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# *Henry VIII in history and fiction, from Shakespeare to Mantel*

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# CONTENTS

<b>List of abbreviations</b>	5
<b>Introduction</b>	7
<b>1. Henry VIII</b>	9
<b>1.1 His life and reign</b>	9
1.1.1 A short biography	9
1.1.2 The king's involvement with the government	13
1.1.3 Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell	15
1.1.4 Wales, Ireland and Scotland	17
1.1.5 The king's divorce	18
1.1.6 Henry's wives	21
1.1.7 The Henrician Reform	29
<b>1.2 The King seen by his contemporaries</b>	31
1.2.1 His character and abilities	31
1.2.2 Holinshed's <i>Chronicles</i>	33
1.2.3 <i>Acts and Monuments of Martyrs</i>	39
<b>1.3 Rowley's <i>When You See Me, You Know Me</i></b>	41
<b>2. Shakespeare's <i>Henry VIII</i></b>	49
<b>2.1 The play</b>	49
2.1.1 The question of authorship	49
2.1.2 The plot	57
2.1.3 The sources	62
2.1.4 Interpretations	63
<b>2.2 King Henry's figure in the play</b>	68
2.2.1 The king's grace	68
2.2.2 The passive aspect of the king: Wolsey and Buckingham	69

2.2.3 The active aspect of the king: his relationship with Cranmer	75
2.2.4 The king's relationship with Catherine	78
2.2.5 The king's relationship with Anne	82
2.2.6 The king's relationship with Elizabeth	84
2.2.7 The king's anger and changes of mood	85
2.2.8 An overall picture of the king	86

### **3. Contemporary representations of Henry VIII: *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies***

<b>3.1 Contemporary representations</b>	89
3.1.1 Novels	89
3.1.2 Films	91
3.1.3 Television Series	92
<b>3.2 The Historical Novel and Postmodernism</b>	93
3.2.1 The Historical Novel	93
3.2.2 Postmodernism	95
<b>3.3 <i>Wolf Hall</i> and <i>Bring Up the Bodies</i></b>	97
3.3.1 The author	98
3.3.2 Conceiving the novel	98
3.3.3 The plot	101
3.3.4 The novels	103
3.3.5 Relationship with the sources	110
3.3.6 King Henry in <i>Wolf Hall</i>	111
3.3.6.1 The king's physical appearance	112
3.3.6.2 The notion of majesty	113
3.3.6.3 The king's anger and sudden changes of mood	115
3.3.6.4 The king's character	116
3.3.6.5 Visions and dreams	117
3.3.6.6 The relationship with Wolsey and Cromwell	118
3.3.7 The king's figure in <i>Bring Up the Bodies</i>	119
3.3.7.1 The king's physical appearance	119

3.3.7.2 Majesty and the king's business	119
3.3.7.3 The king's character	120
3.3.7.4 The king's relationship with Catherine	121
3.3.7.5 The king's relationship with Anne and Elizabeth	121
3.3.7.6 The king's relationship with Jane	123
3.3.7.7 The king's torments	123
3.3.7.8 The king's anger and changes of mood	124
3.3.8 Mantel's King Henry and past representations	125
<b>3.4 The key of the success of Henry VIII</b>	127
 <b>Conclusion</b>	 137
 <b>Bibliography</b>	 139
 <b>Riassunto italiano</b>	 149



## List of abbreviations

*BUTB*: Mantel, Hilary, *Bring Up the Bodies*, London: Fourth Estate, Harper Collins, 2013.

*H8*: Shakespeare, William; Fletcher, John, *King Henry VIII (All is True)*, edited by Gordon McMullan, London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006.

*WH*: Mantel, Hilary, *Wolf Hall*, London: Fourth Estate, Harper Collins, 2010.





## Introduction

This dissertation presents Henry VIII as a literary character, starting out with the depiction of the historical figure, to then arrive to Shakespeare and Fletcher's play *Henry VIII (All is True)* and finally to Hilary Mantel's novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. The aim is to show how various authors have depicted King Henry, and to give some reasons why he is still a very popular character in contemporary fiction. In fact, this monarch has always been very successful throughout the centuries as a literary figure, and also in representations in films and television series in recent years.

Since it is necessary to know the historical figure before getting to the representations of this figure in fiction, the first part of the first chapter focuses on Henry VIII's life and politics; therefore it includes his involvement in the government, his relationship with key political figures such as Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell, the life of his six wives, the matter of his divorce and his Reform. The second part of the first chapter shows how King Henry was seen by his contemporaries, who described his character and his abilities. This representation shows a difference between the first and second part of his reign. Then, the chapter focuses on what Holinshed wrote about him in his *Chronicles*, and Foxe in his *Actes and Monuments of Martyrs*, bearing in mind that both these sources were anti-catholic and generally favourable to the king. Finally, the chapter illustrates the content of Samuel Rowley's play *When You See Me, You Know Me*, and the figure of the king in that particular context.

The second chapter starts with a description of the play *King Henry VIII (All is True)* and discusses the question of its authorship: the play is in fact considered the result of a collaboration between Shakespeare and John Fletcher, and many scholars have discussed the attribution of its acts and scenes. After a summary of the plot, the chapter proposes a series of sources the authors could have used to write the play, underlining the similarities between this work and some of the passages, for example, in Foxe and Holinshed. A series of interpretations of this play follows, to then get to the figure of King Henry in the play. His passivity as a character and as a monarch is discussed in relation to characters like Cardinal Wolsey and the Duke of

Buckingham, while his more active role in the second part of the play is linked to his relationship to Archbishop Cranmer. The monarch's relationships with his wives Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn, and the one with his daughter Elizabeth are also taken into account. Finally, the chapter proposes an overall picture of the king in the play, considering his flaws and his qualities.

The third chapter starts out listing various contemporary representations of King Henry, in novels, films and television shows. Then, it introduces the historical novel, and gives an idea of what postmodernist fiction is and how it is related to the narration of history. Before getting to Hilary Mantel's novels, it describes the author's life, and the way the author conceived the novel, starting from the decision of whose point of view she wanted to adopt. A brief summary of the plot of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* is followed by an explanation of how the novels are structured, who the narrator is and what this entails, which types of language can be found in these works, and how these novels are different from postmodernist works. There is an explanation of which events presented in the sources discussed in chapter one and two of this work can be found in these novels as well. Then, the chapter arrives to the analysis of the complex character of King Henry in *Wolf Hall*, focusing on elements like his idea of majesty, his anger, his characters, his relationship with other characters, his torments, but also his physical aspect. The same procedure is used to talk about the king's figure in *Bring Up the Bodies*, where the relationships he has with other characters include Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn and Elizabeth, and Jane Seymour. The chapter also presents a comparison between Mantel's *Henry VIII* and the previous representations of the king that have been illustrated in this work. The last part of the third chapter tries to explain why Henry VIII is a character that still attracts the public, and why authors are still inspired to write about him nowadays, even though there will probably never be a definitive answer to his endless fascination.

# 1. Henry VIII

When one thinks about Henry VIII, the first things that come to mind are his many wives (and the fact that he might have killed some of them, if not, according to some, even all of them), the separation of England from the Roman Church, and the portrait of a fat man that is often showed in history books.

As Suzannah Lipscomb wrote in her article “Who is Henry VIII?”<sup>1</sup>, most of what people think about this king is made up of stereotypes, fuelled –she thinks- by film and television series portrayals of the king. In order to give a faithful portrayal of Henry VIII, she focuses on the differences between the first part and the second part of his reign. This chapter aims at showing who Henry was and what was said or written about him by his contemporaries.

## 1.1 His life and reign

### 1.1.1 A short biography

Henry VIII was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1491, in Greenwich, near London.<sup>2</sup> His father was Henry VII, his mother was Elizabeth of York, and he had an older brother, called Arthur. But Arthur died, aged only fifteen, in 1502, and Henry became then the heir to the throne. He was crowned king in 1509, not long before turning eighteen. Short after that, he married Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of Queen Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon. Catherine had been married, for five

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<sup>1</sup> Lipscomb, Suzannah, “Who was Henry VIII?”, in *History Today*, Volume 59, Issue 4, April 2009, (available at <http://www.historytoday.com/suzannah-lipscomb/who-was-henry-viii>, last visited: 08/11/2015.)

<sup>2</sup> All the historical references are taken from: Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Pilgrimage of Grace” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/event/Pilgrimage-of-Grace>, last visited: 16/11/2015); MacCulloch, Diarmaid (edited by), *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, policy and piety*, London: MacMillan Press, 1995; McGurk, John, *The Tudor Monarchies, 1485-1603*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Morrill, John. S., “Henry VIII” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-VIII-king-of-England>, last visited: 06/11/2015); Saccio, Peter, *Shakespeare’s English Kings: History, Chronicle and Drama*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Stater, Victor, *The political history of Tudor and Stuart England: a sourcebook*, London; New York: Routledge, 2000.

months, to Henry's brother Arthur. The pope, Julius II, granted a dispensation in order for them to be married.

In 1512 he joined Spain in war against France, partially claiming to be doing that to support the Pope: the King of France had, in fact, rebelled against him. In 1513 England won a battle in France, and Scotland invaded England, but their army was defeated, thanks to the earl of Surrey's victory in the battle of Flodden Field (the earl also regained his title of second duke of Norfolk), and the Scottish King died. The campaign in France was organised by Thomas Wolsey, who had entered the king's favours, and who, three years later, held the titles of Archbishop of York, cardinal, and lord chancellor of England. He was a friend and an adviser to the king, and he had power over the Court and the Council. As papal legate, he also represented the Pope's power in England. In the years between 1514 and 1529 he was, king aside, the most powerful man in the kingdom, and a wealthy one: the palace of Hampton Court, for example, was built for him. The king, from 1517, started to look for advice also in the figure of the humanist Thomas More. In 1520 England made an alliance with France, and the famous Field of the Cloth of Gold took place, a meeting that included a celebration with banquets and dances, and around five thousand people participated. It was only a year later, though, that Wolsey made an alliance with Spain, when Charles V became Holy Roman Emperor. France was defeated by Spain in 1525, but England formed an alliance with France again in 1527. In the end, Charles V took control over Italy, and Wolsey did not achieve his goal to become Pope. Spain and France made peace in 1529 at Cambrai, but England was not invited to participate.

In 1521, Edward Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, was arrested, and he was executed for treason on the 17<sup>th</sup> May. The alleged reason why he was executed was that he had plotted to kill the king and to take his throne, even though this cannot be proved. It is true, nonetheless, that he did have a claim to the throne due to his ascendance, and that he constituted a threat for the king, hence the decision of having him out of the way.

In the same year the king answered Martin Luther's ideas in a book called *Assertio septem sacramentorum adversus Martinum Luterum*, and he was rewarded by Pope Leo X with the title 'Defensor Fidei', that is, 'Defender of the Faith', a title

that was soon to be challenged. From his marriage to Catherine of Aragon he only had a daughter, princess Mary, born in 1516. There had been hope for a boy, but the queen's other pregnancies had ended up either in stillbirths, or in the child dying shortly after being born. To secure the succession, the King needed a son. From 1527, the king and his servants started to work towards his new objective: obtaining an annulment of his marriage to Catherine, on the grounds that the marriage had been against God law. The Pope, Clement VII, never consented to it. At the time, he was also prisoner of the emperor Charles V, who was Catherine's nephew. The failure of Wolsey in this particular matter caused him to be cast aside. He had many enemies at court, due to their envy of his predominant position, and of his wealth, and the king was convinced that he had betrayed him. In October 1529 he was accused of having abused of his authority, and he returned to York in April 1530, losing his titles, apart from that of Archbishop of York. Still, the king thought that the cardinal had kept his connections with Rome and with foreign powers such as France, and that he was trying to regain his power, and Wolsey was accused of treason in November, but died on his way to London, in Leicester Abbey.

The new chancellor was Thomas More, who did not approve of the divorce. The man who eventually helped the king out was Thomas Cromwell, one of Wolsey's servants, who started his ascendance at court in 1532, the same year Thomas More resigned from his place as a chancellor. The solution to the annulment of the marriage was not to obtain the consent from the Pope anymore, but to separate the English Church from Rome, placing the king as the Supreme Head of the Church. In 1533 the Act in Restraint of Appeals was approved, stating that all spiritual cases concerning wills and marriages were to be resolved in England, there could be no appeal to Rome. Thomas Cranmer became the archbishop of Canterbury, and declared the first marriage of the king to be null. This way, he could marry the king to Anne Boleyn, who might have been already pregnant at the time. In September of that year, the king and Anne Boleyn's daughter was born: her name was Elizabeth, later to be Queen Elizabeth I. Two were the acts passed in order to grant the king what he wanted: the first was the Act of Supremacy, stating that the king was the Supreme Head of the Church in England; the second was the Act of Succession, which enabled the succession to the throne to the children the king would have had

with Anne Boleyn. Those who refused to take the oath to these Acts were executed. That was Thomas More's fate: More had refused to speak and to declare anything either in favour or against the matter, saying that his silence was not an offence. Another victim was Bishop John Fisher, who had defended queen Catherine's cause. The king was not 'Defender of the Faith' anymore, and was excommunicated.

Cromwell was a skilled man, and he managed to arrange various plans. One of those, and a famous one, was the dissolution of the monasteries, which followed the separation from the Catholic Church. The wealth of these institutions passed into the hands of the crown. Two thirds of these properties, though, had to be resold, in order for the king to pay his debts. In 1536, the crown found a stark opposition to these plans of religious reform in the Pilgrimage of Grace, a rebellious movement that originated in the north of the country. Nine rebel armies were to be found in the North, not only fighting for religion, but also for their own personal interests (for instance, defending common land from enclosures, or, in general, rising against the control exercised by the government on the North.) The rebels were defeated in 1537, and they ended up not achieving anything. More than two hundred men were executed, among them were Robert Aske, a country gentleman and lawyer, and baron Thomas Darcy.

The king marriage to Anne Boleyn's was not his last. Anne was executed in 1536 for adultery and treason, even though the accuses were most probably false; in the same year, Catherine of Aragon, who had been sent away from court and was living at Kimbolton Castle, had died as well. Henry married Jane Seymour, who in 1537 gave him a son, Edward VI, but she died short after the baby's birth. Her marriage to the king signed the beginning of the ascension of the Seymour family. In the following years, a new suitable wife had to be found, and Cromwell chose Anne of Cleves, the sister of the Duke of Cleves. This choice was dictated by the need of forming an alliance with countries in Northern Europe against the Catholic France and Spain. But Henry was not happy with his bride, and this marriage lasted only six months before being declared null. This failure was detrimental to Thomas Cromwell, who he was arrested in 1540, only two months after receiving the title of Earl of Essex, and executed a month later. The king, now always very suspicious of everybody, was exasperated by everything that was happening to him, which he

considered as terrible misfortunes, including his ill health. His suffering influenced his temperament and actions. He married his fifth wife, Catherine Howard, a young niece of the duke of Norfolk. Catherine had had affairs with other men before the marriage, and it was said she still had a love relationship with one of these men while being married to the king, and for that she was executed. In 1543 he got married once again, with another Catherine, a widow called Catherine Parr, who survived him.

In 1542 the emperor and the king of France were, once again, one against the other. Henry VIII picked Spain's side, Scotland helped France. The Scottish king died, and this could have brought the possibility of an alliance through the marriage of the heirs of England and Scotland, but that did not happen, and a party favourable to the French controlled Scotland. Not only did Henry VIII lose the opportunity to rule over Scotland, but the expenses for the war were great. In 1546 it was already evident that the king's death was not too far away. He died on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 1547.

### 1.1.2 The king's involvement in the government

As Eric Ives underlines<sup>3</sup>, Henry did use ministers to govern, but this does not mean that he did not have a direct responsibility in the government of his country. For instance, he appointed people with a job in the royal estate, and those who administered justice in the kingdom (e.g. sheriffs, judges, etc.), and his signature was required often enough, at least "three or four times a day"<sup>4</sup>.

The royal palace was divided in public chambers and private chambers. The Privy Chamber needed a staff of grooms, with the groom of the stool at the head of it. The gentlemen of the Privy Chamber were not only Henry's closest servants, but also companions, who could influence the king and could eventually obtain more power at court. These servants could also embody the authority of the king, and Ives<sup>5</sup> remembers the episode of Wolsey's arrest: the earl of Northumberland was arresting him for high treason, Wolsey was not condescending to be taken away, but then he saw Walter Walsh, a gentleman of the Privy Chamber, and he surrendered. This

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<sup>3</sup> Ives, Eric, "Henry VIII: the Political Perspective", in MacCulloch, Diarmaid (edited by), *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, policy and piety*, London: MacMillan Press, 1995, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ivi, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ivi, p. 19.

authority was recognised not only in England, but also abroad, as these gentlemen also served to king Henry VIII as foreign ambassadors. The groom of the stool was so close to the king that he could even become his friend, as was the case with Henry's first two grooms, William Compton and Henry Norris. One of the groom of the stool's duties was keeping the private purse, that is, the money the king used for his personal expenses.

The court did not always stay in the same palace. King Henry had more than fifty houses, which Ives<sup>6</sup> classifies into two main groups: the first group is that of large properties, where the entire court could be held, and the court usually moved to these houses from October/November to June; the second is that of smaller houses, which were used to contain a smaller group of people, and were used especially when the king went hunting. In these situations, the king was physically away from his government and apparently, unlike his father, Henry seemed to be bored by political matters, and often delegated other people to fulfil his responsibilities. Samman<sup>7</sup>, though, states that Wolsey kept the king informed, and the king went to visit him even when he was away.

Ives<sup>8</sup> stresses three reasons why the king did not rule in a state of harmony with his Council. The first reason is that he did not like to be opposed, and he gave much importance to freedom of action, which is evident in the way he decided he wanted to attack France, which he did, in 1511, even though the councillors he inherited from his father were against it. The second reason is the fact that a new generation of gentlemen was ascending, and the Privy Chamber was a strong influence on the king. The third reason is that cardinal Wolsey was part of the council, and he did everything he could to satisfy the king's desires. The other councillors were not enthusiastic about the situation, but they consented to it. When Wolsey lost his position, there was a brief ruling by a group of councillors with the duke of Norfolk at the head of them, but the situation did not last long, because of the arrival of Cromwell (who lasted until 1540, the year of his execution.)

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<sup>6</sup> Ives, Eric, "Henry VIII: The Political Perspective", p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Samman, Neil, "Henry VIII: the Progresses of Henry VIII", in MacCulloch, Diarmaid (edited by), *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, policy and piety*, London: MacMillan Press, 1995, p. 72.

<sup>8</sup> Ives, Eric, "Henry VIII: The Political Perspective", p. 24.



