The singing, again, makes the king more likeable and jovial than history suggests.

In later years when Henry turns tyrannical, history rumors of much yelling and beheading. While the King did not like to be contradicted, a fact Mantel writes well in her novels, her Henry is not as large and morose as what we see in Holbein's paintings. While he does a fair amount of yelling in the novel, the instances are countered by well-placed dialogue and sympathetic relationships. The softer side of the king is illustrated through his pensive nature. When speaking of the love letter he wrote to Jane, the king says, "From this point I will do nothing that will offend her honor. In fact, I shall only speak to her in the presence of her kin"



(*Bringing up the Bodies* 212). Mantel's Henry also has a softness for the idea of love. While he seems to fall in and out of love rather quickly, he cared for Anne and Jane and wrote them frequently. Historically, the letters King Henry wrote to Anne speak to a genuine affection between the pair. They also speak to a softer, more likeable side to Henry that Mantel successfully illuminates (*Love Letters*).

Hilary Mantel's Henry allies strongly with what is known about Henry VIII. He was a strong man, quick to anger, narcissistic and self-absorbed. His opinions turned with his conscience, as in the case of his divorce from Catharine of Aragon. Once he became convinced that his marriage was invalid, there was no convincing him otherwise. He also held a great love for sports, for writing, and for his public image. Henry liked to appear larger than life in all situations.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Henry VIII, king of England from 1509-1537, continues to capture the attention of readers and historians. A diverse character, there are many accounts his behavior, his multiple marriages, and his larger than life appetite. All are hallmarks of Henry's image but say little about the man himself or his inner thoughts. Hilary Mantel, in her novels, *Wolf Hall* and *Bringing up the Bodies*, creates a Henry that is likeable and kaleidoscopic. Illuminating the many sides of his personality, Mantel shows Henry as pensive, well-read, scholarly, and a lover. While not shying away from common perceptions of the king, including his tyrannical and morose behavior, she invites the reader to think about Henry and what his motivations and feelings may have been. She also illuminates Anne in ways that may be foreign to those unfamiliar with Tudor History. Anne plays more of a villain in these novels, offsetting the callousness often associated with Henry and granting him more room for diversity of character. While he is callous in the novel, showing an ever-changing conscience towards those around him, Anne seems to be more influential than he in matters that require cruelty. Henry is, as captured in Mantel's novels, a King worthy of infinite study, multifaceted, ingenious, varied, and interesting. Reading historical fiction, such as *Wolf Hall* and *Bringing up the Bodies*, provides opportunity to look at history in new ways. By engendering understanding, providing the opportunity for historical characters to be reinvented and reimagined, and promoting curiosity, novels help to continue the importance of history and retain the narrative of our lives.

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VITA

AMANDA SAHL NICHOLSON

- Education: M.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson  
City, Tennessee, 2020
- B.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson  
City, Tennessee, 2017
- B.A. History, East Tennessee State University, Johnson  
City, Tennessee, 2017
- Professional Experience: Teacher, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College,  
Asheville, North Carolina, 2020-2021
- Honors and Awards: Honors in Discipline Scholarship  
East Tennessee State University, History 2014-2017
- Corrine B. Allen Memorial Scholarship, East Tennessee State  
University 2015
- Lee Theresa Kroll Scholarship, East Tennessee State University,  
2015