

# A Man For All Treasons

By Alison L. LaCroix

Review of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, by Hilary Mantel (Henry Holt and Co., 2009 and 2012)

The Tudor novels of Hilary Mantel – *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, with a third installment still to come – depict two species of crime: crimes against the state, and crimes by the state. The crimes against the state are variations on the obvious one, given the context of the court of Henry VIII: treason. The crimes by the state, in contrast, are more inchoate and subjective. Indeed, they are portrayed by Mantel as perhaps only potential crimes. Torture, or merely aggressive questioning? Blackmail, or simply shrewd intelligence gathering? The reader cannot be certain whether a crime has in fact been committed, or whether she simply expects that a crime will be committed, given that Mantel’s protagonist is Henry’s notorious *consigliere* Thomas Cromwell, described in Mantel’s “Cast of Characters” as “a blacksmith’s son: now Secretary to the King, Master of the Rolls, Chancellor of Cambridge University, and deputy to the king as head of the church in England” (*Bodies*, ix).

Throughout the novels, Mantel plays with her readers’ expectations of Cromwell, whose modern-day infamy stems from at least two sources, only one of which was contemporary. Those sources are his brooding, massy, black-clad portrait by Hans Holbein the Younger, of 1532-33; and Robert Bolt’s 1960 play *A Man For All Seasons*, in which Henry describes Cromwell as one of his “jackals with sharp teeth” and another character calls him “a coming man” (surely a faint-hearted euphemism for the brute whom Bolt depicts as holding the hand of his own protégé in the flame of a candle).

Mantel, in contrast, gives readers a Cromwell famous in his own time as a formidable enforcer of the royal will, a man tutored in the armies, alleys, and counting-houses of continental Europe. Mantel’s Cromwell is fluent in, *inter alia*, Flemish, ancient Greek mnemonic strategies, knife-fighting, silks and woollens, and canon and common law. Cromwell’s reputation in his own time made his contemporaries fear him, Mantel suggests, permitting him to prosecute his work as the king’s servant efficiently and with a minimum of actual violence. By 1536, the year he helped to bring down Anne Boleyn, Mantel’s Cromwell is such a terrifying figure that his mere presence leads the targets of his inquiries to talk themselves into believing that they have been tortured.

Yet Mantel also presents a richer picture of Cromwell. To be sure, her Cromwell possesses some qualities of the Machiavellian henchman (indeed, one personally acquainted with, if unimpressed by, the Florentine politician, and seised of an early version of *The Prince*) and all-around fixer. But as Mantel wrote in an essay in the *Guardian*, “If a villain, an interesting villain, yes?” Mantel thus gives us a complex and

interesting anti-hero who is arguably less blameworthy than the petulant, narcissistic king he serves, and more far-sighted and committed to building the nascent English state than any of the courtiers and councilors surrounding him. Mantel's Cromwell is nothing less than the industrious creator of the modern administrative state.

In different ways, Mantel's account rebuts the customary depiction of Cromwell as a criminal. Indeed, Mantel's Cromwell should in fact be seen as an altogether subtler creature: not exactly a criminal himself, but a representative of the many aspects of crimes committed by and against the state. The novels depict both types of crime as occurring at the same historical moment in which the modern state was being formed. Because crimes against the state, and by the state, both presuppose the existence of the state itself, Mantel's modernizing, list-making Cromwell may not be as distinct from Bolt's devious Cromwell as the competing accounts would suggest. Mantel has expressly disclaimed the suggestion that her novels are intended to repair Cromwell's image. "It wasn't that I wanted to rehabilitate him," she noted in 2012. "I do not run a Priory clinic for the dead. Rather, I was driven by a powerful curiosity."

Mantel's chronicle thus gives us four Cromwells. The first is Cromwell the political operative: the monarch's faithful counselor conducting an internal, civil war that requires harsh interrogations amid claims of exigency and crisis. Closely related is the second Cromwell, the prosecutor who zealously brings charges, proffers (some) evidence, and presses for a conviction. The third is Cromwell the modern bureaucrat, always thinking of reforms (even just hours after Anne Boleyn's execution on May 19, 1536); in modern constitutional terms, this Cromwell is also an arm of the executive. The fourth Cromwell is the potentially evil Cromwell: his reputation as torturer is apparently undeserved, at least in the scenes shown to readers, but we still see occasional glimpses of cruelty that hint at the hidden sources of that reputation.

