

4. Comment on Cromwell's observation regarding an earl that "The world is not run from where he thinks. Not from his border fortresses, not even from Whitehall. The world is run from Antwerp, from Florence, from places he never imagined." What does Cromwell mean...and in what sense is his statement a very modern view of the world?

5. Why does Cromwell dislike the Catholic clergy? What are his motives for helping Henry marry Anne Boleyn and sever ties to the Pope? What larger goals does he hope to achieve in helping ? Are they selfless...or selfish?

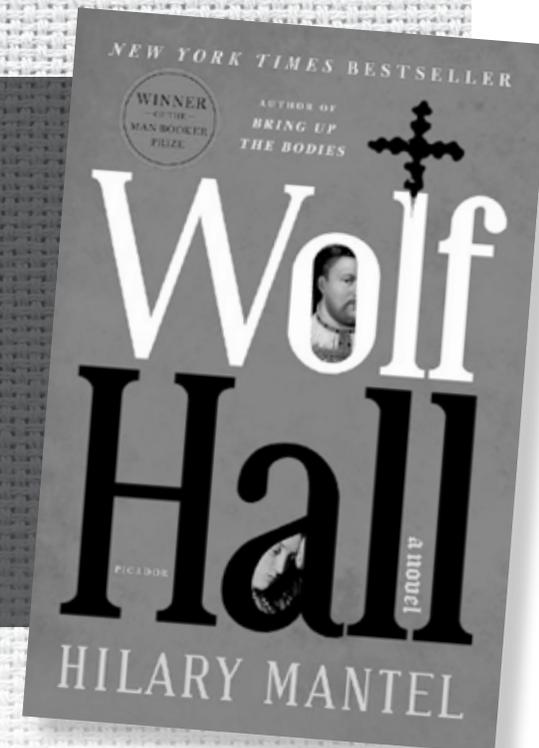
6. If you are familiar with Thomas More, especially through A Man for All Seasons, were you surprised by this book's treatment of him?

7. How does Cromwell perceive Anne Boleyn? How does she come across in this book? Consider his observation when she is in the presence of the king's friends: "Anne is brittle in their company, and as ruthless with their compliments as a house-wife snapping the necks of larks for the table." Also talk about the danger he sees for Anne as he thinks, "Any little girl can hold the key to the future."

8. Do you know the fate of Cromwell, some years after the book's ending? If you don't know, can you surmise? If you do, how does it color your reading of Wolf Hall?

9. Mantel is writing a sequel to Wolf Hall—The Mirror and the Light. Do you think you'll want to read it when published?

Discussion Questions



"Lyrically yet cleanly and tightly written, solidly imagined yet filled with spooky resonances, and very funny at times."
— Christopher Tayler,
The Guardian



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Hilary Mantel is the author of nine previous novels, including *A Change of Climate*, *A Place of Greater Safety*, and *Eight Months on Ghazal Street*. She has also written a memoir, *Giving Up the Ghost*. Winner of the Hawthornden Prize, she reviews for the *New York Times*, *New York Review of Books*, and *London Review of Books*. She lives in England. (From the publisher.)

She was born in Glossop, Derbyshire, the eldest of three children, and was brought up in the Derbyshire mill village of Hadfield, attending the local Roman Catholic primary school. Her family is of

Irish origin but her parents, Margaret and Henry Thompson, were born in England. After losing touch with her father at the age of eleven, she took the name of her stepfather, Jack Mantel. Her family background, the mainspring of much of her fiction, is explained in her memoir, *Giving Up the Ghost*.

Mantel attended Harrytown Convent in Romiley, Cheshire, and in 1970 went to the London School of Economics to read law. She transferred to the University of Sheffield and graduated as Bachelor of Jurisprudence in 1973. After graduating she worked in the social work department of a geriatric hospital, and then as a saleswoman. In 1974 she began writing a novel about the French Revolution, which was later published as *A Place of Greater Safety*.

In 1977 she went to live in Botswana with her husband, Gerald McEwen, a geologist, whom she had married in 1972. Later they spent four years in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia—a memoir of this time, *Someone to Disturb*, has been published in the *London Review of Books*. During her twenties she suffered from a debilitating and painful illness. This was initially diagnosed as a psychiatric illness for which she was hospitalised and treated with anti-psychotic drugs. These produced a paradoxical reaction of psychotic symptoms and for some years she refrained from seeking help from doctors. Finally, in Africa, and desperate, she consulted a medical text-book and realised she was probably suffering from a severe form of endometriosis, a diagnosis confirmed back in London. The condition and necessary surgery left her unable to have children and continued to disrupt her life, with continued treatment by steroids radically changing her appearance. She is now patron of the Endometriosis SHE Trust.

Book Summary

England in the 1520s is a heartbeat from disaster. If the king dies without a male heir, the country could be destroyed by civil war. Henry VIII wants to annul his marriage of twenty years, and marry Anne Boleyn. The pope and most of Europe opposes him. The quest for the king's freedom destroys his adviser, the brilliant Cardinal Wolsey, and leaves a power vacuum.

Into this impasse steps Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell is a wholly original man, a charmer and a bully, both idealist and opportunist, astute in reading people and a demon of energy: he is also a consummate politician, hardened by his personal losses, implacable in his ambition. But Henry is volatile: one day tender, one day murderous. Cromwell helps him break the opposition, but what will be the price of his triumph?

In inimitable style, Hilary Mantel presents a picture of a half-made society on the cusp of change, where individuals fight or embrace their fate with passion and courage. With a vast array of characters, overflowing with incident, the novel re-creates an era when the personal and political are separated by a hairbreadth, where success brings unlimited power but a single failure means death. (From the publisher.)

Mantel published the sequel to *Wolf Hall*, *Bring Up the Bodies*, in 2012.

Discussion Questions

1. What does Holbein's portrait capture about Thomas Cromwell's character that even Cromwell, himself, recognizes? What kind of man is Cromwell? In the rapacious world of *Wolf Hall*, do you find him a sympathetic character, or not?

2. What effect did Cromwell's upbringing have on his character and his later views about the privileged society that permeates the court? How does he feel about the aristocracy and its insistence on ancient rights?

3. What does Cromwell mean when he tells his son that "it's all very well planning what you will do in six months, what you will do in a year, but it's no good at all if you don't have a plan for tomorrow"?
