

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

Hilary Mantel's representation of Thomas Cromwell's identity in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*

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Master [120] en langues et lettres modernes, orientation germanique, à finalité didactique

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Introduction

In the current literary climate, historical fictions are very popular. In fact, “the last few decades have seen an explosion in the sales and popularity of novels set in the past” (De Groot 2009). For many years now, historical fictions have appeared to experience what looks like a renaissance, with many authors writing about the past. One of the most prominent among them is Hilary Mantel, the author of *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012).

For her two books, Hilary Mantel received many prizes, including twice the Man Booker Prize (2009 and 2012), the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction (2009), the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction (2010) and the Costa Book of the Year (2012). Generally speaking, both her books were acclaimed by the critics saying for example that *Wolf Hall* “has a narrative sweep that gleams on every page with luminous and mesmerising detail” (*Daily Mail*) or that *Bring Up the Bodies* is “a real page-turner” (*Mail on Sunday*). Yet, as stated in an interview for *The Guardian*, Mantel explains that some of her readers blamed her for “being too easy on Cromwell” (Mantel 2012). The few times Cromwell was mentioned before Mantel published her books, he appeared to be a villain. The Thomas Cromwell depicted in Mantel’s novels is far from resembling the evil one in *A Man for All Seasons* (1960). But is it fair to make such an assertion when no one looked at the whole picture? Her goal in writing these books was not to go against the belief Cromwell was a villain. As she explained: “It wasn’t that I wanted to rehabilitate [Thomas Cromwell]. I do not run a Priory Clinic for the dead. Rather, I was driven by powerful curiosity. If a villain, an interesting villain, yes?” (Mantel 2012).

And Thomas Cromwell is an interesting villain indeed. *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* depict the rags-to-riches story of Thomas Cromwell, a man gifted for languages who will eventually end up chief minister to King Henry VIII. The reader knows little about his past except that he had to run away from a violent father and travelled through Europe before coming back to London and becoming a lawyer. At the beginning of *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell is Cardinal Wolsey’s assistant, but as the story goes on, he starts advocating for the Reformation and gains favour from Henry VIII. When the King is able to divorce from Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn thanks to Cromwell’s help, the latter becomes one of the influential men in the country. *Bring Up the Bodies* deals with the decline of Henry VIII’s marriage with Anne Boleyn and ends up with her beheading. As we know from history, Cromwell was

executed in 1540, but this event will be dealt with in *The Mirror and the Light* which will possibly be released in 2019 (*The Guardian* 2017).

In writing this master dissertation, my aim is to discuss Hilary Mantel's representation of Thomas Cromwell in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. Using real historical events, Hilary Mantel managed to render Cromwell "tolerant, passionate, intellectually inquisitive, humane" (Benfey 2009). My study strives to highlight the complex personality of Thomas Cromwell. From the beginning of his life onwards Thomas Cromwell had to fashion his identity in an unstable family environment, lacking essential reference points. Afterwards, acquiring both political knowledge and artistic insight Mantel's Cromwell became the powerful Master Secretary.

In the first part of this master dissertation, I shall begin by sketching out the general definition of the historical novel, explaining what its main features are and what the difference is between history and historical novels. This chapter also includes Mantel's own comments on the historical novel. To do so, I shall mainly use her Reith Lectures (BBC 2017), in which she explains what are the main challenges of an authors of historical novels and how they should deal with the reality.

In the second chapter of this work, using Diarmaid MacCulloch's *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*, I shall make a comparison between what truly happened in the 16th century and what happens in Mantel's books. In other words, I shall question her work's authenticity, in which in this master dissertation I define as historical veracity. Yet, I shall not compare every single event that happens in Mantel's novels with the reality. I shall select those that give a fair impression of the Tudor Period under Henry VIII, and are relevant for the fictional construct of Mantel's Cromwell novels.

Moving on to the second part of this master dissertation, the following chapter will first define the concept of identity which will be necessary for the rest of my analysis. The rest of this chapter is built around the theme of Cromwell's public life. The things he was given at the beginning of his life like his name or his date of birth become obstacles in the building of his identity. Cromwell's multiple professions also shed light on his numerous personalities.

The fourth chapter deals with Cromwell's private life and how Cromwell orders himself and the world from within. I shall talk about Cromwell's ability to speak many languages and the consequences for the outer world. Also, tackling Cromwell's painful family life, I shall demonstrate that Cromwell cannot control everything even though he would like to. Finally,

some key concepts of the Renaissance such as the Renaissance man or Humanism will also be explained in this chapter and put in relation with Cromwell's identity.

The last chapter is devoted to the notion of art and what Cromwell makes of it. First explaining what art meant in the Renaissance, I shall then discuss some of the motives related to the animal world and what they tell us about Cromwell's personality. Shifting to the rational side of Cromwell's personality, I shall also talk about the Art of Memory and how it is to Cromwell his greatest strength. Finally, I shall explore the effects of Holbein's painting of Cromwell on Mantel's main protagonist.

List of Abbreviations

BB: *Bring Up the Bodies*

EB: Encyclopaedia Britannica

RL: Reith Lecture

WH: *Wolf Hall*

Part 1: Definition of the Genre and Historical Background

Chapter 1: The Historical Novel

1. The Issue of Genre

Contemporary literary critics are constantly trying to ascribe a genre to the different pieces of writing they encounter. Interest in the classification of literary texts reaches back as far as Plato and Aristotle. In the very first sentence of his *Poetics*, Aristotle expressed his intention to develop a theory of genre: “Our subject being poetry, I propose to speak not only of the art in general, but also of its species and their respective qualities” (in Delabastita 46). Following this Aristotelian tradition, critics have usually divided literature into three main genres: dramatic, epic (which really means narrative as no restriction to heroic literature is intended) and lyrical (*ibid.*). However, this theory overlooks the hypothetical relevance of other criteria than the three which it puts at its centre, making it therefore somewhat incomplete. It also suggests, quite inaccurately, that a genre theory can be universal and timeless whereas in fact, genres are in constant evolution. Finally, it fails to accommodate more hybrid genres. Membership of a genre is more a question of degrees of typicality than a clear-cut yes/no position, and an individual work could be said to belong to more than a single genre (*ibid.*). Still, for the sake of our master dissertation, we shall consider *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* to pertain to the genre of historical novels. This decision relies on among others the fact that Hilary Mantel, the author of both books, claims to be a historical novelist (Mantel 2017).

2. Various Definitions of the Historical Novel

If one enters a large bookshop intending to buy *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, one will certainly be sent to the historical novel section. But what does the term “historical novel” refer to? In the **Encyclopaedia Britannica**, historical novels are defined as follows:

Historical novel, a novel that has as its setting a period of history and that attempts to convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions of a past age with realistic detail and fidelity (which is in some cases only apparent fidelity) to historical fact. The work may deal with actual historical personages [...] or it may contain a mixture of fictional and historical characters. It may focus on a single historic event [...]. More often it attempts to portray a broader view of a past society in which great events are reflected by their impact on the private lives of fictional

individuals. Since the appearance of the first historical novel, Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), this type of fiction has remained popular. Though some historical novels [...] are of the highest artistic quality, many of them are written to mediocre standards.

(EB, historical novel)

In this definition, the genre is not offered a high status. However, as said previously, Hilary Mantel won the Booker Prize twice, once for *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. Therefore, because the historical novel as a genre is the core matter of this master dissertation, it seemed appropriate to give more nuanced definitions of it.

In *Whose History? Engaging Students through Historical Fiction* (2013), Grant Rodwell, an Australian scholar, sketches the different definitions associated with the genre of historical novels. His classification is taken over in the paragraphs that follow.

The Range of Historical Fiction

Firstly, the United States-based Historical Novel Society, which acknowledges the complexity of the term, came up with the following definition:

To be deemed historical (in our sense), a novel must have been written at least fifty years after the events described, or have been written by someone who was not alive at the time of those events (who therefore approaches them only by research).

Looking at this sole definition, one can objectively claim that *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* are historical novels. Hilary Mantel was not alive in the 16th century, which is the time in which the events in the two books take place.

However, Sarah Johnson, one-time editor of the Historical Novel Society, elaborated on how difficult it was to reach a consensus on what the right definition was. To her, "the obvious definition that comes to mind is that historical fiction is simply 'fiction set in the past'" (in Rodwell 48). But this definition seems too wide and unsatisfying. Still according to Johnson, 'While the usual generic definition – "Fiction set in the past" – is true for the most part, this seemingly simple definition brings up a number of questions" (ibid.). Are multiple-time novels

such as *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham historical novels? Is Umberto Eco's *Island of the Day Before* a historical novel since it is set in the past? Many scholars seem to have different answer to questions of this kind.

For MacKinnally Kantor, winner of a Pulitzer Prize, "the term 'historical novel' has a dignity of its own, and should be applied to those works wherein a deliberate attempt has been made to recreate the past". Historical novels acquire then a teaching value as their readers can benefit from the lessons of the past (in Rodwell 49).

Nevertheless, as Andrew Graham Dixon, broadcaster and journalist for the *Daily Telegraph*, puts it: "The historical novel has always been a literary form at war with itself. The very term, implying a fiction somehow grounded in the fact – a lie with obscure obligations to the truth – is suggestive of the contradictions of the genre" (Graham Dixon cited in Rodwell 48). The genre in itself is indeed full of contradictions. Writers of historical novels are supposed to be accurate whereas they still resort to fiction. Still, Richard Lee, founder of the Historical Novel Society, argues that "no-one would bother to read [*Bridget Jones' Diary* (1996) and *Trainspotting* (1996)] if they didn't believe they were in some way drawn from life" (in Rodwell 49). In other words, even if readers are aware that what they are reading is untrue, they will still get the illusion that it is somehow true. According to Lee, this is absolutely fundamental of all fiction, not only historical novels.

History and Historical Fiction

In another context, Scott H. Dalton points out another definition of the genre. To him, there are four situations in which one can talk about historical fiction (in Rodwell 49). For each situation, I shall provide one example:

<i>Situations</i>	<i>Example</i>
Real historical figures in the context of the challenges they face	<i>Wolf Hall</i> by Hilary Mantel
Real historical figures in imagined situations	<i>The Fall of Giants</i> by Ken Follet
Fictional Characters in documented historical situations	<i>Captain Corelli's Mandolin</i> by Louis de Bernières

Fictional characters in fictional situations, but in the context of a real historical context.	<i>The boy in the Striped Pyjamas</i> by John Boyne
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Moreover, “the market recognizes a few other permutations” (Dalton).

<i>Situations</i>	<i>Example</i>
“Time-shift stories, in which a modern character is transported back in time, or more rarely, a historical character is transported to the present, or to a time period not his own” (<i>ibid.</i>).	<i>Outlander</i> by Diana Gabaldon
“Alternate stories, or ‘What if?’ stories, usually set in a world in which an historic event did not occur, or occurred much differently” (<i>ibid.</i>).	<i>The Underground Railroad</i> by Colson Whitehead
“Historical fantasy, in which characters, even historic gures, are depicted in historical periods or situations, but along with magic or dragons or some other element of fantasy” (<i>ibid.</i>).	<i>King Arthur Trilogy</i> by Bernard Cornwell

Dalton adds that “historical fiction is a fictional story in which elements of history, be they persons, events, or settings, play a central role.” He then points out the difference between the genre of historical novels and history as a discipline. Dalton claims that History, just like historical novels, contains an element of speculation. If one was to ask four soldiers to come up with a narrative of the fight they took part in one hour before, one would certainly hear four different stories. The difference between History and the genre we are dealing with lies somewhere else:

It is the job of both the historian and the historical fiction writer to cut through the fog of perception and come as close to the truth as possible. The difference lies in the level at which they seek the truth, the focus of their seeking. The historian focuses on the events. The fiction writer focuses on the persons – the characters, if you will – involved in those events.

As we will see later on this dissertation, this seems to partly be the vision received of historical novels by Hilary Mantel. While historians are trying to answer questions such as “What

happened?” and “Why did it happen that way?”, writers of historical fiction want to know “What was it like?”. To answer this last question, authors present the facts in the way they understood them to fit their storylines. Vernay states (in Rodwell 51):

It is generally accepted that a work of imagination is built on reality contributing to the psychology of the characters, the historical context, fictional setting, the authenticity of certainly situations modelled on the author’s life and so on. [...] Facts give the text substance so that the reader can read it literally or symbolically. Actual trivia feed the historical novel.

History and historical fictions are not same. Whilst History is a discipline that is very methodical and that deals with the past, historical fiction is first of all an act of creation that makes an extensive use of characters and events from the past.

3. Hilary Mantel’s Definition of Historical Novels

As Johnson puts it, “almost everyone – and this includes readers, authors, publishers, agents and the press – seems to have his or her own idea of what historical fiction is, and also what historical fiction should be” (in Rodwell 48). Hilary Mantel likewise has her own concept of what a historical novel should be. As the lecturer of the 2017 BBC Reith Lectures, she introduced her talk as follow:

We carry the genes and the culture of our ancestors, and what we think about them shapes what we think of ourselves, and how we make sense of our time and place. [...] We rely on history to tell us. History, and science too, help us to put our small lives in context. But if we want to meet the dead looking alive, we turn to art.

(RL, *The Day Is for the Living*)

In other words, she claims that dead people have something to tell the people who are alive and she thinks the best way to get a grasp of what we need to know is to resort to art. Therefore, Hilary Mantel opted for the genre of historical fiction in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. In what follows, we will explain what the genre of historical fiction means to her and how close a historical novelist should stay to History as well as the challenges and the problems they face in the writing process.

According to Mantel, there are many different types of historical fiction and while some authors decide to add a hint of fantasy to their work or to make it look like a documentary, what she does in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* is different: “I track the historical record so I can report the outer world faithfully – though I also tell my reader the rumours, and suggest that sometimes the news is falsified” (RL, *The Day Is for the Living*). Historical novelists “don’t have the skills for original research from primary sources” and they often “first meet the material when it’s been filtered – by historians, biographers” (RL, *Can These Bones Live?*). Their task is to construe a pattern, a new story, against the background of these given data.

Writers of historical novels, more than those practising another genre, have to constantly justify their work regarding their authenticity. The question that always comes up when asked about her novels is whether they are true to history books. Mantel’s advice, as expressed in her Reith lectures in 2017, would be not to lie since “one falsification trips another” (RL, *Can These Bones Live?*). One lie, as innocent it may seem, may have great consequences for the rest of the story. An author should not go against well-known facts. But the process of fictionalization takes place as soon as an event occurs. Once it happens, an event cannot be repeated a second time in the exact same way it did. People talk about it and it instantly becomes fiction with its part of interpretation. As Patrick Collinson puts it: “It is possible for competent historians to come to radically different conclusions on the basis of the same evidence. Because of course, 99% of the evidence, above all, unrecorded speech, is not available to us” (RL, *The Day Is for the Living*). A historical novel is thus more than just an account of the past for Hilary Mantel. It also requires a subjective interpretation, it is a new way of looking at well-known evidence. The novelist’s goal is not to recreate the past, “but to recreate the texture of lived experience: to activate the senses, and to deepen the reader’s engagement through feeling” (RL, *Can These Bones Live?*). Hilary Mantel’s main concern “is with the interior drama of [her] characters’ lives. From history [she] know[s] what they do, but [she] can’t know with any certainty what they think or feel” (RL, *The Day Is for the Living*). Her emphasis is thus on the characters and their states of mind rather than on the events. Still, Hilary Mantel says she does not consider facts to be a constraint. Quite the contrary, she thinks facts trigger her creativity. To her, “the closer to history, the stronger the story” (RL, *The Iron Maiden*).

Furthermore, “the task of historical fiction is to take the past out of the archive and relocate it in a body” (RL, *Can These Bones Live?*). In a way, this is a job of resurrection through literary means. The story that is eventually printed in a book is the result of many stylistic and syntactic choices. But according to Mantel, “the historical novel requires an extra set of choices – what sources to consult, what shape to cut from the big picture – what to do when the evidence is missing or ambiguous or plain contradictory” (*ibid.*). It is true that a novelist has to be careful and avoid being too comprehensive. Actually, he or she needs to make choices during their writing process because telling everything would be an endless task. One has to make the difference between “the truth and the whole truth”. Still, selection should not be seen as a “compromise with the truth”. Quite the contrary, “It is an essential part of making sense of a narrative for the reader”. If an author does not operate a selection on the events that he or she is depicting, the reader will end up lost in an ocean of irrelevant details. Hilary Mantel thinks that “a complete thing is an exhausted thing” (*ibid.*). There has to be space for interpretation for the reader as well. What is more, Hilary Mantel states that “sometimes [their] books write [them]” (RL, *Silence Grips the Town*). It happens when the author gets too much involved in her task and forgets that she is living outside her book as well. It is very important that the novelist’s art does not destroy her and she should therefore choose “the Life” over “the Project”. Whether the book is considered to be good or bad is not the author’s decision anyway.

Also, one of the challenges of the novelists of historical fictions is the distance that separates them from the event they are talking about. They are “walking anachronisms” as they try and understand what life was like in the past using present-day language and techniques. “He must try to work authentically, hearing the words of the past, but communicating in a language the present understands” (RL, *The Day Is for the Living*). As a matter of fact, “the past sees and hears differently. It measures differently, counts differently” (RL, *The Iron Maiden*). The past calls for a different arrangement of our senses. “It takes time to locate yourself in a new age, a new geography. You have to expand your area of curiosity, away from political history and into every area of culture. [...] At first you are a stranger in your chosen era” (RL, *Can These Bones Live?*).

But how does a novelist of historical fictions manage to create suspense when the end of the story is already known? It is true that people reading *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* certainly know that Anne Boleyn will eventually be beheaded and that Thomas Cromwell will

be executed as well. Yet, readers of the first two books will probably go and buy the third book because they know it is going to happen and they are curious to know why it happened. In an interview for *The Guardian*, Mantel stated that “despite the inevitability of Cromwell’s death, [...] in every scene, even the quiet one, [she] tries to create turning points, multiple turning points. So the reader knows how it’s going to turn out, but the reader’s expectation of how and why is constantly challenged” (Higgins 2012). It is crucial that readers are put in the moment thanks to some techniques. There is a kind of dramatic irony in all of this since the reader is aware of the character’s fate and he is maybe hoping there will be a change while the character is not. Mantel illustrates this by putting the character on the edge of a cliff. The reader is then “at the foot of the cliff, wise after the event, and he is also on the path, he is before the event” (RL, *Can These Bones Live?*).

Moreover, the historical novelist, unlike historians, has to imagine from the inside what the past looked like and neutrality is thus not an essential feature. He should thus take a step away from the archives and let the characters of his books once again wander around, knowing nothing about their fate. Furthermore, “a good novelist will have her characters operate within the ethical framework of their day – even if it shocks the readers” (RL, *The Iron Maiden*). A first danger lies in the fact that the novelist may distort the truth to make the character match his own ethical standards. The other danger is condescendence. The authors have to be careful not to look down on their characters. What a character thinks or how he acts should be looked at against the background of his times and not against the background of the novelist’s times. As an example, in early modern England, people “looked backwards to the benefits of virtue” while in our modern era, “we look forward, to the benefits of technology” (*ibid.*). Conceptions and values are different from one period to another; the novelist should take this into account in his writing process. Mantel also states:

The essence of the thing is not to judge with hindsight, not to pass judgement from the lofty perch of the 21st century when we know that happened. It’s to be there with them in that hunting party at Wolf Hall, moving forward with imperfect information and perhaps wrong expectations, but in any case moving forward into a future that is not predetermined, but where chance and hazard will play a terrific role.

(Mantel 2012)

Hilary Mantel then argues that the past, especially the medieval period, is today treated like “a horror movie”. Most people have preconceived ideas of what it looked like to live in Henry VIII’s times. Generally, these ideas tend to be quite negative. Still, the first purpose of modern historical fictions like those of Walter Scott was to present the past as reassuring and bright. One of Mantel’s goals, in writing her historical novels, was to unite those two dimensions. To her, “historical fiction faces two ways – making its reader say, ‘I’m glad it’s not then,’ and at the same time, ‘I wish it were then.’” (RL, *The Iron Maiden*). Hilary Mantel wants to offer her readers some insight into what things must have looked like. She claims that she does not pretend her version of the past is the only valid one, her sole wish is for people to consider her version.

