

Wolf Hall Study Guide

Wolf Hall by Hilary Mantel

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Contents

Wolf Hall Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part I – Part II.....	4
Part III.....	9
Part IV.....	13
Part V.....	16
Part VI.....	19
Characters.....	22
Symbols and Symbolism.....	25
Settings.....	27
Themes and Motifs.....	28
Styles.....	34
Quotes.....	35



Plot Summary

“Wolf Hall” is a historical novel by Hilary Mantel which recounts the life of Thomas Cromwell through the mid-1530s when Henry VIII seeks to annul his own marriage to Queen Katherine in order to marry Ann Boleyn, daughter of diplomat Thomas Boleyn. When the novel begins, English native Thomas Cromwell is just a child who is routinely and savagely beaten by his father, Walter, a blacksmith and brewer. Young Thomas then runs away to continental Europe, where he serves as a mercenary soldier in the French army, and later trains in Italian banking. He returns to England to practice law, and secures Cardinal Wolsey as his patron. Cromwell begins to work exclusively for Wolsey, and it is through Wolsey – who has the ear of King Henry VIII – that Cromwell learns the king is worried about producing a male heir, and seeks to annul his marriage to Queen Katherine to marry Anne Boleyn.

Cromwell grows in stature and prestige under Wolsey’s wing. Wolsey himself, however, is tasked with a seemingly insurmountable job: annul the king’s marriage. Wolsey attempts to work through channels to secure the annulment, but has little success. The Catholic Church looks upon marriage as a sacred, inviolable contract and institution. As such, the Catholic Church officially defends Katherine and her position as Queen. Wolsey’s failure is too much for Anne Boleyn to handle. Anne Boleyn, turns the king against Wolsey slowly but steadily, and this leads to Wolsey’s downfall on trumped-up charges of treason. Despite Wolsey’s fall from grace, Cromwell defends Wolsey without hesitation.

Cromwell’s loyalty to Wolsey until Wolsey dies of illness while under arrest earns the king’s respect, and by the 1530s, Cromwell has become indispensable to the king in all matters. Cromwell advises the king on all manner of things, from domestic to foreign policy. Cromwell is among those who establish the idea that the king has jurisdiction over the Catholic Church in England, and not the Pope, for the king is legally entitled to rule over all within the extent of his own lands. As such, the king can annul his own marriage with the rewriting of laws. Henry, Cromwell, and their circle thus commit to reordering church-state relations, combining them.

This outrages nearly all of the Christian world, including the king’s own Chancellor, Thomas More. More protests how Henry is treating the Catholic Church every step of the way, and is later executed for refusing to sign onto the Act of Supremacy, giving the king immense religious powers. Henry soon after has annulled his marriage to Katherine and has remarried to Anne. Anne, however, has failed to produce a male heir after several attempts, which displeases the king immensely. This does not bode well for Anne. At the end of the novel, Cromwell plans the summer and autumn journeys of the king’s court, including a five day sojourn which will be spent at Wolf’s Hall, the residence of the Seymour family, of which daughter Jane has caught the already-wandering eye of the king.



Part I – Part II

Summary

Part I, Chapter 1 – It is 1500 in Putney. Young Thomas Cromwell is savagely beaten by his father, Walter, a blacksmith and brewer. Thomas is treated by his sister, Kat, and questioned by her husband, Morgan Williams. It is not the first time Thomas has been beaten up by his father. He blames the current episode as punishment for his having fought with other boys down by the river. Thomas knows he must get out of town, and Morgan and Kat give him money to do so. Thomas manages to gain passage with three elderly wool cloth-selling Lowlanders aboard a ship. He tells them he is 15, but they do not believe him. Thomas puts a holy medal around his neck, a gift from Kat, and looks forward to the open sea.

Part I, Chapter 2 – It is now April, 1527. Thomas Cromwell, a veteran mercenary who has fought in the French army, is in his 40s and is now a lawyer, and along with the cardinal's secretary, Stephen Gardiner –also the king's unacknowledged cousin – go to see the cardinal, Wolsey, who is Archbishop of York, though he has never been to the territory of his See. Cromwell handles the cardinal's business, including the current project of combining thirty smaller monastic foundations with large ones, with the income diverted to founding two colleges – Cardinal College at Oxford, and a college at Ipswich, the cardinal's hometown. The people of Yorkshire are unhappy with the project. Wolsey relates to Thomas that King Henry VIII is looking for a son to rule after him, but as of yet has no such son.

The king is looking for an annulment to his marriage, perhaps based on the grounds that the queen was formerly married to the king's brother, making her a sister-in-law – and the 18-year-marriage unholy. An annulment can be obtained from Pope Clement at the right price, and Wolsey and his fellows will approach the king pretending not to have been instructed to seek an annulment, but to have found the marriage invalid on their own, rupturing the English-Spanish alliance as Spanish Queen Katherine is removed from the English throne. Thomas then leaves to meet his entourage outside, including his chief clerk, Rafe Sadlery, and the party returns home.

Part I, Chapter 3 – Thomas's wife, Lizzie, is awake and waiting for him when he returns home. Their son, Gregroy, 13, is at college in Cambridge, as well as are Thomas's nephews, the sons of his sister, Bet. Lizzie relates to Thomas that rumors have been swirling that the king plans to have his marriage to the queen annulled, something that all women without sons and of a certain age, and half the world will be against. Martin Luther is already causing a theological storm and crisis of the faith in Germany. In England, the king and Wolsey have banned Luther's works, but study them to make sure they are prepared for them should they gain traction in England. Indeed, the king and Thomas More have printed a book against Luther. Thomas Cromwell reflects on his own time on the continent, after which he became employed in the cloth trade by



Lizzie's father. Preventing the cloth business from failing, Thomas then gained Lizzie as his wife. Thomas is then summoned to return to see Wolsey.

Part II, Chapter 1 – It is now 1529. Cardinal Wolsey is turned out of his own home by the king's men so that Lady Anne may have a place of her own. Wolsey handles it with patience, saying that what the king has given, he may take away –and the cardinal has other residences, still. Traveling to Putney with his entourage, Wolsey begins to wonder what has truly happened that he should be stripped of his residence. At Wolsey's stable, the king's good friend, Harry Norris, comes to meet them with a ring – a sign that the king is not personally displeased with Wolsey, but the confiscation of Wolsey's residence is merely to appease others. Wolsey sends Norris back with a personal holy relic, a chain he has worn about his neck, for the king. He also sends along his best mount, named Patch. Wolsey and his retinue then travel to Esher to take up their old residence. It is believed that Thomas More will take Wolsey's place.

Part II, Chapter 2 – In 1521, Anne Boleyn, 20-year-old daughter of diplomat Thomas Boleyn, appears at court at Christmas. Wolsey oversees an arranged marriage between Anne and Harry Percy, to help bring the north to heel. Wolsey also knows that Anne's older sister, Mary, has caught the king's eye, and knows from current events and history that illegitimate children can strain a king as mothers fight for the recognition of their children, and attempt to get them into the line of succession to the throne. The king later forbids Anne from marrying Percy, for he himself has his eye on Anne.

In 1527, Cardinal Wolsey convenes a secret court to look into the validity of King Henry VIII's marriage to Queen Katherine. Katherine blames Wolsey for everything, rather than her husband. History has many examples of kings setting aside their wives, including King Louis XII and the King of Scotland, so Henry's desire is not uncommon. Getting Pope Clement to consent to this will take some doing, and will require bolstering the Pope's military situation in exchange. Henry feigns regret that the court of inquiry finds his marriage invalid on the grounds that Katherine was the wife of Henry's brother, and the union has offended divine law. Katherine, however, has vowed to fight the situation. Lizzie worries that some harm may come to Thomas Cromwell in the midst of all of the events as they unfold. Wolsey then heads to France, to begin the process of securing Pope Clement's good favor. In 1527, Liz is killed by a plague of sweating sickness. Thomas is devastated, taking to reading and studies to distract himself. He keeps track of Wolsey's progress through letters and dispatches, and tends to the education of his children.

Later that year, Wolsey returns with little success. He now intends to try the Pope for a co-legate to try the issue of the king's marriage matter in England itself. Wolsey does not like the politics of behind-the-scenes deals, and he is glad to be back in England. In the spring of 1528, Thomas More meets up with Thomas Cromwell to discuss everything from Cromwell's lack of desire to remarry, to Wolsey's progress in the king's marriage issue. Johane, Liz's sister, moves into the Cromwell household at Austin Friars with her husband, John Williamson, and their daughter, little Johane, nicknamed "Jo". Thomas Cromwell's elder daughter, Anne, wishes to marry Rafe, even though she would be a very young bride.