Questions of crime, law, and the relationship between them permeate Mantel's novels. Connecting these themes is their corporeal consequence: the collision among state power, law, and human bodies that the late-medieval, early-modern Tudor state produced and consumed.

## I. Cromwell the Political Operative.

Both the historical and the fictional Cromwell ably deployed the treason prosecution as a weapon against Henry's enemies. Eventually, that weapon was turned against Cromwell himself, leading to his own execution for treason and heresy in 1540.

Before 1534, the textual basis of the law of treason was the Treason Act of 1351, a parliamentary statute that defined treason to include "compass[ing] or imagin[ing] the Death of our Lord the King." The act also established an evidentiary standard: proving treason required an overt act – an "open deed." Moreover, the statute contained broad language that invited Parliament, acting in its judicial capacity, to expand the definition of treason to cover particular cases as they subsequently arose.

Between 1351 and Anne Boleyn's execution in 1536, the penumbra of the statute had gradually extended to include new categories of treason. Against the background of

the 1351 statute, treason evolved through judicial construction to become a common law doctrine. This development reflected the sixteenth-century conception of a permeable boundary between statutes and judge-made law.

The indictments against Anne and her alleged confederates (Henry Norris, William Brereton, Francis Weston, Mark Smeaton, and her own brother George Boleyn, Lord Rochford) listed no overt act in furtherance of the conspiracy. On the contrary, the charges against Anne rested on reports of words: Anne and her alleged lovers were accused of compassing the death of Henry on specific occasions. As the indictment returned by the grand jury for Middlesex stated, “And further, the said Queen and these other traitors, 31 Oct. 27 Hen. VIII., at Westminster, conspired the death and destruction of the King, the Queen often saying she would marry one of them as soon as the King died.” According to the indictment, Anne and her lovers had gone well beyond imagining Henry’s death; they had actually conspired to bring it about. But the open deed, to the extent that one existed, was at most an indirect contemplation of the possibility that Henry might die.

Contemporary accounts of Anne’s conduct suggest that Anne’s comment about the king’s death may have been merely a dependent clause to her main outburst amid a quarrel with Norris a few days before her arrest. The historian Eric Ives describes the scene with such color as to merit a lengthy quotation:

It had begun by Anne asking Norris, till then a close ally, why he was postponing his proposed marriage to her cousin, Margaret Shelton, the king’s old flame. She obviously suspected that Norris was reluctant to complete the match in view of the current pressure on the Boleyns, so the noncommittal reply he made [“I would tarry a while”] provoked Anne into a shocking imprudence. Flinging away the safety of courtly convention, she said, “You look for dead men’s shoes; for if ought came to the king but good you would look to have me.’ Norris’s horrified response to this totally unfair and improper shift in the basis of their relationship was to stammer that if he had any such thought, “he would his head were off,” but the queen would not let him escape. She could, she said, undo him if she wanted to. A right royal quarrel about their relationship had then ensued.

Ives and other historians regard this quarrel, which took place within sight of several witnesses, as a key element in Cromwell’s case against Anne.

Two years before Anne’s downfall, Parliament had passed another treason statute that codified the common law doctrine of treason by words. The Treasons Act of 1534, under which Thomas More was prosecuted and sentenced to death in that year, supported the Succession to the Crown Act of 1533 and the Act of Supremacy of 1534. The succession act made the offspring of Anne and Henry, who had married the previous year, the legal successors to the Crown and required all subjects to swear an oath upholding the succession and the supremacy. The supremacy act declared that the king was and always had been the “supreme head of the Church of England” (the statute was characterized as “corroboration and confirmation” of this recognition). The third piece of

this legislative package was the Treasons Act, which made it treason to “maliciously wish, will or desire by words or writing, or by craft imagine, invent, practice or attempt any bodily harm to be done or committed to the King’s most royal person.” Even under this expanded definition, however, Anne’s conduct did not clearly fall within the scope of treason. If the accounts of Anne’s statements to Norris are to be believed, she had used words contemplating the king’s death, but it is not clear that she maliciously wished, willed, or desired any harm to befall him. Under the 1351 act, moreover, Anne could be understood as compassing the death of the king, but she had arguably not engaged in an overt act, or “open deed,” connected with that possibility.