Hilary Mantel also insists that many historical novelists want to tell the untold. “They want to give a voice to those who have been silenced” (RL, *The Iron Maiden*). In an interview for *The Guardian*, Mantel claimed in 2012 that “Blacksmith’s boy to Earl of Essex – how did he do it? The story seemed irresistible” (Mantel 2012). According to her, the work that had previously been done on Thomas Cromwell was “cut up into topics: ‘Finance’, ‘Religion’, and so on. He seemed not to have a private life”. Seeing Thomas Cromwell as a man of flesh and blood remained an unexplored angle of approach, and therefore Hilary Mantel, driven by curiosity, decided to work on Cromwell’s character.

Chapter 2: Faithful Mirroring of History in the Fiction

In Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Tudor England is the main setting and Thomas Cromwell is the main character. Since I am dealing with historical novels in this master dissertation, it seemed relevant to describe the real historical context, that is to say expand on what the Tudor period was like. We certainly do not claim to give an exhaustive answer to the question. This chapter is however designed to offer a foretaste of the English 16th-century period and, more precisely, of Henry VIII's Great Matter as it is one of the main topics in Mantel's novels. What follows is also aimed at showing that Hilary Mantel was meticulous in mirroring history in her fiction.

1. Gathering the Information

Looking for reliable sources can sometimes be challenging, especially when it comes to Thomas Cromwell, whose life is often overshadowed by that of his master Henry VIII. Still, Geoffrey Elton, a German-born British historian, has written a lot about the Tudors and Thomas Cromwell in the second half of the twentieth century. He is, however, often considered to be too much of a traditionalist since his method was empirical only (MacCulloch 4). Nevertheless, his work has contributed greatly to the debate round Cromwell's role in the Tudor government. Elton despised the biographical genre and according to him, Cromwell was "not biographable" (in MacCulloch 3). But Diarmaid MacCulloch, another British scholar, challenged Elton's belief, not without paying tribute to him, and released a new biography in September 2018 entitled *Thomas Cromwell: a life*. Because this is the most recent work on him and because MacCulloch states in his acknowledgments that he got a lot of help from Hilary Mantel in the writing of this book, I shall use this work as our main source of historical information in this master dissertation. Furthermore, MacCulloch claims in his introduction that "[t]his book is different. It invites you, the reader, to find the true Thomas Cromwell of history" (MacCulloch 5), a very bold claim indeed.

In the writing of his biography, MacCulloch had to face many difficulties. When Cromwell was arrested in 1540, the Crown confiscated most of his paperwork, which now belongs to the British Library and the National Archives where they have been unhelpfully re-ordered. Irritatingly enough, it became apparent that these papers only consisted of Cromwell's incoming correspondence, the letters he received. As for his outgoing

correspondence, the letters he sent, MacCulloch explains that its absence may be the result of a deliberate destruction. During Cromwell's arrest in 1540, his household would have done everything they could in trying to save him. Part of their plan was to destroy Cromwell's own writings for they would certainly have strengthened the case against him. As we know from history, their plan to save Cromwell failed, but they managed to destroy his outgoing correspondence and now "the man's own voice is largely missing" (MacCulloch 3). Despite the huge gap in this sea of information, MacCulloch managed to write a "weighty biography of Henry VIII's ambitious fixer" (McCrum 2018).

2. The Great Matter: Anne Boleyn, Wolsey's Failure and Decline

Under Henry VIII, the complications brought about by his relationship with Anne Boleyn are called "Henry's Great Matter." She was the younger daughter of a Norfolk gentleman and could speak French fluently. Her beauty would not match today's standards; however, she seemed to have had many admirers, including the nobleman Henry Percy and the poet Thomas Wyatt. She was a very sophisticated woman (MacCulloch 167). The Great Matter is at the core of Mantel's books and Thomas Cromwell is portrayed as having played an important part. As for her relationship with Harry Percy, the matter is discussed at length several times throughout the books:

Anne has just heard that Harry Percy's wife, Mary Talbot, is preparing to petition Parliament for divorce. For two years, she says, her husband has not shared her bed, and when finally she asked him why, he said he could not carry on a pretence any longer, they were not really married, and never had been, since he was married to Anne Boleyn.

(WH 373)

As to the affair Henry VIII is said to have had with Mary Boleyn (MacCulloch 2018), Cromwell presents it as a rumour to Wolsey:

'Come now, Thomas, you were telling me of a rumour.'

'The women judge from orders to the silk merchants that the king has a new –' He breaks off and says, 'My lord, what do you call a whore when she is a knight's daughter'

[...]

‘But it is not the Boleyn lady new at the court. Not Harry Percy’s lady. It is her sister.’

(WH 74)

Wolsey then goes on by spreading another rumour: “[T]hey say that when His Majesty was young, not yet king, it was Boleyn’s wife who relieved him of his virgin state” (*ibid.*). Hilary Mantel thus treats this information in a very cautious way. In the first instance, she does not claim these accusations to be true, but does not deny them either. Later on in *Wolf Hall*, the confirmation of an affair between Mary and the King will come from Anne Boleyn’s sister herself: “She knows I was Henry mistress” (136). She even implies that she gave birth to Henry’s son: “If you saw my son... well, why do you think I called him Henry?” (WH 137).

Around 1526, it became apparent that Henry VIII wanted Anne Boleyn. His marriage with Katherine of Aragon gave him no son and it was not certain whether their union was legal (MacCulloch 2018). Mantel depicts Henry VIII as being a very whimsical man who is willing to get an annulment of his marriage with Katherine of Aragon, whatever the price, his main argument being that the marriage was unlawful since Katherine had already been married to King Arthur:

‘Nothing will ensue, if you wish to be rid of your wife, but a great deal of trouble and expense.’
[...] ‘Never,’ he said, ‘call that dear lady my wife, until you can show me why she is, and how it can be so. Till then, call her my sister, my dear sister. Since she was quite certainly my brother’s wife, before going through a form of marriage with me.’

(WH 25-26)

Anne Boleyn was very clear on the fact that she did not want to share Henry’s bed unless they were married. Henry’s primary goal was thus to cancel his marriage with the Queen. Until then, the Cardinal Wolsey had managed to make most of the King’s wishes come true. But this one turned out to be very challenging.

Furthermore, Anne Boleyn had decided to blame Wolsey for deliberately slowing off the process. She wanted Wolsey, the lowborn priest, to be destroyed. He was banished to Esher in Surrey. The reason given by Mantel for pushing out Wolsey of his residence was that “the king wants to send in his own builders and furnishers and get the palace ready to hand

over to Lady Anne, who needs a London house of her own" (WH 48). It is said that on his way there, a crowd of excited people were shouting at him from boats on the Thames: "[T]hey are sounds of hooting and booing from the boats" (WH 54). It may have been during this period that Thomas Cromwell became the father of an illegitimate daughter named Jane.

3. Wolsey: Sealing his Fate

At the beginning of 1530, Henry VIII allowed Wolsey to leave Esher and to join the former royal palace at Richmond. He was set to go north in April 1530. Wolsey would go back to his old habit of display (MacCulloch 118). As it appears, the cardinal is willing to go north on the condition that he is looked at by the common people: "He wants to go slowly so the people can admire him" (WH 209). He then adopted a new style where he would go in the crowd, abandoning his horses, showing himself open to the poorest ones. He would have been happy "to say Mass many times among the Common people" (*ibid.*). In *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell finds out that "more people have crowded in to look at Wolsey than have been in that town in living memory" (WH 214).

However, convinced by Anne Boleyn that Wolsey was poisonous, Henry VIII commanded his arrest before he could even make it to York (MacCulloch 2018). In Mantel's work, Anne Boleyn seems to have had influence on Wolsey's fate. At some point, Cromwell officially meets Anne Boleyn. He did not come without a purpose, he wants to rehabilitate his cardinal, and Anne Boleyn having a lot of influence on Henry VIII, is the one to whom Cromwell will present his case. Hence the following conversation between the Master Secretary and Anne Boleyn:

'Think,' he says. 'He is the only man in England who can obtain for you what you need.'

'Very well. Make his case. You have five minutes.'

[...]

He tells her again: the cardinal is the only man who can deliver a good verdict from the Pope.

He is the only man who can deliver the king's conscience, and deliver it clean.

(WH 202)

Unfortunately for Wolsey, we know from what follows in *Wolf Hall* that he will not be rehabilitated. After Cromwell's speech, Anne Boleyn already suggests that Cardinal Wolsey's

fate is sealed anyway: “Very nice, Master Cremuel, but try again. One thing. One simple thing we asked of the cardinal, and he would not. *One simple thing*” (WH 203).

Paradoxically, Mantel’s Henry VIII seems to sometimes care about Wolsey: “Every day I miss the Cardinal of York” (WH 211). Still, even though the King shows some affection towards Wolsey, he wants to take his power down. Henry VIII is torn apart between the desire to have his revenge and his feelings. Within a month, Wolsey was dead and it is highly unlikely that Cromwell could attend his first master’s funeral. Thomas Cromwell was left very touched by Wolsey’s death (MacCulloch 2018). In her first novel, the event is in the first instance soberly approached by Mantel:

On 1 November 1530, a commission for the cardinal’s arrest is given to Harry Percy, the young Earl of Northumberland. The earl arrives at Cawood to arrest him, forty-eight hours before his planned arrival in York for his investiture. He is taken to Pontefract Castle under guard, from there to Doncaster, and from there to Sheffield Park, the home of the Earl of Shrewsbury. Here at Talbot’s house he falls ill. On 26 November the Constable of the Tower arrives, with twenty-four men at arms, to escort him south. From there he travels to Leicester Abbey. Three days later he dies.

(WH 260)

The same event is then told in a more moving manner by George Cavendish. He comes at Austin Friars and brings the terrible news to Thomas Cromwell, who was not aware of Wolsey’s health state.

4. Supreme Head of the Church

In the meantime, Henry VIII was still trying to get rid of his marriage with Katherine of Aragon “using a mixture of theological argument and diplomacy” (MacCulloch 134). In mainland Europe, “a potentially powerful alternative political grouping was emerging in Germany, as various ‘Protestant’ princes and free cities of the Empire to form a security alliance against any aggression from their overlord Charles V” (MacCulloch 135). These burgeoning Reformations were the only hope for Henry VIII to marry Anne Boleyn since his negotiations with Rome had failed. Finally, in 1531, Henry VIII gained the title of the Supreme Head of the Church of England. Going a step further, he would act as if he were already

married to Anne Boleyn, who was still refusing to go to bed with him because they were not officially married:

You would think they were already man and wife, a languorous night before them, filled with marital delights. You would think so, except he has Mary Boleyn's word for it that the marquise has bought Henry only the right to caress her sister's inner thigh. [...]. She uses her body like a soldier, conserving its resources.

(WH 394)

By 1534, the *Act of Supremacy* confirmed that the King was more powerful than the Church itself. According to MacCulloch, "Master Cromwell" (MacCulloch 146) had been actively involved in this move from the beginning onwards.

5. A (Clandestine) Royal Marriage

By the summer 1532, few were the people that still believed her marriage with Henry VIII would not take place. The remaining questions were when and how. Meanwhile, Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, had broken off the Christian rules and was married to Margarete. It was a gesture that "he had embraced evangelical reformation" (MacCulloch 206):

'This woman is...?'

Cranmer says, 'Margarete. My wife.'

'Dear God'. He slams Luther down on the table.

[...]

'It may be the belief in your country, madam, that a pastor should have a wife, but not here.

Did Dr Cranmer not warn you of this?

(WH 475)

During the autumn of 1532, an international summit took place between France and England. Both countries were willing to make a strategic alliance: Henry VIII wanted to secure his marriage with Anne and France wanted to construct an alliance against the Habsburgs (MacCulloch 2018). "The monarchs are to meet for five days in Boulogne, then five days in

Calais" (WH 402). At some point in this trip to France, Henry VIII and Anne have presumably consummated their love, having given up on the hope of an official ceremony. In *Wolf Hall*, this first marriage in Calais is presented as a fact:

Mistress Shelton comes careering towards him. 'My lady wants a Bible!'

'Master Cromwell can recite the whole New Testament,' Wyatt says helpfully.

The girl looks agonised. 'I think she wants it to swear on.'

(WH 410)

It is later confirmed that Anne and Henry consummated their marriage: "She is in his arms, naked as she was born. She can't change her mind now" (WH 411). Henry then went back to England, leaving his new wife in Calais. On the last week of January 1533 (the 24th or the 25th), Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn got clandestinely married in Westminster, maybe for the second time for these two lovers:

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, the married pair both speechless expect for the small admissions of intent forced out of them by the ceremony.

(WH 425)

6. The Act in Restraints of Appeals: from Queen to Princess, from Mistress to Queen

The Act in Restraint of Appeals "was a crucial step in Henry VIII's assertion of royal supremacy" (Act in Restraint of Appeals, Oxford Reference)¹. The Act was passed during the first week of April and weakened the Pope's power even further. Following the Act, Queen Katherine of Aragon became the Princess Dowager and even though no public announcement was made about Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. She was the one that processed as a Queen to the Vigil Mass of Easter: "On 12 April, Easter Sunday, Anne appears with the king at High Mass, and is prayed for as Queen of England" (WH 443).

¹ <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095419633>

By the end of May 1533, Anne Boleyn's coronation took place, being the only one out of Henry VIII's six wives to have had a solo coronation. The weather was perfect. Because of Anne's coronation, the Pope excommunicated Henry VII (MacCulloch 2018). Queen Anne's coronation is discussed at length and in board terms by Hilary Mantel. It lasts for four days and each of them is carefully described by the author who at first does not mention it is Anne's coronation. The reader will have to wait until "Day Two" (WH 463) to read "Queen's Anne coronation" (*ibid.*) in plain letters. Also, Mantel points out that "the sun is out" (WH 462). Moreover, Mantel mentions Anne and Henry's lavish process through London:

At every turn on the route there are pageants and living statues, recitations of her virtue and gifts of gold from city coffers, her white falcon emblem crowned and entwined with roses, and blossom mashed and minced under the treading feet of the stout sixteen, so scent rise like smoke. The route is hung with tapestries and banners, and at his orders the ground beneath the horses' hooves is gravelled to prevent slipping, and the crowds restrained behind rails in case of riot and crush; every law officer London Can muster is among the crowd, because he is determined that in time to come, when this is remembered and told to those who were not here, no one is going to say, oh, Queen Anne's coronation, that was the day I got my pocket picked.

(WH 463-464)

On 7 September 1533, nine months after their wedding, Anne gave birth to Princess Elizabeth. Even though the new born was not a boy, Elizabeth was a good sign that Anne was fertile and could deliver healthy babies (MacCulloch 2018). Henry VIII appears at first to be disappointed and asks to "cancel the jousts" (WH 484). He is then reassured by Cranmer on the topic of Anne's fertility: "'Your Majesty is young enough,' Cranmer says. 'The queen is strong and her family are fertile. You can get another child soon. And perhaps God intends some peculiar blessing by this princess'" (WH 485). This seems to work on Henry as Mantel later wrote: "Soon Henry is striding about the palace at Greenwich, putting the celebrations under way. We are young enough, he says, and next time it will be a boy" (*ibid.*).

Now that Henry VIII got what he wanted, the Aragon annulment, Thomas Cromwell could move forward and push the Reformation further. This did not seem like an easy task since the

King did not particularly like what Protestantism stood for. Nevertheless, along with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cranmer, Cromwell pursued his plans (MacCulloch 2018).

7. Henry VIII: “seduced into this marriage through spells and charms”

During the summer of 1535, Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn undertook a royal progress that would lead them to western England. Cromwell was also part of the journey and was the investigator of this pageant. They wanted to show the population that the Crown and its ministers were on the same path: the evangelical path:

The king had left Whitehall the week of Thomas More’s death, a miserable dripping week in July, the hoof of prints of the royal entourage sinking deep into the mud as they tacked their way across to Windsor. Since then then the progress has taken in a swathe of the western counties; the Cromwell aides, having finished up the king’s business at the London end, met up with the royal train in mid-August.

(BB 5)

In October, nothing could have been better between Anne and Henry. Anne was pregnant and there were many reports that the couple was “merry”. When the Princess Dowager Katherine died on 7 January 1536, both Anne and her husband were delighted. Cromwell did his best to ensure Katherine with a decent funeral in Peterborough Abbey. However, Henry considered that already too much had been given to his former wife and he therefore dismissed Cromwell’s hearse plans (MacCulloch 311).

Following Katherine’s death, the King was on cloud nine and went back to his former pastime: jousting. But Henry was not as strong as he used to be. On the 24th of January, the King was unconscious for two hours after a serious fall in full armour. This stressed Anne very much and five days later, she miscarried a child (MacCulloch 2018). In *Wolf Hall*, Henry VIII is declared dead:

Anne Boleyn is not to blame for this misfortune. It is her uncle Thomas Howard, the Duke of Norfolk, who burst in on the queen, shouting that Henry was dead, and giving her such a shock that the unborn heart stopped.

(BB 214)

The loss of this royal child marked the beginning of the end of the love story between Anne Boleyn and the King. To Eustace Chapuy, the ambassador of France, he would have said “he had been seduced and forced into this marriage through spells and charms.... God had well shown his displeasure at it by denying him male children” (MacCulloch 311):

‘It seems to me,’ he is groping, perplexed, for the right phrases, ‘it seems to me I was somehow dishonestly led into this marriage.’

He, Cromwell, eyes the other half of himself, as if through a mirror: Cranmer looks thrown.

‘How, dishonestly?’ the archbishop asks.

‘I feel sure I was not in my clear mind then. Not as I am now.’

[...]

‘It seems to me I was seduced,’ Henry says, ‘that is to say, I was practised 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?’

(BB 219 – 220)

Meanwhile, it seemed that Henry VIII was developing a love interest in Jane Seymour, a junior lady-in-waiting of the Queen (MacCulloch 2018). In *Bring Up the Bodies*, the king asks the young Jane “if [she] would be his good mistress” (BB 216).

Following Anne’s miscarriage, Stephen Gardner informed some members of the Court that there were some rumours going on about Anne’s possible infidelities. Wriothesley, having heard about it told Cromwell. Together, they decided to tell the King who reacted fiercely. Henry knew how to hide his feelings and decided to do as if he did not know anything. In the meantime, he charged Cromwell and Wriothesley with an important and complicated task: gathering proofs that Anne Boleyn effectively had had affairs (MacCulloch 316): “Be very secret. I trust in your discretion, and your skill” (BB 283).

Anne Boleyn's fate was then sealed on the 29th of April when Mark Smeaton, a young musician was arrested and interrogated by Thomas Cromwell. It took him two days to confess adultery "which may have been no more than a combination of wishful thinking and current terror" (MacCulloch 323):

Mark looks up. 'Why, is it no wonder she is unhappy,' he says. 'She is in love.'

'With whom?'

'With me.'

He, Cromwell, leans forward, elbows on the table: then puts a hand up to cover his face.

(BB 325)

Soon, more charges were allocated to Anne Boleyn, even charges of incest. Anne was arrested and brought to the Tower on the 2nd of May. His brother, Lord Rochford, presumably his sister's lover, was arrested along with Sir Francis Weston, William Brereton and Harry Norris (MacCulloch 2018). The trial of Anne's "lovers" took place ten days later and they were all beheaded. Three days later, it was Anne's turn to be judged. Cromwell did not take part in the trial due to his social status (he was not a nobleman), but when Anne was executed, he was witnessing the event from the front row. Anne died on the 19th May. Apparently, she died with dignity (*ibid.*): "pray for the king, for he is a good, gentle, amiable and virtuous prince..." (BB 470). Her body was buried in the chapel within the Tower. As for Henry VIII, it is said that at the moment Anne was beheaded, he was already "consoling himself with another woman" (MacCulloch 340).

