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# The Ambiguity in Mantel's Cromwell

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## Introduction

As history novels are not historical records, the authors do not be concerned with the accuracy of the historical events portrayed. In other words, history novelists can use their imagination. For example, Shakespeare embodies the Henry V of Tudor historians as the grandfather of Henry Tudor. Hilary Mantel shapes her Cromwell in *The Wolf Hall Trilogy*, claiming that “while looking for the records of Thomas Cromwell, I was shocked that the errors and prejudices of historians have made up his false image for years” (The Observer). In *Wolf Hall* (2009), Mantel describes the fall of Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas More, contrasting it with the rise of Cromwell who considers Anne Boleyn his enemy. Furthermore, *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012) is similar to a revenge tragedy in which the climax sees Anne Boleyn and her supposed lovers executed. This is followed by *The Mirror & The Light* (2020), which depicts the sudden fall and execution of Thomas Cromwell after he is elevated to sit beside the king. In all three volumes, Cromwell is the central protagonist, and the story is presented from his viewpoint. Therefore, considering them from different perspectives might produce other interpretations.

In this essay, first, I discuss why and how Mantel tries to reconstruct Cromwell. Second, I describe the influence of Shakespearean history plays in *The Trilogy* and Cromwell's two sides according to Mantel's characterisation. Finally, I focus on a possible different interpretation of Cromwell image. Stanley Wells indicates that *The*

*Wolf Hall Trilogy* has much of the same subject matter as Shakespearean works. He compares Mantel's work with many Shakespearean plays including *King Lear* and *King Henry VIII: All Is True*, composed jointly by Shakespeare and John Fletcher. In *The Trilogy* by Mantel, a keen fan of Shakespeare since childhood, we find Hamlet-like conversations between Thomas More and Cromwell and details reminding us of Shakespearean plays. Furthermore, the fates of Wolsey and Cromwell in *King Henry VIII* overlap with those of Mantel's Wolsey and Cromwell. Both works indicate the possibility of Cromwell's treacherous behaviour against Cardinal Wolsey, prompting a question regarding his personality, that is, his two sides. The duality of Cromwell leads us to think of Shakespeare's characterisation of Henry V, who appears as an ideal Tudor monarch now and a Machiavellian militarist then. Norman Rabkin likens this duality to Gestalt's rabbit-duck image. Is Cromwell a sympathetic person who lets the commoners think on their own, rather than believing what the authorities force them to, and tries to spread the Bible in English for the reformation? Or is he a villain who betrays even his closest allies? I discuss Mantel's intention, which can be understood by contrasting *The Trilogy* with Shakespearean plays.

## Construction of a New Cromwell

Thomas Cromwell, who introduced legislation to enable Henry VIII's multiple marriages and the establishment of the Anglican Church, thereby promoting the dissolution of the monasteries, is a fascinating character to depict as a protagonist. However, with a limited number of remaining historical documents available on Cromwell, his image has remained mysterious. Thomas Cromwell is recorded as one of the martyrs in John Fox's *The Acts and Monuments* with reference to the Anglican Church (John Foxe's *The Acts and Monuments* Online). In films like *A Man for All Seasons* by Robert Bolt or in historical novels, Thomas Cromwell is often presented as an ambitious, cold-hearted, and brutal man, especially in comparison with his

counterpart Thomas More and his saintly reputation (Guy). Stephen Greenblatt's statement about the Tudor historian image for Cromwell affirms this as follows:

For many Tudor historians, as well as for the innumerable contemporaries who feared and loathed him, Cromwell has been the man who worked tirelessly to satisfy the ruthless appetites of the monstrous Henry VIII, to expand the power of the state over lives and property, to accumulate wealth for himself and his cronies, to crush with merciless efficiency any resistance from any quarter (Greenblatt).