To sum up what his role in politics was, Ives says that it is clear that he had “ultimate authority”<sup>9</sup>, but also that the important thing was that people who served him had to find a way to advance his will, and that his interest in political matters varied according to the specific matter. War, marriages and succession interested him more than other problems. Another thing that cannot be forgotten is his character, which influenced his political actions and decisions. Ives<sup>10</sup> quotes Charles de Marillac, a French ambassador, who wrote about Henry’s three main vices: avarice, a suspicious nature, and lightness and inconstancy. He agrees with this portrait, and stresses out that the king was obsessed by royal dignity, and he could not stand that to be threatened; he was also led by his own personal enthusiasms, adoring women and friends, and then abandoning them or even executing them. And many seem to agree on the point that, by the end of his reign, he had become very suspicious about everything and everyone.

### 1.1.3 Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell

The term ‘chief minister’ or ‘prime minister’ was not used at the time of Henry VIII, and Wolsey and Cromwell, the so-called ‘ministers’ of Henry’s government, had different titles. Wolsey was born as the son of a butcher<sup>11</sup> and cattledealer<sup>12</sup>, who studied at the University of Oxford. Five years after becoming a priest, in 1503, he was the chaplain of Sir Richard Fanfan, and it was Fanfan himself who recommended him to king Henry VII. Wolsey became the king’s chaplain in 1507, at the death of Fanfan, and then served Henry VII’s son, Henry VIII. Under Henry VIII’s reign, Wolsey became bishop of Lincoln (1514), archbishop of York (1514), cardinal (1515) and papal legate (1518). He started off as a royal almoner in 1509, and was appointed lord chancellor in 1515. He had an access to the king nobody else could boast about, and Guy states “Between 1515 and 1525 it can be argued that

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<sup>9</sup> Ives, Eric, “Henry VIII: The Political Perspective”, p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Thomas, Cardinal Wolsey”, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Cardinal-Wolsey>, last visited: 10/11/2015.)

<sup>12</sup> Saccio, Peter, *Shakespeare’s English Kings*, p. 213.

Henry VIII treated him more as a partner than as a servant.”<sup>13</sup> This does not mean that the king knew everything Wolsey did, or approved it. Sometimes, he did know and even took part in the cardinal’s plans, but he then proceeded to deny his personal responsibility and involvement, just like in the case of the Amicable Grant. The Amicable Grant was a tax imposed on both the laity and the clergy by Wolsey in 1525, and it had been imposed to find funds for the war in France. The result was a revolt, and Wolsey even changed the alliance with Spain against France to an alliance with France against Spain. To be fair, Wolsey had been able to solve this matter before, in 1513, when he obtained supplies and equipment for the war against France. By the end of the following year, he was very highly regarded by King Henry. In 1515 he became cardinal and lord chancellor.

Cromwell’s ascent had not been as fast. Not much is known about his early life: he probably lived in Italy for some time, and then in the Low Countries.<sup>14</sup> He became one of Wolsey’s servants in 1516, and in 1530, he became a King’s servant. Guy says he “never became the king’s partner”<sup>15</sup>, and that he “was more subtle, more emollient, less secure politically than Wolsey”<sup>16</sup>. And actually, he had to serve an older and more suspicious king. And “whereas Wolsey had been envied rather than feared, Cromwell was feared rather than envied”.<sup>17</sup> He was, in order, master of the jewels, chancellor of the Exchequer, principal secretary, lord privy seal, vice-regent in spirituals, and lord great chamberlain. His position was never secure, and after the failure of the king’s marriage to Anne of Cleves, and the accuses of Lutheranism brought against him, he was executed in 1540.

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<sup>13</sup> Guy, John, “Wolsey, Cromwell and the Reform of Government”, in *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, policy and piety*, edited by Diarmaid MacCulloch, London: McMillan Press, 1995, p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> Elton, Geoffrey, “Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex”, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Cromwell-earl-of-Essex-Baron-Cromwell-of-Okeham>, last visited: 10/11/2015.)

<sup>15</sup> Guy, John, “Wolsey, Cromwell and the Reform of Government”, p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

#### 1.1.4 Wales, Ireland and Scotland

Wales<sup>18</sup> had been conquered by the English already in the Middle Ages, but it was not until 1536, with the Act of Union, that all Welsh people became citizens of the Kingdom of England. English law, language and customs were to be extended to Wales. The process of religious reformation in Wales was quite slow, and it met with dissent, but it was eventually successful. Cromwell took care of assuring Wales a good government, and an act was put out to improve justice and the jury system: sheriffs in Wales had found it in fact difficult to organise juries and to convince them to declare criminals and transgressors of the law as guilty.

The situation in Ireland was different. The ninth earl of Kildare, Gearóid Óg, had to answer various charges in 1518 and 1519, but he waited a year to do so. This resulted in him being dismissed from his position of Chief Governor of Ireland and replaced by Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey (the future third Duke of Norfolk). Kildare was kept at the English court, and Surrey went to Ireland in 1520 to restore King Henry's authority. To obtain this, Surrey was supposed not to act using force, but instead using diplomacy. The earl did not have enough men nor money, both needed, and failed in his mission; therefore he was substituted in the job. The king made an alliance with the Ormond family, the Kildares enemies, but when Kildare made peace with the king, both Ormond and Kildare were brought to England. Ireland was in a situation of disorder, and Henry Fitzroy, Henry's illegitimate son, was sent to Ireland to control it. The position of Chief Governor was eventually given again to Kildare. Later on, the Irish chief was called again at court, in England, in his absence, his son was the vice deputy in Ireland. A rumour said that Kildare was dead in the Tower of London, and his son broke the allegiance to King Henry. This led to Kildare being arrested, and to his death. His son yielded, and was executed together with his uncles, in 1536. Many Gaelic lords took English titles, in return for their lands. In 1541 Henry was declared 'King of Ireland', instead of retaining the title of 'Lord' he had before.

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<sup>18</sup> All the historical references in the sub-paragraph, unless otherwise stated, are taken from: McGurk, John, *The Tudor Monarchies, 1485-1603*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

The situation with Scotland between 1512 and 1514 was a state of war. Even in the following years, it was not an easy task for the English monarchy to control Scotland. At eighteen King James V married Francis I of France's first daughter, and when she died, he married the Duc de Guise's daughter. They were therefore allied to France, and this made Henry VIII feel threatened, as he was surrounded by Catholic countries. As Henry was James's uncle (Henry's sister Margaret was James's mother), he offered James his daughter Mary's hand, but the Scottish king refused the proposal, unwilling to be controlled by England. Henry even invited him to York, because he wanted to make an agreement, but James was suggested by his councillors not to go there. King Henry did not take it well, and a campaign known as 'the rough wooing' took place in the northern borders of the kingdom, consisting in burning and raiding. In 1542, King James was defeated, and his daughter Mary (the future Mary, Queen of Scots) was born. When he died, she was only one year old, and Henry wanted her to marry his son Edward and to bring her up in England, but the Catholic part of the Scottish government did not allow it. A treaty took place in 1543, but a couple of months later she was secretly crowned Queen of Scotland. She was then sent away to France, where she stayed until she was nineteen. It was arranged she would marry the dauphin, Francis, the son of Henry II and Catherine De Médicis<sup>19</sup>.

#### 1.1.5 The King's divorce

Virginia Murphy<sup>20</sup> states that the king had already decided to divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, in the summer of 1527. In the same year, the rumours he wanted to obtain an annulment were already spreading at court. The first step to take was to ask scholars what they thought about the matter, to ask them if there could be the grounds for the annulment. The king's reason for wanting the

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<sup>19</sup> Fraser, Antonia, "Mary. Queen of Scotland." in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Mary-queen-of-Scotland>, last visited: 08/11/2015.)

<sup>20</sup> Murphy, Virginia, "The Literature and Propaganda of Henry VIII's First Divorce", in *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, policy and piety*, edited by Diarmaid MacCulloch, London: McMillan Press, 1995, p. 135.

annulment was that his union with Catherine was against divine law, and he thought that the Pope should not have allowed them to marry.

In fact, as has been previously stated in paragraph 1.1.1, Catherine had been married to Henry's brother, Arthur. But Arthur had died only five months after the wedding. If the marriage had been consummated, Henry and Catherine would have been linked in a relation of affinity, and, in order for them to marry, a papal dispensation would have been needed. Catherine swore the marriage had not been consummated, but, for there to be no doubt or problem, England and Spain asked for a papal dispensation. Pope Julius II granted it, and Henry and Catherine married in 1509. Their only living daughter was Mary, born in 1516. Henry knew he could have sons, because he fathered an illegitimate child, Henry Fitzroy. Therefore, he started to doubt the validity of his marriage to Catherine. In Leviticus (18:16), it is said that a man should not cover his brother's wife's nakedness, and again in Leviticus (20: 21), it is stated that those going against this rule would be punished by being childless. There is a passage in Deuteronomy (25:5), though, that not only allows, but even suggests the marriage between a man and his sister-in-law after the death of her husband, if they had not had any children. This makes the situation more complex. The validity of the papal dispensation was challenged on two grounds: the first being that the papal bull was invalid, due to mistakes in it (according to Murphy<sup>21</sup>, this was a way to imply that the Pope did have the power to grant such a dispensation, but that he did not act wisely in doing that in this case); the second being the importance and validity of the two passages in Leviticus (which totally questioned the authority of the Pope to grant the dispensation.)

There was a series of books written both against and for the king's cause. The ones said to have been written by king Henry were probably books he contributed to write and lent his name to. He insisted on the fact that, at the time the wedding took place, he did not know that he was doing anything wrong, and that, actually, people like Bishop Fisher (who supported Queen Catherine and wrote against the divorce) should have warned him instead of letting him live in sin. He cared about the

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<sup>21</sup> Murphy, Virginia, "The Literature and Propaganda of Henry VIII's First Divorce", p. 137.

salvation of his own soul, and of his kingdom. The king actually had a daughter, he was not, therefore, childless, like Leviticus says, but he made his scholars research the Hebrew version of the Bible, where it is said that the man discovering his brother's wife's nakedness will die with 'no sons'. And Henry had no male legitimate child.

A series of exchanges between the scholar Robert Wakefield and Bishop John Fisher disputed over the matter. Bishop insisted that the Gospel law and divine moral law did not forbid the marriage, only divine positive law did, and that there was absolutely no reason why the Pope could not have given a dispensation in Henry and Catherine's case. Wakefield (who had started off as a supporter of Fisher and the queen, and then changed sides) protested against his division of four different types of law, and said that the passage in Deuteronomy did not mean anything, that it was just meant for Jews. Other scholars supporting the king's side were John Stokesley (bishop of London) and Edward Foxe (a theologian from Cambridge). The latter even received a Hebrew alphabet, so that he could compare and analyse the versions of the Bible in Latin, Greek and Hebrew.

Thomas More's idea was that of simply stating that there had been errors in the papal bull, instead of involving divine law. The king talked to him, and later on a group of bishops and experts met. The arguments in favour or against the divorce were united in a single book, and Foxe and Gardiner (who became Bishop of Winchester in 1531, and who was Wolsey's agent in Rome) travelled to Italy, to see the Pope. The book was presented to him, but also to Cardinal Campeggio, who had been appointed as a judge in England. Throughout 1528, a succession of books were written, none of them mentioning mistakes in the papal bull. Trials took place in 1527 and 1529, the books were presented and started to be known by the name of their 'author': Henricus Octavus. By 1529 a group of king supporters had been formed, including Thomas Cranmer, who, together with Gardiner and Foxe moved closer to the Boleyns, as Cromwell had done. The king's printer printed a book under the title of *Censurae Academiarum*, a book that presented the support to the king's cause by seven foreign universities. The trials did not deliver a sentence, the court was just adjourned.

General councils, including the Council of Nicea, determined that the resolution of the cause had to be established in England. It was in 1533 that Cranmer annulled the king's first marriage and officially married him to Anne.

#### 1.1.6 Henry's wives

As has been said before, Henry's first wife was Catherine of Aragon. She was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 1485<sup>22</sup>, the daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. She was said to have auburn hair, blue eyes, and fair skin. She had a very good education in Latin, modern languages, and her teachers were important scholars of the time.<sup>23</sup> She was betrothed to the son of King Henry VII of England, and, after long negotiations and various agreements between Henry VII and the Spanish king and queen, in 1501 she went to England. A few weeks later, she married prince Arthur, and they lived together in Ludlow Castle, in Wales. The prince died only five months later, aged only fifteen. Not long after that she was betrothed to King Henry's other son, also called Henry. Various treaties and problems followed, according to changes in international politics, and prince Henry was even made to repudiate the betrothal in 1505. Catherine wrote to her father that she was not being treated very well, and that she was kept in a state of poverty<sup>24</sup>. In 1509, Henry VII died, and King Henry VIII married Catherine. Saccio describes her as a "distinguished person, learned, energetic, upright, popular, noble in character as well as descent."<sup>25</sup> As a queen, she was left governor in England while Henry was at war in France in 1513-1514. She visited Oxford and Cambridge, and she gave her contribute to support poor scholars. She was known as well as a very pious woman, and she supported the Order of Franciscans. Catherine was able to conceive a child many times, and she even had a boy in 1511, called Henry and nominated prince of Wales, but in February, he was already dead. The only child who survived was

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<sup>22</sup> Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Catherine of Aragon, Queen of England", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Catherine-of-Aragon>, last visited: 12/11/2015.)

<sup>23</sup> Davies, C. S. L. and Edwards, John, "Katherine (1485–1536)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, (available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4891>, last visited: 17/11/2015.)

<sup>24</sup> Davies, C. S. L. and Edwards, John, "Katherine".

<sup>25</sup> Saccio, Peter, *Shakespeare's English Kings*, p. 217.

princess Mary, born in 1516. The king hoped that a son would follow, but this never happened. Henry started working for his annulment, and Catherine resisted, claiming that her previous marriage had never been consummated, even confronting Henry personally in June 1527. Catherine kept contact with her nephew Charles V in Spain, hoping he would help her, and that he would work with the Pope to remove Wolsey from his position<sup>26</sup>. The Emperor did in fact sack Rome and kept the Pope, Clement VII, prisoner. Even after he was released, in December 1527, he was under the influence of the Emperor. Catherine kept living in the queen's apartments and presiding at court. Apparently, the sympathy of women, from common people to ladies, including the king's sister, Mary, went to her, rather than to Anne Boleyn. She saw the king for the last time in 1531<sup>27</sup>. Catherine had to go away from court, and was made to live in a series of different castles. She could not see her daughter Mary, but she kept her position and she refused, to the very last moment, to be considered as the Dowager Princess<sup>28</sup>. She got very ill in 1535, and she died on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1536, aged fifty, at Kimbolton, where she had been able to receive visits from the ambassador Chapuys, and where she lived surrounded by a Spaniard household. She had a small funeral, and she was then buried in Peterborough Abbey.

Anne Boleyn<sup>29</sup> was Henry VIII's famous second wife. Her birthday is not known, but it was probably around 1500<sup>30</sup> or 1507<sup>31</sup>. Her father was Sir Thomas Boleyn, an ambitious courtier and diplomat who started off as a merchant. Her mother was a noblewoman, Elizabeth Howard, daughter of the second duke of Norfolk. She was sent to the court of Margaret of Austria in 1513; when in 1514 king Henry's sister, Mary, married the King of France, Anne was there as a lady in waiting, and remained there even after the death of Louis XII and the return of Mary in England. She returned to England in 1522. It is known that her sister, Mary

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<sup>26</sup> Davies, C. S. L. and Edwards, John, "Katherine".

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> BBC History, "Catherine of Aragon", (available at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/people/catherine\\_of\\_aragon/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/people/catherine_of_aragon/), last visited: 15/11/2015.)

<sup>29</sup> Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Anne Boleyn, Queen of England", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Anne-Boleyn>, last visited: 12/11/2015.)

<sup>30</sup> Ives, Eric. W., "Anne (c.1500–1536)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, (available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/557>, last visited: 17/11/2015.)

<sup>31</sup> Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Anne Boleyn".



Boleyn, was King Henry's mistress in those years. Anne became one of Queen Catherine's ladies in waiting, and she seemed to be popular among men, between them was the poet Thomas Wyatt. There were rumours of her engagement to Henry Percy, the son of the earl of Northumberland, and apparently Cardinal Wolsey himself told Percy to end the relationship, in accordance with Percy's father. She was not particularly attractive, at least not in a conventional way, and some chroniclers even arrive to the point of saying –maliciously- that she had a sixth finger in her left hand. Apparently, she was smart and charming, had beautiful black eyes and a long neck. Here is a description of Anne from 1532, by a Venetian ambassador:

“She is of middling stature, with a swarthy complexion, long neck, wide mouth, bosom not much raised, and in fact has nothing but the King's great appetite, and her eyes, which are black and beautiful – and take great effect on those who served the Queen when she was on the throne.”<sup>32</sup>

She probably caught Henry VIII's attention already in 1522, when she played Perseverance in a court pageant<sup>33</sup>, but he probably became more interested in her in 1527, as in that year, he stated in a letter that he had been in love with her for a year. She was probably able to maintain the king's attentions for a long time, as she did not accept to become his mistress, and the king intended to marry her after the annulment he asked for, but Wolsey was not really keen on the matter, he would have preferred the king to marry a lady of higher birth, and probably a French princess. Anne disliked Wolsey as well, and she later chose Cromwell as her ally. She was criticised at court at the time, and did not seem to be very popular. Her situation offended many, and Catherine still had her supporters. She received the title of Marquess of Pembroke in 1532, and even went with the King to France for a state visit. Rumour has it that the king and Anne had a first, secret wedding. The official one took place in January 1533, when they were wed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Some, like Ives<sup>34</sup>, believe she was already pregnant at the time. She was recognised as Queen in April 1533, and she was crowned on the 1<sup>st</sup> June, in a ceremony that Thomas More chose not to attend. She chose her own motto: Catherine's had been ‘Humble and Loyal’, hers was ‘The Most Happy’. Her

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<sup>32</sup> Warnicke, Retha, M., *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family Politics at the Court of Henry VIII*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 58 (available at Google Books).

<sup>33</sup> Ives, Eric. W., “Anne”.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

sympathies seemed to go to the new church, and her position gave her the chance to advance the career of supporters of the new church, and it is known she was close to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cranmer. She read translations of the Bible, and supported the plan of reforming monasteries into educational places<sup>35</sup>. She was a cultivated woman, who appreciated music and art, and was a patroness to Hans Holbein the younger. Her daughter, princess Elizabeth, was born on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1533, and she was declared the king's heir, thus coming before Mary. In 1534, Anne said she was pregnant again. In September, she miscarried a six-month-old boy, and the king was disappointed. Anne's position was not the most stable, and she knew she had to have a son to make it stable. Anne got pregnant again, in 1535, but she gave birth to a stillborn child, reported at the time to be a boy, in January 1536, just a few days after Catherine of Aragon's death. The relationship between the king and Anne was also openly opposed by Mary, Henry and Catherine's daughter. In general, Anne was not very popular, due to the fact that the king had annulled his marriage to his first wife to marry her, and to the fact that she was partially considered responsible for the king's new religious politics. Ives<sup>36</sup> says that Anne's situation got worse when she fought with Thomas Cromwell, the matter being the use of the monasteries (Cromwell wanted to take their wealth for the king, she supported the idea of using them otherwise). Her almoner even pronounced a sermon against him, but the act for the dissolution was passed anyway. Still in 1536, both the conservative group and the group closer to the Boleyns had decided to get closer to Spain instead of France, and a meeting with the Emperor's ambassador, Chapuys, was organised. The king demanded Charles V to recognise Anne as queen, which was not a very diplomatic move. Ives<sup>37</sup> says that Cromwell started to convince the king that he should mistrust Anne. The fact that she loved having the company of many courtiers helped him out, and Cromwell interrogated a court musician called Mark Smeaton, as a witness to a discussion between Anne Boleyn and Henry Norris. Then Cromwell went to the king, and the king accused Norris of adultery, and sent him to the Tower. Instead of finding an impediment in the marriage, it was decided

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<sup>35</sup> Ives, Eric, W., "Anne".