In the summer of 1528, the plague of sweating sickness returns, and the royal court disperses across England to avoid it. Thomas sends his daughters out of London as well. They return in the autumn. The Boleyn family is gaining more and more influence, and using it to tarnish Wolsey's reputation. Thomas learns from Mary that Anne and Henry are determined to wed, no matter the consequences. Mary, young and beautiful, is also a widow, and drops hints that she is looking for her next husband. As the papal legate arrives in London, the Boleyn family is sent away so objectivity may reign. Rumors fly that Mary is pregnant.

As New Year's, 1529 comes around, Stephen Gardiner is in Rome still pressing the king's case with Pope Clement. Preparations for a legatine court are underway, and Katherine protests it every step of the way. The court convenes, overseen by the legate from Rome, Cardinal Campeggio, with Katherine still protesting. Evidence is heard from both Henry and Katherine, and their respective supporters. By July, the court is adjourned for the Roman holidays – but everyone knows the court proceedings against Katherine have failed. The sweating sickness plagues Thomas Cromwell's household. His daughter, Grace, dies in his arms. Ann dies not long after.

In October 1529, Cromwell receives an invitation to come and see the Duke of Norfolk.

Part II, Chapter 3 – Thomas Cromwell dwells on memories of his wife and daughters on All Hallows Day. Thomas believes his own days are numbered as he has worked for so long with Wolsey.

Analysis

“Wolf Hall” is a historical novel by Hilary Mantel which recounts the life of Thomas Cromwell through the mid-1530s when Henry VIII seeks to annul his own marriage to Queen Katherine in order to marry Ann Boleyn, daughter of diplomat Thomas Boleyn. The events of Henry VIII's usurpation of the Catholic Church in England form the central plot of the novel, and it is through Cromwell's eyes that these events are seen.

The novel begins with Cromwell's lowest point in his life – his early teenage years – when he is consistently the object of his father's hostilities. This will leave a lasting mark on Cromwell in coming years, as he will endeavor to always rise, rather than fall – with loyalty towards those being closest to him being the exception. Here, the theme of loyalty can be clearly seen in two distinct places in Cromwell's life – his family (which, in turn, also forms the theme of family) and his patronage from, and friendship with, Cardinal Wolsey.

Cromwell is devoutly loyal to Wolsey, owing every mark of higher success he has to Wolsey's employment of him. Indeed, as the reader can see, Wolsey considers Cromwell a friend – perhaps even something like a son. Wolsey entrusts Cromwell with a wide range of duties that Wolsey himself is too busy or unable to attend to. The trust that Wolsey has in Cromwell due to Cromwell's loyalty is immense. Cromwell's loyalty toward his own family is likewise telling about his character early on in the novel. Family,



for Cromwell, comes above all else, and he is willing to do whatever he needs to do to keep them safe and happy. This includes caring for extended family members as well, and making sure they, too, are safe and happy. However, tragedy in the form of the sweating sickness plague strikes, and Cromwell is devastated by the loss of his wife and two daughters – something which demonstrates his deep love for them, and his loss without them.

It is because Wolsey trusts Cromwell so much that he speaks to Cromwell of secretive matters of the State – including that of King Henry being concerned about producing a male heir to ensure the line of succession when he is gone. Henry wants his marriage to Katherine annulled, and Wolsey is given the unenviable task of making this happen. This, in turn, leads to a challenging of theology and secular law, as the two are often synonymous. Theology, and law, also become themes in their own right early in the novel. It is clear that the state laws of England are subordinate to those of the Catholic Church in all matters, so the king needs to work through religious channels to make the annulment happen. This is why he turns to Wolsey to make the annulment happen.

Theologically, annulments can only be granted under the most meticulous and extreme of circumstances. Annulments are not unheard of, but are incredibly uncommon, especially in the Western world where marriage is seen as integral to Christianity. Even when theologically permissible, annulments are wildly unpopular, especially among the common people, and especially among women, whose rights often extend only so far as their husbands let them. While Wolsey is away seeking to secure the Pope's favor for an annulment – for such an annulment can only come from the Pope – the king convenes his own religious and legal council to look into the matter of his marriage, which includes a legate from Rome. This council breaks down in no small part to Katherine's protestations. Her theological arguments far outweigh anything that Henry's supporters can bring against her.

It is also in the first two parts of the novel that the theme of betrayal emerges. It is subtle early in the novel, in ways many readers would not consider. In the contemporary world, divorce is commonplace and is granted for every possible reason imaginable. Yet, in the medieval world, and especially in the Christian world, marriage, apart from being integral to Christianity, was considered a sacred act and covenant between man and woman under God. As explained before, even when permissible, annulments were wildly unpopular and caused great dismay. Annulments were seen not as a theological issue, but an actual act of betrayal committed by the husband against the wife. It is the equivalent of switching sides in the middle of a battle, or selling out one's closest friend and ally. Henry's betrayal of Katherine is only the beginning, especially as the Boleyns begin to wield more influence, and use it against Wolsey.

Discussion Question 1

What is King Henry VIII's reasoning for wanting an annulment in his marriage to Katherine? Are these sound reasons based on medieval world views? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

For what reasons is Thomas Cromwell so loyal to his family and to Cardinal Wolsey? Do you believe Cromwell's loyalty is based on self-advancement and self-security, or genuineness?

Discussion Question 3

What is the opinion of annulments at large in Christendom? Why?

Vocabulary

speculatively, miraculously, solicitous, efface, amalgamate, uxorious, expiate, vacillation, superfluous, reliquary, recompense, systematically, ransacked, hauteur, alacrity, corporeal



Part III

Summary

Part III, Chapter 1 – It is the winter of 1529. Rafe has secured a seat in the House of Commons for Thomas Cromwell, at the approval of Thomas Howard and the king, based on assurances of Cromwell's loyalty. 44 charges have been leveled against Wolsey, ranging from buying beef at the price the king buys beef at, to praemunire, holding the law of a foreign jurisdiction within the king's realm. Cromwell reports to Wolsey all that is transpiring, and Cromwell vows to do what he can to save Wolsey. Cromwell hopes to broker a truce with Henry, while Wolsey believes the king will ultimately charge him with treason. Wolsey's household is to be sent to serve the Duke of Norfolk. At Christmas, Wolsey takes to bed, ill. Cromwell is lonely without his wife and daughters. His son, Gregory, attempts to console him, without much success, for Gregory, too, is suffering from the loss of his mother and sisters.

Though ill, Wolsey writes to the leaders of Europe to defend him. Richard Williams and Walter Williams, his nephews, whose own father has died, ask to take the name of Cromwell. Thomas consents. Thomas then goes to see King Henry himself about Wolsey. He is ready to respond to each of the 44 charges, but the king says such matters can wait. A new war is on the horizon, and the king looks unkindly upon Thomas Cromwell's opposition to the last war, based on worries about having enough money. Thomas Cromwell, apart from soldiering, has experience in Venetian and Florentine banks as well. The king tells Cromwell that Cromwell has a bad reputation, but Cromwell tells the king that the king can form his own opinions. The king sends Wolsey four carts of furnishings for his residence at Esher and allows him to move to a better house at Richmond.

Cromwell continues to act as an intermediary between King Henry and Cardinal Wolsey. Thomas Howard, Duke of Suffolk, and Charles Brandon, Duke of Norfolk, relay orders that Wolsey is to be sent north. In the Spring of 1530, Antonio Bonvisi, a merchant, hosts a dinner party for the Lord Chancellor, Thomas More, as well as various other politicians, officials, and lawyers. Afterward, Bonvisi tells Cromwell that he believes Wolsey is finished, and that Anne Boleyn's family is straining to do everything they can to secure marriage between Anne and Henry. Cromwell realizes his invitation to the dinner has been to warn him against events that are now unfolding.

Part III, Chapter 2 – It is 1530. Wolsey is in ill-health. Thomas Cromwell goes to see Anne Boleyn at York Place. She says that the king has gained a very favorable opinion of Cromwell, in that the king always quotes him. Thomas urges her to have Wolsey restored to the king's good graces, for Wolsey is the only man who can obtain for them what they need. Anne is unimpressed. After the meeting, Mary Boleyn meets with Thomas Cromwell, assuring him that rumors of Anne's pregnancy are unfounded. At Esher, Thomas Cromwell brings together Wolsey's household to form a plan for moving the cardinal north. Wolsey then meets with King Henry at the king's request, where the



king bestows a gift of a thousand pounds on Cromwell for Wolsey, saying that he misses the cardinal every day. The night before the cardinal is due to leave, he gives Thomas Cromwell a small package to be opened after the cardinal is gone. Cromwell, though he secretly believes it will be in vain, tells Wolsey he will continue to press Wolsey's case.