Mantel presents the new Cromwell as free from the image cultivated over years, namely as someone from poverty and therefore sympathetic to the poor and the struggles among the privileged at the court. She uses her imagination, taking advantage of the dearth of information about him. In the author's note to *Bring Up the Bodies*, she states, "I try to show how a few crucial weeks might have looked from Thomas Cromwell's point of view and I am not claiming authority for my version; I am making the reader a proposal, an offer". she concludes, "this book is of course not about Anne Boleyn or about Henry VIII, but about the career of Thomas Cromwell, who is still in need of attention from biographers" (*Bring* 437-438). As Mantel explains in "From 'Wolf Hall'", Cromwell, aged fifteen, runs away after a beating from his father, and his life for the next ten years is obscure. Mantel uses this obscure period to add a new side to his character.

In *The Spectator*, John Preston highlights Mantel's insistence that in a history novel, characterisation is rarely as satisfactory as in a modern novel; the people are not as layered and real. He contends that Mantel wants to reconstruct Thomas Cromwell's memories for him. Actually, his conduct and struggle in the Court under the King charm readers. Colin Burrow notes that Mantel's writing method of picking out tableaux vivants from historical records renders her rendition different from the

version presented in history books (How to Twist a Knife).

History was written by the authorities, because they had exclusive command over the media, using it to divide the privileged from the common people. Based on that, the privileged do not want people to read and think. In *Henry VI*, Shakespeare writes that at the rebellion led by Jack Cade, his men catch the clerk and decide to hang him because the clerk knows how to write (*Henry VI* II. 4.2). The sentence, 'Beneath every history, another history' (*Wolf* 63) represents Mantel's opinion that history has been written or created by the authorities and that therefore, another history from the commoner's viewpoint must be written. Using her skilful command of the language as a novelist, Mantel launched her Cromwell. In *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell working for Wolsey is prosperous. His legal practice is thriving (*Wolf* 87), and he is so rich that numerous noblemen are indebted to him (*Wolf* 87). He claims that the days of chivalry are over and those of the moneylender have arrived (*Bring* 152). However, he is gentle to the poor. Thirston, the cook of Cromwell, prepares to feed two hundred Londoners, twice a day (*Bring* 50). Eamon Duffy describes her Cromwell in the Times Literary Supplement as a social and religious reformer, a sincere supporter of the Protestant Reformation who nevertheless shies away from the fanatical enthusiasm of religious zealots of every stamp: 'dear God', and he is always nice to women.

Regarding the image of the Cromwell of the past, Greenblatt in *The Trilogy* points out that he works to satisfy Henry VIII to expand his power; however, Mantel gives Cromwell reasons to explain his flattery. Since he witnessed the corruption of the Roman Papacy during his stay in Europe, he has his reasons for accusing the monasteries and the execution of heretics, and he tries to keep Henry VIII as a powerful king for the peace of England: He estimates that the clergy own a third of England's treasure and sends it to Rome (*Wolf* 517) and believes that if the king had the monk's land, he would be three times the man he is now (*Bring* 49). Mantel's depiction of Cromwell's exceptional advancement in the court is well liked, twice

winning her the Booker Prize and making Cromwell's achievement widely known to modern audiences.

## Mantel's Tudor in the Shakespearean Background

In this section, I describe the influence of Shakespeare in *The Trilogy*, because it seems that Mantel depicts the court of the Tudor dynasty and characterisation of the protagonists based on an image from the Shakespearean history world. Subsequently, I elaborate the problems Shakespeare's Henry V faces, and the legitimacy and justification thereof. Finally, I discuss the problem we face in the interpretation of both Mantel's Cromwell and Shakespeare's Henry V.

In her memoir, Mantel states that she was already a lover of Shakespeare before she was ten years old:

I wake up before dawn to read its single scene from *Julius Caesar*, where Anthony pitches the mob against Brutus. The scene is prefaced by an extract from Plutarch, so I am keyed in on the storyline... So this, I think, is the complete works of Shakespeare...In my opinion, it deserves all the applause people heap on it. I learn the death of Caesar by heart (*Giving* 115-116).