8. Conclusion

All in all, I have shown that Hilary Mantel stayed true to history in the writing of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. I did not present all the events discussed in Mantel's work that matched history, but I selected those that offered the best overview of the historical background of these novels. These events were the basis for Mantel's creation of Thomas Cromwell. As stated earlier, she decided to build on them to present her audience what she believed to be a valid interpretation of Cromwell's personality.

Part 2: Uncovering Thomas Cromwell's Identity

Chapter 3: Cromwell's Public Identity

1. Identity

For a long time now, the issue of identity has been much thought through and discussed. In the Oxford Dictionary, the term "identity" is defined as follows: "the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is" (Oxford Dictionary, Identity)². There are different types of identities such as national, cultural, personal and social or group identities. For the sake of this master dissertation, I shall put the emphasis on social and personal identities. To differentiate one from the other, I shall define both. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "social identity theory originated from the conviction that group membership can help people to instill meaning in social situations. Group membership helps people to define who they are and to determine how they relate to others" (EB, social identity)³. Furthermore, in his *Theory of Social Identity*, the Polish social psychologist Henri Tajfel claims that the creation of group identities leads to a distinction between an "in-group" and an "out-group". Individuals tend to view their own group with a positive bias towards the out-group. They tend to regard their own group as superior to the other groups. Social conflicts can thus be explained by this categorisation. The out-group, which is looked down upon by the in-group, can sometimes be rejected by the other. The consequence may be social discrimination (in Huddy 2001). As for personal identity, it is defined as follows:

Personal identity is the concept you develop about yourself that evolves over the course of your life. This may include aspects of your life that you have no control over, such as where you grew up or the color of your skin, as well as choices you make in life, such as how you spend your time and what you believe (Serva)⁴.

The question of Thomas Cromwell's social and personal identity will be discussed in what follows. Still, it is necessary to sketch what were the pre-existing ideas about Cromwell.

² <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/identity>

³ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-identity-theory>

⁴ <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-personal-identity-definition-philosophy-development.html>

According to Diarmaid MacCulloch, Thomas Cromwell is often thought to be a disciple of Machiavelli. This Italian Renaissance political philosopher and statesman is famous today for his controversial political ideas. In *The Prince* (1532), Niccolò Machiavelli gives some advice on how to be the best prince possible; he explains: “to maintain himself a prince must learn how not to be good and use or not use this knowledge according to necessity” (EB, Niccolò Machiavelli)⁵. In other words, the end justifies the means. Thomas Cromwell could be seen as an opportunist whose acts are motivated by his personal interests and not by any moral agenda.

But one could also look at this situation from a Nicodemite outlook perspective (MacCulloch 72), and Cromwell may have publicly been in compliance with the official religious agenda at the expense of his own secret religious beliefs. Henry VIII, Cromwell’s Master, was a very complicated man indeed. Even though he was given the title of *Fidei Defensor*, some of his opponents were calling him the *Fidei Destructor* (MacCulloch 202). To get the annulment of his marriage with Katherine of Aragon, Henry VIII resorted to religious traditionalism but he understood theology in a way that best suited his intentions.

Before the publication of Mantel’s work on him, Thomas Cromwell was thought of as “an arch-manipulator who used bullying and torture to bring about the execution of victims like Thomas More and Henry VIII’s wife Anne Boleyn” (MacCulloch 2018). He was thus widely seen as a villain. Using a truthful historical and social background which is the same as the one that is used by those who despised Cromwell, Mantel managed to make Cromwell more of a human being and less of a villain. In a review of *Bring Up the Bodies* written in 2013 for *The Women’s Review of Books*, the author, Jessica Jernigan, claims what follows:

Thomas Cromwell, Mantel’s boldest appearance. The son of a blacksmith who rose to become Henry’s most-trusted councillor, Cromwell is one of English history’s most universally detested villains. Mantel’s protagonist bears only a faint resemblance to this figure. Her Cromwell is a shrewd politician and a skilled courtier, supple of conscience and physically menacing. But he is also a fond husband, a loving father, and a thoughtful master to his servants. Cromwell’s household is a sort of humanist paradise.

(Jernigan 2013)

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Niccolo-Machiavelli>

In the following chapters, I shall try to shed a light on Mantel's interpretation of Thomas Cromwell in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* by giving an in-depth analysis of the plot in itself. In this master dissertation, I hope to make it clearer how Cromwell's public image was changed as a result of Mantel's work. In order to do so, I shall both use the historical facts and do a close reading of these two books.

1. The Master Secretary's Birth

As we know from history, we cannot be sure of Thomas Cromwell's exact date of birth; it is believed that he was born around 1485 in the small village of Putney. Socially speaking, the Cromwells were stratified as yeomen: "busy industrious folk who liked to see their promising boys get on in the world, and who valued schooling as the key to advancement" (MacCulloch 9). In other words, knowledge was the main road to go up the social scale. This is a value that would accompany Cromwell throughout all his life. He spoke many languages including Italian and French and was his own tutor. His father, Walter Cromwell, brewed beer and was at the same time a blacksmith, aiming at becoming a gentleman. Thomas's mother's Christian name is not certain, but it may have been that she came from a gentry family, meaning that the Cromwells' low origins have been exaggerated (*ibid.*).

Still, in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Hilary Mantel assumes that Thomas Cromwell was born in a very precarious social environment. In the first book, the reader meets him, a young boy, close to being fifteen years. In fact, Cromwell does not know when he was born: "It amuses Wolsey, that he doesn't know his age" (WH 24). Not knowing your birthdate may be amusing for others but it does not seem to be that fun for the young Thomas. As shown by the following extract, Cromwell keeps asking himself about his real age. During an encounter with Thomas More, the first thing he does is to compare More's age to his hypothetical age:

Master More is fourteen this year, someone says, and is to go to Oxford. He doesn't know where Oxford is, or whether he wants to go there or has just been sent. A boy can be sent; and Master Thomas is not yet a man.

Fourteen is twice seven. Am I seven? He asks. Don't just say yes. Tell me am I? His father says, for God's sake, Kat, make him up a birthday. Tell him anything, but keep him quiet.

(WH 114)

It apparently gets on Walter's nerves that his son wants to know his exact birthdate though it is one of the necessary reference points in the building of one's own identity. We can also see that Cromwell resorts to calculations in order to get his answer. His ability to do mathematics and logical reasoning are a stable point of his life, as we will see throughout this master dissertation.

Further on in *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell explains to Morgan Williams that it does not matter much that he does not have a birthday:

Then when he came into this world, bawling, with clenched fists and wet black curls, Walter and his friends reeled through Putney, singing. They shouted, 'Come and get it, girls!' and 'Barren wives served here!'. They never noted the date. He said to Morgan, I don't mind. I don't have a natal chart. So I don't have a fate.

(WH 334)

To him, if you do not have a birthday, you do not exist. Therefore, you cannot have a "fate". This term carries rather negative implications as it is defined as follows: "what happened to a particular person or thing, especially something final or negative, such as death or defeat" (Cambridge Dictionary, fate)⁶. Consequently, Cromwell may have felt invincible in the sense that he was confident nothing bad could happen to him since he was never officially born: "Look at my face: I am not afraid of any man alive" (WH 266). As we will see throughout this chapter, Cromwell's self-confidence is unstable. Sometimes he feels he can do whatever pleases him, sometimes he feels doomed.

Cromwell then goes on about his fate:

In recent years, of course, scholars have tried to give him a fate; men learned in reading the heavens have tried to work him back from what he is and how he is, to when he was born. Jupiter favourably aspected, indicating prosperity. Mercury rising, offering the faculty of quick and persuasive speech. Kratzer says, if Mars is not in Scorpio, I don't know my trade. His mother was fifty-two and they thought she could neither conceive nor deliver a child. She hid her powers and

⁶ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/fate>

disguised him under draperies, deep inside her, for as long as she could contrive. He came out and they said, what is it?

(WH 335)

As it appears, due to his high position, it did not feel right to the other scholars that he did not know how old he was. In an attempt to include him in the in-group, many men tried to guess his age by looking at the stars; astrology was very fashionable in these days indeed (Ashley 1987). No one seemed however to have been successful as Cromwell's conclusion is still the same. Moreover, he uses the question tag "what" that refers to things and not "who" that refers to people. Maybe Cromwell considered he was born an object and not a person, hence his obsession for logical reasoning and figures as we will see throughout this master dissertation. Another reason for this obsession may be that he was missing the most important figure in his life, namely the figure indicating his age.

Regarding his origins, we know that he was born in Putney, a rural town in Surrey. Throughout his political career, being of low-origins is represented as his Achilles heel in Mantel's novels. Thomas Cromwell is constantly reminded of it, even though his father insists on the fact their family used to be rich:

'Law!' Walter said. 'If it weren't for the so-called law, we would be lords. Of the manor. And a whole lot of other manors round here.' That is, he thinks, an interesting point to make. [...] He'd heard it all his childhood: the Cromwells were a rich family once, we had estates. 'When, where?' he used to say. Walter would say, 'Somewhere in the north, up there!' and yell at him for quibbling. His father didn't like to be disbelieved even when he was telling you an outright lie. 'So how do we come to such a low place?' he would ask, and Walter would say it was because of lawyers and cheats and lawyers who are all cheats, and who thief land away from its owners. [...] Just once, when he was sober, Walter had said something that sounded true, and was, by his lights, eloquent: I suppose, he said, I suppose we pissed it away. I suppose once it's gone, it's gone. I suppose fortune, when it's lost, it will never visit again.

(WH 111-112)

In this excerpt, Walter asserts that the Cromwells were robbed of their land some time ago. If it were not for the dishonest lawyers, the Cromwells would still be rich. Thomas Cromwell,

even at a young age, does not actually believe what his father says and remains perplex. Later, being sober, Walter would finally admit it may have been their fault if they lost money. Walter shows here that he is ashamed of his low status and tries to blame the others for his failure. Unlike his father, Cromwell thinks that his own family is responsible for it.

Still, it remained difficult for him to live with this background. As explained by MacCulloch, the Cromwells believed in the power of knowledge. There are hints that Thomas Cromwell was a very intelligent boy indeed since he taught his sister Kat how to write (*WH* 8). In Hilary Mantel's book, there are some references made to a priest that would have taught Cromwell: "Where's Tom, send him home, who paid the bloody priest to teach him to read and write [...] (*WH* 9). Hence, Thomas Cromwell may have been self-taught, but he was apparently not the sole actor responsible for his education. It is also mentioned that it is Walter Cromwell who wanted his son to be able to read and write: "For Walter, the point of being able to read is to take advantage of people who can't; for the same purpose one must learn to write. So his father sends him to the priest" (*WH* 114).

Unfortunately, even though Cromwell was a brilliant scholar, he would still be looked down upon by members of the aristocracy, by the in-group:

'You can never advance your own pedigree – and God knows, Tom, you were born in a more dishonourable estate than me – so the trick is always to keep them scraped up to their own standards. They made the rules; they cannot complain if I am the strictest enforcer.

(*WH* 70)

In this discussion with Cardinal Wolsey, Cromwell's Master, the former explains to the latter that he can never quite get away with his origins. It does not mean, however, that he does not have any power. The solution is to make them stick to their own old-fashioned rules. Since they created them, they cannot say anything against them.

These rules are seen as outdated because the 16th century was a period of deep change. England was entering the Renaissance, a period in European civilization that is believed to have started in Italy during the 14th century (EB, Renaissance)⁷. This was an age

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Renaissance>

that was increasingly mercantile. “The Renaissance was the first wave of the protracted process of transition from feudalism to capitalism.[...]. In that process of transformation a whole social and economic structure, an entire system of values and way of life were shaken” (Heller, 2015). “To be sure, the Renaissance did involve a kind of “rebirth” of knowledge - [...]” (Debus, 1978).

One of these shifts in thinking was that not everything was derived from God and that the essence of the human being was not necessarily linked to his land anymore. In what follows, Thomas Cromwell reflects on what are the established rules in England and most importantly, he questions them:

Time now to consider the compacts that hold the world together: the compact between ruler and ruled, and that between husband and wife. Both these arrangements rest on a sedulous devotion, the one to the interests of the other. The master and husband protect and provide; the wife and servant obey. Above masters, above husbands, Gods rule all. He counts up our petty rebellions, our human follies. He reaches out his long arm, bunched into a fist.

(WH 338)

During this period, the government wants to create the illusion that they are still in charge of everything, but it is not true. Figures of the new society are merchants and bankers. As the reader can see in the following extract, according to Thomas Cromwell, the official authorities have not grasped the concept yet:

How can he explain to him? The world is run from where he thinks. Not from his border fortresses, not even from Whitehall. The world is run from Antwerp, from Florence, from places he has never imagined; from Lisbon, from where the ships with sails of silk drift west and are burned up in the sun. Not from castle walls, but from counting houses, not by the call of the bugle but by the click of the abacus, not by the grate and click of the mechanism of the gun but by the scrape of the pen on the page of the promissory note that pays for the gun and the gunsmith and the powder and shot.

(WH 378)

Then, still in the same period emerged the concept of the Renaissance man which the Encyclopaedia Britannica define as follows:

The idea of a Renaissance man developed in Italy and derived from Leon Battista Alberti's notion that "a man can do all things if he will." The ideal embodied the basic tenets of Renaissance humanism, which considered man the centre of the universe and led to the belief that people should try to embrace all knowledge and develop their own abilities as fully as possible.

(EB, Renaissance Man)

This idea of the Renaissance man is certainly what motivated Cromwell to reach the top of the society. As stated earlier, knowledge was very important to Cromwell and it was one of the stable points in his life that would keep him going on. In the following quote, Thomas Cromwell is once again reminded of his poor origins. However, this is presented as an asset. Cromwell does not have anything to lose since he does not have any title that would make him an aristocrat. The Renaissance is to him an opportunity to climb the social scale. Actually, as Latré puts it, "[t]he world is run from within a Renaissance brain" (2019)⁸, the "Renaissance brain" being a metonymy for Thomas Cromwell:

Obstacles will be removed, tempers will be soothed, knots unknotted. Here at the close of the year 1533, his spirit is sturdy, his will strong, his front imperturbable. The courtiers see that he can shape events, mould them. He can contain the fears of other men, and give them a sense of solidity in a quaking world: this people, this dynasty, this miserable rainy island at the edge of the world.

(WH 522)

In the previous excerpt, Mantel explains that Cromwell is a kind of fixed reference for England. He is the one that can fix the problems of England, "the miserable rainy island". Thomas Cromwell believes he is strong enough to be successful and that is what makes him powerful: "You see this councillor of mine? I warn you, never play any game with him. For he will not respect your ancestry. He has no coats of arms and no name, but he believes he is bred to win" (WH 407).

⁸ Unpublished slides of Guido Latré's Louvain-la-Neuve and Ghent courses on Renaissance texts, 2012-2018.

Going further, some, like Anne Boleyn, thought that Thomas Cromwell was taking advantage of his past situation. As demonstrated in the next extract, she thought Cromwell had learnt tricks from his youth that made him a good manipulator.

‘They say you had a trade as a blacksmith; is that correct?’

Now she will say, shoe a horse?

‘It was my father’s trade.’

‘I begin to understand you.’ She nods. ‘The blacksmith makes his own tools.’

(WH 291)

Anne Boleyn being forced to play the game of manipulation since her survival depended on it, one can hear a tint of jealousy in her voice. She is jealous of Cromwell’s manipulation abilities that he supposedly acquired during his childhood. When she says that “the blacksmith makes his own tool”, she uses a metaphor to claim that Cromwell speaks and acts to suit his intentions, that is to say gaining power.

Going back to Tajfel’s theory on social identity, the Duke of Norfolk, Anne Boleyn’s uncle, does not have a high esteem of Thomas Cromwell. In fact, the Duke of Norfolk, had his eyes set on the throne and considered Cromwell as a threat in his quest to power. He considers Cromwell to be part of the out-group and does not make any effort to diminish this gap. The Duke of Norfolk had undertaken on the task to keep away Fitzroy, the illegitimate son of Henry VIII, from the crown. During their journey to Calais, a discussion occurs between Cromwell and Fitzroy where the latter clearly expresses his dismay: “I wish the cardinal were not dead. Because now the Duke of Norfolk is my guardian” (WH 400). It is then confirmed that he is to marry Mary, the Duke of Norfolk’s daughter: “And I hear Your Grace is to marry his daughter Mary” (*ibid.*). Later in *Wolf Hall*, Mantel writes about this union and further explains why this whole situation is beneficial to the new queen: “Next day, at Hampton Court, the king’s son the Duke of Richmond marries Norfolk’s daughter Mary. Anne has arranged this marriage for the glorification of the Howards; also, to stop Henry marrying his bastard, to the boy’s advantage, to some princess abroad” (WH 517).

To the Duke of Norfolk, he is but a mere accountant of low-birth that only cares about money. Cromwell may be good at mathematics but he does not know how to address important people and that makes him worthless:

Get back to your abacus, Cromwell. You are only for fetching in money, when it comes to the affairs of nations you cannot deal, you are a common man of not status, and the king himself says so, you are not fit to talk to princes.

(BB 155)

We know from history and from Mantel's novels that the Duke of Norfolk was not right when he said Thomas Cromwell was not a good rhetorician; whereas we might consider he was not entirely wrong when he asserted Cromwell had an obsession for money:

Johane walks about the room. It is a large room and filled with light. 'All these things', she says, 'these things we have now. The clock. That new chest you had Stephen sent you from Flanders, the one with the carving of the birds and flowers, I heard with my own ears you say to Thomas Avery, oh, tell Stephen I want it, I don't care what it costs. All these painted pictures of people we don't know, all these, I don't know what, lutes and books of music, we never used to have them, when I was a girl I never used to look at myself in a mirror, but now I look at myself every day. And a comb, you gave me an ivory comb. I never had one of my own. Liz used to plait my hair and push it under my hood, and then I did hers, and if we didn't look how we ought to look, somebody soon told us.'

Why are we so attached to the severities of the past? Why are we so proud of ourselves for having endured our fathers and mothers, the fireless days and the meatless days, the cold winters and the sharp tongues? It's not as if we had a choice. [...].

He says, 'Liz – I mean, Johane...'

[...]

'I want to be good to you. Tell me what I can give you.'

(WH 311)

In this extract Johane, Liz's sister, is upset. To her, Thomas Cromwell has become too much of a consumer and keeps buying unnecessary things. She interprets it as a need Thomas has to tell the world he is not poor anymore, to tell the world he made it. It is true that he is

constantly reminded that he had nothing but a violent father when he was young. This looks like an answer to his greatest problem. If he buys something he does not actually need, he proves to the world he has enough money to buy whatever he wants. Still in the spirit of the Renaissance, he wants to prove that what matters the most is the extrinsic value of things. If Cromwell buys an expansive object, he will be worth more with regard to the high-class people. Cromwell's sole answer to Johane's intervention is to offer whatever she is craving for.

2. What's In a Name?

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose/ By any other name would smell as sweet" is one of Shakespeare's most famous quotes. It means that the names that are given to people or things are totally arbitrary; the names do not carry any specific truth. They are but mere labels that are given to them for the sake of clarity. What matters the most are the intrinsic qualities; if a rose was called a tulip, it would still smell like a rose. In other words, if Romeo had a different name, Juliet would still love him.⁹ The concept of intrinsic and extrinsic values goes as far as to Antiquity. In his *Republic*, Plato draws the distinction between "(1) goods that are good in themselves but not good for their consequences, (2) those that are good both in themselves and for their consequences, and (3), those that are not good in themselves but are good for their consequences" (Heinaman 2002). In his dialogues, Plato further explains that pleasure is intrinsically good and pain intrinsically bad. "The intrinsic value is said to be the value that thing has 'in itself', or 'for its own sake,' or 'as such', or 'in its own right'" (Zimmerman & Bradley 2019)¹⁰. By contrast, extrinsic value is "the value of something based on such things as appearance or what it could be sold for, which may not be its real value" (Cambridge Dictionary, Extrinsic value)¹¹.