Thomas Cromwell later meets with King Henry once more, who says he wishes ownership of the colleges at Oxford and Ipswich, for their revenues. Henry is also impressed that Cromwell remains so loyal to Wolsey. Thomas Cromwell meets with Thomas More about the colleges. More's wife believes Cromwell should marry again. Meanwhile, the king has given Wolsey a pardon, but Wolsey and Cromwell both know what is given can be taken away again. Wolsey is immensely popular among the people as he moves toward York, and the Duke of Norfolk imagines that Wolsey is carving out an independent kingdom for himself. He relates that Anne Boleyn wants the cardinal killed. Cromwell then meets a small, pale Seymour girl of Wolf Hall, gathering information for her brothers and father, John Seymour, on Anne Boleyn. Cromwell meets with Dr. Thomas Cranmer, a scholar on theological matters, who is helping to build the case against Queen Katherine. It is not just the Pope, but all of Europe that must be convinced.

The Duke of Norfolk later explains to Thomas Cromwell that concerns about succession are being floated around. There can be no stable transition if there is no clear male heir to the throne. The king has one daughter born in wedlock 14-year-old Mary –and no one can stomach the thought of a woman on the throne. Meanwhile, Wolsey's time runs out. Warrants for his arrest are sent out, and on the way south under arrest, Wolsey takes ill and dies on November 29th. His death is saddening to many.

Part III, Chapter 3 – William Brereton of the king's privy chamber arrives at Austin Friars to summon Thomas Cromwell to see King Henry. It is Christmastide, 1530. Henry has had a bad dream in which his dead brother has visited him. It worries him and makes him think of how he needs a son. He reveals that Anne believes they should no longer bow down to Rome. Thomas Cromwell is brought on as a member of the king's privy council.

Analysis

Throughout the early part of his adult life, Thomas Cromwell is in and out of politics. He has often taken unpopular stands, such as being against the king's last war for financial reasons. This demonstrates Cromwell's courage and refusal to take positions based solely on things like popularity or because the king commands it. This both aggravates and impresses King Henry. Wolsey's failure to obtain what the king has commanded, however, bodes incredibly unwell for Wolsey, whose fall can now easily be projected. Cromwell's entire life is staked on Wolsey's reputation and good favor, and as Wolsey begins a precipitous decline – orchestrated by Ann Boleyn and carried out by Henry – Cromwell, like many, does not abandon ship so to speak.



Instead, he doubles down in defense of Wolsey, and does whatever he can to secure Wolsey's life and career. Cromwell's genuineness and loyalty are clear, and here, the theme of loyalty is again on clear display. Cromwell could very easily turn against Wolsey to engender the king's favor, and to gain from Wolsey's own misfortune as so many others have done throughout the previous decades, but Cromwell refuses the easy way out. His loyalty to Wolsey clearly goes far beyond a mere employer-employee relationship, but speaks soundly of friendship, and even paternal affection. Cromwell, however, can only delay the inevitable, and Wolsey is eventually arrested on trumped-up charges of treason. He takes ill on the way to be imprisoned and dies.

With Wolsey's death, Cromwell must now rely on himself and himself alone to survive, and to provide for what remains of his family (his son and his extended relatives). Apart from familial loyalty, which is of a genuine nature, Cromwell's political loyalties are, from here on out, no longer of genuine origin. The reader will see how quickly Cromwell falls into the king's fold, as he is made a member of the King's Privy Council by the end of Part III. Cromwell's decision-making from here on out will be one of utilitarian process geared toward Cromwell's own self-advancement.

The reader should also note here that Wolsey's first legal situation – based on 44 charges – is a profound act of betrayal on the part of Henry, who has long considered Wolsey one of his closest advisors. Indeed, the king reflects sadly – if not altogether honestly – on Wolsey not being a part of his everyday life anymore. Indeed, it is possible that Wolsey and Henry at one time may have even shared something akin to friendship, but as demonstrated by the vindictive arrogance of the Boleyn family, and as demonstrated by Henry's own narcissistic greed, where Henry is concerned, there is no such thing as loyalty, only the penchant for betrayal. Indeed, to allow charges against Wolsey to be made for something as asinine as purchasing beef at the price the king purchases beef at is laughable – and speaks to the lengths that Henry will go to in order to use secular law to his own advantage. His pulling down of Wolsey also demonstrates Henry's frustration with his inability to work through theology, canon law, and the Church to have his marriage annulled – and portends that terrible things will be coming. Here, the themes of law and theology can again be seen in Henry's maneuvering.

Interestingly enough, pop history contends that the Church has long-backed the dominant male power structures of nations historically, but this is clearly an oversimplification. The Church has held marriage to be a sacrament, an inviolable and sacred institution backed by God which values man and woman equally. Indeed, it is the Church that defends Katherine's position, and it is the Church that Katherine uses to defend herself. She is not merely a cheap object used for an end (producing a male child) but is a human being worthy of rights and love, as elucidated by the Church. It is clear that it is the Church that now stands in Henry's way.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Wolsey fall? How does Cromwell react to this entire process? Why?



Discussion Question 2

Why does the king make Cromwell a member of the privy council? Do you believe this will be to Cromwell's gain or detriment? Explain.

Discussion Question 3

Why does Cromwell remain so loyal to Wolsey, even until the bitter end? Why does Cromwell ultimately go to work for King Henry in the privy council?

Vocabulary

affectation, malfeasance, praemunire, malcontent, countenance, consternation, interregnum, peremptory

Part IV

Summary

Part IV, Chapter 1 – It is 1531. The changes made under Thomas Cromwell and the privy council have been fast and ruthless, and their plans are well-known. The clergy of the Church have been charged with being complicit in the crime of usurping the power of King Henry in his own realm, and are required to pay 100,000 pounds in a benevolence. As such, the plan is for the king to be named head of the Church in England. Katherine is also to be separated from her daughter. At Austin Friars, Johane is stunned that Cromwell would be a party to such things. As a result, Johane and her daughter, Jo, leave the household, though this is done in a friendly manner.

At New Year's, Thomas Cromwell gives Anna a present of silver forks, and delivers a gift wrapped in blue silk for the daughter of John Seymour. It is now the summer of 1531. As Cromwell's power increases, favors, gifts, and expectations also increase – such as his needed to host larger dinner parties, and tend to the king's business, including handling petitioners. The winter comes on, family gathers together for the holidays.

Part IV, Chapter 2 – Parliament reconvenes in January, 1532, and a petition against the church courts is drafted, questioning their jurisdiction and their very existence. Legal opinion in England is changing, including with Christopher St. German, an internationally respected jurist, who says that Church reform is needed, and if the Church cannot or will not do it, the king in Parliament must do so for it. Thomas More, however, disagrees with German. Thomas Cromwell brings a bill to Parliament calling for the ending of the paying of annates to Rome. The Parliament is also working to break the Bishops and their stand against so many proposed changes. Thomas More comes to see Thomas Cromwell. More is stunned that Cromwell should want to cause such a rupture in Christendom.

In April, 1532, Thomas Cromwell is made Keeper of the Jewel House, where he can study the king's income and outgoings. By May 15, the Bishops cave in to King Henry. They will make no new laws without his consent, and will submit for review all existing laws. Further, they will not meet in Convocation without the King Henry's permission. While many of Cromwell's activities have turned to economic and financial dealings, he keeps an eye on the unfolding situation pertaining to Henry's marriage as well. Harry Percy, who has been arguing that he has been precontracted in marriage to Anne, is silenced under threat of forfeiture of his title and wealth. On September 1, Anne Boleyn receives the title Marquess of Pembroke, making her fit for royal marriage. Thomas Cromwell encourages Jane Seymour to continue to serve Anne.

A meeting is planned in Calais with the French king regarding Henry's planned marriage, in which the Pope will once more be appealed to. Calais is the last English foothold in France. The kings are to meet for four or five days in Boulogne, and then



again Calais. Mary Boleyn and Thomas Cromwell find a moment to themselves and kiss, only to be stumbled upon by William Stafford, another man seeking Mary's affections, who excuses himself.

Part IV, Chapter 3 – When King Henry emerges from Mass at Church, he is wearing a feather in his hat.

Analysis

Thomas Cromwell gains power for himself and security for his family as he becomes loyal to the king on a utilitarian basis. Indeed, his loyalty to the king becomes stronger as time passes as Cromwell's own ambitions increase. For this, Cromwell is willing to risk everything –including the endangerment of his own soul by seeking to counteract the Catholic Church. With Cromwell on the privy council, changes come quickly to England – and these changes are both theological, and legal in nature. These changes continue to inform the themes of both law and theology. In a legal sense, Cromwell helps to orchestrate charges brought against members of the clergy which state that the clergy has been complicit in usurping the power of the king in his own lands – and are made to pay a fine of 100,000 pounds.

The King of England, not the Pope, is to be head of the Church in England, for it is the king who rules England, and not the Pope. Here, the intersection of law and theology can be found. In the past, secular law was formed in conjunction with, and in deference to, the moral laws of the Church. Now, secular and religious law will become the same thing under the king, and with both subservient to the king. There will be no separation of church and state, and there will be no independent and objective force for measuring the merit of the law, except as much insofar as the king is concerned.