There is no story that has not been influenced by earlier stories. In other words, it is evident that Mantel, an admirer of Shakespeare, is more or less affected by Shakespearean plays. Many details in *The Trilogy* suggest the influence of Hamlet or other Shakespearean plays. For example, Henry sees his brother Arthur in his dream when he tries to divorce his brother's wife Katherine (*Wolf* 266), the informer is behind the arras (*Bring* 83), and the mirror often shows his real face. Moreover, Cromwell insists on the legitimacy of Henry VIII, this based on the Tudor historian view in the Shakespearean history world. In *The Trilogy*, Wolsey tells Cromwell of

Henry V's victories in France and the price to be paid for Agincourt (*Wolf* 91). Cromwell says that The Tudor obtained the Crown not by title, not by force, but because by God's grace they won the battle (*Wolf* 247).

Mantel, a keen reader of Shakespeare, as mentioned, presumably considers the embodiment of the Henry V of Shakespeare for the personalisation of her protagonist in Tudor. In *Henry V*, Prince Hal, consorting with commoners, transforms into the king, rejecting Falstaff. Still, Henry V is the grandfather of Henry Tudor, the first king of the Tudor Dynasty. His shift could be an example for Mantel in depicting a man rising from a rogue in the street to the man sitting next to the king in the story positioned in Tudor times. Whatever her intentions, we find the ambiguity both in Cromwell and in Shakespeare's Henry V.

Rabkin outlines two problems regarding Shakespeare's Henry V in the criticism "*Rabbits, Ducks, and Henry V*". The first is his legitimacy as king, because his father Bullingbrook imprisoned Richard II and usurped the throne:

The unresolved thematic issue at the end of *Richard II* is the conflict of values embodied in the two kings who are its protagonist: Bullingbrook's talent as opposed to Richard's legitimacy; Bullingbrook's extroverted energy and calculating pursuit of power as Richard's imagination, inwardness, and sense of mortality (281)

The second is the justification for sending troops to France and killing French soldiers. The King's oration to his troop on Saint Crispin's day demonstrates, "He [the king] is the man we have been waiting for, the embodiment of all the virtues the cycle has made us prize without the vices that had accompanied them before" (286). The victory at Agincourt under Henry V and his subsequent marriage to the French princess seems to promise a bright future for England. Rabkin states that if we read the play optimistically, "Henry is clearly presented as the kind of exemplary monarch

that neither Richard II nor Henry IV could be, combining the inwardness and the sense of occasion of the one and the strength of the other with a generous humanity available to neither" (288).

Rabkin, however, points out that Henry V finds "the major justification for the war is the Archbishop of Canterbury's harangue on the Salic Law governing hereditary succession, a law the French are said to be violated" (290). The law confirms the legitimacy of Henry V's claim to France (290). However, soon after the war, there is no longer any cause, because all that Harry has won will be lost within a generation (289). He no longer appears to be the ideal king for Elizabethan royalism. Rabkin presents this opposite view, lamenting, "the play casts so many dark shadows" (288).

A similar ambiguity is evident in Mantel's Cromwell. In Shakespearean historical plays, as their titles show, the main protagonists are kings, and their fates are depicted as conforming to the Tudor historical view. On the other hand, Mantel places Cromwell in the centre of the story. In *The Wolf Hall Trilogy*, the story follows Cromwell's perspective so that if one reads it without sharing his view, the question arises as to whether what he says is true. We cannot know what he thinks or how others view him, because *The Trilogy* lacks objective and broad viewpoints. As Macbeth says, 'fair is foul, and foul is fair' (Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 12). In the Shakespearean world, truth and falsehood are the opposite sides of the same coin. Everything is bifacial there, and the same object is reflected symmetrically in a mirror. The viewpoint taken depends on the viewer.