However, the work of the philosopher Kripke *Naming and Necessity* may cast some new light on this issue. I shall therefore mention some concepts (often isolated sentences) that can be used as a tool to understand the analysis of Cromwell's identity in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*. According to Kripke, names are fixed indications. Also, names and descriptions are often linked. Frequently, names are introduced by descriptions (53) or names

⁹ <https://literarydevices.net/a-rose-by-any-other-name/>

¹⁰ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/value-intrinsic-extrinsic/#WhatIntVal>

¹¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/extrinsic-value>

are associated with a 'family of descriptions' (31). The most important concept in his theory is that there is a necessary link between names and identity. The relationship between identity and names is very strong and clear.

In *Wolf Hall*, Mantel discusses Cromwell's issues about his family name at great length. In the following excerpt, a conversation occurs between Cromwell and Richard Williams in which the latter asks the former the authorization to be named after him:

'Our father is dead and you are our father now.' [...]

'So shall we change our name to yours?'

'You surprise me. The way things are with me, the people called Cromwell will be wanting to change their names to Williams.'

'If I had your name, I should never disown it.'

'Would your father like it? You know he believed he has his descent from Welsh princes.'

'Ah, he did. When he'd had a drink, he would say, who will give me a shilling for my principality?'

(WH 177)

Cromwell seems to be very surprised about Richard's request. To him, his name is not worth much compared to that of Morgan Williams, who is said to be Henry's VIII cousin. Moreover, he is convinced his name will soon fall into disgrace. This tells us that he does not show much respect towards his family name. Earlier in the book, Cromwell thought: "[H]e smiles at the thought of the Cromwells having a family name. Or any reputation to defend" (WH 141). To Cromwell, having a family name that counts means that you have worthy ancestors that achieved something great or that you have some land. Cromwell dislikes his name because it reminds him of his father, Walter Cromwell, who is presented as a very violent man by Hilary Mantel. Nevertheless, in reality, MacCulloch explains that there is no clear evidence that Walter Cromwell was violent to his son. This may be the product of Victorian fantasy. Still, In the opening scene of the book, the reader can observe the young Cromwell being beaten up by Walter Cromwell:

Felled, dazed, silent, he has fallen; knocked full length on the cobbles of the yard. His head turns sideways; his eyes are turned towards the gate, as if someone might arrive to help him

out. One blow, properly placed, could kill him now. [...] Walter is roaring down at him, working out where to kick him next.

(WH 3)

Hence, Thomas Cromwell does not associate his surname with good memories or good people. From his childhood onwards, he is disappointed by his own surname, as proved by the following extract:

Owen Madoc comes in and commissions a hunting knife, hand-guard, blood gutter and twelve-inch blade? 'Twelve-inch?' he says. 'You'll be flailing around and cut your ear off.' 'You'll not be so pert when the Cornish seize you. They spit children like you and roast them on bonfires.'

'Can't you just slap them with an oar?'

'I'll slap you jaw shut,' Owen Madoc bellows. 'You little fucker, you had a bad name before you were born?'

He shows Owen Madoc the knife he has made for himself, slung on a cord under his shirt: its stub of blade, like a single, evil tooth. 'What do you think?'

'Christ,' Madoc says. 'Be careful when you leave it in.'

He says to his sister Kat – just resting his four-pound hammer on her windowsill at the Pegasus – why did I have a bad name before I was born?

(WH 333)

The last sentence in this extract makes it clear that Cromwell is a “bad name”. Cromwell is persuaded that the other inhabitants of Putney will have a low opinion of him because he is named like his violent father. Going a step further, he may think that because he has the same name as his father, he should behave like his father. This is what John Hoyland, journalist for the *New Scientist* back in 1994, would call nominative determinism. The idea is that people end up doing jobs that suit their surname (Collins Dictionary, Nominative Determinism)¹². This idea will prove to be wrong as we know Thomas Cromwell will become Master Secretary, a very high position indeed. Still, even though Cromwell assumes the fact that his own surname

¹² <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/submission/18319/nominative+determinism>

does not have a brilliant past, the people around him, like Henry VIII in the following excerpt, are trying at all costs to find the Cromwells a lavish history:

‘My lord Suffolk asks me, where does the fellow spring from? I tell him there are Cromwells in Leicestershire, Northamptonshire – landed people, or once they were. I suppose you are from some unfortunate branch of that family?’

‘No.’

‘You may not know your own forebears. I shall ask the heralds to look into it.’

‘Your Majesty is kind. But they will have scant success.’

The King is exasperated. He is failing to take advantage of what is on offer: a pedigree, however meagre. ‘My lord cardinal told me you were an orphan. He told me you were brought up in a monastery.’

‘Ah. That was one of his little stories.’

(WH 218)

Still in terms of Tajfel’s theory of social identity, it is as if Henry VIII and the other aristocrats were part of the in-group because they were lucky enough to be born with a proper name, whereas Cromwell is part of the out-group because his name remains unconnected to higher social origins. The king wants Cromwell to be part of the same group as him and therefore makes up stories to repair what is wrong.

Nonetheless, it seems that Cromwell has a kind of love-hate relationship with his own name. As stated earlier, even as a grown-up, Cromwell does not hold his name in high esteem. He is not taking it seriously that someone besides his children would bear his name. Still, it does not mean Thomas Cromwell gave up on giving himself and his children a proper name with positive associations. At some point in his life, after having left Putney, Cromwell decided that it was possible to chase his dreams, to go up the social scale. To him, it is possible to “make” a name, that is to say, rendering it important. In *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell states: “It matters what name we choose, what name we make. The people lose their name who lie dead on the field of battle, the ordinary corpses of no lineage, with no herald to search for them and no chantry, no perpetual prayers” (178). In other words, those who do not have famous names are those who never achieved anything great and told the world they did. He is willing to do

it. Thomas Cromwell may not be proud of his name, but he has great ambitions. He wants to climb the social scale. As stated earlier, money is part of this recognition process.

Then, Thomas Cromwell's surname not only carries negative connotations, it is also literally distorted on many occasions along with his first name as if it was fine to wrongfully call someone under the pretext that he has no title. The most recurrent example is that of Anne Boleyn who keeps calling Thomas "Cremuel". Even though Anne Boleyn insists on the fact she lived for many years in France and she does not call him Cremuel on purpose, the reader can see it as a provocation. The text specifies that "she pronounces it as if she can't manage the English: *Cremuel*" (WH 201), the structure "as if" making it clear she could actually speak proper English. Her pronunciation of his name becomes a way of slighting him, and of denying him an identity. She and other members of society seem to insist that his identity should forever remain elusive.

3. Thomas Cromwell's Professions and Ambitions: from Being a Ruffian to Being Master Secretary

Thomas Cromwell's legal identity can be defined in terms of his profession. As explained earlier, some would have thought Cromwell would become a blacksmith, like his father. But as we know from history, Cromwell reached the top of society by becoming Master Secretary. In what follows, I shall sketch out the key moments in Cromwell's career.

The Ruffian Cromwell

In *Wolf Hall*, following a violent episode with his father, Cromwell makes the decision to leave Putney. He is still young and does not know exactly what to do. Luckily for him, Cromwell encounters some men in Dover that would take him to the mainland. It seems that he wants to fight, or perhaps he is just looking for employment: "He walks around the dock saying to people, do you know where there's a war just now?" (WH 14). In his biography, MacCulloch uses the adjective "ruffian" to describe Cromwell, and this state of mind may have been what motivated him to cross the borders of England. Ruffian means "a violent person, especially one involved in crime" (Oxford Dictionary, ruffian)¹³, and this looks like an accurate

¹³ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ruffian>

description of Cromwell's father. We can assume that at the beginning of his life, Cromwell thought he would become a criminal. When talking about his youth, Mantel often drops some hints that Thomas was not afraid of blood, as demonstrated by this excerpt: "[...] and when people say, what were you like? He says, oh, I used to stick knives in people" (WH 37). Still, Cromwell thinks he has an excuse for all the harm he has caused. To him, he may be forgiven for his sins because he was a soldier and he did what he had to do. This places Cromwell in a Machiavellian state of mind. Cardinal Wolsey, his master, seems to agree that Cromwell can be saved on the condition he confessed to God and that he did not attack any clerical man:

'So if you attacked the young Cromwell, you went straight to the fiery pit?'

'If you had seen him, my lord. He was too dirty for Purgatory. The Blood of the Lamb can do much, we are told, but I doubt if it could have wiped this fellow clean.'

'I am all for a spotless world,' Wolsey says. He looks sad. 'Have you made a good confession?'

'I was a long time ago'.

'Have you made a good confession?'

'My lord cardinal, I was a soldier.'

'Soldiers have hope of Heaven.'

He looks up into Wolsey's face. There's no knowing what he believes. He says, 'We all have that.' Soldiers, beggars, sailors, kings.

'So you were a ruffian, in your youth,' the cardinal says. '*Ça ne fait rien.*' He broods. 'This dirty fellow who attacked you... he was not, in fact, in holy orders?'

He smiles. 'I didn't ask'.

(WH 73)

Interestingly enough, Thomas Cromwell speaks of himself using the third person pronoun "he". He talks about "the young Cromwell" as if the latter did not exist anymore. The use of this pronoun adds some distance between the person he is now and the person he was then. Even though he does not condemn his past acts, it shows that he has undergone some changes. However, even if Thomas Cromwell can talk about his past as a soldier with what appears to be indifference, deep inside, he feels he is still a murderer. Hence the fact he keeps asking his entourage, if he looks like a murderer: "He would like to ask them, Richard, Rafe, Master Wriothesley call me Risley, do I look like a murderer? There is a boy who says I do" (WH 225).

Taking Part in the Mercantile Society

Furthermore, Cromwell, before working for Henry VIII and after having worked as a soldier, became a merchant. The twenty-first century is very much based on a model of consumption, but back in the 16th century, people had “three basic needs: food, housing and clothing [...] and little else mattered in commerce” (MacCulloch 23). Unlike food, clothing does not perish fast, and unlike housing, clothing can be transported long distances. Consequently, it was about the only basic need that involved commercial trade. Furthermore, clothing is subjected to fashion and thus to changes. The English were famous for their fine wool, which was very much appreciated in the Low Countries, which hosted large-scale clothing fairs where Thomas Cromwell made his first steps as a tradesman around Europe.

Around 1515, Cromwell was back in England where he continued trading clothing. In 1523, he was described as “citizen and Merchant Taylor of London” (MacCulloch 27). He was called a “shearman”, which is rather negative. When he died in 1540, he was reduced again to the shearman status. At this point in history, Cromwell was far from being close to Henry VIII. Still, Cromwell had a great network of acquaintances outside and inside England and had a business of moneylending as well. Even though being a merchant was quite negatively seen in those days by the aristocrats, Cromwell assumed this status and as a true Renaissance man, even believed it made him powerful: “No wonder your humour’s so bitter these days. Nobody’s paying you, eh? Monsieur Cremuel, the retired mercenary.’ ‘Not so retired. I can fix you” (WH 269).

In *Wolf Hall*, there is a 27-year gap between the first time the reader encounters Cromwell in Putney and the second time when he is already in service for his master, Cardinal Wolsey. “We only learn of those years in between from what Cromwell reveals, which isn’t much: some years as a mercenary in France, some more with the bankers in Florence, some time as a clothier, some more as a lawyer” (FitzHerbert 2015). In the book, that is what Mantel offers:

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 weaving, 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.

(WH 31)

This short summary gives a pretty impressive and positive image of Thomas Cromwell. He is presented as being very intelligent and as having a lot of different skills. This account does not, however, tell the reader about Cromwell’s career in the politics.

First Time in Parliament

Still, we know that in 1523, Cromwell became for the first time a member of Parliament. His role lasted for seven weeks. Regarding what exactly happened during this time, Cromwell is said to have delivered a speech criticizing government plans to invade France. But Cromwell certainly was not the only MP with this opinion. It was common at that time to be against the “Tudor despotism”.

At the beginning of *Wolf Hall*, there is an allusion to Cromwell’s speech back in 1523. It happens during a conversation between Cromwell, Cavendish, Wolsey’s gentleman usher, Gascoigne, Wolsey’s treasurer and the cardinal:

‘George, don’t you call to mind what my man Cromwell said in the House of Commons, was it five years past, when we wanted a subsidy for the new war?’

‘But he spoke against Your Grace!’

Gascoigne – who hangs doggedly to this conversation – says, ‘You didn’t advance yourself there, master, speaking against the king and my lord cardinal, because I do remember your speech, and I assure you so will others, and you bought yourself favours there, Cromwell.’

He shrugs. ‘I didn’t mean to buy favour. We’re not all like you, Gascoigne. I wanted the Commons to take some lessons from the last time. To cast their mind backs.’

'You said we'd lose'

'I said we'd bankrupted.'

(WH 53)

As one can see, in Mantel's story, Cromwell delivers a speech in the House of Commons whose aim was to prevent a new war which would cost too much money. When Cromwell said that he wanted "commons to take some lessons from the last time", this should certainly be seen as an attack on the efficiency of the system. Later Cromwell would say "I hope he doesn't think still of invading France" (WH 163), speaking his opinion once again out loud. In one of his letters, Cromwell would have written: "In conclusion, we have done as our predecessors have been wont to do, that is to say, as well as we might, and left where we began" (MacCulloch 52). From what he said, one can believe Cromwell thought the system to be inefficient. Thanks to his quick passage to the House of Parliament, he had learnt about the weaknesses of the system. This episode also highlights Cromwell's amazing abilities for accountancy and logical reasoning.

Moreover, this episode would be one the main reasons why he would become a royal servant. In *Wolf Hall*, Henry VIII enquires Cromwell about the speech that the latter gave at the Parliament seven years ago. The King has many questions on that matter and tries to challenge Cromwell, who does not seem to flinch. Quite the contrary, Cromwell reassures His Majesty that a war with France would be a bad idea since England could not afford such a conflict. This is the first reported conversation in *Wolf Hall* between Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell. Interestingly enough, this talk is presented as being a turning-point in Cromwell's career as he would later serve the King. In the following extract, the reader can see that there is some kind of connivance between the two and that the King may be willing to look after the real Cromwell and not the one that is depicted as bad by many people in England:

'What would Your Majesty like me to be?'

The king looks him full in the face: a rare thing with him. He looks back; it is his habit. 'Master Cromwell, your reputation is bad.'

He inclines his head.

'You don't defend yourself?'

'Your Majesty is able to form his own opinion.'

'I can. I will.'

(WH 183)

In this extract, Cromwell is presented as being very sure of himself. After all, he is challenging what the King of England is telling him. Cromwell does not have a title, but he certainly knows how to defend his opinions. Afterwards, when talking with Gardner about his meeting with Cromwell, Gardner would ask the King "And how was that, Cromwell? Unpleasant, I think?" and Henry VIII would answer "On the contrary" (WH 184).

Serving Cardinal Wolsey: a strong relationship

Back in early 1524, Thomas Cromwell entered Cardinal Wolsey's service. Wolsey had a poor background, his father being a butcher. Wolsey spent most of his career trying to fight against enclosure of arable land which would make the rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer. At Wolsey's fall in 1529, many powerful people felt enthusiastic about his decline. In *Bring up the Bodies*, Thomas Cromwell feels the same urge to make poor people's lives better. The last sentence is very meaningful indeed. After all these years, Thomas Cromwell still thinks he has to prove he is different from his father.

He is preparing a bill for Parliament to give employment to men without work, to get them waged and out mending the roads, making the harbours, building walls against the Emperor or any other opportunist. We could pay them; we could provide shelter, doctors if they needed them, their subsistence; we would all have the fruits of their work, and their employment would keep them from becoming bawds or pickpockets or highway robbers, all of which men will do if they see no other way to eat. What if their father before them were bawds, pickpockets or highway robbers? That signifies nothing. Look at him. Is he Walter Cromwell? In a generation everything can change.

(BB 51)

Later on in *Bring up the Bodies*, Mantel explains that even though Cromwell had some ideas in order to improve their daily lives and self-esteem, members of the Parliament, mostly aristocrats, could not understand that it was their task to create work. Moreover, it

demonstrates that members of the Parliament did not understand the spirit of the humanist movement that was taking place in England whereas Cromwell did. This movement was actually aimed at restoring the dignity of man (EB, Humanism)¹⁴: As a matter of fact, they are still rooted in the old feudal system. We could understand their point of view; after all, it is not easy to give up on power. It is less challenging to remain the dominating one.

In March, Parliament knocks back his new poor law. 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 a field. [...]. But Parliament cannot see how it is the state's job to create work. Are not these matters in God's hands, and is not poverty and dereliction part of his eternal order?

(BB 243)

Furthermore, Thomas Cromwell was engaged to serve multiple purposes. Cromwell was set to travel extensively around England to close small monasteries and nunneries. Wolsey considered them to be superfluous and poorly managed. This dissolution policy was not acclaimed by all and it triggered many opponents. Cromwell was therefore unpopular in those days. Still, Cromwell's greatest job was to make sure Wolsey's huge legacy project would become real. The Cardinal wanted a tomb that would be bigger than those of the kings. He also wanted a pair of memorial colleges at Ipswich and Oxford. Cromwell would have to work on preparing "the Cardinal's plan for immortality" (MacCulloch 52) until Wolsey's death.

In *Wolf Hall*, Mantel hints at Rovezzano, the Italian sculptor of Wolsey's tomb (*ibid.*) without naming him. But what is interesting is that Cardinal Wolsey, being the son of a butcher and hence having low origins, dreams of a tomb that would be bigger than those of the kings and queens of England:

The cardinal, who thinks upon a Christian's last end, has had his tomb designed already, by a sculptor from Florence. His corpse will lie beneath the outspread wings of angels, in a sarcophagus of porphyry. The veined stone will be his monument, when his own veins are

¹⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/humanism>

drained by the embalmer; when his limbs are set like marble, an inscription of his virtues will be picked out in gold.

(WH 22)

We could see a parallel between the Cardinal's craving for a sumptuous tomb and Thomas Cromwell's need to buy anything that is expensive. They both aspire to be eternally remembered and they think the way to do it is to raise their extrinsic value. They are then in a paradoxical situation where they want to give poor people the opportunity to enhance their lifestyles, but they waste their money on futile purchases.

With regard to Cromwell's position in Wolsey's office, he defines it as follows: "[H]is job, as he has defined it at this time, is to feed the cardinal information and soothe his temper and understand him and embellish his jokes" (WH 76). Thomas is able to understand Wolsey since they both have the same desire to achieve something great starting from very little. Mantel's Cromwell seem to hold a fairly positive opinion of Wolsey's projects, unlike "people of influence", as one can read in the following extract:

The gossip is that people – people of influence – have complained to the king, and the king has complained to Wolsey, about the monastic houses he has closed down. They don't think of the good use to which the cardinal has put the assets; they don't think of his colleges, the scholars he maintains, the libraries he is founding.

(WH 126)

In fact, to Cromwell, people that criticize Wolsey are jealous they are not involved in the matter: "They're only interested in getting their own fingers in the spoils. And because they've been cut out of the business, they pretend to believe the monks have been left naked and lamenting in the road" (*ibid.*). Cromwell and Wolsey climbed up the social scale and it may have made the aristocrats jealous. Unfortunately for Wolsey, he would soon be reduced to a low status.

In January 1530, Cromwell rose to royal favour, but there is no way to be sure of how it happened. It is even more surprising knowing that Thomas Cromwell was loathed by many aristocrats due to his policy of closing monasteries. Nevertheless, as for 1530, Cromwell was both the servant of Wolsey and Henry VIII simultaneously.

Those who supported Cromwell at the court were the ones that felt sorry for Wolsey's decline and who owed him something. Paradoxically, they had a low opinion of Anne Boleyn, but they complied with the annulment campaign out of loyalty to the King (MacCulloch 2018).

Cromwell started his career at court with a relatively high position: he gave advice to the king, among other counsellors, on which strategies Henry should use, and on the matter of royal supremacy. This position enabled him to try and save Cardinal Wolsey's Colleges and legacy project. Cromwell was willing "to keep the damage within bounds" (MacCulloch 113).

