

“Wolf Hall” by Hilary Mantel [B2]

Con questo romanzo, che costituisce la prima parte di una trilogia su Thomas Cromwell, statista di corte di Enrico VIII, Hilary Mantel è riuscita a coniugare l'acclamazione della critica con il successo commerciale.

Wolf Hall is the first part of Hilary Mantel's [remarkable](#) trilogy of historical novels exploring the turbulent life and times of Thomas Cromwell, chief minister to King Henry VIII. Mantel spent five years researching the Tudor period to produce this emotive, [wise](#) and [mesmerising](#) tale that won the Booker Prize in 2009.

A FIGHT HE CAN WIN

The book opens in the year 1500 with young Thomas Cromwell being beaten by his drunken father. It then jumps forward twenty-seven years to find Cromwell working as a lawyer for Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. The cardinal is under pressure [to arrange](#) a divorce for Henry VIII from his Spanish queen, Catherine of Aragon. Cromwell, a [skilled](#) negotiator, is expected to assist. “What is good for Thomas Cromwell is good for Thomas Wolsey — and vice versa. His legal practice is thriving, and he is able to lend money at interest, and arrange bigger loans, on the international market. [...] He has a sideline in arbitration, commercial disputes mostly, as his ability to assess the facts of a case and give a swift impartial decision is [trusted](#) in Calais and in Antwerp. [...] These are good days for him: every day a fight he can win.” “Quello che va bene a Thomas Cromwell va bene a Thomas Wolsey... e viceversa. Lo studio legale prospera e lui è in grado di prestare soldi a interesse, oltre a somme più consistenti da piazzare sul mercato internazionale. [...] Come attività secondaria fornisce servizi di arbitrato soprattutto nelle dispute commerciali, dato che a Londra, come a Calais e ad Anversa, si fidano della sua abilità nel valutare i fatti ed emettere una decisione rapida e imparziale. [...] ogni giorno porta con sé una disputa che può vincere.”

ENTICED

Unfortunately, Wolsey cannot win. The Pope, head of the Catholic Church, refuses to allow Henry VIII his divorce. Wolsey loses the [trust](#) of the King, and with it, his position and property. Cromwell uses the law to find a solution for the King, but causes conflict with the Church. When he visits the Queen, she accuses Cromwell of influencing the King. “Until now Master Cromwell’s talent was for moneylending, but now he finds he has a talent for legislation too – if you want a new law, just ask him [...] And when the morning comes you induce the King to describe himself as head of the Church in England’ [...] ‘You say ‘induce’, he tells Catherine. ‘But Your Highness, above anyone, knows that the King cannot be led.’ ‘But he may be enticed.’” “«Finora il nostro Master Cromwell aveva dimostrato del talento come prestadenaro, ma ora scopre che sa destreggiarsi anche con l’attività normativa: interpellate lui se volete una nuova legge. [...] E quando viene mattina, istigate il re a fregiarsi del titolo di capo della Chiesa di Inghilterra». «Voi dite “istigare”», risponde a Caterina. «Vostra Altezza, però, sa meglio di chiunque altro che il re non si lascia indirizzare». «Ma si lascia lusingare».”

VALUED

The Boleyn family was influential during Tudor times. Henry VIII had an affair with Mary Boleyn before turning his attention to her sister, Anne. Desperate for a male [heir](#), the King plans to divorce Catherine and marry Anne. Cromwell meets with Anne, who is already pregnant with the King’s child. “Are you happy?” he asks her. ‘Yes.’ She drops her eyes, and her small hands rest on her ribcage. ‘Yes, because of this. You see,’ she says slowly, ‘I was always desired. But now I am valued. And that is a different thing, I find.’” “«Siete felice?», le chiede. «Sì». La donna abbassa gli occhi e poggia le piccole mani sulla gabbia toracica. «Sì, per questo. Vedete», dice lentamente, «sono sempre stata desiderata, ma adesso sono tenuta in gran conto. Ed è una cosa diversa, a mio parere».”

NOT A BOY

Cromwell proves his value to Henry VIII, and his strength as a strategist during the break with the Pope and the Catholic Church, known as the English Reformation. Cromwell needs all of his skills when he and [Archbishop](#) Cranmer [attend](#) the King as he [learns](#) that Anne has given birth — but not to a boy. “The king drops into a chair. The urge arises to put a hand on his shoulder, as one does for any inconsolable being. He resists it; simply folds his fingers, protectively, into the fist which holds the King’s heart. ‘One day we will make a great marriage for her.’ ‘Poor scrap. Her own mother will wish her away.’ ‘Your Majesty is young enough,’ Cranmer says. ‘The Queen is strong and her family are fertile. You can get another child soon. And perhaps God intends some peculiar blessing by this princess.’” “Enrico sprofonda a sedere su una sedia. Viene l’istinto di mettergli una mano sulla spalla, come si fa con gli inconsolabili. Combatte l’impulso e, in un gesto di protezione, chiude le dita serrando il pugno in cui è stretto il cuore del re. «Un giorno organizzeremo per lei un grande matrimonio». «Povera cosa, perfino sua madre vorrà che scompaia». «Vostra Maestà è abbastanza giovane», dice Cranmer. «La regina è forte e la sua famiglia fertile. Presto potrete avere un altro figlio. E forse il Signore ha voluto concedervi una benedizione particolare dandovi questa principessa».”

MINDSET

Wolf Hall is a work of fiction but Hilary Mantel refused to sacrifice historical [accuracy](#) in her search for a story. Instead, she focuses on the political and religious [turmoil](#) of the Tudor period as experienced by those who lived it — complete with [their beliefs](#), [mindset](#) and morality. Wolf Hall and Mantel’s previous book Bring Up the Bodies were adapted into a six-part series in 2015, with a miniseries based on the third book The Mirror and the Light, set for imminent release.

Glossary

- **mesmerising** = ipnotico, magnetico
- **turmoil** = tumulto, subbuglio
- **accuracy** = accuratezza, precisione
- **beliefs** = credenze
- **skilled** = abile, esperto
- **trust** = fiducia
- **heir** = erede
- **Archbishop** = arcivescovo
- **attend** = accompagnare
- **remarkable** = straordinaria
- **wise** = saggio
- **to arrange** = organizzare
- **learns** = apprendere
- **mindset** = mentalità