In *The Trilogy*, Cromwell is becoming an ambiguous character facing internal contradiction in the process of transformation. We take part in *The Trilogy* from his perspective, which enables us to share his feelings and reasoning. His talking persuades us that his cause is to take revenge for Wolsey. However, his viewpoint is biased. In addition, we can interpret that Cromwell betrays Wolsey and uses his death to his advantage. We also notice Cromwell's self-satisfied way of thinking, his

cunningness. Depending on the viewer, opposite interpretations of Cromwell are possible: as a sincere reformer and man devoted to his master or as a scheming Machiavellian.

## Two Aspects of the Protagonist in Mantel's History Novels

Mantel does not renounce his roughness, his violence, or short-temperedness and keeps them as his unchanging temperament in *The Trilogy*. She portrays his brutal figure as his born nature and describes him by adding the acquired ability and power such as financial acknowledgment, wealth, cultivated manners, or legislative achievements for the king. In *The Trilogy*, a dagger is used to signify his identity as the son of a blacksmith. Mantel seems to take the image of the dagger from a scene in *A Man for All Seasons* in which Cromwell states, 'If I have a dagger knife ...' as he stands before the accused Thomas More in the court. Mantel's Cromwell has always carried a dagger as his good luck charm from childhood until he gives it to Christophe just before his execution. Mantel invents the character of Christophe to be Cromwell's avatar. Christophe is cruel and a villain, but he stays with Cromwell until the execution, and he takes Cromwell's knife and gives him his holy medal (*Mirror* 870). Cromwell describes his relationship with Cardinal Wolsey, who is the son of a butcher, as a butcher with a knife, arguing that any man with a steady hand can call himself a butcher, but that without a blacksmith, he can do nothing (*Wolf* 320). Moreover, Cromwell does not want to give up the pleasure of using a knife for butchering, although he does not have to do so anymore:

'But it is the butchering! The skinning, the quartering!'

'I'll come and give you a hand, shall I?'

'You can't do that!' Thurston wrings his apron.

'It will be a pleasure'. He eases off the cardinal's ring.

'Sit still! Sit still, and be a gentleman, sir. Indict something, can you not?

Write a law! Sir, you must forget you ever knew these businesses' (*Wolf* 305).

This conversation shows that he loves knives and does not realise his bestial behaviour. While his brutality corresponds to that of Christophe, his acquired ability reflects More and Wolsey better.

Before *Wolf Hall*, the devilish image of Cromwell comes face-to-face with that of Thomas More, with Cromwell as the villain and More as the noble-minded man. Mantel's More is the embodiment of wisdom. At age seven, the illiterate Cromwell first met the wonder boy More at Lambeth palace:

One of the Pages was pointed out to him: Master Thomas More, whom the archbishop himself says will be a great man, so deep his learning already and so pleasant his wit. One day he brought a wheaten loaf and put it in the cupboard and lingered, and Master Thomas said, 'Why do you linger?' But he did not throw anything at him. 'What is in that great book?' he asked, and Master Thomas replied smiling, 'Words, words, just words' (*Wolf* 109-110).

More's Hamlet-like replay indicates his indifference to Cromwell. In *Hamlet*, 'Words, words, words' is Hamlet's response to Polonius's inquiry as to 'What do you read, my lord' (*Hamlet* 2.2. 188,189). Polonius fails to comprehend what Hamlet's answer means, and it can be interpreted that the words are meaningless. As Cromwell cannot read, the letters on the surface of the book must appear as a mere group of words, and More does not respond to his interest in which book is on the desk.

This scene symbolises the relationship between the two. The child Cromwell continues visiting More's room and disturbing him, because More is a guide to wisdom with whom Cromwell wishes to talk. Just before his execution, Cromwell remembers this conversation at Lambeth. Facing his own death, Cromwell is willing

to ask More how to prepare mentally, bemoaning the fact that when they met a grown man, More had not remembered him at all (*Mirror* 860). This shows that Cromwell's one-way emotions regarding More who had remain unchanged.