Mantel portrays Cromwell as the originator of these political and dynastic developments. He propels the passage of the succession, supremacy, and treason acts in 1533-34, in order to support Anne’s position as queen, and then uses those statutes to build the case against Anne in 1536. As Mantel draws him, however, Cromwell has an ambivalent relationship toward statutes as a legal form, and toward legislative power more broadly.

Mantel frequently depicts Cromwell employing Parliament to bolster the legitimacy of an already-chosen course of action. For example, in a conversation with the disfavored Mary Tudor, daughter of Henry and Catherine of Aragon, Mantel’s Cromwell uses a positivist account of parliamentary power to justify Henry’s (and his own) decision to remove Mary from the succession by statute. Mary asks Cromwell, “How is it I am put out of the succession, Master Cromwell? How is it lawful?” Cromwell responds: “It is lawful if Parliament makes it so.” Mary replies, “There is a law above Parliament. It is the law of God. Ask Bishop Fisher.” Cromwell: “I find God’s purposes obscure, and God knows I find Fisher no fit elucidator. By contrast, I find the will of Parliament plain” (*Wolf Hall*, 515).

On a reading more in line with modern sympathies, however, Cromwell’s use of Parliament looks like progress toward the eighteenth-century Whig doctrine that the king-in-Parliament, and not the Crown alone, was the locus of English sovereignty. “Where does the prince get this power, and his power to enforce the law?” Cromwell muses. “He gets it though a legislative body, which acts on behalf of the citizens. It is from the will of the people, expressed in Parliament, that a king derives his kingship” (*Wolf Hall*, 494).

Not surprisingly, Mantel’s Cromwell is a keen drafter and promoter of statutes to aid Henry’s campaign to replace Catherine with Anne, including not only the act of succession but also the enhanced treason act. Cromwell relies on statutes as one more tool in the arsenal of promoting the king’s interests. Thus, in *Wolf Hall*, the narrative voice of Cromwell describes the Act of Supremacy as “an act which draws together all the powers and dignities assumed by the king in the last two years” (546). In Cromwell’s view, the act is simply a restatement of a set of (presumably expanded) powers that Henry had already claimed and exercised. “It doesn’t, as some say, make the king head of the church. It states that he is head of the church, and always has been. If people don’t like new ideas, let them have old ones. If they want precedents, he has precedents” (*Wolf Hall*, 546). The statute, then, is a neat encapsulation of preexisting law, and that law stems from royal practice met with acquiescence.

When Mantel's Cromwell discusses the Treason Act of 1534, his words exemplify the view that statutes are codification mechanisms for the benefit of the executive, not avenues for popular will. Discussing the treason by words provision, Cromwell notes, "This is new, people say to him, this treason by words, and he says, no, be assured, it is old. It casts into statute law what the judges in their wisdom have already defined as common law. It is a measure for clarification. I am all for clarity" (*Wolf Hall*, 546). In *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell deploys this clarified treason statute against Thomas More, who had refused to swear the oath of supremacy. In *Bring Up the Bodies*, it is the combination of the new statute's treason by words provision and the 1351 statute's prohibition on compassing the death of the king that destroys Anne, again wielded by Cromwell. "It is treason. Possibly. To envisage the death of the king. The law recognizes it; how short the step, from dreaming to desiring to encompassing" (*Bodies*, 260).

Although treason by words had been a common law doctrine for many decades, Cromwell's statutes had transformed it into a weapon to be wielded by the king's closest counselor. In an exchange with the poet and courtier Thomas Wyatt – a friend of Cromwell and another of Anne's suspected lovers, although he escaped charges – Mantel's Cromwell carefully explains the connection between Anne's adultery and treason. The conversation also illustrates Cromwell's skepticism toward law:

[Wyatt:] "As I understand the law, a queen's adultery is no treason.'

[Cromwell:] 'No, but the man who violates her, he commits treason'

'You think they used force?' Wyatt says drily.

'No, it is just the legal term. It is a pretence, that allows us to think well of any disgraced queen. But as for her, she is a traitor too, she has said so out of her own mouth. To intend the king's death, that is treason.

'But again,' Wyatt says, 'forgive my poor understanding. I thought Anne had said, 'If he dies,' or some such words. So let me put a case to you. If I say 'All men must die,' is that a forecast of the king's death?'