Little by little, by 1531, Thomas Cromwell had become a major influence in England and was referred to by Henry VIII as "our trusty and well-beloved servant". There is one anecdote that can confirm how powerful Thomas Cromwell was. In the Spring of that year, John Creke, one of his old merchant friends, was in serious trouble. After a series of bad decisions, Creke was left without a penny and urgently needed a job. In the hope that Cromwell would find him something to do at court, Creke wrote to him (MacCulloch 2018). This story tells us a lot about the rising of Cromwell up the Court ladder in the sense that Creke somehow felt that Cromwell was better able to fulfil his wishes of a career at Court than Queen Catherine. Moreover, when an Italian, Ludovico Falier, wrote a full description of England in 1531, Cromwell was listed as belonging to the King's inner Council. Thomas Cromwell's great power in the higher spheres of society is made clear by Mantel. At some point, her text explains:

The gentleman of England apply for places in his household now, for their sons and nephews and wards, thinking they will learn statecraft with him, how to write a secretary's hand and deal with translation from abroad, and what books one ought to read to be a courtier.

(WH 534)

This is a major evolution for Thomas Cromwell, who used to be soldier. He has proved himself to be worth something. In the previous extract, Mantel clearly states that Cromwell is multi-tasking. Now that gentlemen are sending their relatives to his household, he has to some

extent become part of the in-group of society, or at least set a foot in it. Through perseverance and hard work, Cromwell has made it:

As a young man he was always shouldering his way through crowds, pushing to the front to see the spectacle. But now crowds scatter as he walks through Westminster or the precincts of any of the king's palaces.

(BB 41)

Hence, we can claim he is a self-made man. This concept includes “the notion that individuals can determine their own future and change their lives for the better” (Paul 2014). Back in 16th century England, this concept was brand new and had several implications, including the following one:

There are contradictory forces at work in this notion, as it includes both aspects of self-denial (education, hard work, and discipline) and self-realization based on an ethic of self-interest that aims at the sheer accumulation of property, recognition, prestige, and personal gain without any concern for others.

(Paul 2014)

Undoubtedly, Thomas Cromwell made some sacrifices to become that important. As shown in the following quote, Cromwell did everything he could to be successful, which meant he had to work relentlessly, and also had to sacrifice his family life, as will be demonstrated later on in this dissertation.

‘But do you ask yourself why people want to kill you?’

He had laughed. ‘Why, Stephen – much in this life is a mystery but that is no mystery at all. I was always first up in the morning. I was always the last man standing. I was always in the money. I always got the girl. Show me a heap, and I’m on top of it.’

(BB 85)

Then, coming back to his work for Henry VIII, Cromwell, gradually, gained power in the King's office to such an extent that he soon believed his power would soon rival the king's: “One of those afternoons when I told my king a little, and he told me a lot [...]” (WH 364). In

the previous quote, Cromwell informs the reader he knows how to get information from Henry VIII. He is in fact a crafty manipulator, he just has to speak a little about himself for Henry to speak a lot about himself. Going further, at some point, Cromwell says: “Henry, I have your heart in my hand” (WH 265). It is as if Cromwell was the only one who was able to fix the King’s great matter. On another topic this time, the Reformation, Thomas Cromwell is convinced that he can shape Fitzroy, Henry’s illegitimate son, to become the courtier he wants him to be. When he says that he “can build [his] own prince”, he means he has the power. What is more, this quote unveils Cromwell’s intention. It does not, however, degrade its image; it just shows how ambitious he is.

If Henry lives twenty years, Henry who is Wolsey’s creation, and then leaves this child to succeed him, I can build my own prince: to the glorification of God and the Commonwealth of England. Because I will not be too old.

(WH 467)

Moreover, confirming once more his insightfulness, Cromwell came up with an idea around Christmas of 1531 during a discussion with Henry VIII: “Because now is the time to become the ruler you should be, and to be sole and supreme head of your kingdom” (WH 277). In other words, Henry VIII should be granted the title of *the Supreme Head of the Church of England*. Cromwell certainly believes that if Henry VIII is granted even ecclesiastical power, then he becomes himself powerful since he has control over the king. Later, a discussion occurs between Mary, the King’s daughter and Cromwell. He tells Mary: “So your father the king is named head of the church, and to soothe the conscience of the bishops, they have caused this formula to be inserted: “as far as the law of Christ allows” (WH 289). To Cromwell, reaching the top of society goes hand in hand with a change in the structure of England, hence some changes regarding religion. This should not, however, be seen as some kind of denial of God’s existence:

This notion is the result of large-scale and complex processes of secularization that are quite at odds with Christian ethics, as it often flaunts competition, self-help, and ambition as its driving forces: “The competitive society out of which the success myth and the self-made man have grown may accept the Christian virtues in principle but can hardly observe them in practice.

(Hofstadter cited in Paul 369)

Even though he is pleading for Reformation, Thomas Cromwell is a pious man. In the writing of his will, his last sentence would be addressed to God: “To God his soul” (*WH* 148). Still, what Cromwell does is to take a critical look at what he considered to be the Church’s flaws, like in the next quote for example:

What I cannot stomach is hypocrisy, fraud, idleness – their worn-out relics, their threadbare worship, and their lack of invention. When did anything good last come from a monastery?

(*WH* 219)

One may as well interpret the latter quote a way to defend himself for closing monasteries. Moreover, to Thomas More, Cromwell is a heretic. During a discussion between the two, Thomas Cromwell asserts he is not. Still, Thomas More has a very negative image of this Cromwell and thinks he is an opportunist craving for money:

‘The King of England is not an infidel. Nor am I.’

‘Are you not? I hardly know whether you pray to the god of Luther and the Germans, or some heathen god you met with on your travels, or some English deity of your own invention. Perhaps your faith is for purchase. You would serve the Sultan if the price was right.

(*WH* 351-352)

Although Mantel’s Cromwell does indeed sometimes give the impression he is a manipulator and an opportunist, as proved by the following quote, his primary goal is a more equal society:

But his greatest ambition for England is this: the princes and his commonwealth should be in accord. He doesn’t want the kingdom to be run like Walter’s house in Putney, with fighting all the time and the sound of banging and shrieking day and night. He wants it to be a household where everybody knows what they have to do, and feels safe doing it.

(*BB* 83)

He has been traumatized by his miserable childhood and, as a true Humanist, strives for giving the English people safer and better lives. In an article for *La Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, Jerry Nash writes about the Humanists' outlook on life and on the nature of man:

Like so many of his Humanist colleagues, Montaigne's final position on man and on the condition of humanity appears ultimately to reject a former outlook of Christian Skepticism (man's misere or condition of being ill) in favor of the more redeeming and optimistic outlook.

(Nash 1992)

Master of the Jewels

At the beginning of 1532, Thomas Cromwell was listed among those who had the permission to buy Henry VIII gifts (MacCulloch 156). As his first formal office under the Crown, "Cromwell was reappointed to supervise of Wolsey's two former Colleges estates" (*ibid.*). Cromwell had also become the Parliamentary manager and those who were absent had to tell Cromwell, which granted Cromwell a very powerful position in the House of Parliament indeed. Still hoping for the Reformation, Cromwell and the House of Commons passed *the Supplication against the Ordinaries*, whose aim was to reduce the power of the Church even more as well as the power of the Lord Chancellor, Thomas More, who was strongly against the Reformation. By 16 May, Cromwell got what he wanted: "the complete submission of the Church in the realm to the King" (MacCulloch 165). This was a huge triumph for Cromwell. "It was the clearest sign yet that Tomas Cromwell was going to fight in the name of a new religion" (MacCulloch 161).

Surprisingly enough, Cromwell did not become Lord Chancellor and was appointed Master of the Jewels instead: "On 14 April 1532, the king appoints him Keeper of the Jewel House" (WH 359). One of the possible explanations for this is that Cromwell, after having seen Wolsey's plunge into darkness, refused to bear the burden of such a position. In *Wolf Hall*, back in 1534, Cromwell reflects on Audley, the Lord Chancellor, and wonders whether this post would have suited him: "He remembers how the post tied Wolsey to London, when the king was elsewhere" (WH 580). In this extract, Cromwell shows that he really cares about his freedom. He has the feeling that being Lord Chancellor would be too much of a burden for him as it would prevent him from moving away from London when he needs and, more importantly, it would prevent him from acting the way he wants to.

Furthermore, Cromwell was not given a knighthood title by Henry VIII, but was high on the social scale. This position required four different adjustments. Firstly, Cromwell needed to be given some land. Then, etiquette called for a coat of arms. Cromwell opted for “a golden demi-lion rampant, holding a gold finger-ring with a ruby stone, which is surely a reference to the Mastership” (MacCulloch 172). Including many references to Cardinal Wolsey, Cromwell’s coats of arms was a proof that he never quite forgot his first Master. Thirdly, Cromwell got his portrait done by Hans Holbein (see Appendix 1). Even though this painting may not be flattering, Cromwell did not reject it, proving himself once again to have a very robust temperament (MacCulloch 2018). As a fourth adjustment, Thomas Cromwell’s name was added to the list of the Justices of the peace, agents who were seen as ideal by the monarchy. The painting will be discussed in more detail in the rest of this master dissertation.

Nevertheless, as stated in the following quote, Cromwell would never be totally accepted by the people of influence, by the in-group:

But Cremuel remains a nobody. The king gives him titles that no one abroad understands, and job that no one at home can do. He multiplies offices, duties pile on him: plain Master Cromwell goes out at morning, plain Master Cromwell comes in at night. [...] It doesn’t matter if it gives him a lesser status. It doesn’t matter if the French don’t comprehend. Let them judge by results. [...] But chivalry’s day is over. One day soon moss will grow in the tilt yard. The days of moneylender have arrived, and the days of the swaggering privateer; banker sits down with banker, and kings are their waiting boys.

(BB 169)

The phrase “Cremuel remains a nobody” is very significant indeed. The first reason why is that Cromwell’s name is wrongly spelled, hence obfuscating Thomas Cromwell’s personal identity. The second reason why is the use of the verb “to remain” that denotes a sense of continuity. Cromwell used to be a nobody and will be a nobody throughout his whole life. Still, to Cromwell, whereas the fact that he does not have any official title may trigger despair, in every cloud there is a silver lining. Cromwell is a very resilient man and, deep inside, he knows the society is undergoing some profound changes. Cromwell is a banker and as stated in *Wolf Hall*, “kings are their waiting boys”, showing that Henry VIII is at Cromwell’s mercy.

Chapter 4: Cromwell's private identity

1. On Perspective and Selective Omniscience

On the website of *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, Niederhoff wrote an article about perspective, i.e. "the way the representation of the story is influenced by the position, personality and values of the narrator, the characters and, possibly, other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld" (Niederhoff 2013)¹⁵. According to Lubbock, there are four points of view: "(1) third-person narration with a prominent or authorial narrator; (2) first-person narration; (3) third-person narration from the point of view of a character, a Jamesian 'reflector;'" (4) third-person narration without comments or inside views" (in Niederhoff 2013). The Jamesian reflector is the one Hilary Mantel decided to use in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* and "this type combines access to the mental life of the reflector character with a withdrawal of the narrator" (*ibid.*). Thanks to the perspective given by Hilary Mantel, the readers access Cromwell's inner life, how he experiences the different events that occur in his life or how he is building his identity, as can be seen on the following example: "He doesn't know. Breathing is difficult, but that doesn't mean anything, it's only because of the clotting inside his nose" (WH 10).

The Jamesian reflector in fact corresponds to the concept of selective omniscience. In his book *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis*, Hugh White defines this concept: "In the Multiple and Selective Omniscience narratives, the narrator, while portraying unlimited knowledge of the character's conscious life as it unfolds, cannot portray the comprehensive knowledge of the past and future or the non-conscious levels of the minds" (1991). Conversely to the concept of full omniscience, the readers cannot know more than what Cromwell knows. Thomas Cromwell cannot know about his future and so do the readers. The narrator, Hilary Mantel, only selected what was accessible to Cromwell's mind.

Throughout this master dissertation, I have analysed some fragments of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* in order to unveil Thomas Cromwell's identity and personality. This concept of selective omniscience is thus very interesting as what I interpret are Cromwell's thoughts and experiences.

¹⁵ <https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/26.html>

2. Places to Live in and Languages to Speak

Wolf Hall and *Bring Up the Bodies* were mainly written in English. However, Mantel's Thomas Cromwell also has the ability to speak Italian, Greek, Latin or French. There is hardly any translation accompanying these excerpts in foreign tongues, which means the reader can sometimes feel left out. Not every reader is fluent in these foreign languages. Consequently, one could wonder whether Mantel did it on purpose to restrict her reading audience or whether her intentions were different. Actually, it is a proven fact that the real Thomas Cromwell was gifted for languages. Hence, Mantel's use of different languages is certainly not a way to keep her book accessible to a multilingual elite only; it should be regarded as a device designed to render her interpretation of the character even stronger. In what follows, I shall try to sketch out what were the languages spoken by Thomas Cromwell and what they meant to him as well as the places that were important to him.

At the beginning of *Wolf Hall*, the young Cromwell shows some ability to speak Welsh. As proven by the following extract, this is the language that is spoken within his family. When he leaves Putney, Welsh is the language he uses to say goodbye:

He picks up the money. He says, 'Hwyl, Morgan Williams. Diolch am yr arian.' Thank you for the money. 'Gofalwch am Katheryn. Gofalwch am eich busnes. Wela I chi eto rhywbryd Pob lwc.'

(WH 12)

But later on, Cromwell states: "I used to speak a bit of Welsh when I was a boy. I can't now" (BB 81). Cromwell cannot speak his mother tongue anymore and now mainly speaks English when he is not exercising his French or Latin. This is a case of subtractive bilingualism: "for Lambert, subtractive bilingualism is characterised by the loss or erosion of a home or first language and culture (Pliiddemann 2013). In other words, '[s]ubtractive bilingualism develops when the two languages are competing rather than complementary'" (Liddicoat in Pliiddemann). In this case, Cromwell developed his skills in English at the expense of Welsh. This phenomenon may be the consequence of Cromwell's identity development:

Drawing heavily on Tajfel's theory, Giles and Johnson (1981, 1997) developed their ethnolinguistic identity theory, focusing on language as a salient marker of group membership and social identity. Giles and Johnson also discuss group membership, hypothesizing that individuals compare their own social group to out-groups in order to make their own favourably distinct and that positive distinctiveness enables individuals to achieve a positive social identity. If the comparison is negative, however, the authors maintain that an individual may adopt several strategies to attain a more positive social identity. One is to assimilate into a group that the individual or the individual's group views more positively. If language is a salient marker of group membership, the individual may face linguistic adaptations that may result in subtractive bilingualism or even language erosion if a large number of members of a particular group assimilate into another to achieve a more positive group identity.

(Hansen & Liu 1997)

Applying this theory to Cromwell's life, what happened is that he compared his group to that of the high spheres of society; which he certainly idealised at the expense of his own group. Consequently, to achieve a more positive social identity, Cromwell took on some characteristics of the idealised group, that is to say English since it was a salient marker of group membership. The result was thus subtractive bilingualism as he lost most of his Welsh.

Moreover, as stated earlier, Cromwell could manage to speak many languages. After having left Putney, Cromwell visited many places where he had the opportunity to learn new languages. In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, Greenblatt highlights what are the "governing conditions common to most instances of self-fashioning" (2012), one of these criteria is that "self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language" (*ibid.*). Learning multiple languages certainly helped Cromwell building his identity.

In Mantel's novel, Cromwell presents himself as a translator, but not in the traditional sense: "I am always translating, he thinks: if not language to language, then person to person. Anne to Henry. Henry to Anne" (WH 421). As shown by this excerpt, Cromwell thinks he has the ability to grasp what people mean, and then give an account to those who may not have understood. It gives him thus a very powerful position. He presents himself as being capable of understanding and retelling what the King of England and the Queen-to-be say want to say to each other. Besides Greek, Latin, French or Italian, Cromwell can speak the language of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, two of the most influent people of England.

Then, Cromwell learned these languages while living abroad, but how does it come about that Cromwell travelled so much and waited until he was thirty to settle in London? In a discussion between Thomas Cromwell and Katherine of Aragon, she states:

He [Henry VIII] is not a man like you [Cromwell], who just packs up his sins in his saddlebags and carries them from country to country, and when they grow too heavy whistles up a mule or tow, and soon commands a train of them and a troop of muleteers.

(WH 454)

To Katherine of Aragon, Cromwell visited so many places because he is a sinful man. One country is not enough to bear all his wrongful deeds. He had to travel through Europe to soothe his sins. But the way Mantel presents Cromwell's story, travelling through Europe may as well be a way to construct his personal identity. Getting to experience different jobs and getting to know different cultures, Thomas Cromwell would pick up what he thought was best in order to build his identity; an identity that would be very much different from his father's.

What is more, in *Bring Up the Bodies*, Thomas Cromwell thinks in retrospect:

[...] and in those days he was French; the King of France paid his wages. He had crawled then limped, he and his comrades dragging their battered bodies as fast as they could from the victorious Spanish, trying to struggle back to ground not bogged with blood; they were wild Welsh bowmen and renegade Switzers, and a few English boys like himself, all of them more or less confused and penniless, gathering their wits in the aftermath of the rout, plotting a course, changing their nation and their names at need, washing up in the cities to the north, looking for the next battle or some safer trade.

(BB 76-77)

When fighting for the French army, Cromwell considered he was French since it was the French government that was paying him money. This way of thinking highlights Cromwell's obsession for money and logical reasoning. Thomas Cromwell does not define his nationality in terms of the language he speaks or the culture he has, but in terms of who is paying for his job. But then, Cromwell says he was an English boy. This demonstrates he is confused on what his personal identity is. Was he French or English? It may be that he was both. Logically, due to his position in the French army, he would claim he was French, but deep down he would

remain English. Furthermore, Cromwell states that they would change “their nation and their names at need”, this undoubtedly led Cromwell to some identity troubles; nationality and names being at the basis of one’s personal identity. Still, the “at need” strengthens the fact that one of the main threads in Thomas Cromwell’s life was reason. To Cromwell, it was necessary to change his nation or his name, so that is what he did. He did not consider the harmful effects this change could have on his psyche, he rather gave more importance to the pragmatic aspect.

Moreover, in *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell states: “‘How much staying away can a man do?’ A question from his own life; he recognises it” (WH 347). In this extract, Cromwell wonders how long he can stay away from England, from his roots. Cromwell explains that leaving England was in a sense a way to get rid of his miserable life. He wanted to escape his past. What is more, he is not sure this has proven to be successful since he is asking himself “how much” he can go away, as if it was not enough yet. Despite all his efforts to change, he would remain, in his mind, but a low-born Englishman. But in the following quote, Cromwell is in a totally different state of mind. Cromwell is aware that some people may despise him and not trust him for he used to be a trader and he is now Henry’s councilor. But he is also aware of his own value as a fair and trustworthy man:

Help Cromwell and he will help you. Be Loyal, be diligent, be intelligent on his behalf; you will come into a reward. Those who commit their service to him will be promoted and protected. He is a good friend and master; this is said of him everywhere. Otherwise, it is the usual abuse. His father was a blacksmith, a crooked brewer, he was an Irishman, he was a criminal, he was a Jew, and he himself was just a wool-trader, he was a shearsman, and now he is a sorcerer: how else but by being a sorcerer would he get the reins of power in his hands?

(WH 585)

Nevertheless, as revealed by the following quote, because of his numerous stays abroad, Cromwell thinks he does not have a home, “a place of security, comfort, and family”¹⁶: “The boy follows him into his office. ‘Did you never feel homesick master, when you were on your travels?’ - He shrugs: I suppose if I’d had a home” (WH 303). There is no place where Thomas Cromwell feels secure and at ease. He is always on the lookout. Thomas Cromwell

¹⁶ <https://www.dictionary.com/e/denotation-and-connotation/>

wants to rise in society, but it happens at the expense of his own personal life. When talking about Austin Friars, his house, he would say: “So this house will become places of business. My home will be where my clerks and files are, my home will be with the king, where he is” (WH 584). What can bring Thomas Cromwell comfort are his files, shedding once again the light on his reasonable attitude. Maybe Thomas Cromwell does not have a home that matches the traditional definition because he does not want his emotions to get in the way of his ambition to reach the top of society.