Several decades later, Mantel's More, as the Lord Chancellor, is a demonic prosecutor of heretics, which disturbs Cromwell. He accuses More, claiming, "The word is that the Lord Chancellor has become a master in the twin arts of stretching and compressing the servants of God" (*Wolf* 288). In addition, "More says it does not matter if you lie to heretics, or trick them into a confession ... burn them with irons, hang them up by their wrists" (*Wolf* 349). Cromwell tries to understand the cause to justify the execution in the Bible in vain. Here, Cromwell was able to transform from a member of the illiterate masses to the elite by learning several languages in Europe and becoming a lawyer. He recognises the importance of learning words and offering a readable Bible to commoners. This is why Cromwell tries to spread the New Testament in English. He insists, "They [the commoners] have seen their religion painted on the walls of churches, or carved in stone, but now God's pen is poised, and he is ready to write his words in the books of their hearts" (*Wolf* 501). However, More thinks that if we let the people read God's word for themselves, Christendom would fall apart (*Mirror* 429). He often recalls his conversation with More about the translated Bible. Comparing himself with More during the Lambeth days, he thinks of Tyndale who translates the Bible into English: "A boy washing dishes in the kitchen is as pleasing to the eye of God as a preacher in the pulpit or the apostle on the Galilee Shore" (*Wolf* 118). At the same time, he criticizes More saying, "translations of scripture are malicious and wilfully misleading" (*Wolf* 117).

Cromwell, who grieves More's actions and denounces his misogyny and ill-treatment of servants, seems charitable. John Guy claims that the extraordinary cultural shift was inspired less by historical facts than by the creative fiction of *Wolf Hall* (Thomas More), although some critics also criticize that *The Trilogy* cements the characterisation of More's image as a cruel prosecutor. However, breaking the

created image was Mantel's motivation for writing conceptualising a new Cromwell. This was for us to view as successful her attempt to add a new version of Cromwell and reinvent his old image.

In addition, Mantel's More is a man of prejudice and an arrogant executioner of heretics. However, he is also portrayed as a committed Christian with an unshakable faith in Roman Catholicism. He accepts his own execution rather than accepting the Act of Supremacy, which states that the King has always been and will be head of the church (*Wolf* 570). In contrast, Cromwell demonstrates weakness and perplexity. He attempts to protect himself, even taking a holy medal from his servant before his execution. Cromwell accuses More in the Tower of London, stating, 'You call history to your aid, but what is history to you? It is a mirror that flatters Thomas More. But I have another mirror, I hold it up and it shows a vain and dangerous man, and when I turn it about, it shows a killer' (*Wolf* 548). However, as Cromwell also becomes one of the executioners of Catholic believers, he must be reflected as a killer in the mirror. More and Cromwell are like the front and back of a mirror, staring back at each other's faces. The difference between them is Cromwell's bemusement by religion juxtaposed with More's attitude and conviction.

While Wolsey is on his side, he knows how to behave. To this end, Wolsey advises him about discrete behaviours in the Court and warns Cromwell not to show his brutal nature, which often emerges inadvertently. After Wolsey is gone, he tries to look at himself in the mirror with reference Erasmus' book, which states that one should arrange his face every morning before leaving the house: "Put on a mask, as it were" (*Wolf* 309). Speaking about Thomas More, the figure of wisdom for Cromwell who later becomes his counterpart, Cromwell tries to be discrete, making himself suitable for noble circles, judging himself comparable to More. Nevertheless, his brutality or slyness cannot be hidden completely. After the deaths of Wolsey and More, and succeeding their post of the Lord Chancellor, he seems lost and perplexed, not knowing how to arrange his face.