'It would be well not to put cases,' he says pleasantly. 'Thomas More was putting cases when he tipped into treason.'" (*Bodies*, 353-54)

The treason act gave a veneer of parliamentary authority to the silencing of those who would speak against the king, even if such speech consisted in little more than a secondhand report of a conversation in which the king's mortality was discussed. One might, therefore, view the treason act as nothing more than a fig leaf for personal rule and royal prerogative.

Yet even if the act of Parliament was mere show, intended to cover might with a thin coating of right, that fact must mean that at least a few legal formalities were necessary to convince some important audience that the exercise of royal will was also lawful. The legislature was the arm of the executive, but legislative power itself clearly had some ideological *puissance* independent of the executive.

## II. Cromwell the Prosecutor.

The trial procedures, as Mantel depicts them, show a similar blend: legal forms and process are tools of the prince, and they serve crucial legitimizing purposes. Following the interrogations of Anne's alleged co-conspirators, which will be discussed below, Cromwell directs his own retinue of young lawyers and courtiers to begin drafting indictments. Indictments are necessary for Cromwell, for although Anne is at this point held captive in the Tower of London, she has not yet been formally charged. "[H]er judicial status uncertain, the charges not yet framed, it is hard to describe Anne. If she is a traitor she is, pending the verdict of the court, technically dead; though at the Tower, . . . she eats heartily enough, and giggles" (*Bodies*, 310). Once the indictments are produced, Cromwell regards them as artificial narratives, polemics written in order to shock and persuade the audience attending Anne's trial.

On Mantel's account, the trials of Anne and her co-conspirators proceed according to Cromwell's plans. Following the order to "bring up the bodies," the alleged lovers who are commoners – Weston, Brereton, Smeaton, and Norris – are brought from the Tower to Westminster Hall on Friday, May 12, 1536. The four are haled before a commission of oyer and terminer, a special court of investigation that was likely summoned by Cromwell and Lord Chancellor Thomas Audley. Weston, Brereton, and Norris plead not guilty; Smeaton pleads guilty. Mantel describes the process as "clear, logical, and designed to create corpses by due process of law" (*Bodies*, 364). Watching the scene, Cromwell notes, "There is only one penalty for high treason: for a man, to be hanged, cut down alive and eviscerated, or for a woman, to be burned. The king may vary the sentence to decapitation" (*Bodies*, 364-65). All four are found guilty and sentenced to drawing, hanging, and quartering.

As peers, Anne and her brother George are brought three days later before the court of the lord high steward (their uncle, Thomas Howard, 3rd Duke of Norfolk), in the great hall of the Tower. Anne is tried first; she is "tainted now, she is dead meat," Cromwell thinks. Cromwell acts as prosecutor. Then "the dizzying catalogue" of charges against Anne is read; "and then the loose words and taunts, the jealous quarrels and twisted intentions, the declaration, by the queen, that when her husband is dead, she will choose some one of them to be her husband, but she cannot yet say which." Cromwell: "Did you say that?" Anne, shaking her head, in an "[i]cy little voice: 'No.'" (*Bodies*, 373). Anne pleads guilty; she "disdains to enlarge, to excuse, extenuate: to mitigate. And there is no one to do it for her." She is convicted. The Duke of Norfolk reads the sentence: "Thou shalt be burned here, within the Tower, or else to have thy head smitten off, as the king's pleasure shall be further known" (*Bodies*, 374). Anne is taken out; George is brought in. George plays to the crowd, reading aloud a statement about Henry's alleged lack of potency despite Cromwell's order not to do so. But George quickly realizes that his gambit has led him to repeat the phrase in court, and thereby to own them. "In one moment of bravado, to get the applause of the crowd, he has impugned the succession, derogated the king's heirs, even though he was cautioned not to do it" (*Bodies*, 377). George, too, is condemned; he is sentenced to drawing, hanging, and quartering.

Mantel's account of the trials is well supported by the historical evidence. But her account elaborates on an additional theme: Cromwell as the ultimate servant of the king,

a counselor and politician able to use legal forms and processes to further his monarch's will. He achieves this by making mundane, gossip-fodder causes of action such as adultery the subject of statecraft and by using the institutions of the courts and Parliament to process the private intricacies and disappointments of one marriage. While making his final arguments in Anne's case, Cromwell's attention momentarily drifts, and he sees "the Attorney General stifle a yawn." Cromwell then muses, "I have done what I thought I could never achieve, I have taken adultery, incest, conspiracy and treason, and I have made them routine" (*Bodies*, 374).