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

to have Anne falsely accused. She was accused of adultery and treason, and she was arrested, along with her brother George, and Francis Weston, William Brereton, Thomas Wyatt, and Richard Page. The only man who confessed having had an affair with Anne was Mark Smeaton (and his confession had been extorted through torture.) Smeaton, Norris, Brereton and Weston were condemned for high treason on the 12<sup>th</sup> May. The trial for queen Anne and her brother George took place three days after, and she pleaded innocent. Her ‘lovers’ were executed on the 17<sup>th</sup> May. Anne was beheaded on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1536. She was buried in St Peter and Vincula, the church of the Tower of London.

Jane Seymour was Henry’s third wife<sup>38</sup>. She was the eldest daughter of Sir John Seymour, to him belonged Wolf Hall, a property in Wiltshire. He had been a gentleman of the King’s Privy Chamber. Her birth date is not known, but it was probably around 1508/1509<sup>39</sup>. She was a lady in waiting for Catherine of Aragon first, for Anne Boleyn then. She was described by the Emperor’s ambassador Chapuys as “of middle stature and no great beauty, so fair that one would call her rather pale than otherwise.”<sup>40</sup> She is often compared to Anne Boleyn in the fact that, from the point of view of her appearance and of her character, she was very different from the queen who preceded her. In 1535 the King’s progress stopped at Wolf Hall, honouring thus the Seymour family. In 1536 there were rumours at court that the King wanted to make her the new Queen. She was apparently very modest and refused to be the king’s mistress, and Chapuys<sup>41</sup> reported that, after Anne Boleyn had a miscarriage in 1536, Jane was offered presents by the king, but also that later on she refused money and a letter from him. She was betrothed to the king the day after Anne’s execution, and ten days after that they got married. Her brothers obtained very good positions at court, as well as grants and lands. Her motto as a queen was ‘Bound to Obey and Serve’, and as a queen, she seemed to enjoy court life, she travelled in various cities with the king and she went hunting with him. She was able

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<sup>38</sup> Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Jane Seymour, Queen of England”, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Jane-Seymour>, last visited: 15/11/2015.)

<sup>39</sup> Beer, Barrett, L. “Jane [Jane Seymour] (1508/9–1537)”, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, (available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14647>, last visited: 17/11/2015.)

<sup>40</sup> Beer, Barrett, L., “Jane”.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

to help the king's daughter Mary to return into her father's favours. She also seems to have been in good relationship with princess Elizabeth. In June of 1536 Henry Fitzroy died, but in 1537 she announced she was pregnant. She gave birth to a son on the 12<sup>th</sup> October, the eve of St Edward's day, and the baby was called Edward, and was baptised three days after. Her conditions were not very good, in fact, she died twelve days later. She is believed to have died of puerperal sepsis, also known as 'childbirth fever'. She died on the 24<sup>th</sup> October, at the age of twenty-eight. The fact that she was a gentle and obedient woman, that she gave the son the king wanted, and that she died after childbirth seemed to have had an effect on King Henry. Her body, after a grand funeral on the 12<sup>th</sup> November (it had been preceded by various other rituals), was brought to Windsor castle, where King Henry also lies, next to her. The king mourned her, wearing black until 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1538.

His next wife was Anne of Cleves<sup>42</sup>, born on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1515. She was chosen because Thomas Cromwell wanted an alliance with a Protestant country, and Anne was the Duke of Cleves's sister. France and Spain were in fact, at that time, allies, and England was afraid of the threat of the Catholic forces united. Hans Holbein, the famous painter, was sent in the Netherlands to paint Anne. She arrived in England in December 1539, and the king saw her on New Year's day. Apparently, she was less attractive in real life than she was in the painting. They were married on the 6<sup>th</sup> January, but the king did not like her: her English was not very good, either, and she had had a different type of education, compared to English ladies. The king even said to Cromwell that he was not able to consummate the wedding, and Anne was instructed to be more pleasant to the king.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the intimidating alliance between Spain and France was over. It was Cromwell that organised the match, as people at court reminded the king about, and Cromwell was actually executed in 1540. To get rid of his fourth wife, it was found out that Anne of Cleves had been engaged with the duke of Lorraine in the past, and that the end of the betrothal had never been rendered official. This, the king had known before, but he had been

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<sup>42</sup> Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Anne of Cleves, Queen of England", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Anne-of-Cleves-queen-of-England>, last visited: 15/11/2015.)

<sup>43</sup> Warnicke, Retha, M., "Anne [Anne of Cleves] (1515–1557)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, (available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/558>, last visited: 17/11/2015.)

assured that the engagement with the Duke of Lorraine was over, and he had reluctantly proceeded to marry Anne of Cleves. But, when the documents proving it were requested, Anne's brother did not provide them. This made her marriage to Henry invalid: the marriage was declared null in July 1540, and Anne accepted her condition. She received the title of 'Queen's sister', and a settlement with a good annual income, in England. She was invited more than once at court, especially during the festivities, and she was in good relationships both with princess Mary and princess Elizabeth. She was present at Queen Mary I Tudor's coronation. She died in 1557, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Catherine Howard, the king's fifth wife, was born probably between 1518 and 1524<sup>44</sup>. She was the daughter of Lord Edmund Howard<sup>45</sup>, the first Duke of Norfolk's younger son, and the second Duke of Norfolk's brother. Therefore, she was related to former Queen Anne Boleyn. Her father was poor, and she had nine siblings. She came to court as a lady in waiting for Queen Anne of Cleves, and the fact that the king expressed an interest in her and that she became queen is said to have been caused by his uncle Norfolk's plans (his uncle being in the conservative faction against Cromwell and other reformers) of exploiting the king's disappointment with Anne of Cleves. The king married Catherine, with a private ceremony, on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 1540, the same day Cromwell was executed. She was described by ambassador Charles de Marillac as "short and graceful rather than beautiful."<sup>46</sup> During the Christmas holidays in 1540-1541 she met Anne of Cleves at court, and gave gifts to her. As a queen, she begged the king to pardon some men, including Thomas Wyatt, accused of treason. In 1541 the king came to know that Catherine had had relationships with at least three men before their marriage, and Cranmer presented him the allegations. The men were Henry Mannock or Manox (Catherine's ex music teacher), Francis Dereham (her secretary), and Thomas Culpepper. She could still have had an affair with Culpepper, when she was married to the king, even though

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<sup>44</sup> Warnicke, Retha, M, "Katherine [Katherine Howard] (1518x24–1542)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 (available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4892>, last visited: 17/11/2015.)

<sup>45</sup> Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Catherine Howard, Queen of England", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Catherine-Howard>, last visited: 15/11/2015.)

<sup>46</sup> Warnicke, Retha, M, "Katherine [Katherine Howard]".

we do not have proves. We know that they met in her private chambers, and that one of the things that convinced historians was a letter she sent to Culpepper, which she signed saying “Yours as long as lyffe endures”<sup>47</sup>, even though in the letter she never refers to him as being her lover. Catherine at first denied her relationships with Manox and Dereham, but then she told Cranmer that she had affairs with them in the past. She denied that the relationship with Dereham had continued after her marriage to the king, and so did he. Cranmer reported that she was frightened, when he went to interrogate her. It was Dereham who said his place had been taken by Culpepper, and even though Culpepper and Catherine first denied, then she said he was the “aggressor in the relationship.”<sup>48</sup> Culpepper said it was Catherine who approached him first, and said he had an intention to have an affair with her, but never did. In December 1541, he was beheaded for treason. Dereham was “hanged, disembowelled, beheaded, and quartered.”<sup>49</sup> In 1542 a bill was passed in Parliament, stating that an unchaste woman could not marry a king, because that was treason. On 13<sup>th</sup> February 1542, she was beheaded, and Jane Rochford (George Boleyn’s widow, and her lady in waiting) was executed as well. She was buried in Saint Peter and Vincula, the Tower chapel.

Henry’s last wife was Catherine Parr<sup>50</sup>, who was born in 1512, the daughter of Sir Thomas Parr of Kendall. She was an educated woman, who knew Latin, French and Italian.<sup>51</sup> She had two husbands; both of them had died. She seemed to be wanting to marry Sir Thomas Seymour (Jane Seymour’s brother) but her family pushed her towards a marriage with the king. She married King Henry in 1543. She was “of medium height, with red hair and grey eyes”<sup>52</sup> and was lively and intelligent. She took an interest in the arts and in dancing. She had a good relationship with all the children of the king, and she cared about Prince Edward and Princess Elizabeth’s education, and she convinced the king to bring Mary and Elizabeth back in line for

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<sup>47</sup> Warnicke, Retha, M, “Katherine [Katherine Howard]”.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>50</sup> Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Catherine Parr, Queen of England”, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Catherine-Parr>, last visited: 15/11/2015.)

<sup>51</sup> James, Susan, E. “Katherine [Katherine Parr] (1512–1548)”, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, (available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4893>, last visited 17/11/2015.)

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

succession, after their brother Edward. She sympathised with Lutheran ideas, and some people at court, including Stephen Gardiner, wanted to bring her down for this reason, along with the fact that she acted as regent during the campaign against France. But the king died before anything against her could be committed. After Henry's death, she did not take the regency, Edward Seymour, prince Edward's uncle did. She actually married again, to Sir Thomas Seymour this time, but she died giving birth to a daughter, in 1548.

#### 1.1.7 The Henrician Reform

Before the Reform, Henry VIII presented himself as pious, he heard many masses a day, he went on pilgrimage, he did everything he was expected to do. As has been said before, he declared he had started war against France because Francis I had rebelled against the Pope. He had been awarded with the title of 'Defensor Fidei' in 1521, writing against Luther. Things changed when he started doubting his marriage and his annulment was not granted.

Already in 1529<sup>53</sup>, the king distanced himself from Wolsey to get closer to other aristocrats at court, like Charles Brandon duke of Suffolk (a companion to the King, and also his brother-in-law) and Norfolk (the third Duke, the son of the man who caused the defeat of the Scottish in 1513), who were not drawn to the Continental Reform, or rather despised it, but, who, at the same time, did not like high clergy and their aim to be as important as aristocrats (which was perfectly embodied by Wolsey.) They wanted Wolsey to fall, but also to attack the Church hierarchy. Anne Boleyn herself seemed to have had a real interest in the reform and she actually had contacts with Cambridge scholars. Cromwell's religious position, for MacCulloch<sup>54</sup>, is unclear, while Cranmer was at first quite conservative, and then started to show interest in Luther's ideas: he even married –in secret- the niece of a

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<sup>53</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid, "Henry VIII and the Reform of the Church", in *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, policy and piety*, edited by Diarmaid MacCulloch, London: McMillan Press, 1995, p. 166.

<sup>54</sup> Ivi, p. 170.

German theologian, Andreas Osiander<sup>55</sup>. Cromwell and Cranmer worked together, and there is evidence of them exchanging private letters. It is not to forget, in fact, that Cromwell was appointed the title of vice-regent in spirituals and vicar general. Cranmer actually advised Cromwell, regarding the king's fourth marriage, to pick an English wife, but apparently Cromwell did not want to choose one family over the others (and of course, he wanted to cement an alliance with another non-Catholic country.)

The opinions of those in favour of the reform were not, anyway, compact. The things that united them, according to MacCulloch<sup>56</sup>, were their common dislike for radicalism, and the fact that they needed to protect themselves from the attacks coming from conservatives. The conservatives were divided between themselves, and their lack of a unified front is what also eventually brought them down.

The king's idea was that of maintaining balance, of avoiding extremisms, of being united. This "could turn to murderous paranoia"<sup>57</sup> because people from both sides, that is Catholics and 'Eucharists', were both executed. The king also changed his mind about the existence of Purgatory: he had previously attacked a paper which argued against the existence of Purgatory, but he eventually distanced himself from the notion of it. He had also said, in the past, that individual confession to a priest was an institution by God, just to say that it actually was not. This does not mean that he was a 'Lutheran': he remained a Catholic, conservative in many aspects of religion, and marriage, baptism and Eucharist were basic and important sacraments for him. He even refused to change his mind on the marriage of clericals.

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<sup>55</sup> Elton, Geoffrey R., "Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Cranmer-archbishop-of-Canterbury>, last visited: 08/11/2015.

<sup>56</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid, "Henry VIII and the Reform", p. 172.

<sup>57</sup> Ivi, p. 179.



## 1.2 The King seen by his contemporaries

### 1.2.1 His character and abilities

It has already been stated what the French ambassador, Charles de Marillac, wrote about him. Other ambassadors wrote their opinion about the king, both concerning his looks and his personality.

Lipscomb, who researched about Hampton Court Palace in occasion for its 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary, stresses the difference between the first and second part of his reign. In her article, she quotes a letter by William Blount, lord Mountjoy, to the humanist Desiderius Erasmus, concerning Henry's ascension to the throne:

"When you know what a hero [the king] now shows himself, how wisely he behaves, what a lover he is of justice and goodness, what affection he bears to the learned, I will venture that you need no wings to make you fly behold this new and auspicious star. If you could see how all the world here is rejoicing in the possession of so great a prince, how his life is all their desire, you could not contain your tears of joy. The heavens laugh, the earth exults, all things are full of milk, of honey, of nectar. Avarice is expelled from the country. Liberality scatters wealth with bounteous hand. Our King does not desire gold or gems or precious metals, but virtue, glory and immortality."<sup>58</sup>

This was an enthusiastic opinion, maybe also dictated by the fact that it was the beginning of his reign, and such praise was common. It is also underlined by Saccio<sup>59</sup> that people seemed to be happy about the ascension of their new king and his qualities. It appears that king Henry was quite praised and admired not only when he first sat on his throne, but throughout the first twenty years of his reign. Henry was described as a good-looking man. A Venetian ambassador called Pasqualigo wrote, in 1515, to Sebastian Giustinian, that:

"His Majesty is the handsomest potentate I ever set eyes on; above the usual height, with an extremely fine calf to his leg, his complexion very fair and bright, with auburn hair combed straight and short, in the French fashion, and a round face so very beautiful, that it would become a pretty woman, his throat being rather long and thick. He was born on the 28th of June, 1491, so he will enter his twenty-fifth year the month after next. He speaks French English, and Latin, and a little Italian, he plays well on the lute and harpsichord, sings from book at sight, draws the bow with greater strength than any man in England, and jousts marvellously."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Lipscomb, Suzannah, "Who is Henry VIII?"

<sup>59</sup> Saccio, Peter, *Shakespeare's English Kings*, p. 211.

<sup>60</sup> McGurk, John, *The Tudor Monarchies, 1485-1603*, p. 46.

Therefore, he states both his attractiveness, and his accomplishments, such as his knowledge of languages, his ability to play music and to sing, and his prowess in using the bow and arrow and jousting. Francesco Chiericato, the Apostolic Nuncio in England, was also praising king Henry, saying he was “a most invincible King, whose acquirements and qualities are so many and excellent that I consider him to excel all who ever wore a crown.”<sup>61</sup> And, just like Pasqualigo had done, others praised him for his ability in physical activities: he danced very well, he liked tennis, horse riding and hunting. Ambassador Sebastian Giustinian said he was: “not only very expert in arms, and of great valour, and most excellent in his personal endowments, but... likewise so gifted and adorned with mental accomplishments of every soil we believe him to have few equals in the world.”<sup>62</sup> Again, this emphasises the fact that the king was so good, that few others could be as good as he was. The king, while still young, was apparently often in full spirits, and he liked spending time entertaining himself with various kinds of shows, banquets and sports. His wardrobe was fine too, he wore precious fabrics and jewels.

As to his character, apart from his predisposition to gaiety, many notice he was a nice man. Giustinian called him “affable and gracious”<sup>63</sup> and somebody who “harmed no one”<sup>64</sup>. William Roper, Thomas More’s son-in-law, said:

“And for the pleasure he took in company, would his grace suddenly times come home to his house at Chelsea, to be merry with him, whither on a time unlooked for, he came to dinner with him; and after dinner, in a fair garden of his, walked with him by the space of an hour, holding his arm about his neck [...] as I have never seen him do to any other except Cardinal Wolsey.”<sup>65</sup>

Erasmus himself called him “a man of gentle friendliness, and gentle in debate; he acts more like a companion than a king”.<sup>66</sup>

These descriptions offer a contrast with descriptions of the same man, later on in his life and reign. One of the most evident changes was the physical one: the king put on quite a lot of weight, especially after his 45<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1536. As to his character, it was usually noted how he was inconstant, cruel, prone to anger, which

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<sup>61</sup> Lipscomb, Suzannah, “Who is Henry VIII?”.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>65</sup> McGurk, John, *The Tudor Monarchies*, p. 46.

<sup>66</sup> Lipscomb, Suzannah, “Who is Henry VIII?”.

caused worries in his councillors and in the courtiers. His ill health could be partially be deemed responsible for his changes of mood: he had an inflamed ulcer in the leg, which became worse after a jousting accident in 1536, “this ulcer brought him constant and debilitating pain”<sup>67</sup>. Lipscomb thinks the beginning of this ‘descent’ started off exactly in 1536: he fell from his horse in January of that year, and from that moment on, he could not devote himself to physical activity, which helped him to grow fat; Anne Boleyn’s suffered a miscarriage, and later on she was arrested and executed; his son Henry Fitzroy died; the risings in the North started the Pilgrimage of Grace. This could help us understanding why his character was not as brilliant as before, and why he turned more violent and suspicious, even though it is not a complete explanation nor an excuse to any of his actions.

### 1.2.2 Holinshed’s *Chronicles*

An image of king Henry VIII –and an interpretation of historical facts- is given to us in the third volume of *Chronicles* by Raphael Holinshed, a chronicler and translator born around 1525. During Queen Mary I’s reign, he worked for Reyner Wolfe, a printer, and an evangelical. These *Chronicles* were composed by using various other sources, that cannot be trusted completely<sup>68</sup>. Even though they are known as *Holinshed’s Chronicles*, they were actually the result of a collaboration of authors<sup>69</sup>. The first edition was published in 1577, the second in 1587. The *Chronicles* are to be considered as an evangelical source, that is why it is not surprising that King Henry is painted favourably, while Cardinal Wolsey is not. In the passages in the *Chronicles* concerning King Henry, the king is in fact always described as a noble and wise man, while the stress is often on the person of Wolsey, represented as a negative character.

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<sup>67</sup> Lipscomb, Suzannah, “Who is Henry VIII?”.