Cromwell, working for Henry without the advice of Wolsey or More, tries speaking with their ghosts and begins seeking his way. Sometimes, Cromwell seeks guidance in Machiavelli's *Principalities* (*Wolf* 101, 474, *Bring* 75). To bring about peace, he considers negotiation better than war. However, he also claims that Henry Tudor's children are the legitimate claimants of the throne, repeating stating that the Tudor won the battle and God favoured his army (*Mirror* 237). To justify the reformation, Mantel let Cromwell talk with Christopher St. Germain to win the debate. St. Germain tells him, 'There is no man in England who does not believe our church is in need of reform, which grows more urgent by the year, and if the church cannot do it, then the King in Parliament must, and can' (*Wolf* 328). Moreover, he becomes vain and tries to use Henry for the reformation: 'The king cannot resist change even if he would. Let me live another year or two, and I will make sure what we have done can never be undone, not by any power on earth. And even if Henry does turn, I will make good my cause in my own person' (*Mirror* 602). Note that this statement is a considerable blasphemy to the king. Thus, we see a Machiavellian streak in him. Regardless, Cromwell is afraid of Henry because he is the legitimate king. He believes, "If Henry is the mirror, he is the pale actor who sheds no lustre of his own, but spins in a reflected light. If the light moves, he is gone" (*Mirror* 617).

The two sides of his face are showing, and his ambition is watched by others, particularly the courtiers. Cromwell thinks he is able to deceive others and believes that his behaviour in court is appropriate. However, others recognise his excessive aggression. The readers looking through his eyes hardly recognise his errors. However, from an objective view, other courtiers see him as an obstacle, pushing him into a corner.

### **Presumed Murder Disguised as a Revenge Tragedy**

As repeatedly mentioned, to reconstruct her Thomas Cromwell, Mantel

investigates the historical records and adopts his image as portrayed in novels or the media on the Tudor dynasty, especially that in Shakespearean works. Mantel uses a scene from a biography on Cardinal Wolsey by George Cavendish, who was Wolsey's gentleman usher, to describe Cromwell who weeps when he becomes aware of the Wolsey's fall. Mantel mentions Cavendish's biography in her author's note and points out that its influence on Shakespeare is clear (*Wolf* 632).

The scene in the Shakespearean play influenced by that biography is reflected when Wolsey realises his fall when seeing Cromwell weeping in Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII*. Therein, before the weeping scene, letters from Wolsey to the Pope asking him to stay judgement of the divorce from Katherine of Aragon falls into the king's hands. It is odd that the letter is slipped into a package for the king from the inventory Wolsey asked Cromwell to give to Henry in the King's bed chamber (3.2.30-129). The letter leads to the fall of Wolsey, who was blamed. Cromwell is weeping, as he adores Wolsey; thus, it is hard to think that Cromwell did this on purpose. However, based on the circumstances, Cromwell seems to have had more opportunity than anyone else to do this.

Mantel depicts this incident of the suspicious letters that may have been set intentionally against Wolsey in *The Wolf Hall Trilogy*. Decades after the Wolsey's death, his daughter Dorothea accuses Cromwell of intentionally delivering to Norfolk Wolsey's letters asking the King of France to support Henry's divorce from Katherine. Cromwell tries to prove his innocence to her, explaining that Wolsey understood his love for the gospel. However, when she blames Cromwell of betraying Wolsey and tells him that Wolsey knows, he becomes agitated and begins to cry (*Mirror* 286-289). His blameworthiness seems to remain unclear. Incidentally, why does Mantel include this conversation? As she follows many of the Shakespearean play plots, she questions Cromwell's culpability in the Wolsey letters to the Pope case in *King Henry VIII: all Is True*. Wolsey is Cromwell's guide to success, who admires and respects Wolsey. It does not seem possible that Cromwell

betrayed Wolsey. However, if Mantel's Cromwell does abuse Wolsey's trust, he has no reason to avenge him against Anne Boleyn.