Throughout *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Mantel gives ample descriptions of Austin Friars, “his house”. In the following extract, Austin Friars is presented as a very busy place, far from being a peaceful heaven indeed:

Unkind people describe his house as the Tower of Babel. [...]. Gentlemen and even noblemen from here and abroad are pressing him to take their sons into his household, and he accepts all he thinks he can train. On any given day at Austin Friars a group of German scholars will be deploying the many varieties of their tongue, frowning over the letters of evangelists from their own territories. At dinner young Cambridge men exchange snippets of Greek; they are the scholars he has helped, now come to help him. Sometimes a company of Italian merchants come in for supper, and he chats with them in those languages he learned when he worked for the bankers in Florence and Venice. The retainers of his neighbour Chapuy loll about drinking at the expense of the Cromwell buttery, and gossip in Spanish, in Flemish. He himself speaks in French to Chapuys, as it is the ambassador’s first language, and employs French of a more demotic sort to his boy Christophe, a squat little ruffian who followed him home from Calais, and who is never far from his side; he doesn’t let him far from his side, because around Christophe fights break out.

(BB 59)

Hilary Mantel insists that many languages are spoken at Austin Friars and she claims that unkind people compare Cromwell’s house to the Babel of Tower. The story of the Tower of Babel is a myth that originated in the Old Testament. “The story of its construction, given in Genesis 11:1–9, appears to be an attempt to explain the existence of diverse human languages” (EB, Tower of Babel)¹⁷ as well as “to account for [one of] the two great phenomena

¹⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tower-of-Babel>

of human society - the distinction of races" (*The Old and New Testament Student* 268). It is true that Austin Friars is a very cosmopolitan place, and Mantel writes that those that show interest in his household come "from here and abroad". But the Tower of Babel has negative connotations: "The narrative has a plain religious significance, emphasizing the supremacy of God over all the inhabitants of the world, that evil is the result of a man's seeking his own glory, and that rebellion against God is the true source of discord" (Ryle cited in *The Old and New Testament Student* 268). To the criticizing people, the evil and the man seeking his own glory is Thomas Cromwell. He is working at the expense of the established Christian rules and hence, is seen as a villain. Since the 16th-century, this may have been one of the arguments that contributed to Cromwell's negative image. Nonetheless, to Hilary Mantel, by opening his doors to everyone, including the poor ones like Christophe, Cromwell shows that he puts the human being at the centre of his concerns, like a true Renaissance man. It may be true that he was willing to climb the social scale, but he is also caring for the dignity of his fellow human beings. The fact that he lets people that come from different countries come to Austin Friars shows that he is open-minded. Austin Friars should not be presented against the negative background of the Old Testament story as Cromwell does not want to distinguish races or to create any kind of hierarchy between them.

In another description of Austin Friars, Hilary Mantel adds: "At Austin Friars, there is little chance to be alone, or alone with just one person. Every letter of the alphabet watches you" (*WH* 224). There is thus no privacy at Cromwell's residence. It means that there is no place where Thomas Cromwell can sit down and relax. He constantly has to live surrounded by his family, but also by strangers willing to learn how to become an influent man. Maybe he is afraid of being alone or it may be that Cromwell is a proud man. He is not the king of England even though he is very powerful, but he is the king of Austin Friars: "His household are happy to see him, all his folk with shining faces, and a swarm of little dogs about his feet; he lifts them into his arms, writhing bodies and wafting tails, and ask them how they do" (*BB* 56).

Before buying Austin Friars, Cromwell had travelled extensively through Europe: "For himself, he can go anywhere, he has been anywhere" (*WH* 330). And as a matter of fact, Italy seems to have held a special place in his heart. Much of what Cromwell did during his first trip to Italy is told in a novella written by a prolific author of Cromwell's times: Matteo Bandello (MacCulloch 22). Nevertheless, in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Mantel does not tell the

reader much about what Cromwell did in his Italian days. Still, she makes it clear he is nostalgic about it. At some point, Cromwell is feeling overwhelmed by the Boleyns and the Great Matter. He wants to escape his reality. To do so, he thinks about going back to Italy:

East. Though I grant this would not be a good starting point.' East of the Boleyns, he thinks. East of everybody. He is thinking of the Middle Sea, not these Northern waters; and one night especially, a warm midnight in a house in Larnaca: Venetian lights spilling out on to the dangerous waterfront, the slap of slave feet on tiles, a perfume of incense and coriander.

(WH 412-413)

In fact, Italy may in various respects still be his home. The way he perceives it, the reader can see it is a place of comfort, a shelter for Thomas Cromwell. Earlier in *Wolf Hall*, Thomas Cromwell would also praise the Italians for their virtues, much at the expense of the English people:

'At least, as an enemy, you stand in plain sight. I wish my friends could bear to be as conspicuous. The English are a nation of hypocrites.' 'Ingrates,' he agrees. 'Natural liars. I've found it myself. I would rather the Italians. The Florentines, so modest. The Venetians, transparent in all their dealing [...].'

(BB 106)

Italy being the cradle of the Renaissance, it is no wonder that Cromwell really cares about this country. Not surprisingly either is the fact that he praises the Venetians for being "transparent in all their dealing", directing once more his attention to the mercantile side of society. To Cromwell, Italy is a kind of humanist paradise, whereas to Thomas More, Cromwell's great friend-in-examination, Italy is an evil country: "Fight for the French, eh, bank for the Italians? [...] No, I tell you what you are, Cromwell, you are an Italian through and through, and you have all their vices, all their passions" (WH 567). In this extract, More claims that Cromwell is like an Italian, full of vices. One transformation that triggered the Renaissance was "the increasing failure of the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire to provide a stable and unifying framework for the organization of spiritual and material life" (EB, Renaissance). Nevertheless, Thomas More, even though he is a humanist himself, is not very

keen on Cromwell's project of Reformation as he considered the Master Secretary to be an heretic. Italy becomes thus a paradise or a vicious place depending on the point of view you adopt.

In the next extract, Thomas Cromwell remembers Italy:

Oh my moat and my little bridges, my rose gardens and strawberry beds, my herb garden, my beehives, my ponds and orchard, oh my Italianate terracotta medallions, my intarsia, my gilding, my galleries, my seashell fountain, my deer park.

(WH 368)

What is interesting is that he uses the first person possessive pronoun "my" to discuss the many things he likes about Italy. This strengthens the impression that Cromwell is an Italian at heart. There are a lot of references to nature, something he may be missing in the heart of London. But in Mantel's novels, Cromwell's beautiful garden at Austin Friars is mentioned on several occasions. Unravelling his romantic side, this garden may also be the symbol of his deep bond with the Italian culture, with the Renaissance.

3. Thomas Cromwell as the Unfortunate Family Man

As is confirmed in MacCulloch's biography, Thomas Cromwell and Elizabeth Wykes's marriage certainly dates back from around 1510. Their connection "suggests a local alliance, at much the same social level from which Cromwell started out: on the borders between yeomen and minor gentry" (MacCulloch 35). In the novels, Cromwell first learns to know Elizabeth's father, Wykys. Both men are working in the trade industry. They come to appreciate each other and it is as if Cromwell fell in love with Lizzie, or as if there was at least some kind of attraction: "'*Wat will je?*' they teased him. 'The old man's business? His wife when he dies?' 'No,' he said, surprising himself. 'I think I want his daughter'" (WH 42-43). His wish then came true when old Wykys asked his daughter and Cromwell if they wanted to get married. It was thus an arranged union, but not the usual kind since there were some kind of feelings involved. In *Wolf Hall*, Thomas Cromwell and Liz, his wife, seem to be a happy couple. They talk to each other about their everyday problems and Cromwell even confides in his wife and tells her secrets. Their emotional bond is made clearer by the following quote: "His hand, resting on

her familiar but lovely left breast [...]She puts her head on his shoulder. Too tired to speak, they lie side by side, in sheets of fine linen, under a quilt of yellow turkey satin" (WH 38). It contrasts very much with the image of the heartless murderer and calculator he sometimes tends to give himself.

Unfortunately, his wife dies of the sweat. Cromwell was not there when his wife died, but he had realizes she was not doing well the morning of her death: "He remembers the morning: the damp sheets, her damp forehead. Liz, he thinks, didn't you fight? If I had seen your death coming, I would have crucified him against the wall" (WH 102). In this extract, Cromwell asserts that he would have done anything he could do to save his late wife. But the fact is that he could not possibly foresee what would happen to Liz. Even though he is a Renaissance man and he thinks he can reach any summit through hard work, there are things he cannot control such as life and death. Liz's death was a huge shock in Thomas's life and he never remarried. It is often said that "he could not bear the thought of marrying anyone else" (MacCulloch 36). On several occasions in Mantel's novels Cromwell remembers the morning Lizzie died, as if he could have done something to save her. Cromwell would not go past his grief; he even calls Johane, Liz's sister, by the name of his late wife: "'God forgive me... For a moment I took you for your sister.' – 'The mistake is made,' Johane says. 'And sometimes persists'" (WH 301).

Thomas and Elizabeth had three known children: one son, Gregory named after Pope Gregory, and two younger daughters, Anne and Grace (MacCulloch 2018). In *Wolf Hall*, Thomas Cromwell is depicted as being very tender to his two girls. Traumatized by his father, he is willing to improve on what was done to him: "I shall be as tender to you as my father was not to me. For what's the point of breeding children, if each generation does not improve on what went before?" (WH 43-44). Going further, Cromwell claims that "It is the inly honest thing to be done: look after your children" (WH 147). So, it seems that Cromwell has a private and a public identity. In public, Cromwell appears to be "the master of practical solutions" (WH 85), but in private, the most important thing to Cromwell seems to be his family. It appears that he cannot be as successful in his private as in his public life. Actually, both Anne and Grace died in 1529, shortly after their mother. Cromwell's family is thus reduced to him and his son, Gregory. Nevertheless, Cromwell remains haunted by his past throughout Mantel's novels, as shown by the following excerpt: "There were days when he'd woken from

dreams of the dead and searching for them. When his waking self trembled, at the threshold of deliverance from his dreams" (*WH* 359).

Gregory Cromwell is thus the only surviving child of the Cromwell family. The first time Gregory is mentioned in Mantel's fiction, it does not happen in laudatory terms. Cromwell has received a letter from his "dutiful son" (*WH* 35), who is away. The first thing he tells his wife about the letter is that it is written "in bad Latin" (*ibid.*) Later, it is said that "Gregory has little interest in his books so far, though he likes to be told stories, dragon stories, stories of green people who live in the woods; you can drag him squealing through a passage of Latin if you persuade him that over the page there's a sea serpent or a ghost" (*WH* 36). Here also Cromwell would have liked Gregory to be like him. But Gregory is different, he appears to be a gentleman: "Gregory will never make a man of business. [...] Gregory is a gentleman" (*WH* 132). As it appears, one cannot be a gentleman and a man of business at the same time. Whereas Cromwell is clearly a man of business, Gregory is a gentleman in the sense that he is "is a fine archer, a fine horseman, a shining star in the tilt yard, and his manners cannot be faulted. He speaks reverently to his superiors, not scuffling his feet or standing on one leg, and he is mild and polite with those below him" (*BB* 27). So far, we have seen that Cromwell had the ability to fashion his own identity, but there are things he cannot fashion, like his son. Cromwell sometimes cannot hide the fact that he is disappointed by Gregory: "'Do you think More is disappointed in his boy? He shows no talent for affairs. Still, I hear you have a boy like that. You'll be looking for an heiress for him soon.' He doesn't reply. It's true" (*WH* 235).

Nonetheless, despite their differences, it does not prevent Cromwell from loving his son. At some point, Gregory is to joust against the king. Sadler then comes with the news that Henry VIII is dead. At first, Cromwell thinks it was his son that died and it upset him very much:

He will recall, later, how difficult it was to get through the doorway, to turn his steps to the tilting ground. He feels weak, the backwash of the weakness that had made him drop the pen when he thought that Gregory was hurt. He says to himself, that is not Gregory; but his body is dazed, slow to catch up with the news, as if he himself had received a killing blow.

(*BB* 201)

Chapter 5: Fashioning his Identity through Art

1. Art in the Renaissance

In the late 13th and early 14th centuries, the proto-renaissance movement flourished in Italy and preceded the Renaissance. Artists such as Giotto revealed “a new pictorial style that depends on clear, simple structure and great psychological penetration rather than on the flat, linear decorativeness and hierarchical compositions of his predecessors” (*ibid.*). Already in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (1308-1321), “its subjective spirit and power of expression look[ed] forward to the Renaissance (EB, Renaissance). Petrarch and Boccaccio were also part of this proto-renaissance period since they used the vernacular in their work (*ibid.*). Due to the plague and the outbreak of the civil war, Italy would have to wait another century to see the spirit of the Renaissance coming back to the surface (*ibid.*).

According to Carl Goldstein, art during Renaissance started as a way to express civic pride (1991) and the Florentines back in the 14th-century “revived an art that was almost dead” (*ibid.*), hence the name Renaissance. Among famous names of the Italian Renaissance we can cite Leonardo da Vinci or Raphael and Titian, who contributed greatly in making Florence “the preeminent city of Italy” (*ibid.*). Art was a high-point in formulating what the Renaissance was about and it soon “came to be seen as a branch of knowledge, valuable in its own right and capable of providing man with images of God and his creations as well as with insights into man’s position in the universe. [...]. Art was to be based on the observation of the visible world and practiced according to mathematical principles of balance, harmony, and perspective, which were developed at this time” (EB, Renaissance).

As stated by Goldthwaite, the production of art was major during the Renaissance and pieces of art came to belong to a category of goods in their own rights:

The increased production of art, and of luxury goods in general, is one of the most characteristic features of the Renaissance; and indeed it is at this time that art created consciously as such emerges as a distinct category of goods. The kinds of objects we today call art proliferated boundlessly, showing up in all walks of life, secular as well as religious, and they added up to a major change in the history of style.

(Goldthwaite 1987)

As Greenblatt claims, “In the 16th-century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process” (2012). The important word here is “artful”; Renaissance man shapes his identity like a work of art. In *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Thomas Cromwell relies greatly on art to help him fashion his identity, whether it be through literary works, through paintings or through the use of metaphors.

2. The Dog Metaphor

Throughout her novels, Mantel makes extensive use of the animal motif, including the *dog* motif. The connotative meaning of dog “can be either positive or negative; *dog* can be a derogatory term meant as an insult, or it can be used in a light-hearted way meaning *friend*”¹⁸. In what follows, I shall try to explain what it meant to Thomas Cromwell.

In the opening chapter of *Wolf Hall*, he introduces Bella, his bastard dog. He tells the reader how he got to have the “first Bella”, inducing there were others afterwards:

One day when he is nearly home he finds the first Bella lying in the street, and he sees that nobody wants her. She is no longer than a small-sized rat and so shocked and cold that she doesn't even cry. He carries her home in one hand, and in the other a small cheese wrapped in sage leaves.

The dog dies. His sister says, you can get another. He looks in the street but never finds one. There are dogs, but they belong to somebody.

(WH 115)

When he met the first Bella, she was neither in a good state, nor attractive. She looked as if she was abandoned and he therefore decided to take care of her. Unfortunately, she died. Kat, Cromwell's sister, gave him the permission to get another dog but he did not find any other lonely specimen. Bella could be a metaphor as the parallel between the bastard dog and Cromwell could easily be drawn. Like the first Bella, the first Thomas Cromwell, the one in the opening chapter of *Wolf Hall* is at a terrible moment in his life. He is constantly beaten up by his father and his face is covered with bruises. He is taken care of by his sister and her

¹⁸ <http://content.nroc.org/DevelopmentalEnglish/unit05/Foundations/identifying-denotation-and-connotation.html>

husband, like Cromwell took care of Bella. Fortunately, he does not die and decided to leave Putney. Nevertheless, as we can read in the following extract, he is disappointed that he cannot take the new Bella with him to the mainland:

‘Or I could be a ship’s boy. But, you know, Bella – do you think I should go back for her? She was screaming. He had her shut up.’

‘So she wouldn’t nip his toes?’ Morgan says. He’s satirical about Bella.

‘I’d like her to come away with me.’

‘I’ve heard of a ship’s cat. Not of a ship’s dog.’

‘She’s very small’

(WH 10)

Like Bella Cromwell is, at this stage in his life story, o very small in the sense that he is very young and he keeps lying about his age: “As they wait to cast off, they ask him his age. He says eighteen, but they laugh and say, child, you are never. He offers them fifteen, and they confer and decide that fifteen will do; they think he’s younger, but they don’t want to shame him” (WH 14). Furthermore, leaving Bella behind in Putney could be seen as an attempt to let go of his past, of the younger Thomas Cromwell. Leaving England was a turning point in his life; to do so, Cromwell had to let go of everything and everyone he knew in hope of a better life, and this included Bella as well, the symbol of his youth. Nonetheless, the next quote is a proof that Thomas Cromwell would always remember the first Bella and the first Cromwell: “Why are your dogs always called Bella and always so small?” (WH 314). Bella is a reminder of what he used to be. She is his like a Proust madeleine.

However, when he has grown older, Cromwell has also raised his standards and bought some dogs with a pedigree, greyhounds. In the following discussion between Gregory and his father, the son is complaining that people are making fun of him because he has black greyhounds. To the students in Cambridge, black dogs are made for those who do not want to be seen because of their criminal activities. Cromwell accepts to buy his son other dogs, but decides to adopt Gregory’s. Cromwell is not afraid of being laughed at, and is aware that he may be scary:

‘People in Cambridge are laughing at my greyhounds.’

‘Why?’ The black dogs are a matched pair. They have curving muscled necks and dainty feet; they keep their eyes lowered, mild and demure, till they sight prey.

‘They say, why would you have dogs that people can’t see at night? Only felons have dogs like that. They say that I hunt in the forests, against the law. They say I hunt badgers, like a churl.’

‘What do you want?’ he asks. ‘White ones, or some spots of colours?’

‘Either would be correct’

‘I’ll take your black dogs.’ Not that he has time to go out, but Richard or Rafe will use them.

‘But what if people laugh?’

‘Really, Gregory,’ Johane says. ‘This is your father. I assure you, no one will dare laugh.

(WH 221)

Here also a parallel can be drawn between Gregory’s greyhounds and Cromwell. As stated earlier, Cromwell thinks he has the look of a murderer. He is not Bella anymore as he now has a proper job, he deserves to be compared to a dog that has a pedigree. He is like a greyhound, working at night. Moreover, like the dogs, he has black hair and even though he respects the law, some, like Thomas More or Anne Boleyn, may think he is exceeding his rights. He is acting in favour of the King’s Great Matter, but he is working in the dark, he is not showing off to the world. In an online article written by Mark Nichol that deals with the connotative meanings of dogs, he writes: “*Hound*, a term for a particular class of dog bred for hunting, is sometimes used to label an unpleasant person, although the term may also apply to someone who doggedly pursues something”¹⁹. The two definitions of the term could be applied to Thomas Cromwell, depending on the point of view we decide to take on. Thomas Cromwell, before Mantel’s publications, used to be looked at as an unpleasant person. Throughout this master dissertation, it is becoming clear that from Mantel’s perspective, Cromwell was in fact a Renaissance man pursuing his ambitions.

Then, later in *Wolf Hall*, Henry VIII would say to Cromwell that “the country is going to the dogs” (WH 306). His utterance has a double meaning. In its literal sense, “if a country or organization is going to the dogs, it is becoming very much less successful than it was in the past” (Cambridge Dictionary, to go to the dogs)²⁰. In its figurative sense, the country is going to the dogs because Cromwell is gaining more and more power over England and Cromwell is

¹⁹ <https://www.dailywritings.com/5-animals-that-inspire-canine-connotations/>

²⁰ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/go-to-the-dogs>

like a dog. The reference to dogs in the idiomatic expression has become part of a dead metaphor, which, however, comes back to life again because of the frequent association between Cromwell and dogs.

The metaphor of Cromwell being a dog is once again strengthened during a discussion with Anne Boleyn: “‘I hear that at night you take the drafts to your house in – where is your house?’ She makes it sound like ‘your dog-hole’” (WH 288). Anne Boleyn does not explicitly say he is living in a dog-hole, but that is what Cromwell thinks she implies. In fact, Cromwell, and not the others, feels like he is a dog.