<sup>68</sup> Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Raphael Holinshed, English chronicler”, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Raphael-Holinshed>, last visited: 10/11/2015.)

<sup>69</sup> Clegg, Cyndia Susan, “Holinshed, Raphael (c.1525-1580?)”, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, (available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13505>, last visited 27/11/2015.)

Holinshed describes the famous meeting between Henry VIII and King Francis I. According to his version, the French king really wanted to “continue the friendship latelie begun betwixt him and the king of England”<sup>70</sup>, and it is stated that it was Wolsey who insisted to the king that they should meet “declaring how honourable, necessarie, and convenient it should be for him to gratifie his friend therein”<sup>71</sup>. The meeting was organised, and letters were written to lords and ladies in order for them to attend the meeting. The chronicle states that the Duke of Buckingham, though, did not seem very happy about the prospect: “he knew not for what cause so much monie should be spent about the sight of a vaine talk to be had”<sup>72</sup>. Holinshed says that the cardinal knew about it, and he knew the Duke called him “a vile and importunate person”<sup>73</sup>. Therefore, he decided to do everything he could to have the duke on the trip, and meanwhile he tried to do what he could “to bring the duke out of the kings favour”<sup>74</sup>. The first day of the meeting, that became known as “The Field of the Cloth of Gold”, was the 7<sup>th</sup> June 1520, and the two kings were both accompanied by a great number of noblemen, and wore rich clothes and jewels. Henry and Francis met first on horseback, than on foot, and embraced each other and exchanged courteous words. Then they went in a tent made of cloth of gold, where they spent time talking and banqueting. Everything stated about Henry VIII (and Francis I) is said to state how noble and courteous he was. It is, though, Wolsey who talks him through to make him meet the French king.

Holinshed’s chronicle continues with the cardinal, who, in the meantime, seemed to be wanting to find a way to bring down the Duke of Buckingham, and he called for Charles Knevet, “the dukes surveior”<sup>75</sup>. Knevet told him that the Duke often talked about taking Henry’s crown, if Henry were to die, and that he threatened to punish the cardinal. Not only that: Knevet says the Duke had thought of a plan to kill the king. According to the chronicle, the cardinal talked to the king, and Buckingham was brought to the Tower of London, and accused of high treason.

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<sup>70</sup> Holinshed, Raphael, from “The Third Volume of Chronicles”, in *Later English history plays: King John, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VIII*, edited by Geoffrey Bullough, London: Routledge and Paul, 1960, p. 454.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>72</sup> *Ivi*, p. 455.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>74</sup> *Ivi*, p. 456.

<sup>75</sup> *Ivi*, p. 458.

Holinshed says that “inquisitions were taken in diverse shires of England of him”<sup>76</sup>, and it was said he was organising a sort of revolt against the king. Holinshed then continues to talk about the trial, and says that Buckingham pleaded innocent. He denied the accuses to be true, but the king’s attorney had confessions, examinations and “proofes of witnesses.”<sup>77</sup> The witnesses were brought forth, between them was Charles Knevet. The judge, the duke of Norfolk, asked the duke of Suffolk if the duke was guilty or not, and he and the other earls and lords declared him to be guilty of high treason. Holinshed writes that Norfolk “wept”<sup>78</sup>, and sentenced him to death. The Duke of Buckingham said again that he was not a traitor, that the king was a gracious prince, and asked the lords to pray for him. On the 17<sup>th</sup> May 1521 he was led to the scaffold, and said he “offended the kings grace through negligence and lack of grace”<sup>79</sup>, asked the noblemen to pray for him and said he died as the king’s true man. He was then beheaded with an axe. Holinshed comments on the fact saying that Buckingham was noble, but he should have been in allegiance to his king, and he was not, and says:

“Such is the end of ambition, the end of false prophesies, the end of evill life, and evill counsell; but speciallie the end of malice, which grew to so huge and so monstrous a fire in the hautie hart of the proud cardinall, that nothing could assuage it, but the bloud of this noble duke, against whome he had procured this processe in judgement endend with the execution of death: the torments whereof were (as it seemeth by the sentence of the judge) much diminished through the mercie of the king...”<sup>80</sup>

In no part of the text it is suggested that Buckingham was innocent, and that the king’s justice was wrong. No wrong is said of the king, whose action was merciful: he turned the judge’s sentence (which originally condemned Buckingham to be hanged, cut down alive, have his members cut off and thrown in the fire, have his bowels burnt, his head cut off, and his body divided) into a death by beheading. The Duke of Buckingham appears to be a nobleman who made the big mistake of going against his king, but the man that Holinshed condemns in his narration is Cardinal Wolsey, who could not be satisfied unless he got Buckingham’s blood.

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<sup>76</sup> Holinshed, Raphael, “The Third Volume of Chronicles”, p. 459.

<sup>77</sup> *Ivi*, p. 461.

<sup>78</sup> *Ivi*, p. 462.

<sup>79</sup> *Ivi*, p. 463.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*.

Holinshed also states that there was a rumour, in London, in 1527, that the marriage between king Henry and his wife was not lawful, and that the king would want a divorce to marry the duchess of Alançon. He says that “the king was offended with those tales”<sup>81</sup> and charged the mayor of London to make these rumours stop. This doubt was moved, and the king wanted to have the case examined. And like a “wise and sage prince”<sup>82</sup>, he called the learned men of the kingdom to hear their opinions. He also listened to the opinions of those in favour to the queen. He presented his cause to Rome, asked for the opinions of European universities, and even asked Rome to “send to his realme a legat, which should be indifferent, and of a great and profound judgment.”<sup>83</sup> Rome sent him Cardinal Campeggio. The place where the cardinal heard the cause was, says Holinshed, Blackfriars, and reports how the trial went, starting from saying where everyone was sitting, and going on by reporting Catherine’s talk. The chronicle reports that she said she was just a poor woman, who never offended the king, that she had been his “true and humble wife”<sup>84</sup>. She is said to have affirmed that she would be glad to go away in shame, if she did anything against the king. She went away, and was called back to return in the room, but she replied she was going out of the court, and she never made an appearance at trials again. The king said she had been a good wife, and that she had all the qualities of a woman of her status. The chronicle says he also confirmed, at Cardinal Wolsey’s request, that Wolsey was not the one who stirred his doubts about his marriage: it was actually a French bishop, when there was talk of an union between the dauphin of France and the king’s daughter Mary. Apparently, this bishop wanted to know if Mary was a legitimate child, since Catherine had been married to Arthur. That is how the king’s conscience started doubting the validity of the marriage. He realised he was not given a male son, which must have meant that God was angry with him. He therefore wanted to know if that marriage could be considered unlawful and he could marry another woman, lawfully. That was the first session. Holinshed also says that it is to be stressed that there was tension between the queen and the king, because the queen did not like Cardinal Wolsey, and did not

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<sup>81</sup> Holinshed, Raphael, “The Third Volume of Chronicles”, p. 465.

<sup>82</sup> Ivi, p. 466.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>84</sup> Ivi, p. 467.

want to be judged by him. There were other sessions, and Holinshed said the king tried to convince the queen, by sending to her cardinal Wolsey and cardinal Campeggio, who told her the best choice would have been to let the king deal with the matter, and acconsent to his decisions, instead of resisting him. Holinshed reports that she could not take a decision, because her advisers, people she trusted, were in Spain, while in England it would be difficult for people to take her side against the king's. Then the chronicle tells that she took the cardinals to the side, and spoke to them, and then they referred the conversation to the king. The case went forward, until the last session came. Campeggio said that he would make no judgment until he heard back from Rome, the court was dissolved, and "no more doone".<sup>85</sup> Holinshed says that Campeggio returned to Rome, and Henry was not satisfied at all. The king is here cast again in good light, nothing in the text suggests that his doubts about his marriage were not real doubts.

Holinshed also writes about Wolsey's fall. He asserts that Wolsey did not like Anne Boleyn, and that he even wrote to the Pope, asking him to delay the divorce, so that he could talk to the king and discourage him from marrying Anne. This was done secretly, but the king came to know it, and the other noblemen started accusing him of things they knew to be true, and even "made a booke conteining certeine articles"<sup>86</sup> against the cardinal. The chronicle states that the king sent the dukes of Suffolk and Norfolk at Westminster, and asked the cardinal to surrender the great seal, and to go to Asher, a house near Hampton Court. The cardinal believed they had no such authority to do so, and refused to do it. Suffolk and Norfolk came again the next day, bringing the king's letters, and this time Wolsey gave them the seal. Among the accuses moved against the cardinal were these: writing "Ego and rex meus" in his letters, thus putting the king in a subordinate position in respect to his own; doing actions (for example, to conclude leagues) without the king's permission; sending a great amount of money to Rome, to obtain his dignities. These articles were signed and read by the cardinal. He had to go back to York, but he stopped at Richmond and Southwall, and was arrested for treason in 1530. The Earl of Northumberland came to arrest him, but Wolsey would not surrender, he said the

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<sup>85</sup> Holinshed, Raphael, "The Third Volume of Chronicles", p. 471.

<sup>86</sup> Ivi, p. 472.

Earl did not have a commission that allowed him to do so. But then he saw Walsh, a member of the Privy Chamber (as stated in paragraph 1.1.2 of this chapter), and told him he would surrender to him, but not to Northumberland. On the way south the cardinal was ill, and stopped many times. At Leicester the abbot welcomed him and he stayed there, getting sicker and sicker, and Holinshed says he told the abbot he knew he was about to die. And Wolsey said:

“If I had served God as diligentlie as I have doone the king, he would not have given me over in my greie haire: but it is the just reward that I must receive for the diligent paines and studie that I have had to doo him service, not regarding my service to God, but onelie to satisfie his pleasure.”<sup>87</sup>

And then he wished well to the king and died. Wolsey therefore, according to this text, realises on his deathbed that he did wrong in being so involved in politics. Holinshed reinforces this idea by saying that this was the end of pride and arrogance, and describes Wolsey as “the hautiest man in all his proceedings”<sup>88</sup>, saying he cared more about himself than anything else, unlike his profession would have required. Holinshed’s editors also insert Hall’s description of Wolsey, who said the cardinal was a double person: he lied, he made promises he did not keep, giving clergy a bad example.

Holinshed also makes reference to the king’s marriage to Anne Boleyn, saying they married secretly on the 14<sup>th</sup> November, and that few people knew about it before Easter. Queen Catherine was not to be called queen anymore, but princess Dowager. Anne was crowned, and Thomas Cranmer became a man of great importance. He also says Elizabeth was born on the 7<sup>th</sup> September, and briefly describes the baptism. He talks about Catherine’s death at Kimbolton, and says she commended her daughter to the king. She died on the 8<sup>th</sup> January, and Anne had a miscarriage on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> Holinshed, Raphael, “The Third Volume of Chronicles”, p. 476.

<sup>88</sup> Ivi, p. 477.



### 1.2.3 *Actes and Monuments of Martyrs*

John Foxe was a preacher and a clergyman<sup>89</sup>, who worked for the Reformation, and wrote the accounts of martyrs who defended the cause of Protestantism. He was born in 1516 or 1517<sup>90</sup>, and who embraced the evangelic faith while studying at Oxford. He felt he belonged to a minority, and that he was under scrutiny for his actions.<sup>91</sup> He worked as a tutor for the earl of Surrey's children, but his teaching and his writings came to a halt when Queen Mary accessed the throne. He left England, and his work, *Commentarii rerum in ecclesia gestarum*, was published first in Latin and abroad (he had to go away from England during Queen Mary I's reign), then in English, for the first time in 1563. Other three editions followed, the last one being the 1583 edition quoted here. The English title is *Actes and Monuments of these Latter and Perillous Dayes* but the book is also known as *Actes and Monuments of Martyrs* or simply *The Book of Martyrs*.

Foxe occupies himself with the accuses against the Archbishop of Canterbury and the king's intervention in that matter. He asserts that some of the members of the Council were worried by the fact that "the Realme was so enfected with heresies and heretickes"<sup>92</sup> and they thought that the king should put a stop to this. They accused the bishop of Canterbury to be the main responsible for the spread of these heresies. The king wanted to know who accused him of that, but nobody dared to go against the Archbishop, they just said that the king could consider sending him to the Tower, and then proves and accuses would come. The king decided the Archbishop would have his trial the next day, "(but yet meaning not to have him wronged...)"<sup>93</sup> The king sent a man to the Archbishop, and Cranmer came to court, and was told what would happen to him the next day. Cranmer did not protest, but just said he would do what would please the king, and even thanked him for letting him go to his own trial, and said he could defend himself from the accuses. To that the king answered saying

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<sup>89</sup> Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "John Foxe, British clergyman", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Foxe>, last visited: 10/11/2015.)

<sup>90</sup> Freeman, Thomas, S., "Foxe, John (1516/17-1587)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, (available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10050>, last visited: 27/11/2015.)

<sup>91</sup> Freeman, Thomas, S. "Foxe, John".

<sup>92</sup> Foxe, John, "Actes and Monuments of Martyrs", p. 485.

<sup>93</sup> Ivi, p. 486.

that it would be easy for the councillors to create false accuses against Cranmer, and that the archbishop had many enemies. But “Your enemies shall not so prevayle against you, for I have otherwyse devised with my selfe to keepe you out of their hands.”<sup>94</sup> It is stated that then he told Cranmer to go to the trial, and, if his persuasions did not work, he would have to show the councillors his ring, the king’s ring, and say he appealed to the king. The next morning the Council called for the Archbishop, and he came to the door of their chamber, but he was not let in: he was left to wait outside, with pages and servants. The king’s physician informed the king that the Archbishop was left there standing, and the king told him to wait, because they would hear soon from the Council. When, finally, Cranmer entered the chamber, he did as the king bid him the day before, and after defending himself with no results, he showed the councillors the king’s ring. The councillors were in amazement, but the Earl of Bedford affirmed he said from the beginning that he knew that would have been the result, and that “Do you thinke that the King will suffer this man finger to ake?”<sup>95</sup> They all went to the king, and passed the case into his hands. The king reproached them, saying he thought his councillors to be wiser. Instead, they had decided “the Primate of the realme”<sup>96</sup> waiting outside the room, like a servant. He would have expected them to treat him justly, and like a councillor. This, Foxe’s text reports, made him think they acted with malice against him, and that the Archbishop was a worhty man: “the king most entirely loved him and alwaies would stand in hys defence whosoever spake against hym: as many other times the Kinges pacience was by sinister information agaynst him tried.”<sup>97</sup> The king here is again shown in a positive light, helping his adviser, and even organising this whole plot in order to reprimand his Council, because he knew the councillors accused the Archbishop rather because they were his enemies, than for real crimes.

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<sup>94</sup> Foxe, John, “Actes and Monuments of Martyrs”, pp. 486, 487.

<sup>95</sup> Ivi, p. 488.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>97</sup> Ivi, p. 489.

### 1.3 Rowley's *When You See Me, You Know Me*

Samuel Rowley was both an actor and a playwright, who worked with various companies, including the company Admiral's Men after 1601<sup>98</sup>. His play *When You See Me, You Know Me*, also known as *The Famous Chronicle Historie of King Henrie the Eight* was published in 1605, and seems to have been performed the year before. Bullough<sup>99</sup> says it could have been performed at the reopening of the Fortune Theatre on Easter Monday 1604, when the company the Admiral's Men had already become Prince Henry's men. Bullough affirms that this play is "very unhistorical"<sup>100</sup>: not only it spreads from 1514-1544, putting together characters that did not coexist at court at the same time, but there are also various ridiculous elements. Bullough thinks that this play might have been conceived as a celebration for Henry's son Edward, who is present more than once on scene. In order to include him, the play is set later in the reign, not at his beginning, but still, Wolsey is alive (when he was actually already dead in 1530, and prince Edward was born in 1537.) The divorce from Catherine of Aragon is ignored, and so is the marriage with Catherine Howard, while Anne Boleyn is mentioned. The play opens up with the arrival of some French ambassadors, who are in England to organise a marriage between the King of France, Louis XII, and Henry VIII's sister Mary. This really happened in 1514, but, in the play, king Henry has to leave the meeting because Jane Seymour is having her baby. In the fourth scene, we witness a sad king who has lost his wife (they tell him he has to choose between his son's life and his wife's, because the physicians cannot possibly save both of them, and he is persuaded by Jane to save prince Edward), and the fools perform for him. He has also just obtained the title 'Defender of the Faith', which he actually received from the Pope in 1518. The following scene is a comic scene, where the king gets arrested and is then released when Suffolk arrives to get him out. He then sends Suffolk to France: Louis XII has died, and Henry's sister has to be brought home, which happened in 1515. In this scene we learn that he is

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<sup>98</sup> Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Samuel Rowley, English dramatist" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-Rowley>, last visited: 10/11/2015.)

<sup>99</sup> Bullough, Geoffrey, "Henry VIII, Introduction" in *Later English history plays: King John, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VII*, London: Routledge and Paul, 1960, p. 438.

<sup>100</sup> Ivi, p. 437.

married to Anne of Cleves and orders to send her away, an event occurred in 1540. He also says his next wife will be Catherine Parr. Later on, Wolsey laments the fact that he does not like queen Catherine Parr, whom he believes to be on the Lutherans' side. The next scene sees Henry going mad, because Suffolk has married his sister. In scene ten prince Edward appears, with his teacher, the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer. Then the Queen talks to Bishops Bonner and Gardiner about religion, Gardiner accuses her of treason and king Henry orders to arrest her. In later scenes, prince Edward helps her out, and the king decides she is innocent, and the accuse is turned to the two bishops, who are saved by the queen's mercy. Wolsey is in France, and the two court fools find treasures in his cellars, treasures he is said to have used to try to get elected as Pope. The Emperor of Spain arrives at court and accuses the cardinal of having defied him as an enemy. The king is mad at the cardinal, and Wolsey loses his office.

The play, according to Bullough, uses Foxe, Hall and Holinshed as its sources<sup>101</sup>. Apparently, this play is Protestant, but at the same time Henry is shown as Luther's adversary.

Some passages help us understand how the king is portrayed by Rowley. The play opens up with a well disposed and gracious king. In the first scene he praises Jane, his queen, and he seems to be caring about her, and asks the other ladies to attend her during the birth. When his sister Mary tells him that he must choose between the queen's life or the child's life, he orders to spend more money on doctors, and thinks it is impossible that, he, the king, should be "put to this extremity"<sup>102</sup>. He affirms he cannot decide so quickly, and does not know what is best, "to lose my queen, that is my sum of bliss"<sup>103</sup> or his son "(if son it be) / That all my subjects so desire to see, / I lose the hope of this great monarchy"<sup>104</sup>. He decides: "Go, let the child die, let the mother live, / Heaven's powerful hand may more children give. / Away and comfort her with our reply, / Harry will have his queen,

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<sup>101</sup> Bullough, Geoffrey, "Henry VIII, Introduction", p. 440.