Mantel presents the impressive interlude scene, which allows readers to sympathise with Cromwell, as much as it may be justified that he plotted revenge plan against the Boleyns. When the interlude takes place at Hampton Court, which once belonged to Wolsey before he had to yield it to Anne and Henry:

A vast scarlet figure, supine, is dragged across the floor, howling, by actors dressed as devils. There are four devils, one for each limb of the dead man. The devils wear masks. They have tridents with which they prick the cardinal, making him twitch and writhe and beg...Anne sits laughing, pointing, applauding... Henry sits frozen by her side.... The cardinal rolls across the floor, kicking out at the demons, but they harry him, in their woolly suits of black, and cry (*Wolf* 257-258).

Cromwell later identifies the four participants corresponding to each of Wolsey's four limbs. The play must be one reason he wishes the fall of Anne and the other Boleyns, regardless of the original aim of his revenge plot. Here, the Wolsey kicked and rolling across the floor closely resembles Cromwell at age fifteen when he killed a boy with a knife and was kicked by his father before acquiring a new face. To Cromwell, Wolsey on the floor must be humiliating. However, for this reason, the play offers him an opportunity to choose the victims to be executed with Anne for him. According to Corrin Burrow, the interlude leads to an improvised revenge tragedy, with Cromwell using Anne's fall to revenge Wolsey's death (On your way, Phantom). However, he also has a reason to want to get rid of Wolsey: Wolsey is a Roman Catholic cardinal and collects and burns translated Bibles. This act opposes Cromwell's will. As such, Wolsey's death seems favourable for the reformist Cromwell. At this point, his Machiavellian side emerges.

If Cromwell betrayed Wolsey, it is not clear whether *Bring Up the Bodies* is a revenge tragedy for Wolsey or the story of a murderer who tries to send his opposition to the Tower of London disguised as revenge. If he wished to avenge Wolsey, he would not become allies with Anne and the other Boleyns. However, while working for Anne, Cromwell uses her for himself, pretending to get along with her against his will. She is useful to Cromwell for three reasons: First, she is already a reader of the Bible translated into French and supposed to be an evangelist. Therefore, Cromwell can rely on her to spread English Bibles. Anne tries to put Tyndale's books into Henry's hand (*Wolf* 292). Second, she may have had a son with Henry VIII whom Cromwell can educate as a protestant King. Cromwell hopes, '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' (*Wolf* 453). Third, having a legitimate male successor means the war can be avoided (*Bring* 5). It then transpires, after several miscarriages, that she is not able to produce a male successor and that she had tried to convert the king's faith. Consequently, he began to take actions to get rid of her. To hide his supposed revenge plot, Cromwell up-charges the four participants of the interlude, stating that they have had sexual relationships with Anne. This is where he wants to plant misconceptions. He tries to behave as if he is not able to hide his real purpose of sectioning the accused. There is no more cause for revenge. This means that he uses the interlude to disguise his real purpose, namely to eliminate Anne Boleyn. In this case, her Cromwell is not the sympathetic and devoted man, but the merciless, arrogant man who accuses More in *A Man for All Seasons*.

The question of whether he is a sympathetic affectionate man or an ambitious villain is similar to that asked about Shakespeare's Henry V, who appears either as a rabbit or duck as Rabkin indicates. Rabkin states the following in the final paragraph:

In this play, Shakespeare reveals the conflicts between private selves with which we are born and the public selves must become, between our longing that authority figures can be like us and our suspicion that they must have traded away their inwardness for the sake of power (296).

This conflict between the two selves can be applied to the story of Mantel's Cromwell, who has two sides—a waif longing for a father like Wolsey and a Machiavellian who tries to take better advantages until his luck runs out. The revenge plot shows that he detests when one of his close officers talks to him, 'All the players gone. All four who carried the Cardinal to Hell' and 'A gentleman asked me, if this is what Cromwell does the cardinal's lesser enemies, what will he do by and by to the king himself?' These questions transfix Cromwell who feels a dagger between his shoulders (*Bring* 430). He then realises that if what he plotted was revenge for Wolsey, his next enemy would be Henry VIII. He is told that the king fears him because he had outgrown him (*Mirror* 816). Furthermore, the king says, 'He has never forgiven me for Wolsey and I have long wondered to what extremity will sorrow lead him?' (*Mirror* 851). This shows that he has surpassed the point that will lead him to his own fall.