From the text, Cromwell's state of mind here is difficult to discern: is he congratulating himself, a blacksmith's son from Putney, for bringing about the execution of the queen of England, a queen whom he had himself helped to ascend the throne? Or does his pride spring from a more workmanlike source, from the attorney's pride in the craft of corralling unruly, unsavory facts into the forms of pleading? He, Cromwell (to borrow Mantel's phrasing), has shepherded the bloody bodies of the traitors into their graves in a way that satisfies the emotional and the procedural needs of both the sovereign and the broader court, and perhaps even the populace. The desire to operate in "a law court, not the Roman circus" drives Cromwell the prosecutor (*Bodies*, 374). For a brief moment in this scene, Cromwell steps back to admire his own work as a builder of bureaucracy. But because he serves a would-be emperor, fairness and predictability ultimately remain elusive goals.

### III. Cromwell the Bureaucrat.

Despite Mantel's statement that she did not set out to rehabilitate Cromwell, a consistent theme in the novels is his dedication to modernizing and rationalizing the institutions of government. In a 2012 interview, Mantel appeared to endorse the historian G.R. Elton's characterization of Cromwell as "the man who created a bureaucracy and parliamentary structure as bulwark[s] against kingly incompetence," a view that she contrasted with Bolt's depiction of Cromwell in *A Man For All Seasons*.

In the final chapters of *Bring Up the Bodies*, we see Cromwell, newly created Baron Cromwell of Wimbledon, preparing to extend his power while ever more aware of his own vulnerability to the sudden political shifts of Henry's court. Amid the giddiness of some of his supporters following the executions of Anne and the others, the still-wary Cromwell sees opportunities for progress and reform ("useful wreckage") (*Bodies*, 399). Despite a needling sense of unease about his own future, Cromwell's grasp of realpolitik – and his desire to triumph over his growing number of enemies – emboldens him to seize the king's favor while he can.

Let them try to pull him down. They will find him armoured, they will find him entrenched, they will find him stuck like a limpet to the future. He has laws to write, measures to take, the good of the commonwealth to serve, and his king; he has titles and honours still to attain, houses to build, books to read, and who knows, perhaps children to father . . . (*Bodies*, 406).

Cromwell's desire to bring modernity to England is so irrepressible that it breaks upon him at unlikely moments. Within the space of a half page in *Wolf Hall*, he moves from musing about Thomas More's horsehair jerkin and habitual scourging to contemplating the economy behind such tools of self-humiliation: "Are simple villagers paid – how, by the dozen? – for making flails with waxed knots?" Cromwell the man of business then thinks, "[P]eople ought to be found better jobs" (*Wolf Hall*, 80). Similarly, in the aftermath of Anne's execution, during an interview with the king's illegitimate son Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond, Cromwell the recordkeeper begins planning for a registry of births (*Bodies*, 323). With these ironic juxtapositions between Tudor court intrigue and modern bureaucratic rationalization, Mantel creates a dynamic account of a polity in transition. Her account of Cromwell depends on the rise of the state, and her account of the early modern English state depends on Cromwell's vision.

In the novels, Cromwell's desire to make England work better extends beyond greasing the channels of royal revenue collection. Not only does he seek a "single coinage," he also hopes for "just one method of weighing and measuring, and above all one language that everybody owns," and he plans a roads bill that would "give employment to men without work" (*Bodies*, 70, 43). It is Cromwell alone who grasps the extent of the commercial, political, and legal webs connecting subjects to each other and to their king. Her Cromwell seizes the opportunity to transform the king's marital problems, dynastic anxieties, and diplomatic negotiations into the impetus toward self-conscious progress. And some essential element in his character makes him regard these reforms as a test of his own strength. We can hear this tone of energetic ambition, albeit with a vaguely sinister undercurrent, in the historical Cromwell's 1538 prayer "that God gyue me no longer lyfe than I shall be gladde to vuse myn office in ediciatione, and not in destruction."