Going further, in *Bring Up the Bodies*, Anne Boleyn is devastated as her dog, Purkoy, a spaniel, died, she thinks he was murdered. Cromwell then remembers the first day he saw Purkoy and what it triggered in him:

The day Purkoy came from Calais to the court, he had held Francis Bryan by the sleeve: ‘Where can I get one?’ Ah for your mistress, that one-eyed devil had enquired: fishing for gossip. No he had said, smiling, just for myself. Soon Calais was in uproar. Letters flitting across the Narrow Sea. Master Secretary would like a pretty dog. Find him one, find him one quick, before someone else gets the credit. Lady Lisle, the governor’s wife wondered if she should part with her own dog. By one hand and another, a half-dozen spaniels were whisked in. Each was party-coloured and smiling, with a feathered tail and delicate miniature feet. Not one of them was like Purkoy, with his ears pricked, his habit of interrogation. *Pourquoi?* Good question.

(BB 134)

When he met Purkoy, Cromwell immediately felt the urge to get a dog that would resemble the Queen-to-be’s spaniel. At this point, Cromwell being very powerful, he has been shown many dogs, but he would always reject them as they were not exactly like Purkoy. One may wonder why Cromwell wanted such a dog so badly “just for himself”. The first reason may be that Purkoy was Anne’s dog and hence, out of his league; Cromwell is perpetually searching for things he logically cannot have. Most of the time, he succeeds, but not this time; this is harsh on him as he is in general a very successful man. The second reason is that Cromwell identifies with Purkoy. The dog’s own name is a mystery, it triggers interrogation. Purkoy resembles the French interrogative word *Pourquoi*. Cromwell himself is very mysterious man indeed. The dog’s name is a comic representation of the mystery there is around Cromwell.

At some point in *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell is asked by the cardinal to get closer to the people at Katherine of Aragon's court. He pretends he can barely speak Spanish even though it is a lie: "I told him my Spanish wasn't good" (WH 35). In fact, Cromwell thinks Wolsey "doesn't have to know everything" (*ibid.*). This mysterious part may be a way to protect himself. He certainly does not want to unveil all his secrets at once and keeps some in case he would get into trouble. The why, the *Pourquoi* is always what eludes people when they are around Cromwell.

3. The Snake Metaphor

So far, we have discussed the parallel that exists between Cromwell and his dogs. In Mantel's novels, the snake is a recurrent motif as well. In *Wolf Hall*, Thomas Cromwell recalls a time when he was in Italy. He had bet that he could hold still a snake for ten seconds. Unfortunately for him, Cromwell got bitten before the ten seconds had passed. Nevertheless, he continued holding it until the time was up. Cromwell thought he was going to die, but he remained quiet. Cromwell did not pass away as we know, quite the contrary, according to the following extract, it made him stronger. He adds that "the snake looked sick" and that he had become "quick to hide and quick to strike", as if the strength of the serpent had now shifted in him:

When he Italy he had picked up a snake for a bet, he had to hold it still till they counted ten. They counted, rather slowly, in the slower languages: *eins, zwei, drei...* At four, the startled snake flicked it head and beat him. Between four and five he tightened his grip. Now some cried, 'Blood of Christ, drop it!'. Some prayed and some just kept on counting. The snake looked sick; when they had all reached ten, and not before, he eased its coiled body gently to the ground, and let it slip away into its future.

There was no pain, but one could see clearly the puncture wound. On instinct, he tasted it, almost bit his own wrist. He noticed, surprised by it, the private, white, English flesh of his inner arm; he saw the narrow blue-green veins into which the snake had slipped the poison. He collected his winnings. He waited to die, but he never did die. If anything, he got stronger, quick to hide and quick to strike.

(WH 99-100)

Actually, during a discussion between Cardinal Wolsey and Cromwell, the former would tell the latter about Edward Plantagenet's misfortunes. Edward reacted as follows: "His

whole life took wing and soared. In that wash of brilliant light he saw his future. When no one else could see, he could see: and that is what it meant to be a king" (WH 95). This reminds us of Cromwell's story; when no one thought he would become that powerful, he decided he could and he did. But what follows is even more interesting as it reminds us of the snake episode told by Cromwell:

And why did he [Edward] fasten his affection, finally, on the widow of a Lancastrian knight? [...]. It was that she claimed descent from the serpent woman, Melusine, whom you may see in old parchments, winding her coils about the Tree of Knowledge and presiding over the union of the moon and the sun. 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.

(WH 96)

Like Cromwell that got bitten by a snake, Edward Plantagenet "got bitten" by the love of Melusine, a snake. These events made both Cromwell and Plantagenet stronger. Whereas Plantagenet was offered a bright future with many kids, Cromwell was also offered a bright future at the top of society.

More similarities can be found between snakes and Thomas Cromwell. "The serpent has been the most universally worshiped of all animals; [...]. The reason is not far to seek. The primal cause of the superstitious regard of any animal lies in its 'uncanniness' – a quality which the serpent possesses in a very high degree" (Murison 1905). Being uncanny means being "mysterious; arousing superstitious fear or dread; uncomfortably strange," as well as "having or seeming to have a supernatural or inexplicable basis; beyond the ordinary or normal; extraordinary" (Dictionary.com, uncanny)²¹. Both definitions could be applied to Cromwell. Many people fear Thomas Cromwell, much to his pleasure. He is also being mysterious on purpose as explained in this quote: "A man's power is in the half-light, in the half-seen movements of his hand and the unguessed-at expression of his face. It is the absence of facts that frightens people: the gap you open, into which they pour their fears, fantasies, desires" (WH 359). Also, it is true that Cromwell is beyond the ordinary. Born in Putney, he managed

²¹ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/uncanniness>

to get around his miserable destiny and make it something better.

Then, as stated by Muzur et al., “there are very few animals that humans have been so afraid of, and (maybe precisely because of this fear) at the same time so abundantly and diversely used as symbols” (2005). In *The Serpent in the Old Testament*, Murison compiled a list of characteristics that have led mankind to attribute so many different symbols to those animals (1905). I have selected those that matched Cromwell as well.

According to Murison, snakes proceed “forward like a ‘streak of burnished light’, or still more wonderfully executing without haste and without confusion the most intricate figures” (Kipling cited in Murison 1905). Cromwell acts reasonably and is very efficient at solving problems. To give the Reformation a firm footing in the realm of England, Cromwell acted at a slow pace, having to deal with many people that were sceptical about it. But in the end, he got what he wanted. Still, Cromwell may also work more quickly. For example, by 1528, when it became clear that Henry VIII had a love interest for Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth Barton, also known as the Maid of Kent, started having divine visions on the King’s future wife. As long as her prophecies would support the existing order, the Maid of Kent would not get into trouble. But when Henry VIII started on his quest for the annulment of his wedding with Katherine of Aragon, Barton turned against him. She pretended that if the King were to marry Anne Boleyn, he would be dead within a year. She could even see a place in Hell for Henry VIII. In 1533, she was arrested by the Crown and had to confess she had made up her visions. Thomas Cromwell was apparently in the front row during Barton’s interrogation. Without a proper trial, she was condemned and brought to the scaffold (MacCulloch 2018). In *Wolf Hall*, the Barton’s case makes Cranmer, Rafe Sadler and Cromwell reflect on the existing laws on treason. According to them, Barton’s case was missing something in order to properly convict her since “There is no overt action. She has only expressed an intent” (WH 492). Mantel’s Cromwell is aware of the multiple shapes treason can take on, treason can also happen orally. They then go on with their discussion and conclude that “new laws are needed” (*ibid*). A new bill was presented to the Parliament in which it was asked that oral treason would now be covered in *the Act of Succession*. Even though it was already too late for Barton since her crimes dated from before the passing of the bill, “the Act of Succession was a programme for combating [...] current or future acts of wickedness [...]” (MacCulloch 247). So, Cromwell

noticed there was something wrong in the justice system, therefore he made to prevent it from happening in the future; a quick move indeed, like a snake.

Furthermore, Murison states that “a poisonous snake rarely uses its power against man except to avenge an insult or injury” (1905). Throughout his life, one of Cromwell’s most trying moments was Cardinal Wolsey’s death. When it comes to his previous master, Cromwell is ready to go out of his comfort zone, he is even ready to part with reason. In *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell goes to see the monk responsible for Elizabeth Barton and asks him whether it would be possible for her to find the cardinal if he were to make an offering (WH 398). Cromwell is thus willing to pay a substantial amount of money because “[he] would need to know he wasn’t in Hell” (*ibid.*) even though deep down he knows that “her visions are inventions. She never spoke to heavenly persons. Or raised the dead; that was all a fraud” (WH 500). What is more, Cromwell would never recover from Wolsey’s death and as he says in *Bring Up the Bodies*, he “needs guilty men. So he has found men who are guilty. Though perhaps not guilty as charged” (BB 393). He is here pointing at the fact that Norris was charged for treason, after he was accused of having had an affair with Anne Boleyn. This may not be true, but Cromwell thinks Norris is guilty of Wolsey’s fall. Cromwell recalls a play “in which the late cardinal was set upon by demons and carried down to Hell” (BB 391). He goes on:

He sees Norris’s eyes move, as the scene rises before him: the firelight, the heat, the baying spectators. Himself and Boleyn grasping the victim’s hands, Brereton and Weston laying hold of him by his feet. 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, grovelling on the boards and scrabbling his paws.

(*ibid.*)

Cromwell wanted to avenge Wolsey because Norris played a role in such an insulting play. Knowing that he could not condemn Norris for the play and eager to avenge Wolsey, Cromwell managed to charge Norris for treason. Cromwell is however not in the habit of being harmful to others when it is not necessary. But in this context, like a snake, Cromwell released his poison to soothe his desire of revenge. Besides the snake metaphor, this event is also significant as it strengthens the fact that Cromwell came to use art to fit his purposes.

Fortunately for Thomas Cromwell, not all the symbols linked to snakes are negative. As pointed by Murison, “the serpent was also frequently regarded as the symbol or cause of life and healing”. As Muzur et al. justly put it, “the snake entwined around the stick of Asclepius is still used as the symbol of pharmacy” (2005). Actually, Cromwell was also a healer in his own style. Throughout his life, Cromwell takes on the responsibility to save many people that are in an awkward position, including Rafe Sadler, Christophe, a young French ruffian or Helen Barre, a poor woman taken in by the household. As a true humanist, Cromwell wants to give these people their dignity back. He saves them from ignorance and errands.

4. The Art of Memory

In *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Mantel explains on several occasions that Cromwell has a talent at remembering things. It is said that he knows the Old Testament by heart. His memory seems to be very important to him. In the following extract, Cromwell asserts that his memory is one of its greatest assets: “The word in the city is that Thomas Cromwell has a prodigious... Memory he says. I have a very large ledger. A huge filing system, in which are recorded (under their name, and also under their offense) the details of people who have cut across me” (WH 481). Not only does this quote highlight Cromwell’s capacity for remembering things, it also sets the focus on Cromwell’s obsession for figures. A ledger “is a book in which things are regularly recorded, especially business activities and money received or paid” (Cambridge, ledger)²².

In *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell also explains that he has such a good memory thanks to a method he learned while he was in Italy:

In Italy he learned a memory system and furnished it with pictures. Some are drawn from wood and field, from hedgerow and copses: shy hiding animals, eyes bright in the undergrowth. Some are foxes and deer, some are griffins, dragons. Some are men and women: nuns, warriors, doctors of the church. [...] It is no use hoping to remember with the help of common objects, familiar faces. One needs startling juxtapositions, images that are more or less peculiar, ridiculous, even indecent. When you have made the images, you place them about the world in locations you choose, each one with its parcel of words, of figures, which they will yield you on demand. [...] Some of these images are flat, and you can walk on them. Some are clothed in skin and walk around in a room, but perhaps they are men with their heads on

²² <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/ledger>

backwards, or with tufted tails like the leopards in coats of arms. [...] He keeps them, in strict order, in the gallery of his mind's eyes.

(WH 216)

What Cromwell is referring to in this quote is the method of loci. According to Wang and Thomas, "this mnemonic device supports serial recall of items by creating a visual image link between each-to-be-remembered item and one of a series of locations familiar to the learner" (2000). In other words, the method of loci is based on the assumption that people will better remember something if they associate it with a familiar place. So, if they want to remember something, they will have to enter through their mind the room in which they placed their memory.

Then, the method of loci is supposedly 2,500 years old and was invented by Simonides. In *Wolf Hall*, the reader is told about this anecdote in her work as a way to draw a parallel between Simonides, the poet and Thomas Cromwell, the artist of his own life:

Once in Thessaly, there was a poet called Simonides. He was commissioned to appear at a banquet, given by a man called Scopas, and recite a lyric in praise of his host. Poets have strange vagaries, and in his lyrics Simonides incorporated verses in praise of Castor and Pollux, the Heavenly twins. Scopas was sulky, and said he would pay only half the fee: 'As for the rest, get it from the Twins.' A little later, a servant came into the hall. He whispered to Simonides; there were two young men outside, ask for him by name.

[...]

As he turned back, to go and finish his dinner, he heard a terrible noise, of one 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.

The bodies were so broken and disfigured that the relatives of the dead could not identify them. But Simonides was a remarkable man. Whatever he saw was imprinted on his mind. He led each of the relatives through the ruins; and pointing to the crushed remains, he said, there is you man. In linking the dead to their names, he worked from seating plan in his head.

It is Cicero who tells us this story. He tells us how, on that day, Simonides invented the art of memory. He remembered the names, the faces, some sour and bloated, some blithe, some bored. He remembered exactly where everyone was sitting the moment the roof fell in.

(WH 157-158)

This method is further illustrated in *Wolf Hall* as follows:

The king has given him lodgings within the old palace at Westminster, for when he works too late to get home. This being so, he imagines himself walking through his rooms at Austin Friars, picking up his memory images from where he has left them on windowsills and under stools and in the woollen petals of the flowers strewn in the tapestry at Anselma's feet.

(WH 432)

Actually, Anselma was a woman he had an affair with while in Antwerp. At Wolsey's residence, there is a tapestry representing the Queen of Sheba. Cromwell immediately sees a resemblance with Anselma. After Wolsey's fall, he will inherit the tapestry and Cromwell's thoughts will often be directed at his previous lover for whom he still has sweet feelings. The Queen of Sheba is in fact a biblical figure that lived during King Salomon's reign: "She visited his court at the head of a camel caravan bearing gold, jewels, and spices. [...]. The purpose of her visit was to test Solomon's wisdom by asking him to solve a number of riddles" (EB, Queen of Sheba)²³. Anselma seems to have been a very important figure in Cromwell's life. Whenever he is not feeling right, he is thinking about her, like in the following quote for example when he is wondering whether he was a happy man while he was traveling through Europe. His answer is positive; the moments he shared with Anselma appear to be pleasant and at the same time tinted with magic. Anselma spoke a language he could not understand. Like the Queen of Sheba she offered riddles to King Salomon. Anselma was a riddle to Cromwell. The fact that Cromwell associates the Queen of Sheba that stands on the tapestry with Anselma proves once more that Cromwell construes his identity through art:

Home then was a narrow shuttered house on a quiet canal, Anselma kneeling, creamily naked under her trailing nightgown of green damask, its sheen blackish in candlelight; kneeling before the small silver altarpiece she kept in her room, which was precious to her, she had told

²³ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Queen-of-Sheba>

him, the most precious thing I own. Excuse me just a moment, she had said to him; she prayed in her own language, now coaxing, now almost threatening, and she must have teased from her silver saints some flicker of grace, or perceived some deflection in their glinting rectitude, because she stood up and turned to him, saying, 'I'm ready now,' tugging apart the silk ties of her gown so that he could take her breasts in his hands.

(WH 414)

Going further with regard to the art of memory, we could mention Giulio Camillo. He was an Italian humanist who was famous for his short treatise *L'idea del Teatro* (1550), in which he discusses his theatre of memory: "When it was finished, the user – so he predicted – would have access to the knowledge of the whole universe" (Matussek 2001). His system was in fact the ancestor of the computers we use today (*ibid.*). In *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell discusses Giulio Camillo's invention, a kind of memory machine, with the French ambassadors. They seem to be confused about what exactly this object is, the ambassadors say it is "a wooden box" (471), Cromwell asserts it is a theatre:

'Erasmus has written to us about it,' Henry says, over his shoulder. 'He is having the cabinetmakers create him little wooden shelves and drawers, one inside another. It is a memory system for the speeches of Cicero.'

'With your permission, he intends it as more than that. It is a theatre on the ancient Vitruvian plan. But it is not to put on 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? Yet it is more than that.'

(WH 471-472)

In *The Renaissance of the Theatre of Memory*, Peter Matussek further explains that the theatre of memory (See Appendix 2) was constructed as an amphitheatre that contained seven sections, each section represented one planet as the human being only knew of seven planets at that time. They each stood for different symbols and combining them, it was possible "to reproduce every imaginable micro and macrocosmic relationship in one's own

memory” (2001). To Thomas Cromwell, this invention is extraordinary. Later on in *Wolf Hall*, he would imagine what it be like to be able such a great memory:

Suppose within every book there is another book, and within every letter on every page another volume constantly unfolding; but these volumes take no space on the desk. Suppose knowledge could be reduced to a quintessence, held within a picture, a sign, held within a place which is no place. Suppose the human skull were to become capacious, spaces opening inside it, humming chambers like beehives.

(WH 482)

Thomas Cromwell defines himself partly through his ability to memorize things. What is interesting here is that he appears to be captivated by Giulio Camillo’s project, which is a “theatre”. Here too art helps him fashion his identity. Further in *Wolf Hall*, when he would learn Camillo’s project had failed, he would be sad he did not get to grasp more of it, but he is happy King François, the one Camillo designed the theatre for, did not get to have it either. Cromwell would not want others to access such a large memory. In the Renaissance perhaps more then ever before, knowledge is power and the theatre of memory would have enabled the French king to become even more powerful:

Giulio has quit Paris, they say. He has scuttled back to Italy and left the device half built. [...]. It is likely, he thinks, that we shall never know what his invention really was. A printing press that can write its own books? A mind that thinks about itself? If I don’t have it, at least the King of France doesn’t either.

(WH 647)

5. Holbein’s Painting

In an article for the *Oxford Art Journal*, Loh deals with the theme of portraits in the Renaissance. She explains that portraits in the Renaissance were designed to tell something about the personality of the one that was painted. These portraits influenced very much the way these people were perceived by others as well as their own identity:

Portraits, in short were not about preserving truthful likenesses, they were about bodies being transformed into data through significance and subjectification. These faces reterritorialise the bodies attached to them – luminous face/regal body, anxious face/neurotic body – which in turn naturalises the construction of these ‘individuals’ along similar terms. [...] Rather than the ultimate testament to individuality, the face becomes the matrix that enables us to believe in the myth of the veridical self. Portraits create identities that come to define our behaviour and our sense of how we are seen in the world.

(Loh 2009)

In Mantel’s novels, Thomas Cromwell’s portrait is painted by Hans Holbein the younger. As written on the website of the National Gallery of London, “Holbein was one of the most accomplished portraitists of the 16th-century. He spent two periods of his life in England (1526-8 and 1532-43), portraying the nobility of the Tudor Court” (National Gallery, Hans Holbein)²⁴. Among the people he painted we find Henry VIII, Desiderius Erasmus, Thomas More or Jane Seymour (*ibid.*). According to Ganz, “in 1533 the full-length portrait-group of the French Ambassadors no doubt caused a sensation in London and made the artist’s name famous” (1943).