The conflation of religious and state law also can be seen in other places as well. Consider the arguments of Christopher St. German, a well-known and internationally respected jurist, who argues that it is widely known that Church reforms are needed – but that if the Church cannot reform things, the State must. Here, tremendous weight is added to Henry's great takeover of the Church in England, as Henry may now assume the role of reformer. Yet Henry's reforms are not so much a safeguard to the protection of the Church and its adherents, including common people, but his reforms are more an engine for his rule and the State. He is now able to exercise increased powers in his personal affairs, such as separating his daughter from Katherine, silencing Harry Percy, and planning to marry Anne Boleyn while still married to Katherine.

Yet, in two places do Henry and Cromwell find staunch opposition. First, they continue to find opposition in Katherine, who is herself devoutly Catholic, and who continues to argue from a Catholic position as to her rights as a married woman, and to oppose the interference of the State in the Church's affairs. The second – and surprising – place where Cromwell and Henry find opposition is from Thomas More, the king's own Chancellor. More, himself devoutly Catholic, is stunned to see the way that Cromwell



and the others are twisting Church teachings and scrambling for every legal excuse to transform the Catholic Church in England.

While the Bishops continue to hold out against Henry, it is clear the tide is against them as well. When the king emerges from Mass in Calais with Anne Boleyn, Cromwell notices that Henry is wearing a feather in his cap – and the reader should take note of this. The feather here takes on two important meanings, under the auspice of the traditional idiom that a feather in a cap means to have secured an accomplishment. The first is that Henry has slept with Anne. The second is that Henry has made great gains in his own power against the Church.

Discussion Question 1

On what grounds do Katherine and Thomas More continue to oppose King Henry's overhaul of the Catholic Church in England? Why do they do this? Do their arguments hold any water in and of themselves? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways has Henry sought to transform the Catholic Church in England? What reasoning do he and his advisors provide for having done so?

Discussion Question 3

Explain the difference in loyalty between Cromwell and Wolsey, and Cromwell and King Henry. Why has Cromwell's conception of loyalty changed between Wolsey and Henry?

Vocabulary

intransigent, portraiture, abjures, bilocation, haranguing, extempore, ardent, imputation, impromptu

Part V

Summary

Part V, Chapter 1 – Thomas Cromwell does not see Mary Boleyn again in Calais. Before leaving Calais, Cromwell brings on a local boy, Christophe, as a new servant to his household. On January 25, 1533, Henry and Anne take their vows to confirm the contract they made in Calais. Mary later confirms the rush to marry has been because Anne is pregnant. Cranmer tells Cromwell he does not officially know about the new marriage, for the old marriage must still be dealt with. Every conceivable excuse is being concocted. Anne Boleyn, meanwhile, endeavors to have 17-year-old Mary, daughter of Katherine, married to some very old man, and endeavors to have her own sister, Mary, married as well.

Cromwell pushes a bill through Parliament forbidding appeals to Rome, and is granted the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. Cromwell, meanwhile, arranges marriage between his nephew, Richard, and Frances Murfyn, daughter of Thomas Murfyn, Lord Mayor. Cromwell goes to see Katherine, to see if she will give way to the king in exchange for an estate. Cromwell tells Katherine that it is possible she may be found in treason, for her nephew has been threatening to invade England in her name. Katherine says this is not possible. Cromwell says her marriage to Henry will be annulled, with or without her consent. Anne is made Queen – Anna Regina – in a coronation ceremony. King Henry is thrilled. The Pope condemns the marriage, ordering that Henry should return to Katherine, or risk excommunication and the retribution of all of Christendom. The Pope is not heeded. A few months pass, and Anne is sequestered to give birth.

Part V, Chapter 2 – Anne gives birth to a baby girl that Henry names Elizabeth. Henry is saddened by the news, but Cromwell, Cranmer, and the others attempt to cheer him up, saying that Anne is clearly young and fertile, and that God must have intended some peculiar blessing by a princess. Henry is not sad for long, deciding that his next child will indeed be a boy.

As the summer turns to autumn, Cranmer believes the king is already considering another woman, and Cromwell notes that the king's hand lingers on Jane Seymour's waist during a dance. King Francis in France has convinced Pope Clement to suspend his papal bull of excommunication for Henry. Henry is later thrilled to learn that Anne is pregnant once more. His illegitimate son, the Duke of Richmond, is wed to young Mary Howard, at Anne's insistence. They are, however, to be kept apart for the time being for the reason that Mary is merely 13, something which the 15-year-old duke does not like. He believes Anne is forcing this upon them so that he will not have a boy before she does. Meanwhile, Princess Mary, daughter of the king and Katherine, is told she will have to move to Hatfield to attend to the baby Princess Elizabeth.

Part V, Chapter 3 – Hans Holbein brings Thomas Cromwell's finished portrait to Austin Friars. Cromwell thinks his portrait resembles that of a murderer.



Analysis

As the novel continues, Henry begins to take advantage of his newfound power in the union of Church and State under his control by marrying Anne Boleyn. This is stunning to Katherine and More, the latter of whom precipitates his own downfall by continuing to oppose Henry's injurious rule. Indeed, Pope Clement himself swiftly condemns the new marriage, and others – like Cranmer – find the marriage a political nightmare, for the old marriage has never officially been taken care of, except in Henry's own mind and Anne's own ambitions. Indeed, it is through Cromwell's own ambitions that his politically-motivated loyalty continues to sharply increase, as does his power.

Here, the themes of loyalty, law, and theology can again be seen in clear display – as Henry's allies and supporters fall over backwards in the attempt to find every conceivable excuse to nullify Henry's marriage to Katherine, both of a religious and secular nature. What is even more to Henry's benefit, Cromwell pushes a bill through Parliament which forbids Englishmen – of the clergy or the laymen class – from appealing to Rome for any reason whatsoever. Cromwell, the king, and the king's circle have effectively sealed England off from Rome, and giving greater power to the king. The king now has the power to make his next move, which, as the reader will come to learn, will make the king – officially – the head of church and state in England. All that is needed now is the correct evidence and rationale for it to occur.

It is also in this section of the novel that the themes of family and betrayal can again be seen in light of the plot. Anne Boleyn's family has continued to push to elevate Anne to the throne by way of marriage Henry, more out of love of ambition for themselves and their own gain than for love of Anne and her happiness. King Henry himself betrays his own family, by wanting to strip his own daughter of her title of princess, and to remove her to more moderate lodgings – which, surprisingly, for Cromwell, is too far – which Cromwell advocates against. Nevertheless, the title is removed and Mary is cruelly made to be an attendant to the baby princess, Elizabeth. Anne herself also cruelly arranges marriages – and their conditions – so that she may have a boy for the king before anyone else is able to have a boy. Interestingly enough, married to Anne for less than a year, the king already has a wandering eye. The lingering of his hand on Jane Seymour's waist is long enough to be noted by Cranmer, and by others -and serves to be an ill-omen for the future.

So quickly did Henry betray his first wife for his second, and so quickly now is it apparent that Henry may be considering his second wife. Clearly, loyalty means little – if anything – to Henry in light of his own desires and narcissism. The reader should also note that Cromwell himself is not beyond reproach for his own narcissism and desires, as symbolized in Holbein's portrait of Cromwell. To Cromwell himself, the portrait makes him appear a murderer – a potent and ominous foreshadowing statement given that More is in disfavor with the king.



Discussion Question 1

Why is Henry so distraught by the birth of his first child? How does he ultimately come to view this birth?

Discussion Question 2

What is the greatest existing obstacle to Henry in his new marriage to Anne Boleyn? Why? How do Henry's men attempt to overcome this obstacle?

Discussion Question 3

Why do some advocate against the removing of Mary's title and position as princess? What happens, ultimately? Why?

Vocabulary

indignities, vacancy, conciliate, schismatic, excommunicated, rapprochement, mirth, ignominy, genuflection, bleat, dubious, maligned, archaic, boisterous, obdurate, sedition, credulity, imperturbable, impermeable, efficacious



Part VI

Summary

Part VI, Chapter 1 – Thomas Cromwell has been doing some research. He brings to the king the writings of Marsiglio of Padua, who in 1324 published 42 propositions with an aim to reform the Church, ranging from the fact that Christ did not seek to rule on earth as king, or give His followers the right to make laws to levy taxes – all things done by members of the Church. Thomas More continues to oppose the trends of thought creeping in around the king, and he is marked as an enemy by many. More is named in a bill of attainder by the king as such. Not everyone agrees with this. Thomas Cromwell goes to visit now-18-year-old Mary, daughter of the king and Katherine. She is happy to see Cromwell, but unhappy that she is no longer legally a princess, though she doesn't see how this is possible in the eyes of God. Cromwell explains that Mary may return to court if she accepts Anne as Queen, but Mary will not do so. Mary knows she will never be accepted, and knows that Anne worries she will marry and have a son before Anne does.