## Conclusion

Mantel created a new profile for Thomas Cromwell in *The Trilogy*, whose persona is a social and religious reformer with a global outlook free from an insular spirit. He faithfully serves Wolsey, whom he admires a great deal. However, his brutal nature is retained.

Cromwell's ambiguity arises explicitly when he devises a plot to remove Anne Boleyn and her supposed lovers. He seems to revenge the participants of the interlude insulting Wolsey. However, if he betrays Wolsey and uses his death to

achieve his own ambitions of a higher position, we see the devilish cunning man that is Cromwell. However, as he quickly rises to the King, he is eliminated, like Mortimer who laments in *Edward II* by Christopher Marlowe in comparison to the King:

Base fortune, now I see, that in thy wheel  
 There is a point to which, when men aspire,  
 They tumble headlong down; that point I touched,  
 And seeing there was no place to mount up higher  
 Why should I grieve at my declining fall? (25. 59-62)

Rabkin states that “a reading of Shakespearean plays as communicating only ambiguity is as arid as reading in which the plays are seen to be about appearance and reality. But in *Henry V*, it seems to me, Shakespeare’s habitual recognition of the duality of things has led him, as it should lead his audience, to a point of crisis” (295-296). One can read *King Henry V* differently depending on his view, because it has “a structure like the Gestaltist’s familiar drawing of a rare beast” (279-280). He looks both like an ideal Tudor monarch with military virtue and like a Machiavellian militarist whose deeds reveal both hypocrisy and ruthlessness. Mantel constructs a similar ambiguity about Cromwell in *The Trilogy*: The reader is unable to discern whether he is a sympathetic reformer or cruel villain.

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## SUMMARY

## The Ambiguity in Mantel's Cromwell

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Mantel tries to construct a new Cromwell in *The Wolf Hall Trilogy* free from the accumulated images. She tries to produce a historical novel whose characterisation is as satisfactory as is in a modern novel. Since little is known about Cromwell, Mantel created a new profile for him using the obscure period in his life after running away to Europe. Owing to the experience in Europe, her Cromwell built up a persona as a social and religious reformer with a global outlook free from an insular spirit. He is faithfully serving Wolsey, whom he greatly admires.

Mantel does not renounce Cromwell's brutal profile depicted in previous writings or the media. In *The Trilogy*, he is portrayed as ambitious and wicked, and he behaves relentlessly against his opponents. Even after working in the Court, he has since childhood carried a dagger based on his identity as a blacksmith's son. His brutality is outstanding compared to noble-minded More, who is his figure of wisdom. As Cromwell is aware of the importance and power of words, he tries to spread the English Bible for the commoners and accuses More of killing heretics. However, he also becomes a cruel executioner for Catholic believers.

Cromwell's ambiguity emerges when he devises a plot to remove Anne Boleyn and her supposed lovers. Cromwell pretends to be furious with her, as she was the cause of Wolsey's fall. He seems to revenge the participants of the interlude insulting Wolsey. However, if he betrays Wolsey and uses his death for his purposes, we see a demonic man. Mantel, a keen reader of Shakespeare, might have modelled her Cromwell on the characterisation of the Shakespearean Henry V, namely as a character that can be interpreted in opposite ways. Rabkin points out that Henry V is structured like a Gestaltist's familiar drawing. He looks simultaneously like an ideal Tudor monarch with military virtue and like a Machiavellian militarist whose deeds reveal hypocrisy and ruthlessness. A similar ambiguity arises about Cromwell as a sympathetic reformer or cruel ambitious strategist.