<sup>102</sup> Rowley, Samuel, *When You See Me, You Know Me*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1874, p. 12, (available at <https://archive.org/details/cu31924013134113>).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*.

though thousands die.”<sup>105</sup> In this passage the king acts in a way that we probably would not expect, since real life king Henry really wanted to have a son and nothing seemed to be stopping him from having one. Here he even says that maybe it is God’s will that is taking his son away, because the child might be “some impotent and coward spirit, / Unlike the figure of his royal father.”<sup>106</sup> But Lady Mary comes with a report from the queen: queen Jane would sacrifice herself in order to save the baby. If indeed, the child were to die, she might die herself from the pain. The king then changes his order. The countess of Salisbury brings him his son, and the king fondly calls him “little cakebread”<sup>107</sup>. They tell him the queen is dead, and he is in sorrow. He then decides to call the boy Edward, since it is Saint Edward’s eve.

In the fourth scene, some noblemen, that is Brandon duke of Suffolk, Dudley, Grey and Seymour ask William Compton how the king is, and Compton answers that he is “As sad and passionate as ere he was”<sup>108</sup>, and when Dudley suggests Brandon to go comfort the king, Brandon is against it, and says he will not go unless he is called by the king “I will not put my head in such a hazzard, / I know his anger, and his spleene too well”<sup>109</sup>. And Grey reinforces this idea by affirming “none dares venture to confere with him.”<sup>110</sup> Apparently, the queen’s death has left him very sad, but he is also prone to violence and anger, so much that these men are scared to even go and try to solace him, because they think he could attack them. The king then calls, and Compton goes in, the other men tell him to report if the king is in a better mood, so that they can go in as well. Wolsey has arrived and Brandon explains to him why the king is in such a bad mood, adding that Luther has written against the king, because the king sided with the Pope. But Wolsey brings good news, saying that the Pope has made the king ‘Defender of the Faith’, and they think this title might please him. Will Sommers, one of the fools, says, anyway, that he will not go in to cheer the king up because “his fist is too heavie for a foole to stay under”<sup>111</sup>,

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<sup>105</sup> Rowley, Samuel, *When You See Me, You Know Me*, p. 12.

<sup>106</sup> Ivi, p. 13.

<sup>107</sup> Ivi, p. 14.

<sup>108</sup> Rowley, Samuel, “When You see Me, You know Me”, in *Later English history plays: King John, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VIII*, edited by Geoffrey Bullough, London: Routledge and Paul, 1960, p. 489.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>111</sup> Ivi, p. 491.

stressing out the fact that the king can be violent. He reports that the evening before, he tried to comfort the king but he actually “gave me such a boxe on the eare”<sup>112</sup> that made him go through various rooms, stairs, to the bottom of the cellar. Here of course he exaggerates for comedic purpose; still, this is not a charming image of king Henry, rather a ridiculous portrait of a violent man. The king then arrives, and starts reproaching Wolsey, saying that he wanted to be alone, and calls him “presumptuous priest”<sup>113</sup>. At the same time, he is angry at the other noblemen, and threatens to send them to the Tower and to have their heads cut off, and declares “Am I not Hary, am I not Englands king, ha?”<sup>114</sup>. He wants to underline his authority and the fact that he, as the king, can do whatever he pleases.

The fools then attempt to make him happy again, and the king tells Will Summers: “Call in the lords, tell them our spleen is calm’d: / Mother o’God, we must give way to wrath, / That chafes our royal blood with anger thus, / And use some mirth, I see, to comfort us.”<sup>115</sup> The king thanks the lords for the fact that they have been suffering his anger, and tells them he will now listen to them. He is now told about the title he received from the Pope and he even says he will embark on a crusade against the Turks. The king also decides he wants to go around London at night, disguised (Bullough<sup>116</sup> thinks it could be a homage to the scene in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, where king Henry walks, in disguise, among his soldiers.) He wants to see which crimes are committed at night, and whether the city watch captures and punishes the criminals. He takes William Compton with him, but then sends him to Brandon, and has an encounter with Black Will, a criminal. After talking for a while, they fight, so that Black Will shall prove his ‘manhood’. The king is arrested, and one of the watchers even tells him (thinking he is of the king’s guard) that he is dishonouring himself. The king sends a man to call for Brandon. Henry realises that people who get arrested can pay to get free, poor people cannot hope for the same thing. “I perceive, / Money plays fast and loose, purchases favour,

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<sup>112</sup> Rowley, Samuel, “When You see Me, You know Me”, p. 491.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>114</sup> Ivi, p. 492.

<sup>115</sup> Rowley, Samuel, *When You See Me, You Know Me*, p. 22.

<sup>116</sup> Bullough, Geoffrey, “When You see Me, You know Me”, in *Later English history plays: King John, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VII*, London: Routledge and Paul, 1960, p. 442.

/ And without that, nought but misery.”<sup>117</sup> When Brandon comes and reveals that the man they arrested is the king, Henry sends one of the men he has met to prison, while he promises to those who have been wronged by his servants or the cardinal’s servants that they will be repaid. Black Will, who had told him before he was not a good fighter, and thought he could teach him something, now tells him that he is the best swordsman in Europe. Henry orders to keep him in prison, but says he will call for him if he is ever in need of men. The king here shows that he cares about justice and safety in his kingdom, but, at the same time, he does it just for a night, as if it were some whim, and the whole passage also serves a comedic purpose, due to the fact that these people do not recognise the disguised king, and to the dialogues between him and Black Will.

Right after the wedding to Catherine Parr, Seymour reads the king some petitions: one of them is by Lady Seaton for her son, who says he killed a man to defend himself. The king replies that the man has already been pardoned twice, for murdering two other men, and he does not agree his pardon, calling this a “cruelty”<sup>118</sup>. The other two petitions come from the two gentlemen the king met in the previous scene, and the king gives the cardinal one of the two: it is stated that this man was imprisoned, even though the crime was committed by one of the cardinal’s servants. A servant of the king’s, Rokesby, is brought forth, he is the man who tricked the other gentleman. The king gets angry at him, because the servant lies to him, and tells him “Think’st thou, false thief, thou shalt be privileg’d, / Because thou art my man, to hurt my people?”<sup>119</sup>. He seems to believe that justice should be the same, for the rich and for the poor, for powerful men and for common people. The king even says he would have pardoned Rokesby if he had attacked him, but he would not pardon him for attacking one of his subjects. He dismisses him and orders him to be sent to the Counter. Yet again, the king is a choleric man, even though he seems to act in order to maintain justice.

Just after this, a messenger arrives, and the king is told that Brandon has come back from France (where he was sent to bring back the king’s sister, since her

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<sup>117</sup> Rowley, Samuel, *When You See Me, You Know Me*, p. 33.

<sup>118</sup> Ivi, p. 41.

<sup>119</sup> Ivi, p. 43.

husband the King of France was dead) with his wife, his wife being in fact Mary herself, the king's sister. As soon as Brandon enters the room, Henry loses no time and exclaims: "Off with his head!"<sup>120</sup>, showing again his temper. The king tells him he does not want to listen to his apologies, because Brandon was not allowed to marry his sister without permission. The king then silences Queen Catherine, who tries to intervene, and asks Bonner and Gardiner if killing Brandon is the right decision. They say it is, unless the king wants to pardon him. He tells them they are fools who flatter him, and immediately after saying this, even though he was in anger before, he declares he will not harm him, and "Dear Brandon, I embrace thee in mine arms"<sup>121</sup>. The king tells his sister that she will be happier marrying an Englishman than she was being the Queen of France. Brandon tells the king that the league between France and Spain is broken, and Henry sends Cardinal Wolsey to France, to "salute the emperor"<sup>122</sup>, and then to make peace with France as well.

In the next scene, prince Edward is learning on his books, and his father pays him a visit. The king comes to know from Will, the fool, that prince Edward has knighted Will Browne, his whip boy. The king confirms the knighthood, but tells the prince he now has to "give him some living, or else 'tis nothing"<sup>123</sup>. Prince Edward says that when he hears of something good for him, he will give it to him, but in the meantime, he will maintain the knight. The king approves of his solution, but says that he himself will pay him. He then tells his son to study hard, and to make no more knights. Will Browne might still be whipped if he does not do well. In this scene the King appears as a father who cares about his son's education, and who tries to teach him how to behave like a king (teaching him about appointment of knighthoods.) Edward's teacher is Archbishop Cranmer, and this leads to the following scene, where Bishops Bonner and Gardiner talk about the menace of Lutheranism in England, saying Queen Catherine is one of them. The queen actually says that the Christian kings in Europe should all read what Luther wrote, and see whether he proposes "a truer way to heaven"<sup>124</sup>. She then laments the fact that the

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<sup>120</sup> Rowley, Samuel, *When You See Me, You Know Me*, p. 45.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>122</sup> *Ivi*, p. 46.

<sup>123</sup> *Ivi*, p. 49.

<sup>124</sup> *Ivi*, p. 57.



kings and their subjects have to obey the Pope. She exposes all the negative aspects of Catholicism, and she even asks the bishops what they would do, if the king told them one day to go against the Pope. While Queen Catherine is not there, the bishops convince the king that she is a heretic, and he agrees to get her to the Tower. "If she of treason be convinct, I swear, / Her head goes off, were she my kingdom's heir."<sup>125</sup>

In scene twelve, where Queen Catherine Parr is accused, she is afraid as well of the king's rage and says "The Lion in his rage is not so sterne, / As Royal *Henry* in his wrathfull spleene."<sup>126</sup> In scene fourteen, prince Edward talks to his father, and tries to defend the queen from the accuses moved to her, and the king is, at first, definitely not willing to pay attention to what his son has to say. He calls his wife a "traitresse"<sup>127</sup> and a "beast"<sup>128</sup>, and does not even want to look at her anymore. But then prince Edward says he gives his word that she is innocent, and Henry thinks that the prince's word is good enough for him to listen to his wife's plea. He changes his mind quite quickly, which shows his moody character. And after listening to the queen's reasons and her declaration of innocence, he calls her "poor *Kate*"<sup>129</sup> and affirms that the men who accused her wronged her. He asks her to sit on his knee, and just changes the object of his anger to the bishops Gardiner and Bonner. Just like, before, he was convinced by the prince to talk to Queen Catherine, now he is convinced by Queen Catherine not to harm them.

The king comes to know, thanks to the fools, that Cardinal Wolsey's barrels, in his cellar, contain a lot of jewels, and then the Emperor himself tells him he had been defied by the English herald, when peace was being made between Spain and France. Wolsey admits to it, and the king calls him "presumptuous traitor"<sup>130</sup>, and then accuses him. Here, the king uses the charges that Wolsey was actually accused of: putting his hat in coins and signing his letters as "Ego and rex meus". He accuses him of collecting money and properties (even of taking four abbeys) for the purpose of becoming richer. He discharges him from his position and orders him to get out of his sight. Right after, he calls his fool to "chase this / anger from our blood

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<sup>125</sup> Rowley, Samuel, *When You See Me, You Know Me*, p. 60.

<sup>126</sup> Rowley, Samuel, "When You see Me, You know Me", p. 496.

<sup>127</sup> Ivi, p. 499.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>129</sup> Ivi, p. 500.

<sup>130</sup> Ivi, p. 507.

again<sup>131</sup>. His mood is inconstant, he is often prone to choler, but he can also quickly be put in a better mood.

The play ends with king Henry welcoming the Emperor, and merrily telling him they will have a banquet and a tourney.

The portrait of the king in this whole play is that of a choleric man: he gets angry very easily, but he seems (in certain cases) to forget and forgive preattly easily. He is a man who can become violent, but at the same time, gracious when he is pleased. His efforts of being a good king often end up in comic scenes (the night out in London, the fools intervening all the time when he is talking to prince Edward or when he is deciding how to administer difficult situations.)

This is only one of the many representations of this king, who share same aspects but differ in others. His contemporaries saw him as a good man of many talents during the first part of his reign, and a suspicious and suffering man in the second part of his reign; Holinshed and Foxe give the idea of a good and just king, namely because of their propaganda against Catholicism; Rowley writes an entertaining play where the king, who is sometimes angry and sometimes cheerful, tries to right the wrongs in his realm, but is often a comic character. In the next chapters it will be shown how this representation has changed through time. Shakespeare (and Fletcher) will take more from Holinshed and Foxe than from Rowley, representing a graceful king; yet, his character is far more complex than what it might appear at first); modern writers will often retain his choleric temperament, but, such as is the case with Hilary Mantel's Henry VIII, there will also be more balanced portraits of this king.

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<sup>131</sup> Rowley, Samuel, "When You see Me, You know Me", p. 508.

## 2. Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*

Henry VIII appears as one of the characters of the eponymous play *King Henry VIII (All is True)*. The aim of the first part of this chapter is to present the play, discussing the question of authorship, giving a detailed account of the acts, and giving an idea of some interpretations and the studies that have been conducted on it. The aim of the second part of the chapter is analysing the way king Henry is represented in the play, through his lines and other characters' lines.

### 2.1 The play

*Henry VIII* is Shakespeare's last history play<sup>132</sup>, and it is believed to have been performed not long after princess Elizabeth's (King James's daughter) wedding, on the 14<sup>th</sup> February 1613<sup>133</sup>. It was still being performed in June, when the 'special effects' for one of the scenes (Henry VIII's arrival at Wolsey's house for a masque) set fire to the Globe<sup>134</sup>. The exact day was the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, and the play was considered new at the time. The earliest text we have dates back to 1623, since the play is included in the First Folio<sup>135</sup>. This play is often compared to Shakespeare's earlier history plays, as it depicts more or less true historical facts, and has a king's name for a title; but also to his romances, with which the play shares the parts that are more similar to a masque, and some elements that are mystical<sup>136</sup>.

#### 2.1.1 The question of authorship

Some scholars believe that Shakespeare could be the only author of this play, others are quite sure that parts of it were written by John Fletcher. John Fletcher was

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<sup>132</sup> Yates, Frances. A., *Shakespeare's Last Plays: A New Approach*, London: Routledge & Paul, 1975, p. 65.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>135</sup> *Ivi*, p. 66.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibidem*.

a playwright who lived between 1579 and 1625<sup>137</sup>, the son of Richard Fletcher, a church minister who then became bishop, and who was famous for being an accuser in the trial of Queen Mary of Scots, and for being present at her execution. It seems that John Fletcher studied at Cambridge, at Corpus Christi College, from a very young age. His first mention is in 1607, when he contributed to *Volpone* by Ben Jonson. In that year, he started collaborating with Francis Beaumont, another dramatist, initially for the Children of the Queen's Revels, and then for the King's Men at the Globe and at Blackfriars. There is a first folio that dates back to 1647 containing thirty-five of their collaborative plays, while there are fifty-three in the second folio, dated 1679. Between the other collaborators of Fletcher's were Philip Massinger, Nathan Field, and William Rowley, but he also wrote plays on his own. He died in 1625 in the London plague. His plays written in collaboration with Beaumont include *Philaster*, *The Maides Tragedy* and *A King and No King*; while *The Faithfull Shepheardesse*, *The Mad Lover*, *The Loyall Subject*, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, *Women Pleas'd*, *The Island Princesse*, and *A Wife for a Moneth* are some of those he wrote on his own.

According to McMullan, "critics who like the play have been happy to claim it for Shakespeare; those who do not have found it useful to be able to lay the blame on Fletcher"<sup>138</sup>. He does not fall in any of the two categories: he likes the play and he thinks it is the product of a collaboration. Some critics, he thinks, consider collaboration as an "unfortunate aberration"<sup>139</sup>, and they are convinced that works produced in collaboration must be inferior in respect to other works of arts produced by individuals. This was more common in the past, and this negative attitude has changed through the years. *Henry VIII* has, anyway, always been considered "one of the most 'doubtful' in the Shakespeare canon"<sup>140</sup>. The first written appearance of the play is that of the First Folio, where no other author other than Shakespeare is explicited, but the play was written in a period when Shakespeare was known to have

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<sup>137</sup> Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "John Fletcher, English dramatist", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Fletcher>, last visited: 18/12/2015.)

<sup>138</sup> McMullan, Gordon, "Introduction", in *King Henry VIII (All is True)*, London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006, p.180.

<sup>139</sup> Ivi, p. 181.

<sup>140</sup> Ivi, p. 186.

been working with Fletcher. Fletcher is in fact thought to have collaborated with Shakespeare for *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (the Quarto attributes the work both to him and Shakespeare) and for *Cardenio*, a lost play, again attributed to both of them. James Spedding, author and editor of the works of Sir Francis Bacon, wrote “Who Wrote *Henry VIII* ?”, published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1850, where he attributed certain scenes to Shakespeare, others to Fletcher, and from that work many others have been inspired to start their own analyses. Spedding thought there was a distinction between their styles, Fletcher’s being more manneristic. He started by intuition, but then proceeded to analyse the metrical pattern of the scenes, showing the similarities in the pattern between the scenes he thought Fletcher wrote and other plays by Fletcher. He attributed 1.1, 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, the first part of 3.2 and 5.1 to Shakespeare, the other scenes to Fletcher. Hoy analysed the same case in the 1950s, and used linguistic criteria to find the differences between the scenes, even though he himself admitted that one can not bind an author to any specific linguistic forms. The important thing is “the frequency of usage of those [linguistic] preferences”<sup>141</sup>. McMullan thinks that, in analysing the play thus, one encounters the problem of scribes and compositors, who adjusted the texts they are given. A more recent analysis is that of Jonathan Hope, who, in 1994, conducted a study from a ‘socio-historical linguistic’ point of view: he decided not to focus on words like *ye* and *em* (words that Hoy took into account), but rather *that*, *which* and *do*. He believed that it was possible to find out certain preferences due to the place the writers were brought up in, and other aspects of their formation. He hinted at the fact that Fletcher might have been more used to “prestige variants”<sup>142</sup> than Shakespeare, the former being part of the upper class and having probably attended Cambridge. This approach, McMullan thinks, is more similar to that of Spedding’s instead of Hoy’s, and has the advantage of focusing on the social aspect, rather than just on individual preference. There are problems in his interpretation, too, due to the knowledge he had of Early Modern English: he could not really have known if spoken and written forms corresponded, and he still based himself on texts that might have been changed by scribes. Moreover, language is not fixed, and it is possible that the way authors

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<sup>141</sup> McMullan, Gordon, “Introduction”, p. 191.

<sup>142</sup> Ivi, p. 194.

approached language and wrote might have changed in time. Also, the style adopted might change also in relation to the character that is speaking at a given moment in the play. McMullan says that, in any case, Shakespeare did not come up with *Henry VIII* all by himself, because playwrights were always surrounded by an environment, and the theatre company, the actors, the audience, the traditions and acting styles all have to be taken into account. And, in Early Modern times, it was hard to claim authorship of one's texts. Furthermore, writers did have sources they used, such as, in this case, Holinshed, to name one. McMullan thinks the play can be described as Shakespeare's play, because "it has been read, performed, and witnessed in a Shakespearean context [...] and in the sense that it engages with [...] the other plays in the Shakespeare's canon"<sup>143</sup>. It can be considered as Shakespeare's and Fletcher's play (as it is stated in the title of the edition the introduction is to), because there is "a certain amount of evidence"<sup>144</sup> that this play was the product of collaboration of these two playwrights.