Back at court, King Henry is persuaded to remove Thomas More from the bill of attainder. However, More will not swear allegiance to the supremacy of the king, no matter how much Thomas Cromwell and the others insist. Cromwell is then called before the king, not to be scolded for failing to get More to take the oath, but to be promoted to Master Secretary. Thomas Cromwell is likewise surprised to find that Rafe has secretly married a beautiful servant girl in the house, Helen Barre, out of love, and even though she is a nobody. It makes Cromwell glad to know he has brought up a man in his household who thinks of something other than advancement in life. He tells Rafe to tell Rafe's father that Cromwell's own promotion will also elevate Rafe, despite the marriage. Nevertheless, Cromwell intends to set up Rafe with his own household. Cromwell also learns that, while More's family has taken the oath to the king, Thomas More still has not. It is clear the family has done so under protest, for Meg, More's daughter, can barely stand the sight of Cromwell. By midsummer, Anne Boleyn suffers a miscarriage. The baby is believed to have been a boy.

Part VI, Chapter 2 – It is 1534. Pope Clement has died. Henry, impressed that Cromwell correctly predicts the next pope, Cardinal Farnese, as well as impressed by Cromwell's continued service and sound advice, promotes him to Master of the Rolls. The new position means new wealth, new houses, and more power. Elsewhere, Ireland is in revolt and peace has been made with the Scots. Attempts are made again with More to get him to swear to the Act of Supremacy of the king, but More still refuses. At court, word comes that Mary Boleyn is pregnant with the child of William Stafford, and claims she has married him. Anne disowns Mary. At Christmas, Gregory returns home from his studies for the holiday.

In early 1535, Cromwell is given a newly invented title and position, Vicegerent in Spirituals, making Cromwell a deputy to the king in church affairs. Over the winter,



Thomas Cromwell takes seriously ill. By April, the king visits. Cromwell is still ill but better. The Duke of Norfolk later comes to visit as well. When Cromwell is better, he goes to see Thomas More, to plead with More to swear to the oath. More refuses the attempt, as well as several others, and has his books and papers taken away from him. Cromwell continues to try to press More to throw himself on the king's mercy, but More has settled to his fate. He is put on trial.

Part VI, Chapter 3 – Thomas More is executed. Plans are made for the king's court to visit the Seymours of Wolf Hall for five days in September.

Analysis

In the final part of the novel, Henry's machinations come to full fruition, and the themes of theology and law return to the fore. The Act of Supremacy – which officially makes Henry the head of church and state – is passed, and all must swear allegiance to the act by oath. The combination of church and state under one powerful figure is complete – and will become a model for much of Europe in the coming centuries. To undergird the Act of Supremacy, Cromwell digs deep into Church history and theology to bring back to light the 1324 work of Marsiglio of Padua to discredit powers of the Church, to demonstrate that they need reform, to demonstrate that the King has the right to rule over all in his own lands, and that the King himself may provide the needed reforms.

The most notable opponent to the Act of Supremacy is Thomas More. More, who has remained devoutly and loyally Catholic, is stunned by what has transpired under Cromwell and Henry in the past few years. As such, he will not risk his soul or his beliefs for his own life – and is executed for refusing to swear to the Act of Supremacy. More will ultimately become a saint in the Catholic Church for his stand against Henry. No one expresses any true regret over More's death, though attempts are made to save him at the last minute. It is as if the king's men have become aware that they have created something of a monster in attempting to give the king what the king has demanded, and none of them is willing to truly stick their necks out again for any reason.

Cromwell's loyalty to the king continues to be utilitarian in nature, doing whatever he must to advance himself and to be able to provide for his family. Indeed, it is ironic that conditional loyalty to the king should be contingent upon absolute loyalty to the family for Cromwell. However, despite Cromwell's own obvious penchant for advancement, as well as that of his son, Gregory, Cromwell is actually surprised by a genuine display of love and loyalty toward the end of the novel. He is pleasantly moved by Rafe, who has married a pretty servant girl – with no connections and no wealth at all – purely out of love. It amazes Cromwell that there are people in the world who are still genuinely moved in that way, which causes Cromwell to bless the marriage and want to set Rafe and Helen up with their own household out of respect – and loyalty for them.

However, loyalty is not the foremost thing on the king's mind, as is demonstrated by the King's decision to want to visit Wolf Hall – home of the Seymours, and home of Elizabeth Seymour – for five days in September. Already, the reader can tell that Anne's



own days are numbered, and that the king's eye has not only wandered toward the Seymour girl, but has apparently caught onto her. Here, the author sets the stage for the novel's sequel, "Bring Up the Bodies".

Discussion Question 1

Why is Cromwell so moved and pleasantly surprised that Rafe has married out of love?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Thomas More refuse to take the oath of the Act of Supremacy? What would you have done had you been in More's position? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What is obvious about the king's desire to spend some time at Wolf Hall? What does the reader know that Anne doesn't seem to know?

Vocabulary

convivial, intricate, copiously, inconstuable, indefeasible, peremptory, munificence, imperious, indeterminate, arquebusier, remitted, ascetic, treacherous, austere, abhor, flippant, supervened



Characters

Thomas Cromwell

Thomas Cromwell is the main character of Hilary Mantel's historical novel, "Wolf Hall". It is through Cromwell's eyes that the events relating to King Henry VIII's determination to marry Anne Boleyn at all costs can be seen. Physically abused as a child and teenager, Cromwell ran away from Putney, England, to Europe, to fight as a mercenary in the French army, and later train in Italian banking before returning to England to work in law, where he became the right-hand man of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. Thomas Cromwell is just over 40 for the duration of the novel, is starting to gain weight, and loses his wife and two daughters to the sweating sickness plague early in the novel. It is a loss which will haunt him deeply. He remains steadfastly loyal to Wolsey during Wolsey's downfall, and earns the respect and ear of the king. Cromwell, motivated by ambition, moves up through the ranks to the king's inner circle, where he helps the king to establish himself as head of the Church in England, and marry Anne Boleyn. Cromwell not only becomes a member of the inner circle of the king, but gains immense power, prestige, and wealth for himself and his remaining family in the process.

Gregory Cromwell

Gregory Cromwell is the son and sole surviving child of Thomas and Lizzie Cromwell. For much of the novel, he is in his studies at university, and a bright and prosperous path for Gregory through life is being envisioned by Thomas Cromwell for him. Gregory takes after his father in his ambition and zeal to do well in life.

Rafe Sadler

Rafe Sadler is Thomas Cromwell's chief clerk and one of his most trusted allies. Indeed, Cromwell considers Rafe to be something of a son, and Cromwell approves of the fact that Rafe marries a pretty young peasant servant girl in his household named Helen out of love, rather than with an eye for personal gain or advancement. This encourages Cromwell to set up Rafe with his own household.

Henry VIII

Henry VIII is King of England, husband of Katherine, and father of Mary. Henry VIII worries about producing a male heir for the throne, and out of a mixture of fear and lust pursues Anne Boleyn, daughter of Thomas Boleyn, a diplomat. Henry is a tempestuous ruler, alternating between violent outbursts and weak-kneed blithering – all subject to his passion for Anne, who dominates him. Henry VIII is brutal and ruthless in securing marriage to Anne, betraying Katherine and Mary to do so, betraying his friend and former ally, Cardinal Wolsey, and severing ties from the Catholic Church in Rome.



Frustrated by Anne's inability to have a male child, by the end of the novel, Henry is already sizing up Jane Seymour.

Thomas More

Thomas More is the Lord High Chancellor and trusted advisor to King Henry VIII for much of the novel. More is famous for his writing as well, including his philosophical work "Utopia". More is loyally and devoutly Catholic, and so opposes Henry's move to annul his marriage, consolidate church and state power, and to marry Anne Boleyn. Refusing to swear allegiance to Henry as Head of Church and State through the Act of Supremacy, More is executed and later beatified a saint by the Catholic Church.

Anne Boleyn

Anne Boleyn is a young girl in her 20s who has caught the eye of King Henry VIII. She is the daughter of Thomas Boleyn, a diplomat. Vindictive, cold, and cruel, Anne is determined to marry Henry and be queen at all costs. This includes her encouraging Henry to overturn the Catholic Church in England, and to dispense with Thomas Wolsey.

Thomas Wolsey

Thomas Wolsey is Lord Chancellor, Cardinal, and Bishop of York, as well as the patron of Thomas Cromwell. Wolsey is in his mid-50s, is politically-astute but kind and careful, and serves as an advisor to the King. It is upon Wolsey's shoulders that the task of seeking an annulment to Henry's marriage to Katherine, falls. When Wolsey is unable to deliver, the king turns on Wolsey, having numerous charges, including treason, brought up against Wolsey. Under arrest and traveling to London, Wolsey falls ill and dies.