As explained earlier, Cromwell’s rising in the society required that his portrait needed to be done. Hans Holbein was thus commissioned to do it during his second visit to England. It appears that the original painting is now lost, but three copies of it are known, the best one being exposed in the *Frick Collection* in New-York City. In *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Lionel Cust utters the hypothesis that Cromwell deliberately asks Holbein for a portrait that would resemble More’s “in spite of the difference between the high-bred features and dignified mien of the lord chancellor and the vulgar snub-nosed, roguish aspect of the lord privy seal” (1911). Funnily enough, Cromwell’s portrait faces that of Thomas More, his enemy friend (MacCulloch 2018). As explained by Erikson and Hulse, the present location of both paintings impacts Cromwell’s image very much as it emphasises his role as the villain:

²⁴ <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/hans-holbein-the-younger>

The formal qualities of Cromwell, the posing of the figure, the averted face and narrow eyes, the blocking table, the surrounding spaces filled with arabesques, the illegible writings, the hand closed in on the paper, have come to be read as suggesting aloof distance, coldness, even a murderous nature. [...]. This is exacerbated by the present location of the painting in the Living Room of the Frick Collection where their subjects seem to face each other across a mantel. The almost universal reaction is incisively summarized in a letter to Sidney Cockerell written by the painter Charles Ricketts [...]: 'Imagine Sir Thomas More, the beautiful saint, and Cromwell, the monster, united in history, art and tragedy, now facing each other, united by Holbein and time and chance'

(Erikson & Hulse 2000)

In *Wolf Hall*, Thomas Cromwell cannot wait to see what Hans Holbein has made of him. Cromwell asks the latter several times throughout the novel when he can see the finished products. Cromwell seems pretty confident about his own reflection. In a discussion with Johane, he tells an anecdote in which people destroyed all their belongings after they were enchanted by a magician. To him, the worst part is that they all crushed their mirror. Consequently, they cannot look at themselves anymore. As proven by the following quote, Cromwell can still look at himself in the mirror because he does not feel guilty for what he has done so far: "'You said the mirrors were the worst. Not to be able to look at yourself.' – 'Yes. Well, so I think. I hope I can always look myself in the face'" (WH 312).

Further on in the novel, a chapter named "The Painter's eye" is intended to tell the reader about Cromwell's discovery of the portrait. Interestingly enough, Cromwell is not sure of himself anymore and before looking at Holbein's work, he feels shy. He remembers his father, Walter, who traumatized him. He does not dare to look at the whole picture at once and does it step by step:

When Hans brings the finished portrait to Austin Friars he feels shy of it. He remembers when Walter would say, look me in the face boy, when you tell me a lie.

He looks at the picture's lower edge, and allows his gaze to creep upwards. A quill, scissor, papers, his seal in a little bag, and a heavy volume, bound in blackish green: the leather tooled in gold, the pages gild-edged. Hans had asked to see his Bible, rejected it as too plain, too thumbed. He had scoured the house and found the finest volume he owned on the desk of

Thomas Avery. It is the monk Pacioli's work, the book on how to keep your books, sent to him by his friends in Venice.

(WH 525)

In this quote, Cromwell's portrait is described in great detail and it tells us a lot about him. Cromwell is holding a "book on how to keep your books", thus highlighting Cromwell's talent for accountancy. Cromwell first wanted to hold a Bible, but Holbein refused this. Maybe Holbein wanted to present Cromwell as man of figures rather than as a man of God. The description goes on:

He sees his painted hand, resting on the desk before him, holding a paper in a loose fist. It is uncanny, as if he had been pulled apart, to look at himself in sections, digit by digit. Hans has made his skin smooth as the skin of a courtesan, but the motion he has captured, that folding of the fingers, is as sure as that of a slaughterman's when he picks up the killing knife. He is wearing the cardinal's turquoise.

(WH 525-526)

Regarding Cromwell's hands, he sees them as those of a slaughterer holding a knife. In his youth, Cromwell killed some people, maybe with a knife. What is more, Wolsey's father was a butcher, a "slaughterman". Cromwell never recovered from his death and we could claim that Wolsey was a father to Cromwell. Hence, the link between Cromwell's hands and the slaughterer. Mantel then writes about Cromwell's face:

He raises his eyes, to his own face. It does not much improve on the Easter egg which Jo painted. Hans had penned him in a little space, pushing a heavy table to fasten him in. He had time to think, while Hans drew him, and his thoughts took him far off, to another country. You cannot trace those thoughts behind his eyes.

(WH 526)

While Cromwell was being painted, he was thinking about foreign countries. That was impossible for Holbein to paint and it remains part of Cromwell's private personality and it adds up to his mysterious personality. As for the location, Cromwell had wished to be painted in his garden:

He had asked to be painted in his garden. Hans said, the very notion makes me sweat. Can we keep it simple, yes?

He wears his winter clothes. Inside them, he seems made of a more impermeable substance than most men, more compacted. He could well be wearing armour. He foresees the day when he might have to. There are men in this realm and abroad (not only in Yorkshire now) who would stab him as soon as look at him.

I doubt, he thinks, they can hack through to the heart. The king had said, what are you made of?

He smiles. There is no trace of a smile on the face of his painted self.

(*ibid.*)

Cromwell's garden is a place of comfort reminding him of Italy as stated earlier, but Holbein had preferred to "keep it simple". Cromwell then talks about his clothes and the facts they were made of "a more impermeable substance than most men", meaning he could wear anything under these and it would remain a mystery. In *Wolf Hall*, Wolsey explains to Cromwell that what people are wearing under their clothes can tell a lot about who they really are: "Try always, Wolsey says, to find out what people wear under their clothes" (WH 84).

Furthermore, Erikson & Hulse claim that "out of all the portraits that Holbein did at the English court, the portrait of Cromwell has always seemed the least flattering to its subject, the most viciously mocking" (2000). Hans Holbein did not paint a very flattering portrait of Cromwell indeed; when Cromwell's household discovered Holbein's portrait, they were unanimous that it was a wrongful representation of Cromwell. Helen Barre would say "I don't think you look like that" (WH 526) and Chapuy would add that "he looks like a dancing monkey" (*ibid.*). Moreover, it would be a shock for Thomas Cromwell as well. To Gregory, his son, he would say: "I was surprised, when the picture came, to find I was vain. I thought of myself as I was when I left Italy, twenty years ago. Before you were born" (WH 527). It shows that, even though Cromwell has gained power and money, he is not fully aware of it yet. He still sees himself as the young ruffian he was.

Holbein's portrait, like other portraits in the Renaissance, were designed to show the painted figure's personality or identity. However, Holbein's representation of Cromwell seems to have failed in this respect. Having controlled too many aspects of the painting's set up and

Cromwell being very mysterious, Holbein did not manage to properly represent Mantel's Cromwell, troubling even more Cromwell's quest for his identity.

Conclusion

Throughout this master dissertation, I have striven to analyse systematically Hilary Mantel's representation of Thomas Cromwell in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. In the 2017 Reith Lectures, Mantel explained that the historical novelist's aim in general is to offer the reader a kind of meaningful immersion back in an unfamiliar period, and in Mantel's case, back in a period that is too often criticized according to her, viz. 16th century England. To do so, Mantel decided to write about Thomas Cromwell, since his story had not been told yet with sufficient respect for his point of view. Still, she does not pretend her interpretation of the character of Thomas Cromwell to be the sole possible version, but she wants to make the readers of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* reflect on the personality of Thomas Cromwell.

Cromwell's personality was often looked down upon before the publication of Mantel's work. Usually seen as a villain, we have shown that his identity cannot possibly be reduced to a single characteristic. Having first discussed the different existing definitions of the historical novel, I have then summarized Hilary Mantel's point of view on this matter as she explained it in her Reith Lectures (2017). The history as told in Diarmaid MacCulloch's very recent scholarly biography were later confronted with Mantel's own storyline. Moving on to the second part of this master dissertation, a line was drawn between Cromwell's public and private identity. I examined the connection between the representation of Cromwell's private identity and the author's use of selective omniscience as a narratological technique. As to Thomas Cromwell's identity, his name(s), date of birth, home and jobs have proven themselves to be very important in the building of it. The notion of art was an important concept as well as it enabled Cromwell to fashion himself.

In the first part of this master dissertation, I first indicated the most salient characteristics of the genre of the historical novel. Historical novelists set their fictions in the past, dealing with events that happened in real life. But most importantly, these authors will put the emphasis on the characters rather than on the events. Events are used to set the background of the books whereas characters give it substance. According to Hilary Mantel, events are a major source of inspiration and a novelist should be careful if she ventures to make up stories. Still, Mantel claims it is impossible to talk about everything that happened. The novelist has to operate on a selection because she thinks this is necessary for the sake of

clarity. As Mantel explained later on in her lectures in 2017, a historical novel is more than just an account of the past; otherwise, it would just be a book that could be used to teach history.

Relying on Hilary Mantel's comments about the historical novel, I checked whether the plot in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* was a mirrored history faithfully. To do so I used Diarmaid MacCulloch's *Thomas Cromwell: A Life* (2018), as it is the most recent source of information regarding Thomas Cromwell. Moreover, MacCulloch kept contact with Hilary Mantel in the writing of his book. As expected, the events depicted in Mantel's books are very similar to those depicted in Cromwell's biography. This is not only evidence of Mantel's great quality as a writer; it also demonstrates that Mantel's representation of Cromwell can be considered valid since as far as the events are concerned, she used historical facts only. Using the same material as those that wrote *A Man for all Seasons*, and adding quite a lot more, Hilary Mantel managed to give a nuanced image of Thomas Cromwell.

The aim of the second part of this master dissertation was the uncovering of Thomas Cromwell's identity. The third chapter focused on Cromwell's public identity. I have demonstrated that in the fictional representation, Thomas Cromwell low origins are both an asset and a weakness. On the one hand, as a true Renaissance man, Cromwell believes that if he wants something, he will be able to have it through hard work and knowledge. Going further, he considers he is one of the few that understand there were some highly significant changes going on in society and that one could take advantage of them. Some, like Anne Boleyn, understand that his low origins have enabled him to acquire expertise that was only accessible for a man like him. On the other hand, being the son of a blacksmith will necessitate a hard struggle throughout his life. Some aristocrats reject him because he was not well-born. They understand that he is good with figures, but they do not analyse the situation any further and do not accept him as part of their group. Cromwell is thus in a very uncomfortable position where he has to prove himself to the higher spheres of the world. Within the fictional framework, this explains why Cromwell places too much emphasis on his material belongings, thinking that if his extrinsic value is raised, his intrinsic value will be as well.

Thomas Cromwell is acutely aware that his name is ambiguous. From his birth onwards, Cromwell has disliked his non-aristocratic family name as he has often had the impression that it sealed his fate. Because of it, it seemed likely that Thomas would become like his father. Still, Thomas Cromwell, as a true Renaissance man, wants his name to be remembered. He has the feeling he can make it in the English society and hence make his

name famous. In our own day and age, we know he ended up being an important figure in English history as two celebrated novels and an important biography about him were published five centuries after he died. Nonetheless, many people in Cromwell's days did not take him seriously and gave him condescending nicknames, denying him the identity that he wanted to acquire. 'Cremuel', the comic distortion of his name when it is pronounced in the French manner by people like Anne Boleyn, is a prominent example of this. The implication is that calling Cromwell an aristocrat sounds as ridiculous as does the French pronunciation of his name. For all these reasons, it was certainly not easy for Thomas Cromwell to develop his personal identity.

Thomas Cromwell has experienced many positions throughout his life. From being a soldier he ended up serving the King of England. He is trusted by many to educate their relatives, even though he does not have any title, which shows that the 16th century was a period of deep change for the English society. In *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Cromwell, as a true Renaissance man, seems confident he can shape a new society that improves the well-being of the human being. This has implications, the first being that he may be thought to be an opportunist. After all, it is true that Cromwell knows how to manipulate people, including Henry VIII. Hence the second implication – he is not trusted by some important men like Thomas More, who believes he is a heretic. More does not see the need for a remodelling of the Church, whereas Cromwell thinks it is a crucial step for giving back their dignity to the people.

The chapter on Cromwell's public life offered a mix between what Cromwell was given from the beginning of his life onwards (name and date of birth) and what he had to fashion by himself (professions). The fourth chapter on Cromwell's private identity focuses only on what Cromwell created by himself, as a true Renaissance man. In the paragraphs on perspective, I explained the concept of selective omniscience and how the reader should be aware that he is immersed in Cromwell's thoughts while reading *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. Focalising on events, thoughts and emotions from within Cromwell's heart and mind offers readers a chance to as it were shape the self and society with him in Renaissance fashion.

Older, Cromwell then back in England would say: "'You look like a foreigner.' – 'I am a foreigner'" (WH 111). Cromwell does not consider himself to be an Englishman. But what is he then? I have shown that Cromwell's talents for eloquence develop at the expense of his

mother tongue, Welsh. Wanting to become powerful, Cromwell has had to let go some parts of his origins to match the expectations of the higher spheres in society. Besides English, Cromwell masters several other languages and if one considers 'language' in a wider sense, he has learnt to master the language of Henry VIII. His language skills would prove to be very useful as the more languages he could speak, the better he could communicate with people and hence, become stronger. Cromwell's rivals do not match Cromwell's linguistic skills, and this gives him a major advantage. Before taking up residence at Austin Friars and managing an elaborate household, Cromwell had travelled through Europe and was struck by the magnificence of Italy, as he would recall several times in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. His memories of this Renaissance paradise would be his shelter in the absence of having a proper home. As for his nationality, we could argue that he is a European citizen. Cromwell is an Englishman through his birth, but becomes Tommaso, the Italian trader, through his humanist ideas, and a cunning tradesman, thanks to his stay in both Italy and Antwerp. He is also Cremuel, the French soldier, when talking to Anne Boleyn.

Furthermore, I have demonstrated that Cromwell's family was very important to him. The stability his home gives him gives him a strong inner core that enables him to deal with the outside world that brands him as an outsider. Mantel's Cromwell deeply cares for his wife and children. Unfortunately, he does not manage to protect Lizzie, Grace and Anne from the plague. Obviously, he could not possibly have had such power. There are limits to Renaissance man's ability to shape the world around him. Nevertheless, Cromwell would always feel guilty for the loss of his wife and daughters. As to his son, Gregory, what first appears to be a relationship based on disappointment turns out to be more complex. Gregory and Thomas Cromwell are different from each other because Thomas Cromwell was not able to fashion his son like him. Gregory is a gentleman whereas Cromwell is not. Still, their bond is strong and they both look after each other. This painful family background illustrates that Cromwell cannot fashion everything, however close he may come to the Renaissance ideal of the *uomo universale*.

The fifth chapter of this master dissertation centred around the notion of art and how Cromwell used it to fashion his own identity. During the Renaissance art was very prominent and as Greenblatt claims in his publications, Renaissance men were shaping their identity in an artful manner. First dealing with the metaphor of the dog, which is a recurrent motif in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, I have shown the parallel that exists between Cromwell

and dogs. Bella, the first dog he had when he was a child, would be Cromwell's reference point through much of his life. Even when he is near the top of society, he would have a dog named after Bella to remind him of what he was before. Bella was a bastard and thus in many ways a reject like Cromwell himself, but Mantel also mentions greyhounds, whose description interestingly enough likewise matches Cromwell's public image at that time. Cromwell was seen as a thug operating in the dark by the aristocracy. Moreover, if, as Anne Boleyn claims "the country is going to the dogs" (WH 306), then Cromwell is the dog that controls England. Going further, I have shown that Cromwell seems to be obsessed with Anne Boleyn's spaniel, Purkoy, whose name resembles the French interrogative marker *pourquoi*. Thomas Cromwell's ways are mysterious and the people around him do not seem to always understand the 'why' of Thomas Cromwell.

Another recurrent metaphor is that of the snake. Cromwell told the Cardinal he got bitten by a snake when he was in Italy. Even though he thought he would die, it actually made him stronger. It as if he had become a snake. Similarities between Cromwell and the animal can easily be found. Like Cromwell, snakes are said to be uncanny and mysterious. Also, Cromwell appears to good at time-management. He knows when to act and when to deal a blow if necessary. Working at a slow pace for the Reformation, he acted very promptly regarding Elizabeth Barton's case. Finally, Cromwell is not poisonous, except when he wants to avenge the one he loved, like his master the Cardinal. Still, Cromwell is also a healer as one of his main priorities is to give their dignity back to people that deserve it.

Furthermore, talking about the Method of loci and Giulio Camillo, I have shown that the Art of Memory was an important part of Cromwell's life. It enabled him to remember important figures of his life such as Anselma, a woman with whom he had an intimate relationship in Antwerp. Also, memory was to Cromwell a way to be more powerful than the elite. Finally, as a way to be remembered, Cromwell had his portrait painted by Hans Holbein. However, as I have proven by analysing some extracts in *Wolf Hall*, Holbein did not manage to faithfully mirror Cromwell's image. In the building of his identity, Cromwell could only rely on the memories he had built by himself, and not on those built by others, even by some highly talented painters like Holbein.

All in all, in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Mantel's Cromwell appears to be ambitious and very sure of himself. Nevertheless, there are some times when he loses his confidence and shows the reader his weaknesses, proving himself to be a very ambiguous

man, every now and then at odds with his own systems of belief. Mantel's Cromwell is thus a round character whose personality is complex. Unlike many of the authors that wrote before her on Thomas Cromwell, Mantel is managed to make the reader think more deeply about Cromwell's personality. Mantel's work was adapted in a miniseries broadcasted by the BBC in 2015. It may be interesting to see whether their representation of Cromwell's identity is the same as Hilary Mantel's, but that would be the subject of another dissertation.

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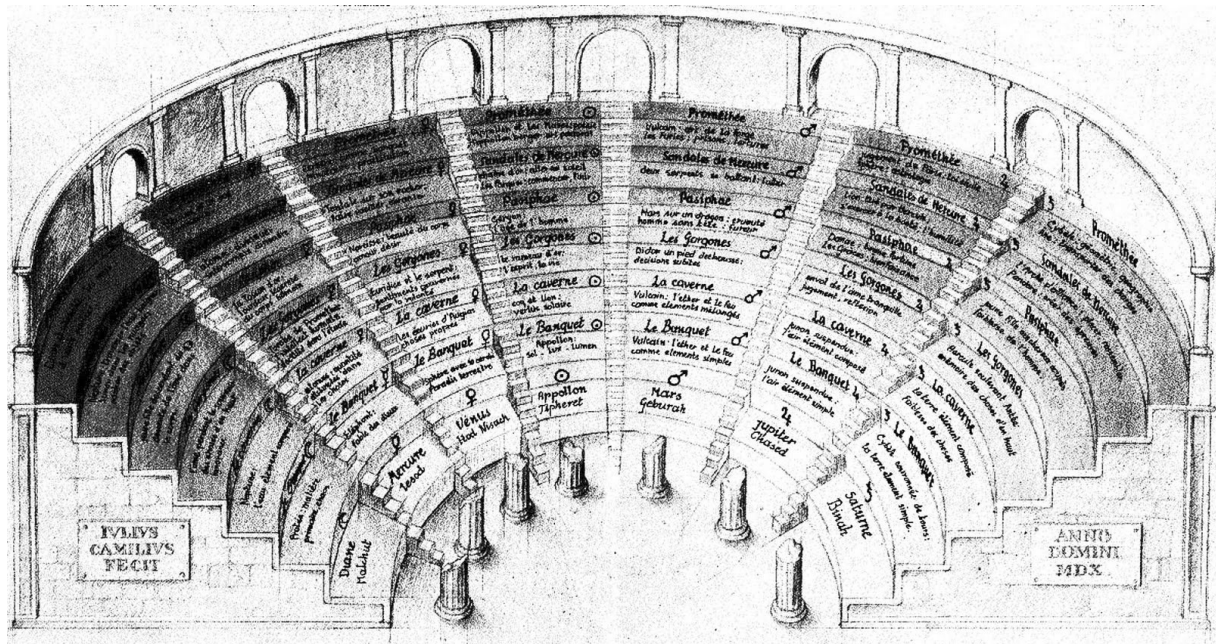
Appendices

Appendix 1: Thomas Cromwell Painted by Hans Holbein (1532)



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait_of_Thomas_Cromwell#/media/File:Cromwell,Thomas\(1EEssex\)01.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait_of_Thomas_Cromwell#/media/File:Cromwell,Thomas(1EEssex)01.jpg) (Accessed 8.05.19)

Appendix 2: Giulio Camillo's Theatre of Memory



<http://socks-studio.com/img/blog/memory-theater-02.jpg> (Accessed 8.05.19)

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