Brian Vickers dedicated a book to Shakespeare as a co-author, and he says that in some cases the authors Shakespeare collaborated with are not taken into account, as is the case with *Titus Andronicus*, *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles*, *The Two Noble Kingsmen*, and of course *Henry VIII*. Vickers thinks that the discussion about these last two plays has been following a certain scheme, that is: firstly, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century some scholars have tried to identify which scenes were written by whom; secondly, other scholars have used different methods to reach the same results; thirdly, people who think these works were written only by Shakespeare have denied the points made by these scholars; lastly, other, more recent scholars have returned to what the 'first scholars' had found out and analysed the plays as well. Vickers identifies Richard Roderick as the first one who identified Shakespeare's style, back in 1758. This scholar paid attention to the metrical system of *Henry VIII*, and noticed three types of irregularities in his verses. Charles Knight, about fifty years later, also finds the verses particular if compared to other Shakespeare's works. Vickers says that these observations were probably useful to the aforementioned Spedding, who dealt with the matter of authorship in 1850. Spedding's study has been considered "one of

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<sup>143</sup> McMullan, Gordon, "Introduction", p. 198.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibidem*.

the first classics of Shakespeare authorship studies”<sup>145</sup>. His work inspired another scholar, John Ingram, who in 1864 analysed the verses of the play dividing them between those with ‘light endings’ and those with ‘weak endings’. Other scholars have worked not basing themselves on the verses, such is the case with Thorndike (1901) and Farnham (1916). The former realised that Shakespeare used the form *them* much more than the abbreviated ‘em, preferred by Fletcher, and confirmed the division of the scenes proposed by Spedding. The latter focused on the use of contractions in the play, and it turned out that Shakespeare used more contractions than Fletcher did. E. K. Chambers (1930) accepted Spedding’s division as well, and he thought that *Henry VIII* could very well be a collaboration between Shakespeare and Fletcher, because none of the two seemed to be using their usual style<sup>146</sup>. Two authors who decided to overlook the statistic data were Baldwin Maxwell (who wrote the essay “Fletcher and Shakespeare” in 1923), and Peter Alexander (who wrote an essay in 1930 called “Conjectural history, or Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII*”). They disregarded Spedding’s tests and said that he was drawing from previous articles from other scholars. Maxwell agreed that Fletcher could be involved, if verses are considered, in fact, many lines end in a stressed extra syllable, which is apparently characteristic of Fletcher’s style. He realised that comparing *Henry VIII* to other works of Fletcher’s. But other tests Fletcher wrote did not really confirm the idea. In conclusion, he said that, if Fletcher had been the co-author, his style in writing *Henry VIII* was a different style from his usual one. Mincoff started from this point to prove that Fletcher’s style changed when he collaborated with other authors, varying according to the writer he worked with. Alexander’s work that denied Fletcher as an author of the play was challenged again by Mincoff, but also by Ants Oras (in 1953) and Robert Adger Law (in 1959). Oras observed the verses as Alexander had done (considering extra monosyllables at the end of feminine endings), in both Shakespeare’s plays considered to have been partially written by Shakespeare, and in three Fletcher plays. He thought that it was impossible not to notice the difference between Shakespeare’s and Fletcher’s parts in *Henry VIII*, them being very different. He found Fletcher to be “less versatile than Shakespeare in his

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<sup>145</sup> Vickers, Brian, *Shakespeare, Co-Author*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 341.

<sup>146</sup> Vickers, Brian, *Shakespeare, Co-Author*, p. 347.

methods”<sup>147</sup>, more monotonous, using the same patterns more often. Law thought that Spedding’s division of the scenes between Shakespeare and Fletcher was right, and he believed that some tests that presented convincing evidence had been ignored. Without knowing Oras’s work, he as well analysed the verses and the feminine endings. He also highlighted what he thought were differences in the style of the two authors, for instance, comparing scene two in act two, where Norfolk talks about Wolsey’s advice for the king to divorce, and scene three in act two, where Anne Boleyn pities Katherine for this reason. While in the first scene, attributed to Fletcher, “we have in simple direct language the thought expressed with three images separately developed”<sup>148</sup>; in the second one, attributed to Shakespeare, “at least five images are mingled in complex sentences”<sup>149</sup>. Mincoff contested Alexander’s theory as well, saying that the style always has to be considered in context, and never as something separate. He wrote in conclusion to his analyses, that “it is not a question of slight, or even of marked, fluctuations with regard to one or two indicators alone, but of two fundamentally different styles, poles apart in every respect”<sup>150</sup>. Oras and Marina Tarlinskaja then proceeded to revise the evidence brought by scholars who worked between 1850 and 1959, presenting statistic data to confirm their results. Other studies have been made not just from the metrical point of view, but also from the linguistic point of view, putting in relation the metrics and syntax, as Charles Langworthy did in 1931. Hart, on the other hand, focused on vocabulary, in 1943, and Molly Mahood on word play in 1957. Partridge, in 1964, also adopted a linguistic approach, taking into account various aspects. R. A. Foakes (who edited the *Henry VIII* Arden edition in 1957 and 1968), though, does not agree with the theory of the jointed authorship, doubting the evidence brought forward by other scholars. The fact that Foakes, in 1957, denied Fletcher the status of author in *Henry VIII* was what led Law in 1959 and Mincoff in 1961 to start their studies. MacDonald Jackson’s work in 1962, and David Lake’s work in 1969 departed from there as well. Jackson focused on the presence and place of affirmative particles in the play; Lake wrote about the use by Fletcher of the form *more* rather than *mo* or *moe*. Vickers

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<sup>147</sup> Vickers, Brian, *Shakespeare, Co-Author*, p. 359.

<sup>148</sup> Ivi, p. 363.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>150</sup> Ivi, p. 366.



believes that the studies that contest Fletcher's authorship do not present coherent evidence.

Recent studies on the attribution of parts of the play to either Shakespeare or Fletcher have been conducted by Thomas Merriam. In 2003 Merriam<sup>151</sup> studied the occurrences of the word 'conscience' in the play, in both its ironic and non ironic use. There are twenty-four occurrences of them in the play, and, regarding five of them, Spedding and Hope assignate them to Fletcher, while he says they are all Shakespeare's. The first one is the Lord Chamberlain's affirmation, in 2.2., "has crept too near his conscience". In the same scene Suffolk says "No, his conscience has crept too near another lady". The king says 'conscience, conscience, O 'tis a tender place'. In 4.1. the second gentleman says 'I cannot blame his conscience'. The ironic meaning of conscience is "that of the king's equating his sexual desire with moral justification". Merriam believes all the ironic meanings are to be ascribed to Shakespeare. Four are oaths, and they are Fletcher's. Eight others are unironic, and they are Fletcher's as well. In 2008, he<sup>152</sup> wrote another article suggesting that a part of scene two in act three could have been written by John Fletcher, and not by Shakespeare, as many critics seem to believe. The part he analysed, is, specifically, the one where Anne Boleyn speaks with the Lord Chamberlain, and consists of thirty-one lines. Anne makes a speech, contained between lines 66 and 73, which contains eight feminine endings, a characteristic usually ascribed to Fletcher. He also noticed that some sentences used in this part never appear in other works by Shakespeare, while they appear in works by Fletcher, like "I speak sincerely", occurring in *The Noble Gentlemen*, but nowhere in Shakespeare. Another example is the description of Anne by the Chamberlain, he praises her for her "beauty and honour", a sentence never used by Shakespeare, which appears in *The False One*. Merriam also believes there is a difference in style between this thirty-one lines and the rest of the scene. The Lord Chamberlain's praise of Anne is not ironic at all, while the whole dialogue between her and the Old Lady stands out for its irony. Moreover, before departing, the Lord Chamberlain says "and who knows yet, but

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<sup>151</sup> Merriam, Thomas, "Though this be supplementarity, yet there is method in't.", in *Notes and Queries*, vol. 50, issue 5, December 2003, p. 423.

<sup>152</sup> Merriam, Thomas, "A Fletcher interpolation in Henry VIII", in *Notes and Queries*, vol. 55, iss. 2, June 2008, p. 213.

from this lady may proceed a gem to lighten this isle” (3.2.77-79), therefore referring to Queen Elizabeth. This sentence seems to connect with scene four in act five of the play, which is usually attributed to Fletcher. The Lord Chamberlain uses the expression “from this lady”, not used elsewhere by Shakespeare, and used in Fletcher’s *Valentinian*. In both this play and *Henry VIII* the obedience of the ladies “bears a carnal connotation”<sup>153</sup>. Words like wonder, heaven, honour, and others, occur both in scene two act one of *Valentinian* and in Cranmer’s prophecy in act five scene four of *Henry VIII*, believed to have been written, as has been said, by Fletcher. This, according to Merriam, confirms the fact that there is a link between the thirty-one lines of scene three act two in *Henry VIII*, scene five act four in the same play, and other plays by Fletcher. In 2005, Merriam had written *The Identity of Shakespeare's Henry VIII*, in which he had challenged the traditional division of scenes in the play, ascribing 2.2.1-17, 2.2.116-142, 3.1.1-23, 3.2.228-235, 3.2.255-325, 4.1.37-80 and 4.1.32-99 to Shakespeare, and 2.3.50-80 and 5.1.86-157 to Fletcher. Jackson<sup>154</sup>, in a 2013 article, takes into account Merriam’s redistribution and challenges his idea. By analysing the number of feminine endings, the verse being either 'run-on' or 'end-stopped', the use of contractions, and the use of affirming particles, as well as the use of “has/hath” (all elements that had been analysed through the years to assign the scenes to one of the authors or the other), Jackson explains that he thinks the passages Merriam took an interest into are rather more likely to belong to the authors that were traditionally thought to have written them. He thinks that the passages usually thought to be Fletcher's and assigned by Merriam to Shakespeare's are metrically far more similar to Fletcher's verses, and "linguistic data, as detailed by Vickers [...] also support the original assignments"<sup>155</sup>. The fact that both metrics and linguistics seem to suggest that the traditional assignation is the right one is an important fact. Phrase length is also a characteristic to be taken into account. Jackson thinks that Merriam's proposals are going against solid evidence.

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<sup>153</sup> Merriam, Thomas, “A Fletcher interpolation in Henry VIII”, p. 214.

<sup>154</sup> Jackson, MacDonald, P. "All Is True or Henry the VIII: authors and ideologies", in *Notes and Queries*, vol.60, issue 60, September 2013, p. 441.

<sup>155</sup> Ivi, p.442.

Merriam replied to this article, in 2014. He states<sup>156</sup> that Henry VIII is a complex and contradictory play, so his analysis being 'at odds' with evidence should not be a problem. He thinks that metrical and linguistics characteristics, on their own, are not enough to affirm whether Fletcher or Shakespeare wrote a part of the text.

In general, there seems to be strong evidence suggesting that Fletcher was in fact co-author of *Henry VIII*, and the edition used for this work actually presents him and Shakespeare as co-authors.

### 2.1.2 The plot

The play opens with the prologue, and the spectators are told that the matter of the play is a serious one. This is not a 'bawdy play'<sup>157</sup> (and here perhaps the play references Rowley's representation of King Henry and his time). In the first scene, Buckingham recalls that he and Norfolk were in Calais for the meeting between King Henry VIII and King Francis I, organised by Cardinal Wolsey, and this leads him to talk angrily about the cardinal. Norfolk warns him to be more careful, because the cardinal might want to take revenge against him. Wolsey comes on the scene at that very moment, and asks his secretary if 'Buckingham's surveyor' is there to give testimony against him. Buckingham thinks the cardinal is planning to do something against him, and decides to go to the king. Norfolk manages to stop him, and Buckingham makes a list of everything wrong the cardinal has done. As soon he says that, the duke of Suffolk arrives on scene to arrest him for high treason and take him to the Tower. The second scene sees the king's first appearance: Henry is thankful to Wolsey for stopping Buckingham. Then Queen Katherine (here written with a K, which is one of the spellings that can be found for Catherine of Aragon's name) enters the scene. She asks the king to remove the new tax imposed on the English subjects, which the king seems not to know about. The queen explains it has been imposed to help raise money for the campaign against France, and the king decides

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<sup>156</sup> Merriam, Thomas, "A reply to 'All is True or Henry VIII: authors and ideologies'", in *Notes and Queries*, vol. 61, issue 2, June 2014, p. 253.

<sup>157</sup> Shakespeare, William; Fletcher, John, *King Henry VIII (All is True)*, p. 210.

to remove it. The surveyor talks about Buckingham's plans: he wanted to seize the throne, and he wanted Wolsey dead as well. In the following scene, while the Lord Chamberlain and Lord Sands are discussing on on how English noblemen are imitating the French ways, Sir Lovell arrives and says he is about to go to Wolsey's house, and that they invited are as well. In the fourth scene, they go there, and Anne Boleyn, or Bullen, as the text reports, is also present. There are some new guests, just arrived, dressed as shepherds. It is said that they are Frenchmen, but they are actually King Henry and his men. Henry dances with Anne, and tells her he will not forget her.

The first scene of the second act marks the arrival on the scene of two commentators: the two gentlemen. The second gentleman says that he is going to see Buckingham's trial. The first gentleman tells him the trial is already over, and that the duke has been found guilty and condemned to death, despite pleading innocent. They think Cardinal Wolsey has something to do with it. Then, Buckingham enters, and forgives those who wronged him. He then asks those who loved him to pray for him and says that his prayers are with the king now. The second gentleman reveals to the first that somebody else might fall, that is, Queen Katherine. The events in the play here are condensed together: Buckingham was executed in 1521, and the rumours that the king wanted an annulment from the queen did not start before 1527. Then again, the gentlemen think it was the Cardinal who suggested the king to cast the queen aside. In the second scene, the gentlemen at court are discussing, and the Lord Chamberlain hopes that the king will one day realise that Wolsey is not who he thinks he is. Suffolk and Norfolk go to King Henry, but he sends them away as soon as Wolsey and Campeius arrive. Henry also calls for Gardiner, who was previously Wolsey's secretary, and who indeed tells the cardinal that he will always answer his commands. The king declares that they will go to Blackfriars and he will announce his intentions towards Katherine. In the third scene, Anne Boleyn is with the Old Lady, who is a sort of chaperon and companion to her. They are talking about Queen Katherine's fall, and Anne thinks her fall will be so bad, because she will go from such a high position, to no position at all. This leads her to announce that she would not want to be queen, but the old lady calls her a hypocrite, and says that of course she would want to. Anne insists she would not become queen, not even if they

offered her “all the riches under heaven”<sup>158</sup>. The Lord Chamberlain comes in, bringing news: the king wants to offer Anne the title of Marchioness of Pembroke, and increase her income. Anne accepts and the old lady mocks her, hinting at the fact that just a moment before she seemed to be uninterested in title and riches. The last scene of the second act takes place in Blackfriars. Katherine begs Henry to have pity, because she has always been his loyal wife and never did him wrong. She asks him to stop the trial until she can receive advice from Spain. She is told they have to proceed, and she addresses Wolsey, telling him that she does not want to be judged by him, her enemy, but by the Pope. She goes out of the room, and King Henry lets her go, and speaks of her qualities. Here Shakespeare reprises once again Holinshed’s chronicles, stating that the king’s conscience was in fact shaken when the Bishop of Bayonne, ambassador for the French king, was sent to England to discuss a marriage between princess Mary and the Duke of Orléans, and the Bishop asked whether Mary was a legitimate child. The king then realised that there might have been something wrong, because he never had a son, and all their other children (apart from Mary) died. The Cardinal had no part in stirring his doubts. Campeius says the court has to be ajourned, and the king, aside, says he does not like these tricks, and that he waits for Cranmer’s return.

The first scene of the third act opens with Wolsey and Campeius calling on Queen Katherine. Wolsey claims he has not come there to accuse her, and Campeius offers her his own advice, telling her she should trust the king to solve the matter. She tells that she will not put her cause in the hands of the man who rejected her. Wolsey insists that she is misunderstanding them, and she answers with sarcasm, declaring that if she has misunderstood them, it must have been because she is a woman, not intelligent enough to understand. In the next scene there is a discussion between Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey and the Chamberlain. They are all against cardinal Wolsey, and they want to find a way to bring him down. The Chamberlain reveals that the king has already married Anne, and Suffolk says that Cranmer is coming back to make the union official. Then Wolsey enters the scene, and, after having sent Cromwell away, he talks to himself, saying that the king should marry King Francis’s sister, and not Anne Boleyn, whom he considers a Lutheran. The king

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<sup>158</sup> Shakespeare, William; Fletcher, John, *King Henry VIII*, p. 291.

comes into the scene, and tells the noblemen that, among some papers Wolsey sent him, he found an inventory of all the cardinal's riches. The cardinal is summoned in front of the king, and Henry tells him he seems to care more about earthly things than about spiritual matters. The cardinal replies he cares about both, and says that he has always worked for the king and for England. The king tells him he speaks like an obedient servant, and then gives him the papers he found, and goes out. Wolsey realises that the papers have ruined him, and blames himself for being so foolish as to send them to the king. The noblemen come back, and Wolsey does not surrender to them, at first. They remind him of his schemes, and they tell him that all his possessions will be taken from him, and they depart. The cardinal even compares his fall to Lucifer's fall. Cromwell comes to him, and the cardinal tells him he is now at peace. Cromwell informs Wolsey that Cranmer has become Archbishop of Canterbury, and that Anne is now officially queen. He also says that his prayers will always be with his master Wolsey. The cardinal gives precious advice to his servant: to avoid ambition, and to serve the king well. He then says that he should have served God more than he did the king, and here Shakespeare quotes Holinshed, who, in his turn, had quoted Cavendish<sup>159</sup>.

The fourth act opens with the reappearance of the two gentlemen, the occasion being Queen Anne's coronation. They tell us what happened to Katherine, now Princess Dowager. She refused to appear in court, and the king divorced her. Now she lives at Kimbolton Castle, and she is ill. This dialogue is followed by a description of the procession. A third gentleman comes, telling the others that he has seen the ceremony, and describes it in detail. The second scene focuses on Katherine. Her usher, Griffith, tells her that Wolsey was arrested in York, and was going to London, but, being ill, he stopped at Leicester Abbey, where he died. The queen talks about the cardinal in negative terms, and here Shakespeare draws again from Holinshed, originally taken from Hall's narration<sup>160</sup>. Griffith stresses out that Wolsey was also a scholar who cared about education, and a kind man to his friends, and he died fearing God. Katherine wishes Wolsey peace at last and falls asleep. She has a vision: she sees six figures wearing white robes, with garlands on their heads, and

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<sup>159</sup> Shakespeare, William; Fletcher, John, *King Henry VIII*, p. 362.

<sup>160</sup> Ivi, p. 376.

branches in their hands. They dance and offer her a garland to put on her head. In her sleep, she puts her hands up to heaven. She wakes up, and her servants assure her nobody entered the room. Then a guest comes: Eustace Chapuys, here called “Capucius”, the Emperor’s ambassador. He tells Katherine he has come because the king asked him to. She asks him to deliver a letter to the king and Chapuys promises he will do that. Katherine bids everyone goodbye, knowing she is about to die, and tells her women how to dispose of her body.