Pope Clement

Pope Clement is the head of the Catholic Church in all the world. Based in Rome, Pope Clement's political situation is perilous, and at first, Henry VIII, Wolsey, and others conspire to supply the Pope with military resources and funding in exchange for an annulment in Henry's marriage – an exchange which does not work. Repeated attempts to negotiate the annulment fail, and Henry marries Anne anyways. This causes Clement to prepare a papal bull of excommunication for Henry, and to condemn Henry's marriage to Anne, though Clement dies by the end of the novel.

King Francis

King Francis is the king of France. Seeking to avoid war with England, and seeking to further his own position, Francis is happy to intervene on Henry's behalf to the Pope in



lieu of Henry's new marriage. Francis is able to delay the Pope's excommunicative orders for Henry.

Katherine of Aragon

Katherine of Aragon is the Queen of England, mother of Princess Mary, and first wife of Henry VIII. Devoutly Catholic, Spanish in origin, beautiful, and kind, Katherine vehemently opposes the idea that her marriage to Henry is unsound based on the fact that she was previously married to Henry's older brother. She rallies most of Christendom to her defense, though in the end, all comes to naught as Henry marries Anne Boleyn, regardless.



Symbols and Symbolism

Feather

A single feather is worn by King Henry VIII in his hat after Mass in Calais. The feather in the hat, traditionally symbolic of accomplishment, is noted in Henry's hat by Cromwell for two reasons. First, he has had much success in consolidating his power as head of church and state; and second, he has slept with Anne Boleyn.

Act of Supremacy

The Act of Supremacy is the official law which makes Henry the head of church and state in England. It is required to be sworn in oath by individuals to demonstrate their loyalty for king and country. Thomas More refuses to swear by the Act, for More is a devout and loyal Catholic, and the Act supplants the Church and the Pope. As such, More is executed for refusing to swear.

Holbein's painting of Cromwell

Holbein's painting of Cromwell meets with mixed reviews by his family members. The worst opinion of all occurs with Cromwell, who believes he has come out looking like a murderer. This is a prescient and ominous statement, for Cromwell's actions of supplanting the Pope with the King in England will lead to the execution of Thomas More.

The Opinion of Christopher St. German

The opinion of Christopher St. German is given as Henry publicly advocates reform of the church. St. German, a respected jurist, has his opinion seized upon by Henry, Cromwell, and their allies, as proof that Henry has the right to reform the Church. The opinion, essentially, states that The Church is in need of reform, and that if the Church cannot handle the reform, then the State must handle the reform.

The Forty-Two Propositions of Marsiglio of Padua

The Forty-Two Propositions of Marsiglio of Padua are a set of theological questions, statements, and positions with respect to the practices of the Catholic Church, written in 1324 and seized upon by Thomas More in the 1530s to further demonstrate the king's power over the Church in England. The Propositions include the assertion, for example, that Jesus Christ did not give His apostles the power to lay and collect taxes –which the Church of Cromwell's day, does. Henry uses this as further proof of his authority over the Church.



The 44 Charges

Forty-four charges are brought against Cardinal Wolsey for arrest due to his failure to secure an annulment for the king. These charges vary in nature, with many of them trumped-up and scrambled-for in order to bring about Wolsey's demise. For example, Wolsey is charged with the crime of buying beef at the same price the king buys it.

Bill of Attainder for Treason

A Bill of Attainder for Treason is levied against Cardinal Wolsey for his failure to annul the marriage between Henry and Katherine, and for his respecting Church law above the laws of the king of England. The bill of attainder signals Wolsey's final fall, and he dies while enroute to prison.

Clean linens

Clean linens are carried by maids and ladies-in-waiting as they tend to Anne during her birth of Princess Elizabeth. The clean linens are an illustration of stature and wealth, for royalty is able to afford fresh, clean materials, cloths, and linens, when the common people are not.

One Thousand Pounds

One thousand pounds is given by King Henry as a gift to Cardinal Wolsey to help Wolsey handle his moving and furnishing expenses before Wolsey's final downfall. The king – probably dishonestly – says that he wishes he could do more for Wolsey, but this is the least of Wolsey's problem as the king ultimately has in mind to finish Wolsey off by imprisonment at the very least, and execution at the worst.

Assistance

Military, political, and financial assistance is offered to Pope Clement by Henry VIII in exchange for Pope Clement granting Henry an annulment in his marriage to Katherine. These forms of assistance are needed by Clement, who is engaged in war and political turmoil. However, Clement refuses to accept the deal, and refuses to annul the marriage between Katherine and Henry.



Settings

London

London is the capital city of England, and the seat of power for King Henry VIII. He reigns there through much of the year, leaving the spring and autumn to both enjoy the countryside, and to avoid epidemics. It is in London that Cardinal Wosley lives, and Thomas Cromley and his household make their homes at the Austin Friary.

Austin Friary

Austin Friary, owned by the Augustinian order of monks, is leased to Thomas Cromwell and his household while they are in residence in London. Austin Friary appears to be something of a middle-class dwelling at least, having numerous bedrooms and a kitchen. It very much becomes home to Cromwell and his family to the point that they are reluctant to leave it when Cromwell begins to be promoted left and right.

Calais

Calais is a city and small territory on the coast of France. It is the last foothold of land that England has in France, and is governed by Lord Berners, and later Lord Lisle. Calais is visited by King Henry and his retinue during a state visit to France, during which time Henry first sleeps with Anne Boleyn.

France

France is a major European country that lies across the English Channel from England. France has long been a periodic enemy and peaceful ally of England, and is governed by King Francis. While most of France is ruled by Francis, a small spot of land, along with the city of Calais, is owned and run by the English.

Rome

Rome is the capital city of Italy, and the seat of power and order in the Catholic Church. It is from Rome that the Catholic Church operates, and it is in Rome that Pope Clement, head of the Catholic Church, lives and administers the Church.



Themes and Motifs

Theology

Theology (and Church doctrine) is an important theme in the novel "Wolf Hall" by Hilary Mantel. Theology – the study of God and the Christian faith, specifically, the Catholic Church in this instance – becomes essential and central to the plot of the story in which Henry VIII seeks the annulment of his marriage to Queen Katherine of Aragon.

In the theological tradition and doctrine of the Catholic Church, marriage is held to be integral and sacred in Christendom. It is from marriage that families are made, and future generations are born. Marriage is not merely a legal arrangement, but is a joining of man and woman overseen by God, and as such, marriage is a divinely-attended, consequential, and incredibly important sacrament in the Church. It is held to be inviolable in exception for the most extreme of reasons, and then, annulments are few and far between. Henry VIII seeks such an exception to invalidate and annul his marriage to Katherine, but is turned down by Pope Clement.

At the same time in Western Europe and elsewhere in Christendom, all secular laws are made in accord with the moral precepts and doctrine of the Catholic Church. The Church itself reigns supreme on all matters of state and theological concern, though the Church itself remains officially separate from the State. While the Church itself is not without flaw or need for reform, the distinction between the Church and government helps to slow or stop much corruption between the two, and the amalgamation of too much power by one or the other. However, based on the rejection of his request for annulment, and based on Henry's increased frustration in having to rely on the Catholic Church in Rome, Henry begins what history will come to remember as the English Reformation.

Henry, relying on the learnedness of Thomas Cromwell, moves to consolidate his power in England. Relying on the opinions of two primary scholars – Christopher St. German, who argues that the State must carry out the reforms of the Church that the Church is unable to carry out itself – and Marsiglio of Padua, who wrote the Forty-Two Propositions of 1324 – which criticize the Church in areas where it needs reform, such as the Church laying and collecting taxes when it should not – Henry ultimately breaks the allegiance of the Catholic Church hierarchy in England to Rome, and reorients it, by force and by law, to England. He isolates and then insulates England from Rome, and then merges the powers of the Church and State unto himself (and the monarchy). As such, he has rewritten not only the secular law of England, but theology as well. As such, he has no qualms about moving forward in marriage with Anne Boleyn, and casting aside Katherine and his daughter, Mary. However, without the Church as the ultimate authority in matters of marriage, Henry is free to put aside and annul his own marriage to Anne quite easily – a fact which she begins to realize as the novel comes to a close.



However, not everyone is thrilled with Henry's usurpation of the Catholic Church. Most notable in his objections to Henry's actions is his Lord Chancellor, Thomas More. More, himself devoutly and loyally Catholic, is stunned at the moves that Cromwell and Henry make to supplant the Pope and the Church. This leads to More's downfall. When the Act of Supremacy is passed, officially rewriting laws of theology and laws of state, More refuses to swear by the Act. As a result, he is executed for his refusal to having done so. More will ultimately be beatified a saint by the Catholic Church for his opposition to Henry's reforms.

Law

Law is an important theme in the novel "Wolf Hall" by Hilary Mantel. In the novel, two forms of law are dealt with – secular, and religious (see the theme "Theology" for a discussion of religious law). Secular law will be treated here, primarily. Secular law proves to be incredibly important to the plot of the novel, as Henry seeks an annulment to his marriage with Katherine of Aragon.