#### IV. Cromwell the Evil.

Locked in the room with these mixed characterizations of Cromwell as executive agent, prosecutor, and administrator, there is also Cromwell the torturer, the evil enforcer of the king's will. Here Mantel uses her readers' expectations of Cromwell to create a multilayered narrative in which the reader is never certain whether Cromwell did or did not use torture to extract information and confessions from his opponents. We do know, however, that Cromwell's contemporaries believed that he used torture; moreover, Mantel's Cromwell makes us aware that he knows that his contemporaries believe this of him.

The locus of reports, then and now, of Cromwell's use of torture is the interrogation of Mark Smeaton, Anne's musician and alleged lover. Unlike Norris, Brereton, Weston, and Rochford, Smeaton's status as a musician, and likely a foreigner, made him a relative outsider with few allies at court. Smeaton was the only one of Anne's alleged lovers and co-conspirators to confess. Over the same weekend as Anne's quarrel with Norris, which was followed by an exchange with Henry in the window of Greenwich Palace, reports reached Cromwell that Smeaton was suspected as the queen's lover. Cromwell had Smeaton taken to Cromwell's house in Stepney, where he was questioned for twenty-four hours before confessing to adultery with the queen. On



Monday, Smeaton was dispatched to the Tower. Cromwell, and even Henry, then began to press the others to confess.

Mantel's account of these events takes full advantage of the ambiguities surrounding both sixteenth- and twenty-first-century beliefs about Cromwell's activities. In a scene of excruciating detail and suspense – even though the reader knows how it will end – Mantel shows Cromwell's careful psychological torture of Smeaton. A request for a fire from Cromwell, whom Mantel calls "Master Secretary" as though to emphasize that he is in his official role as the king's servant, leads the nervous Smeaton to panic: "Just an ordinary household request, and yet Mark thinks they mean to burn him. He jumps off his stool and makes for the door" (*Bodies*, 276). Master Secretary then builds the pressure by asking Smeaton whether he would like to be left alone with Cromwell's burly servant Christophe, who is lurking at the door. Cromwell continues to build the threats, locking Smeaton in a dark closet overnight with Christmas decorations covered in feathers and points so that Smeaton's mind creates a scene of torture for himself. The following morning, Smeaton confesses to adultery with Anne and also names dozens of other courtiers who allegedly were also her lovers.

Throughout the scene, Cromwell is acutely aware of his reputation as a rough brute, even a torturer. Indeed, other characters repeatedly mention Cromwell's reputation. After passing incriminating rumors to Cromwell, Jane Rochford – wife of George Boleyn – notes, "[Y]ou are what you are, a man of resource who spares no one. It will be thought that you drew the truth out of me, whether I was willing or no" (*Bodies*, 268). After hearing news of Smeaton's confession, Anne's uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, greets Cromwell, "Now, Cromwell! I hear the singer has sung to your tune. What did you do to him? I wish I had been there" (*Bodies*, 293). While Anne and the others await their fates, Cromwell reflects to himself on his power: "None of the men except Mark have been properly interrogated: that is to say, interrogated by him" (*Bodies*, 323). Only during his interrogation of Norris does Cromwell lose his composure, but only briefly, in response to Norris's challenge – and only to threaten:

"You will not put gentlemen to the torture, the king would not permit it."

"There don't have to be formal arrangements." He is on his feet, he slams his hand down on the table. "I could put my thumbs in your eyes, and then you would sing 'Green Grows the Holly' if I asked you to." He sits down, resumes his former easy tone. "Put yourself in my place. People will say I have tortured you anyway. They will say I have tortured Mark, they are already putting the word about. Though not a gossamer threat of him is snapped, I swear. I have Mark's free confession" (*Bodies*, 325-26).

Such scenes are the apotheosis of Mantel's meta-Cromwell: aware of himself, aware of his own reputation, and able to use that reputation in order to compel others to do his will.