Act five begins with news: Anne is giving birth to a child. Gardiner hopes that the child will live, but he thinks the kingdom will be safer without Anne, Cranmer, and Cromwell. He also says that Cranmer will have to appear in front of the Council the day after, to stand the accuse of heresy. Then, there is a dialogue between the king and Cranmer. Henry warns him that he will have to confront the Council and Cranmer thanks him for the warning, but he says he is not afraid. Henry reminds him that he has enemies, and people may even give false testimony. Therefore, he gives him his ring: if the Council decides to imprison him, the Archbishop will show them the ring, and ask for the king’s appeal. Then, the old lady tells the king that Anne has delivered a baby girl. The second scene concerns Cranmer and the Council. He is told to stay out of the room, and doctor Butts, the king’s physician, realises something is wrong: Cranmer is part of the Council, he should not be told to wait. He goes and tells the king what he has seen. The lords then let Cranmer in, and tell him that he has been spreading heretic ideas. Since he is a councillor, they can not make accuses against him. Gardiner tells him they want to put him in the Tower, and deprive him of his status: this way, he can be accused. But Cranmer shows the king’s ring, and the councillors realise they have committed a mistake. The king comes in and tells the councillors that he thought they were wise men, but they are not. Scene three contains some discussions with a porter, before Elizabeth’s christening. In scene four, Cranmer baptizes Elizabeth, making a speech which is often referred to as “Cranmer’s prophecy”, in which he says that the princess brings promises of future blessings. She will be a great queen, and after her death, she will be born again, like “a maiden phoenix”<sup>161</sup>, in her heir (that is James I). Cranmer describes her future reign as a golden age, and the king is amazed. He even prophesies that

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<sup>161</sup> Shakespeare, William; Fletcher, John, *King Henry VIII (All is True)*, p. 431.

Elizabeth will die a virgin, and that England will mourn for her. Then the Epilogue enters, saying that some people in the audience might have fallen asleep; others might be disappointed, because they expected witty dialogues; while the ones that have appreciated it are probably good women, because a good woman has been represented (it could be Katherine, Anne, or Elizabeth). If these ladies clap their hands, surely the men will do that as well.

### 2.1.3 The sources

Among Shakespeare's sources for this play are authors that have been taken into account in chapter one, such as Holinshed and Foxe, while Rowley could probably be considered more as an inspiration rather than anything else.

The scenes present in Holinshed's chronicles that are present in *Henry VIII* as well are many: the Field of the Cloth of Gold; Wolsey's plan to bring down Buckingham, followed by Buckingham's execution; Katherine's trial (with the explanation of how the king first started doubting the wedding); Katherine's dialogue with Campeggio and Wolsey; Wolsey's fall and the list of accusations against him, Wolsey's last words as well as Katherine's; Wolsey's positive characteristics among the negative; princess Elizabeth's christening (without Cranmer's prophecy). From Foxe comes the part dedicated to Archbishop Cranmer, with all the plot of the Council to bring him down, and King Henry's warning at first, and intervention to save him then. McMullan states that Shakespeare and Fletcher did not just use sources, but took parts of them and copied them into their text. *Henry VIII* also follows pretty much everything is written in the Chronicles about the king, which does not mean, McMullan underlines, that the play is just "a versified chronicle"<sup>162</sup>. He notices that in the scene of Katherine's trial the words she uses are almost exactly the same reported by Holinshed, but this play makes her more vehement, and the impact of her going away is stronger. The things Henry says in this scene are drawn from Holinshed as well, but with more nervousness added. Scene three from act two seems to have been taken from Holinshed in its beginning, but the departure of Cardinal Campeggio may come from Hall or from Foxe. The dialogue between

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<sup>162</sup> McMullan, Gordon, "Introduction", p. 166.



Cromwell and Wolsey might come from *Annals of the Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, written by Wolsey's usher George Cavendish, even though no evidence suggests that Shakespeare might have read this work directly. It is believed, though, that John Stow incorporated some passages from Cavendish in his chronicles. In general, the scenes attributed to Shakespeare tend to be following Holinshed (apart from scene five act one which seems to draw from Foxe), while the scenes attributed to Fletcher seem to be more distant from Holinshed.

McMullan also identifies some analogues for the play<sup>163</sup>, stating that both in *King Johan*, a 1539 play by John Bale, and *Valiant Acts and victorious Battles of the English Nation* by Christopher Ockland, present eulogies to Queen Elizabeth, in the form of a prophecy, just like Cranmer's prophecy in *Henry VIII*. He also takes into account a long poem from 1607, by Michael Drayton, called *The Legend of Great Cromwell*, where Gardiner and Cromwell evidently do not like each other, and Gardiner tries to make Cromwell fall in the same way he does, in *Henry VIII*, to bring down Archbishop Cranmer. King Henry, though, is in this long poem quite different from what he appears to be both in *Henry VIII* and in Holinshed's chronicles, he is in fact described as a tyrant. In the anonymous play *Thomas, Lord Cromwell*, Gardiner's plot to bring down Cromwell is more similar to the situation between Cardinal Wolsey and the Duke of Buckingham in *Henry VIII*, and Gardiner asks for witnesses just like Wolsey relied on a surveyor. In this play two commentators similar to the two gentlemen from Shakespeare are also present: in this case, they are merchants.

#### 2.1.4 Interpretations

Various scholars have offered different interpretations of this play, from different points of view. Barton wonders about the definition of truth in the play, since the play itself claims that "all is true". She thinks that the plot of the play is based on real events, but that it takes "a number of liberties with historical facts"<sup>164</sup>.

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<sup>163</sup> McMullan, Gordon, "Introduction", p. 176.

<sup>164</sup> Barton, Anne, "Enter Mariners wet: realism in Shakespeare's last plays", in *Essays, mainly Shakespearean*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 184.

It could be taken as a true account of the fact, in a way, if we compare it to what Rowley did in his *When You See Me, You Know Me*. But still, she underlines that the truth in *Henry VIII* is quite contradictory, and that the characters themselves are not well defined, “as to create serious problems of interpretation”<sup>165</sup> Analysis is put aside, to have show and pomp.

Champion thinks this play is, unlike other history plays Shakespeare wrote, a “celebration of history”<sup>166</sup>. He believes it to be inferior if compared to other plays, and he as well considers the characters not to be very strong, in the sense that nobody is dominating over the others, and that actually, none of the character speaks considerably more than the others, the lines are almost equally distributed between them. He also stresses the importance of pomp in the play, stating that many lines are devoted to stage directions, and he believes this to bring more emotional detachment from the events of the play. Champion thinks that the play could be seen as a celebration of a Protestant England, especially considering Cranmer’s prophecy in the end, but the Catholic Church is not presented entirely negatively. Katherine is a victim, a good woman, and a sympathetic character. Characters like Buckingham and Wolsey are represented both negatively and positively. Wolsey is definitely more a negative character than a positive one, and Champion says he is presented as a villain. But he repents in the end, he recognises his mistakes, he has a moving scene with Cromwell, and Griffith, Katherine’s servant, talks about the good things he has done. These two parts of his character, though, are rather distinct: first he is a villain, then he repents. He does not appear to have a mixture of good and bad qualities from the very beginning of the play. As to Buckingham, we are never really told whether he is innocent or not, but he says he is, and sympathy is created towards his character. Before being executed, he speaks nobly and forgives his enemies. His negative trait seems rather to be his anger: he is told more than once by Norfolk to control it. Cranmer, Champion thinks, is more neutral: he is a victim (of Gardiner), but unlike Buckingham he is not a passionate man, he is “passive”<sup>167</sup> (he is actually saved by the king), but he can attract the audience’s sympathy as well. Champion

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<sup>165</sup> Barton, Anne, “Enter Mariners wet: realism in Shakespeare’s last plays”, p. 184.

<sup>166</sup> Champion, Larry, S., “Shakespeare’s ‘Henry VIII’: A Celebration of History”, in *South Atlantic Bulletin*, Vol. 44, No. 1, South Atlantic Modern Language Association, January, 1979.

<sup>167</sup> Champion, Larry, S., “Shakespeare’s ‘Henry VIII’: A Celebration of History”, p. 10.

stresses out that the play aims at giving broader idea of history, rather than being a play that focuses on its characters. A critic often made to the play is that it lacks of coherence, and that the events chosen seem to have been chosen because they were present in Holinshed's chronicle. In this regard, Champion talks about the structure of the play: the first three acts are about "tyranny, oppression, and misjudgment"<sup>168</sup>, while the last two are about "justice and [...] happiness"<sup>169</sup>.

Leggatt<sup>170</sup> finds other correspondences and thinks that the fall of Wolsey echoes the rescue of Cranmer: the Lord Chamberlain tells Wolsey's accusers not to be too harsh with him, and Cromwell asks the same to Gardiner; Norfolk, Suffolk and Surrey are involved with both attacks. Chance also plays quite a big role: Wolsey put his papers in the documents he gave to the king by mistake, and the king's physician noticed Cranmer waiting outside the Council's room by accident (here, though, it could be argued that the king already knew what the Council was planning to do, even if the doctor had not told him). Leggatt says that the virtues that cardinal Wolsey seems to acquire when he realises he has fallen are the same virtues Cranmer shows to possess throughout the whole play. He says that relationships can be found between other scenes, like Anne's coronation as a queen, and Katherine's divine coronation in her vision. Also, if we look carefully, there are elements connecting every scene to the other, "one action is always opening up into another"<sup>171</sup>. The actions are put into juxtaposition, and rise and fall seem to be the elements that link them one to another: during Buckingham's trial, the second gentleman thinks there will be another fall, that of Katherine; at Anne's coronation, he talks to the other man about Buckingham's execution and about Katherine. The usefulness of the figures of the two gentlemen is that of connecting one scene to the other, and to explain what is going on in the play. That said, Leggatt believes Katherine and Wolsey's treatment to be incongruous, and he also thinks that the show is "more lavish than significant"<sup>172</sup>. Two examples are Anne's coronation and Elizabeth's baptism. This, he thinks, was probably done also to balance more dramatic moments, like the speeches of

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<sup>168</sup> Champion, Larry, S., "Shakespeare's 'Henry VIII': A Celebration of History", p. 13.

<sup>169</sup> Ivi, p. 10.

<sup>170</sup> Leggatt, Alexander, *Shakespeare's political drama: the history plays and the Roman plays*. London; New York, Routledge, 1988, p. 229.

<sup>171</sup> Ivi, p. 225.

<sup>172</sup> Leggatt, Alexander, *Shakespeare's political drama*, p 223.

Buckingham and Wolsey. He also believes that the play does not allow the audience to focus on a certain part of the plot, because every time an event is taking place, another one gets in the way. He brings the example of Katherine's trial: instead of presenting us with the trial, the play makes Katherine question Wolsey as a judge. That leads Leggatt to affirm that "diffused attention is characteristic of the play"<sup>173</sup> and "spreading and splitting [...] characterise the play's action"<sup>174</sup>. He maintains that, at first, the play could be considered as a telling of historical facts, but actually, "everything is subsumed to a grand design"<sup>175</sup>, and the pattern is more relevant than the characters themselves. The characters even follow the same pattern of rising and falling. One of the principal aspect is that they all submit to the king.

Yates and Felperin are more concerned with the religious significance of the play. Yates<sup>176</sup> thinks that Henry can be seen as the purifier of the Church, and Wolsey as the representative of all the vices of the Roman Church, with his wealth, greediness, pride and haughtiness. Still, he stresses out that there is a certain tolerance towards all the characters. *Henry VIII* has "the tolerant atmosphere of a last play"<sup>177</sup>. Katherine and Anne are both admired, even though the first is presented as a firm Catholic, and the second as a Lutheran. Archbishop Cranmer is a good man and no flaw is highlighted of him. Cardinal Wolsey has many vices, but, just like Champion underlines, his speech as a fallen man draws sympathy. Even the visions present in the play work out for both Protestants and Catholics. The Protestant one is Cranmer's prophecy regarding the future of England and Elizabeth's reign, the Catholic one is Katherine's vision before dying.

Felperin sees this play as a Christian history play, which insists on the representation of patience as an important virtue. For instance, Norfolk tells Buckingham a few times to let go of his anger and to be more temperant, and Buckingham seems to listen to his advice, speaking very nobly in his fall. Felperin also thinks that Katherine is more like a patient victim than like an angry woman, and the fact that she has a certain stubbornness and does not move from her position is

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<sup>173</sup> Leggatt, Alexander, *Shakespeare's political drama*, p. 222.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>175</sup> Ivi, p. 225.

<sup>176</sup> Yates, Frances. A., *Shakespeare's Last Plays*, p. 72

<sup>177</sup> Ivi, p. 73.

less a sign of pride than it is of her nobility. These two characters fall even though they possess virtues, while Wolsey falls because of the wrongs he committed, but his fall represents his regeneration, in a spiritual sense. Just like Buckingham acquires a new sense of self, Wolsey is reborn. Felperin underlines as well the fact that Wolsey, of course, represents the Roman Church, while Henry (and Cranmer) represent the Church of England. With Wolsey's death, England is free from Rome. Many have compared this last history play to romances, and Felperin here takes into account the fact that while in romances there were mentions of gods, here there is only one God, and there are no more allusions to the classics, but to the Bible. The golden age prophesied by Cranmer is for him a "paradise regained"<sup>178</sup>.

As to the character of King Henry specifically, Leggatt thinks that all the other characters in the play are very deferent to the king, not just because he is the king, but because of the person he is. Yet Henry does not appear as a particularly strong person. He is mostly shown through other characters (just like in the Roman plays), and sometimes he lets his servants and subjects fight without being shown to intervene, just like in Buckingham's case. The king does not even get to talk to Buckingham. The situation concerning Gardiner's attack on Cranmer is different, because this time the king does intervene, and promises Cranmer he will save him. Leggatt says he acts as a "rex ex machina"<sup>179</sup>, and in return for this action, he is 'rewarded' by Cranmer's prophecy in the last act. Leggatt says that the attention during the scene is both on the king and on Cranmer, and that Henry's kingship is shown "sideways, through the career and character of one of his principal subjects"<sup>180</sup>. At the beginning of the play, we are not shown a particularly weak king, but still, we see Wolsey's dominance at court, and in the first scene the name of the king is not even mentioned. When the matter of taxes is discussed, King Henry does not seem to know that such a tax exists in his kingdom, which is an element of weakness. But he will recover from his mistakes. Leggatt draws a comparison between Henry and other kings in Shakespeare's plays, saying that unlike the earlier

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<sup>178</sup> Felperin, Howard, "Shakespeare's Henry VIII: History as Myth", in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Spring, 1966), p. 244.

<sup>179</sup> Leggatt, Alexander, *Shakespeare's political drama*, p. 229.

<sup>180</sup> Ivi, p. 230.

kings or even the heroes of the Roman plays, Henry is never self-assertive, and he never does anything heroic.

McMullan writes that “Henry’s masculinity is in crisis in the play”<sup>181</sup>, and this can be seen in his joy when Cranmer announces the future of Elizabeth. McMullan says it is weird for him to be so excited for Elizabeth, when he already had a daughter, and when the reason for casting off his first wife was that they never had any sons. But this highlights the king’s constant anxiety, he thinks, about his own manliness. When the king describes his doubts, in scene four of act two, McMullan notes that it is clear that “Mary’s legitimacy has had a penetrating effect on his selfhood”<sup>182</sup>. At the same time, Henry seems unable of controlling his desires, as he keeps dancing with Anne even after the cardinal suggested him not to. McMullan writes that “his inability to control his lust for Anne Bullen undermines the very manliness of the urges that drive him to flirt with her”<sup>183</sup>. He is immoderate in this situation, just like Wolsey is generally immoderate.

## 2.2 King Henry’s figure in the play

The representation of King Henry in the play is not just that of a graceful monarch: the character is more complex than it might appear at first.

### 2.2.1 The king’s grace

Henry VIII is indeed a graceful and gracious character, and that is the first image we are given of him in the play, when Buckingham and Norfolk discuss the Field of the Cloth of Gold in scene one of act one. The king is referred to as a ‘sun of glory’, which emphasises his importance and grace. The next reference to Henry is from line 28 onwards, when Norfolk says “the two kings, / Equal in lustre, were now best, now worst, / As presence did present them: him in eye, / Still him in praise, and being present both, / ‘Twas said they saw but one” (*H8*, 1.1.28-31). This puts the two

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<sup>181</sup> McMullan, Gordon, “Introduction”, p. 81.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>183</sup> Ivi, p.84.

kings in a state of equality in their magnificence. Then they are referred to, again, as “suns – / For so they phrase ‘em” (*H8*, 1.1.33-34), and the footnote to this edition<sup>184</sup> underlines that in early modern times defining a king “sun” was a very common metaphor, and that it was often done in the case of king James I. Their ability in fighting is then praised, which, if only, confirms what was said of king Henry in his youth.

### 2.2.2 The passive aspect of the king: Wolsey and Buckingham

The king is immediately described as a graceful monarch, but there is a passivity to the character that has been often underlined: Henry is not always a king who decides what is going on in this kingdom, but a king that lets other people do his job, at least, in the first part of the play.

He does not appear immediately in the play, and he is first mentioned in scene one of act one, and yet, his name is not said. When discussing the Field of the Cloth of Gold, Buckingham says he could not take part in the meeting, because he was ill, when “those two suns of glory, those two lights of men, / Met in the vale of Andres” (*H8*, 1.1.6-7), referring thus, as has been said, to King Henry and King Francis I. Henry is then again referred to as ‘King’ when the dukes and Lord Abergavenny discuss Wolsey’s position and influence at court, and when Buckingham thinks of going to the king first, to get there before the Cardinal. He would like to tell the king “that thus the Cardinal / Does buy and sell his honour as he pleases, / And for his own advantage” (*H8*, 1.1.191-193), already making it clear that the king does not know anything about the machinations of Cardinal Wolsey. Then, Brandon comes in ordering the arrest of both Buckingham and Abergavenny, “in the name/ Of our most sovereign King” (*H8*, 1.1.201-202). The king will never be shown in the same scene as Buckingham, and it seems almost as if the situation does not require his personal intervention. He delegates other men to deal with this nobleman, who was accused of wanting to usurp his throne. This reinforces the idea that the king seems to do what Cardinal Wolsey wants, and that he trusts Wolsey and his decisions, so much that he does not object to imprisoning Buckingham, Wolsey’s enemy. The king’s passivity

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<sup>184</sup> Shakespeare, William; Fletcher, John, *King Henry VIII (All is True)*, p. 215.

in the first half of the play is directly related to the king's dependence on the cardinal, so that he listens to every word the cardinal says, and even lets him choose the enemies of the crown, as is the case with Buckingham.