Thomas Cromwell is, himself, trained in law. Though he has at times in the past served as a mercenary soldier and banker, law is his forte. He handles all of the legal affairs of Cardinal Wolsey, religious and secular, and later handles the same for King Henry VIII. For example, Cromwell is tasked with helping navigate the law so that Wolsey may found two universities, and is later tasked by King Henry to navigate the law to allow both churches to cede much of their income to the State. In these matters, Cromwell proves himself indispensable.

When Pope Clement refuses to grant Henry an annulment, Henry and Anne take it out on Wolsey. Using secular law, the King and his men cobble together forty-four charges against Wolsey to bring about his downfall. These charges are sketchy and hastily gathered at best, for they include such ludicrous claims as Wolsey purchasing beef at the same price the king purchases beef at. While these forty-four charges are later withdrawn at Cromwell's adept handling of each of them, a Bill of Attainder for Treason is brought against Wolsey – for adhering to the rule of Rome rather than the rule of the English king – from which there can be no escape. Wolsey is arrested and dies en route to prison. Secular law, here, is best described as a vehicle for the king's will and desires, rather than as a vehicle for true justice. It is one of the reasons why laws of the Church – primarily moral in nature – are kept separate from secular laws, to ensure that there is a higher authority than even the worst despotic rulers. Henry does not like this at all.

With Wolsey out of the way, Henry makes his move to consolidate his power. Relying on the opinions of various thinkers, writers, theologians, philosophers, and legalists – such as the jurist Christopher St. German, who argues that the State is obligated to reform the Church where the Church cannot reform itself – Henry cuts off contact with Rome, and isolates and insulates England from the Church in Rome. Through the Act of Supremacy – a purely secular, legal act in origin – Henry brings together the powers of the church and the state under the auspice of himself and the monarchy in general.



Loyalty

Loyalty is an important theme in the novel “Wolf Hall” by Hilary Mantel. Loyalty – which includes the faithfulness, adherence to, or support of, a person, place, idea, or otherwise – becomes crucial to the plot of the novel as it unfolds. Loyalty is contrasted with betrayal, and will be dealt with as its own theme later (see the theme Betrayal).

In the novel, loyalty is most chiefly associated with the character of Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell himself is an ambitious man, but early in the novel, his loyalty tempers his ambition, rather than exacerbates it. Cromwell’s personal loyalty is always to his family. Even as his ambition overrides the genuineness of his political and public loyalties later on, his family remains his one constant source of genuine loyalty. Everything Cromwell does in his life ultimately is also intended to benefit for his family. He remembers how difficult his own childhood was – he was routinely, savagely beaten by his father – and he does not want his own family to go through the same kind of terror. As such, he works long hours and works hard to provide and care for his family. He ensures, for example, that his son will be able to attend university in order to have a better life than he himself had.

In terms of public and political loyalty, Cromwell’s only true genuine show of loyalty comes by way of Cardinal Wolsey, his patron and employer. Cromwell is absolutely loyal to the cardinal, and not just because the cardinal is Cromwell’s source of income. Indeed, Cromwell has developed almost a paternal affection for the elder cardinal, who in turns sees Cromwell as his most trusted friend and ally. When Wolsey’s precipitous downfall begins, and many flee his side (including the king himself), Cromwell remains loyal to Wolsey. Even though Cromwell knows that Wolsey’s fate is sealed, and even though Cromwell knows his own reputation suffers dramatically as a result, he will not surrender his loyalty to Wolsey, and remains loyal to Wolsey until the bitter end.

Later in the novel, the loyalty that Cromwell displays for King Henry is utilitarian and self-serving at best. What the king wants, Cromwell finds a way to make happen – all for the benefit of Cromwell’s own power, prestige, advancement, and wealth, and not because Cromwell truly believes in any of the things that the king proclaims or wants. This pragmatic, utilitarian loyalty cements Cromwell’s place at the king’s side, and only whets Cromwell’s appetite for advancement and ambition, leading him to higher posts and offices.

Family

Family is an important theme in the novel “Wolf Hall” by Hilary Mantel. Family – which, thematically, involves love, compassion, loyalty, encouragement, and support of others who may or may not be blood-related – serves both positive and negative ends in the novel. Of principal interest to the theme of family are the Cromwell, Boleyn, and royal families.



The best of family is on display with the Cromwells. Thomas, as sole provider and patriarch of his family, does everything in his power to give his wife, two daughters, and son – as well as his extended family – the life that he himself never had. He provides for them financially, and sees to their education and instruction in life lessons. Cromwell's family is the center of his world, so when his wife and two daughters die of sickness, he is devastated. This will haunt Cromwell for years to come. Indeed, Cromwell proves to be such a magnificent head of house and family patriarch that his nephews request – and receive permission – to take Cromwell's last name as their own. The loyalty in the Cromwell family is based on love.

A utilitarian and pragmatic sense of family can be seen in illustration by the Boleyns. Thomas Boleyn, patriarch of the Boleyn family, is a diplomat in good favor with King Henry VIII. When his daughter, Anne, catches the eye of King Henry, Thomas and the entire Boleyn family throw their weight behind pushing the match, and subsequent marriage. This is done not out of love for Anne or desire to see her happy, but as a purely mercenary maneuver to advance the family's own standing, wealth, power, and prestige. Anne is not an innocent bystander in this, as she rallies her family to her cause, and operates with full-knowledge of her family's ambitions. Their loyalty is based not on love, but on gain.

The absolute worst display of family can be seen through the royals – King Henry VIII, Katherine, and their daughter, Princess Mary, though this display is by no degree the fault of either Katherine or Mary. In lust and seeking a male heir to the throne, Henry goes to extreme lengths to sever ties to the Catholic Church in Rome, annul his marriage to Katherine, and marry Anne Boleyn – all at the expense of Katherine and Mary. Henry treats them cruelly, locking up Katherine and stripping Mary of her title and wealth, and forcing Mary to act as an attendant to the infant babe Elizabeth. Henry is a cruel father to not only to Mary, but to Elizabeth as well, for he is disappointed that Elizabeth is a girl, and wishes to have little to do with her. For Henry, there is no such thing as real family loyalty, and that loyalty only extends as far as his wife is able to produce a male heir.

Betrayal

Betrayal is an important theme in the novel "Wolf Hall" by Hilary Mantel. Betrayal, the act of disloyalty in harm to a person, place, idea, or otherwise, becomes central to the plot of the novel through the person of King Henry VIII. His constant betrayals act as a catalyst to events portrayed in the story.

Henry's first act of betrayal is to his wife, Queen Katherine, and his daughter, Princess Mary, by seeking not only an annulment of the marriage, but by actively seeking to marry Anne Boleyn and bed her while still married to Katherine. Henry has made vows to Katherine before God and country in his marriage to her, and now he betrays his loyalty to her because he is in lust with Anne, and because Katherine has not yet been able to produce a male heir for him. Henry's betrayal of Katherine knows no bounds as he goes to great extremes, both religious and legal, to get Katherine out of his way as if



she were a burden rather than his wife. Indeed, once he has Katherine out of the way, he does not hesitate to strip Mary of her title and her position, and to cruelly make her an attendant to his daughter, Elizabeth, by Anne.

During the novel, Anne becomes pregnant twice to Henry. Her first child is a baby girl who is named Elizabeth, and her second is a miscarried boy. This disappoints and frustrates Henry, and he begins to see Anne as a liability rather than a benefit to his throne. He has done everything in his power to be able to marry her, and now she has failed to deliver what she has promised him – a son. As such, Henry is already seeking to betray Anne, as his gaze has been falling on Jane Seymour again and again. The irony here is that what Anne has urged Henry to do in order to betray his marriage to Katherine can now be used in order for Henry to betray his marriage to Anne.

Henry's third great act of betrayal has not to do with love or marriage, but to the Church and Cardinal Wolsey. Henry betrays his own participation in the Catholic Church by rising against it and usurping the power of the Pope, as well as twisting the moral positions of the Church, proper. Henry betrays his long-standing friendship and mentor/mentee relationship with Wolsey when Wolsey is unable to do what Henry asks –to obtain an annulment. While Henry has some qualms about betraying Wolsey, these are few and short-lived, as he is glad to bring the forty-four charges against Wolsey, and later, the Bill of Attainder for Treason. None of these charges has any merit, but Wolsey has proved to be an inconvenience for Henry, and at the insistence of Anne, Henry decides that Wolsey must be done away with.

Sexism and the Church

Sexism is an important theme in the novel "Wolf Hall" by Hilary Mantel. Sexism -the privileging of one sex over the other at its expense by word, intent, or action -heavily influences the events of the plot, and also reflects the historical complexity of power among genders.