Mantel thus presents Cromwell as always stepping back from the precipice: using threats of torture, but not torture itself, to extract the admissions he needs. Cromwell pursues this course partly because he is the king's loyal servant and enforcer. But Mantel

gives him an additional motive for punishing Brereton, Norris, Weston, and Boleyn: at a masque several years before, they performed a humiliating impersonation of Cromwell's former patron, Cardinal Wolsey. As he finishes his interrogation of Norris, Cromwell sees the scene in his mind: "Four men, who for a joke turned the cardinal into a beast; who took away his wit, his kindness and his grace, and made him a howling animal, groveling on the boards and scrabbling with his paws" (*Bodies*, 329). Throughout *Bring Up the Bodies*, we become increasingly aware of the depth of Cromwell's feeling for Wolsey, which leads him to merge his own revenge against the four courtiers with Henry's need to be rid of Anne. "He needs guilty men. So he has found men who are guilty. Though perhaps not guilty as charged" (*Bodies*, 330). The theme of Cromwell's loyalty to Wolsey emerges slowly, and it appears to provide an emotional justification for many of Cromwell's other actions. Perhaps, then, Mantel's Cromwell does have a heart after all?

But Mantel appears unwilling to give her readers that solace. Instead, in a few key scenes, she portrays a different kind of Cromwell: an almost comic-book-style evil villain. Not surprisingly, the most telling such exchange comes during the interrogation of Smeaton while he is being held at Cromwell's home. Besides Smeaton and Cromwell, also present are Cromwell's protégé Thomas Wriothesley (nicknamed "Call-Me") and Cromwell's nephew Richard Cromwell (great-grandfather of Oliver). "I explained to you, Mark, that Mr. Wriothesley will write down what we say. But he will not necessarily write down what we do. You follow me? That will be just between us." Mark's reply: "Mother Mary, help me" (*Bodies*, 277). Then follows this exchange:

Mr Wriothesley says, "We can take you to the Tower where there is a rack."

"Wriothesley, may I have a word with you aside?" He [Cromwell] waves Call-Me out of the room and on the threshold speaks in an undertone. "It is better not to specify the nature of the pain. As Juvenal says, the mind is its own best torturer. Besides, you should not make empty threats. I will not rack him. I do not want him carried to his trial in a chair. And if I needed to rack a sad little fellow like this . . . what next? Stamping on dormice?"

"I am reproved," Mr Wriothesley says.

He puts his hand on Wriothesley's arm. "Never mind. You are doing very well" (*Bodies*, 277).

This exchange shows us yet another Cromwell: not the political operative, not the prosecutor, and not the administrator. This Cromwell is coldly cruel, calculating the precise measure of suggestion needed to make his victim become the victim's own torturer. But most striking is Cromwell's tone in the final statement to Wriothesley. His display of concern for Wriothesley is chilling in its clinicalness. He rushes to reassure Wriothesley that he is "doing very well" at interrogating a political prisoner whose confession he knows to be coerced and, even more important, false. Smeaton's confession is the key to the entire case against Anne and her alleged lovers. But the real targets are the four men whose complicity in the Wolsey parody so enraged Cromwell. "He has spun his enemies to face him, to join him: as in a dance. He means to spin them

away again, so they look down the long cold vista of their years . . . so they bed down in ruins, and wake up cold” (*Bodies*, 352).

Anne is therefore a pawn even in Cromwell’s crusade against her; she is a casualty of what Mantel suggests may be Cromwell’s sole noble deed, his campaign to avenge Wolsey. This cruelty is apparent in the thoughts that Mantel puts in Cromwell’s voice as he helps Anne make her way to the Tower after her arrest. Anne falls to the ground, “her head thrown back, wailing.” Cromwell “takes hold of her – since no one else will do it – and sets her back on her feet.” As in the later scene with Wriothsesley, we see Cromwell acting in an apparently sympathetic manner. But then the inhumanly cold observation: “Silent, she steadies herself against his shoulder, leans into him: intent, complicit, ready for the next thing they will do together, which is kill her.” (*Bodies*, 299).

Mantel thus saves Cromwell from the charges of torture, at least with respect to Smeaton; we are not permitted access to the events that gave rise to his contemporary reputation for roughness. But in these moments of utter coldness, Mantel gives us not just a devoted servant, but a hollowed-out guilt-conjuring machine. Cromwell’s desire for revenge for Wolsey initially makes him appear human, but by the end of *Bring Up the Bodies*, his clinical observations in the scenes with Wriothsesley and Anne suggest that he has started to become the cold-eyed, inhuman figure pictured in Holbein’s portrait. The bodies are brought up for punishment, just as those bodies once brought up the pretend body of Wolsey for the entertainment of the court. Eventually, we know, Cromwell’s body will also be on the pile, a bloody symbol of the inability of Cromwellian bureaucracy to subdue Tudor will.

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