Pop history maintains that Church-backed male power structures dominated the lives of women to the point of complete disregard of rights and freedoms in a continual and unrelenting fashion. As the novel demonstrates, this is not exactly the case. While it is true that, in many instances, the freedoms and powers of women were negated -consider, for example, politically-motivated arranged marriages, such as the one between Henry and Katherine- what often negatively affected the woman also negatively affected the man (a male suitor in an arranged marriage based on politics, for example, had little say in the matter, either, especially when his parents were doing the arranging). What emerges in the novel, however, is that it is not the Church, but men acting around and outside of the Church, that leads to sexism.

Interestingly enough, it is the Church that serves as Katherine's principal defender and delays her fate. Katherine as well exerts every ounce and shred of power she can as a married woman and queen in the Catholic tradition. Every attempt that Henry and his circle make to annul Henry's marriage to Katherine are frustrated by the Catholic



Church, its office holders, and the theological idea that marriage is a sacred and inviolable sacrament and institution. Consider that Wolsey's failure to work through Church law and Church channels seals Wolsey's fate -and Katherine's fate as well.

Without being able to pursue moral and legal means through the Church to annul his marriage to Katherine, Henry decides to circumvent the Church and supplant its authority with his own secular supremacy. Henry argues that the king should be in charge of the religious institutions within his own country -and as such, has every right to annul and divorce. Without the protection of the Church, Katherine's future is bleak.

It is also apparent that Henry, as well as members of his circle, now freed from the constraints of the Catholic Church, view women as nothing more than objects and means to an end. Arranged marriages sometimes grew into love. With Henry, this is not the case. Because Katherine could not produce a male heir, she was useless. Anne's own inability to as of yet produce a male heir puts her on shaky ground. Henry cannot stomach the thought of his daughter tending to the English throne. Although women have ruled England before, this is unacceptable to Henry.

To Henry, men run the world, and must rule with an iron fist. Allowing his secular government to hold sway over the churches in England makes this possible. The Church is no longer a defender of sacred beliefs and institutions (such as marriage), but is rather an instrument of the State -and thus Henry is allowed to take and dispense with women as his needs or desires demand. By the end of the novel, he is already growing tired of Anne -and is beginning to look to the Seymour girl, insisting that they visit Wolf Hall.



Styles

Point of View

Hilary Mantel tells her novel from the third-person narrative mode, with a limited-omniscient aspect in the present-tense. This is done for at least two reasons. First, the third-person narrative mode allows Mantel the ability not only to tell a story, but to supplement the novel itself with important historical asides and contextual information. For example, in Part VI, Chapter 1, Mantel is able to explain that Cromwell has been studying the work of Marsiglio of Padua, and then provides a brief explanation of that work, and its historical context to her novel. The second reason that the novel is told in the third-person limited-omniscient narrative is that it creates a degree of drama and suspense for the reader, for the reader learns things only as the character in the novel learn them.

Language and Meaning

Hilary Mantel tells her novel “Wolf Hall” in language that is poetic and replete with medieval and Middle English terms. The novel – which spans the time between the year 1500 and 1535 in England – is historical in nature, and so the use of uncommon words in the contemporary world lend a sense of realism and atmosphere to the novel. For example, Mantel uses words like uxorious (meaning to dote upon or be submissive and weak before one’s wife), obdurate (to be unmoved by passion or persuasion, and to be unyielding), and hauteur (arrogance). The poetic prose the novel is told in also helps to establish a sense of realism and atmosphere, for language in the medieval world was more romantic, careful, and considered in use than it is today (where language is brief and quick to the point).

Structure

Hilary Mantel divides her novel “Wolf Hall” into six major parts, numbered linearly from I to VI, and each part is further subdivided into three chapters (some are a few pages long, others are more than seventy in length). Each part deals with a specific, overarching aspect of the plot. For example, Part I deals with Cromwell’s early years, and the beginning of the end of his service to Wolsey. Each chapter therein deals with a specific set of situations, events, or circumstances relating to the overall part of the plot of that section. For example, Part VI, Chapter 3, deals with the execution of Thomas More, and plans being made to visit Wolf Hall, after the Act of Supremacy has been passed, and Anne’s marriage to Henry made legal in England.



Quotes

But where shall I begin looking for a son to rule his country after him?

-- Cardinal Wolsey (Part I, Chapter 2 paragraph 53)

Importance: Here, Cardinal Wolsey explains to Thomas Cromwell what King Henry VIII is searching for – a son to follow him in succession to the throne of England. Henry wants a son, but Wolsey has absolutely no idea how to make that happen. This is the beginning of Wolsey's downfall, and is the source of much of the action to come in the novel as Henry seeks to marry Anne Boleyn.

I am going to lose everything, everything I have worked for all my life, because I will go down with the cardinal.

-- Thomas Cromwell (Part II, Chapter 3 paragraph 13)

Importance: Thomas Cromwell laments the knowledge that he will probably lose everything when Wolsey falls, but he does not make any moves to betray the cardinal. Indeed, Cromwell remains loyal to Wolsey to the bitter end, at which time Cromwell's loyalty is noted positively by the king.

Cromwell, I am content you are a burgess in the Parliament.

-- Duke of Norfolk (Part III, Chapter 1 paragraph 20)

Importance: As Cromwell gains power and influence, he is named to Parliament by the King through the Duke of Norfolk. This is the first of many new positions, titles, and powers that are to be bestowed on Cromwell in the coming few years.

So, you are going to see the evil lady. She has bewitched the king, you know?

-- Mark (Part III, Chapter 2 paragraph 1)

Importance: Mark, a servant, speaks for the common people in general who all believe that Anne Boleyn is cruel at best, and evil at worst, having corrupted their king. Most people love Katherine, and do not want to see her supplanted by Anne Boleyn, who by comparison is cold and callous.

The dead do not come back to complain of their burial. It is the living who are exercised about these matters.

-- Thomas Cranmer (Part III, Chapter 3 paragraph 25)

Importance: Cranmer, in a very utilitarian fashion, dispenses with concerns for the people who have died, such as Wolsey and the king's brother. The dead are dead and buried and have no concerns for themselves. It is only the living who worry about the dead. This is a green light for Henry to proceed as he will, no matter the consequences.

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.

-- Christopher St. German (Part IV, Chapter 2 paragraph 10)

Importance: German, a respected jurist, makes the legal and secular case for the king and state to take charge of the Catholic Church within its own borders in England. German argues that the state has the right to fix the Church where the Church cannot, or will not, fix itself. This argument is seized upon by Cromwell and Henry.

As he leaves the church, Henry puts on his hat. It is a big hat, a new hat. And in that hat there is a feather.

-- Narrator (Part IV, Chapter 3 paragraph 6)

Importance: Here, great symbolism is afforded the feather in Henry's hat, which colloquially means that he has had some form of accomplishment. The feather here speaks to two accomplishments for Henry: the continuance of pushing for his case for annulment to Katherine and marriage to Anne, and his having had sex for the first time with Anne.

As they leave – the king towing his wife, hand on her upper arm, toward a little harp music – Mary turns and gives him a sumptuous smile. She holds up her hand, thumb and finger an inch apart.

-- Narrator (Part V, Chapter 1 paragraph 63)

Importance: Here, Mary, sister of Anne, gives away the reason for such a quick marriage between Henry and Anne, to Cromwell. Mary, who laces Anne's bodice each day, must lace it a little looser now, for Anne is pregnant.

Call her Elizabeth.

-- King Henry VIII (Part V, Chapter 2 paragraph 4)

Importance: Henry, dismayed and upset that his first child with Anne Boleyn is not a boy, orders the child to be named Elizabeth. The child is referred to as a peculiar blessing by God, and little does Henry know just how much of a blessing Elizabeth will be to England in the coming decades.

It would be good to have a post in the legal hierarchy, so why not at the top?

-- Narrator (Part VI, Chapter 2 paragraph 3)

Importance: Here, Cromwell receives one of his highest titles yet. He is to be made Master of the Rolls, an ancient, lauded, and well-respected judicial post which gives Cromwell enormous influence and power. Cromwell's rise is still meteoric, and the new post brings him even closer to the king.

A shriveled petal can hold its scent, a prayer can rattle with curses; an empty house, when the owners have gone out, can still be loud with ghosts.

-- Narrator (Part VI, Chapter 3 paragraph 17)



Importance: Here, the narrator speaks to memory, and the power that memory has over Thomas Cromwell as he leaves his old house and old station in life behind for bigger and more prestigious posts. Memories – including of his wife and two daughters – will weigh heavily on the heart of Cromwell no matter where he goes, or what he does, reminding the reader that not everything with Cromwell is blind ambition.

I follow my conscience, More said, you must follow yours.

-- Narrator (Part VI, Chapter 3 paragraph 22)

Importance: More explains, succinctly, why he refuses to submit to the Act of Supremacy, and in so doing, signs his own death warrant. His conscience matters more, he says – and conscience must guide Cromwell and all the others, though lately, they are not listening to their consciences at all.