At the beginning of scene two, the lines that describe the stage directions are already meaningful: Henry is "leaning on the Cardinal's shoulder"<sup>185</sup>, as if he depended on him. The cardinal also takes place on the right side of the king, that is, a position of importance. The king's first words stress his dependency on Wolsey, because he thanks the cardinal for stopping Buckingham's plot. When Queen Katherine informs him that his subjects are rebelling about his taxations, he shows absolute ignorance about it. "Taxation? / Wherein, and what taxation?" (*H8*, 1.2.37) he asks, and then proceeds to ask the cardinal "you that blamed for it alike with us, / Know you of this taxation?" (*H8*, 1.2.39-40) The king is not responsible for the tax, but his being oblivious about it does not give the idea that he is a particularly good ruler in control of decisions being made. Wolsey's answer underlines that he is just a single individual, and if he is to blame, he did not take the decision by himself. Katherine accuses him, and Henry seems still confused: "The nature of it? In what kind, let's know, / Is this exaction?" (*H8*, 1.2.53-54). When Katherine explains the situation, Henry is displeased: "By my life, this is against our pleasure" (*H8*, 1.2.67). Wolsey proceeds defending himself, and adding that they should not be stopped in doing something for fear of the results, but the king says that things done without a precedent are to be feared, and there is not a precedent of this tax. He affirms "We must not rend our subjects from our laws / And stick them in our will" (*H8*, 1.2.93-94), he does not want to bind subjects to his will, which would make him a tyrant. On his own, he takes this resolution: "To every county / Where this is questioned send our letters with / Free pardon to each man that has denied / The force of this commission" (*H8*, 1.2.98-101). The king cannot be described as entirely passive in this passage, since he immediately decides to eliminate the tax as soon as he realises what it is about, exercising his power. Still, he is not entirely in control: he had to be informed by the Queen about the tax (and about the people's unwillingness to pay it), and, just after he takes his decision, Wolsey tells his secretary "let it be noised / That

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<sup>185</sup> Shakespeare, William; Fletcher, John, *King Henry VIII (All is True)*, p. 231.



through our intercession this revokement / And pardon comes" (*H8*, 1.1.105-107), acting behind the king's back, and taking credit for something he did not do.

The other noblemen are aware of the importance of Cardinal Wolsey, and of the power he has over the king, and they resent it. When the Lord Chamberlain, Suffolk and Norfolk are discussing the reasons why the king is in a bad mood, Norfolk says it is the Cardinal's fault, and calls him "King-Cardinal" (*H8*, 2.2.18), angry and disgusted at the Cardinal's power and haughtiness, but this also suggests that the real ruler in the kingdom is actually Wolsey himself. "The King will know him one day" (*H8*, 2.2.20), he adds. The noblemen wish that one day, the king's eyes will be opened, and one wonders why the king keeps trusting Wolsey, if so many at court know about his plots. But of course, they need evidence, since accusing the cardinal is a bold move. Norfolk even suggests that Wolsey "dives into the King's soul and there scatters / Dangers, doubts, wringing of the conscience" (*H8*, 2.2.25-26), underlining the weight everything Wolsey says has, and how deep his words can trouble the king's conscience. The Lord Chamberlain, at line forty, hopes again that "Heaven will one day open / The King's eyes" (*H8*, 2.2.40-41), presenting Henry as a victim who needs to get to know the truth. That will bring him to end the injustices perpetrated by the Cardinal, which is actually what happens with the play after the Cardinal's fall.

Even the second gentleman, when discussing about the rumour of the king's divorce, says that "either the Cardinal / Or some about him near have, out of malice / To the good Queen, possessed him with a scruple / That will undo her" (*H8*, 2.1.155-158). This comment takes responsibility away from the king, and at the same time suggests that the king is influenced by the cardinal. So, the king acts with good intentions, and the cardinal is the evil one, yet the cardinal has the strings and the king is the puppet. The passivity of the king is explained in his relationship to Wolsey. In the same scene, cardinals Wolsey and Campeggio come to the king, and Henry is relieved to see Wolsey, whom he calls "the quiet of my wounded conscience" (*H8*, 2.2.73) and he says he is "a cure fit for a king" (*H8*, 2.2.74). He is very gracious with him, and agrees to confer with him, sending the other noblemen away. After the accusations moved to Wolsey by Norfolk, Suffolk and the Lord Chamberlain that the reader has just read (or the spectator has just seen), the king

appears here as quite naive to the audience. He does not realise he is being played by his servant and advisor. This becomes even worse, when Gardiner, pledging to be the King's servant, tells the cardinal he will only ever be *his* servant: the king has acquired another man he should not trust.

In scene two of act three, Suffolk, Norfolk and the Lord Chamberlain speak with Surrey, again about Wolsey, and the Lord Chamberlain declares that the cardinal has "a witchcraft / Over the King in's tongue" (*H8*, 3.2.18-19). The cardinal's power is so great that the king is practically spellbound. But Norfolk has news: the king has, finally, opened his eyes, and found "matter against him that forever mars / The honey of his language" (*H8*, 3.2.20-22). The king is free from Wolsey's enchantment; he has found the letters Wolsey sent to the Pope. Then Wolsey enters with Cromwell, and says that the king shall marry the Duchess of Alençon, the King of France's sister, as if his opinion were the only one that counted: the king will do as he wishes. "No, I'll no Anne Bullens for him: / There's more in't than fair visage" (*H8*, 3.2.87-88). Wolsey does not think the king a good judge in matter of marriage, he should not be following his instincts, being tricked by a beautiful face; he should realise that a king needs more for a future Queen. Wolsey actually goes on by saying that Anne was a gentlewoman at the service of the former Queen, she is not noble enough, furthermore, she is a Lutheran. He thinks Anne might convince the king of her own religious ideas, and that a sign of that is the King favouring Cranmer. The king then enters, talking to the noblemen. He is outraged at the cardinal, and reports that he has found, between the papers the cardinal sent him, an inventory of all the cardinal's riches. The noblemen report that Wolsey is nervous and worried, but now that the king has seen through the cardinal's plots, he declares "If we did think / His contemplation were above the earth / And fixed on spiritual objects, he should still / Dwell in his musings. But I am afraid / His thinkings are below the moon, not worth / His serious considering" (*H8*, 3.2.130-134). The cardinal is definitely thinking about earthly matters, and not about something spiritual, so the king does not think he will disturb his thoughts in interrupting him. Henry's words to the Cardinal are deeply ironic: he says the cardinal must be thinking about heavenly things, and that he might not even time to think about earthly things. He even says the cardinal has "the inventory / Of your best graces in your

mind" (*H8*, 3.2.137-138), reprising the term inventory he just used to describe the list of Wolsey's wealth that has come into his hands. Wolsey starts saying there is a time for holy offices, and a time for earthly matters, and that he is devoting time to the king's divorce cause, and Henry concedes him that he is saying well. But, as the king himself puts it out, "words are no deeds" (*H8*, 3.2.154), and Wolsey's enchanting tongue will not save him this time. He tells the cardinal how much Henry VII had loved him, and how he himself loved him. The king underlines that he has made the cardinal a great man, "the prime man of the state" (*H8*, 3.2.162), and Wolsey immediately says the king is right, and that he has always been loyal to the king. Henry says that he has "opened bounty" to the cardinal, and love, and that every part of Wolsey's body, from his heart to his mind, to his hand, should be the king's friend. Wolsey insists with his image of loyal servant, and the king does not unmask him: he just gives him the papers, and frowns at him. The cardinal realises what he has done, and the noblemen ask him to give them the seal, on the king's orders. The cardinal refuses, and insists that they are asking him to give something the king gave him. They accuse him, and then Wolsey's speech follows. The moment in which King Henry comes to know the whole truth about Wolsey is the moment in which he takes the reign back into his hands, and frees himself from Wolsey's spell: from this moment on in the play, the King seems to be definitely less passive, and more in charge of what is happening.

The relationship of the king with Thomas Cromwell is not depicted here, even though we are told, at Anne's coronation, that Cromwell is high in the king's favour, and he has been given the title of Master of Jewels. But we are allowed to see the relationship between Wolsey and Cromwell, and the words Wolsey speaks of the king. When Cromwell comes in, after Wolsey has realised that he is now ruined, and has made his soliloquy, Wolsey says he now has a clear conscience, and that "the King has cured me / I humbly thank his grace" (*H8*, 3.2.380-381). The king is, in a way, his saviour, who took a burden away from his shoulder. Henry himself called the cardinal his cure, before, and referred to the matter of his marriage as something that needed remedy. The imagery of illness is repeated, but this time, the other way round, and the king has caused this change in the cardinal. At line 408 Wolsey says "the King has gone beyond me": Wolsey has no power over him. The cardinal tells

Cromwell to go to the king, who is a sun he prays will never set. The king here is again a graceful entity, and the prayers of Wolsey go to him, such as the prayers of Buckingham went to him. Wolsey also thinks that Henry will advance Cromwell's position, therefore having faith in the king. In his advice to Cromwell, he also bids to serve the king, as if Cromwell's safety depended on that.

Another instance of the king's passivity, directly related to Henry's relationship with Wolsey, can be seen in his relationship to Buckingham: he never talks directly with the Duke, and decides to condemn him due to the words said by a surveyor brought to him by Wolsey. Right after the discussion about taxations in scene of act one, Katherine says she is sorry to hear about what happened to the Duke of Buckingham, and king Henry says he is as well. He starts talking about all the qualities of the duke, but then Buckingham's virtues "turn to vicious forms, ten times more ugly / Than they ever were fair" (*H8*, 1.2.117-118). He was a wonderful, graceful man, and now he "is become as black / As if besmeared in hell" (*H8*, 1.2.123-124). His appreciation of Buckingham's qualities seems sincere, which makes his judgment of Buckingham now so harsh. Indeed, he believes everything the cardinal told him, and he thinks the surveyor will tell them the truth. The second scene ends in fact with the king declaring, convinced, that Buckingham's plan was to "sheathe his knife in us" (*H8*, 1.2.210), and he calls for an immediate trial, entrusting the case in the hands of the law. The king has listened to the "witness", and from this moment on he will not intervene in Buckingham's case anymore. Act one of scene two is dedicated to Buckingham, and the king does in fact not appear, he is just mentioned. Buckingham, after forgiving those who condemned him also says that he does not hope to live, "although the King have mercies / More than I dare make faults" (*H8*, 2.1.70-71), suggesting that it would not matter if he had committed a great crime, in any case the king would be able to bestow mercy, if he wanted to. After forgiving Lovell, Buckingham asks him to "commend me to his grace, / And if he speak of Buckingham, pray tell him / You met him half in heaven" (*H8*, 2.1.87-88) and "my vows and prayers / Yet are the King's and, till my soul forsake, / Shall cry for blessings on him" (*H8*, 2.1.88-90). This probably tells more about Buckingham's forgiveness than about the king, but still, he does not judge the king negatively, instead, he prays for him. When Buckingham talks about his fate and his

father's, he mentions the king name for the first time in the play: "Henry the Eighth, life, honour, name and all / That made me happy at one stroke has taken / For ever from the world" (*H8*, 2.1.116-118). The king has deprived him of everything, but he is happy because he had a trial. And yet, he says that both he and his father "fell by our servants, by those men who loved most" (*H8*, 2.1.122). So, Buckingham is full of forgiveness, and says he prays for the king, and he does not put blame on him, probably knowing that the enemies he had at court were the ones who really brought him down, but at the same time, he considers the king's treatment unjust. He even advises men:

"Where you are liberal of your loves and counsels, / Be sure you be not loose; for those you make friends / And give your hearts to, when they last perceive / The least rub in your fortunes, fall away / Like water from ye, never found again / But where they mean to sink ye" (*H8*, 2.1.126-131)

He probably refers to a number of people who were close to him who abandoned him in his disgrace, or to the enemies at court who helped bringing him down, Wolsey and the surveyor definitely come to mind, but still, the fact that he mentions that after talking about how he was treated by the king might suggest that his faith and love in the king were misplaced. The Duke of Buckingham prays for the king, yet the reader is brought to think that the king is probably committing a mistake in this situation, due to the blind trust he has in Wolsey. If we consider Buckingham innocent, we realise that his reliance on the cardinal brought to the end of an innocent man, guilty of being an enemy to Wolsey.

### 2.2.3 The active aspect of the king: his relationship with Cranmer

The passivity of the king transforms into activity in the second part of the play. When King Henry gets rid of Wolsey, he is seen to intervene more in the play than he did before, and that is particularly evident in act five: not only does he warn Cranmer about the Council's plan to put him in the Tower, but he also offers a solution to the problem, stepping in when he is needed. In scene one of act five, Gardiner is speaking with Lovell, and Gardiner talks ill of Queen Anne, Archbishop Cranmer, and Thomas Cromwell. Lovell says that "th'Archbishop / Is the King's hand and tongue, and who dare speak / One syllable against him?" (*H8*, 5.1.37-39).

Wolsey was previously accused of influencing the king with what he said, while here the Archbishop acts on behalf of the king, but their relationship is not similar to the one there was between Henry and Wolsey, as, later on, Henry will save him and act for him, instead of being ruled by him. Henry treats Cranmer very gracefully, and he is very sorry to report about the complaints he has received about the Archbishop: "I grieve at what I speak, / And am right sorry to repeat what follows" (*H8*, 5.1.95-96). He warns him about the Council's plan, and after Cranmer thanks him, he says "thy truth and integrity is rooted / In us, thy friend" (*H8*, 5.1.114-115). Unlike the compliments he paid Cardinal Wolsey about his loyalty and honesty, these ones are sincere, and show how much King Henry appreciates Cranmer. The king is also surprised, because he thought Cranmer could have asked him to appease these problems between him and the Council, while he only thanked the king, saying that he would be glad to defend himself against their accusations. But Cranmer does not fear the accusations. Henry informs him that he has enemies, therefore, "at what ease / Might corrupt minds procur knaves as corrupt / To swear against you? Such things have been done" (*H8*, 5.1.131-133), which is actually what happened in Buckingham's case, only that, that time, the king listened to those who swore against Buckingham, while here he does the opposite. The king then instructs Cranmer to appeal to him, if there is need to, showing the councillors his ring. Henry seems to be quite moved by Cranmer's tears, and says "I swear he is true-hearted, and a soul / None better in my kingdom" (*H8*, 5.1.154-155). In this case, he placed his trust in a person worthy of it.

Scene two of Act Five depicts Cranmer's confrontation with the Council. The king's physician, Doctor Butts, sees that Cranmer is made to wait outside the room, even though he is part of the Council, and refers it to the king, who is at a window above. The king is displeased that they have such bad manners as to make him wait outside, and asks, rhetorically "is this the honour they do to one another?" (*H8*, 5.2.25) and thinks they are making him wait "at the door, too, like a post with packets" (*H8*, 5.2.31). He seems to know more of what is going on at court now, compared to the first acts, and he has learnt his lesson with Cardinal Wolsey, and expects his councillors to behave honourably, and is displeased if they do not. He says to Butts they should leave them alone in the meantime. The scene between

Cranmer and the councillors follow and right after they decide to bring him to the Tower, Cranmer shows them the king's ring. The Archbishop affirms "I take my cause / Out of the gripes of cruel men and give it / To a most noble judge, the King my master" (*H8*, 5.2.133-135), expressing the king's superiority in judgement and wisdom in respect to his servants. Suffolk and Norfolk realise they should have seen them coming, and Norfolk asks "Do you think, my lords, the King will suffer but the little finger / Of this man to be vexed?" (*H8*, 5.2.140-141), stressing how high Cranmer has risen in the king's favours, and how much the king protects him. The king comes in, frowning at them (just like he frowned at Wolsey before), and cuts off immediately Gardiner's flattery, as he himself defines it. "To me you cannot reach, you play the spaniel / And think with wagging of your tongue to win me" (*H8*, 5.3.160-161), he proudly accuses. In fact, not long ago in the play, the king was in fact "won" by the "wagging" of Wolsey's tongue, but he has now grown suspicious of flattery. He even gets to the point of saying "I'm sure / Thou hast a cruel nature and a bloody" (*H8*, 5.3.162-163) a cold and harsh judgement towards Gardiner. These men should better starve, the king declares, than think that Cranmer does not deserve his place in the Council. He scolds them, saying he thought "I had had men of some understanding / And wisdom of my Council, but I find none" (*H8*, 5.2.169-170). He tells them that few of them deserve to be called honest and good, unlike the Archbishop, and calls what they did a shame, they were malign. He tells them to respect Cranmer, and that "if a prince / May be beholding to a subject, I / Am, for his love and service, so to him" (*H8*, 5.2.189-191) expressing almost more affection for Cranmer than for anyone else in the play. He encourages all the councillors to embrace him, and be friends with him, thus not condemning anyone of them, but just urging them to recognise Cranmer's worth. The king also decides that Cranmer will be his daughter's godfather, bestowing him a great honour. Cranmer cries again, this time, for joy, and Henry thinks that shows Cranmer's "true heart" (*H8*, 5.2.208).

The king has learned from his mistakes, and his relationship with Cranmer is the inverse of his relationship with Wolsey: Cranmer is to be trusted, and he does not put himself as an equal to the king, a powerful man, but rather as a faithful servant, which allows the king to act to protect him. The intervention of the king to save Cranmer from imprisonment also mirrors Buckingham's arrest: in the first case, the

king helped out the Archbishop personally (and he thought that the councillors could have produced fake testimony against Cranmer), in the second case, he did not concede mercy to the Duke (and he did not doubt the surveyor's affirmations).

#### 2.2.4 The king's relationship with Catherine

In the play, another important aspect of Henry's character is his relationship with his wives, Queen Katherine, first, and Queen Anne, then, and the attitude he has towards them. Katherine is represented as a good woman and a strong person. She first appears in scene two of act one, and she is seen immediately kneeling, but Henry brings her up and kisses her, asking her to take place next to him, and telling her: "You have half our power; / The other moiety ere you ask is given. / Repeat your will and take it" (*H8*, 1.2.11-13). He is courteous with her and seems to consider her important; he does not want her to kneel too long in front of him. Therefore, she talks to him about the Amicable Grant, the tax that has recently been imposed on the subjects. She actually seems more informed on what is going on in the kingdom than the king is, and she appears in this scene as a good Queen worried about her people, and about Buckingham, as well. There is nothing wrong about the behaviour of Henry with her, either.

Later on, the king realises that his marriage could be unlawful, and he says that Cardinal Campeggio is coming from Rome by order of the Pope, and that the Queen shall have the best scholars to defend her case. Henry never seems to scorn Queen Katherine in any way, he seems, indeed, deeply troubled by the doubts he has on their marriage, but he still seems to have respect for his wife, and, in his words, love as well. The scene ends with the king affirming that they will meet at Blackfriars to settle this matter, and saying, referring to Queen Katherine: "O my lord, / Would it not grieve an able man to leave / So sweet a bedfellow? But conscience, conscience – / O, 'tis a tender place, and I must leave her" (*H8*, 2.2.139-142). The king expresses affection and appreciation for the Queen, what, he says, leads him to leave her is his conscience. This is actually what the king did, in real life, claiming that the sole reason he left his Queen was his having been wrong and sinful in being married to her in the first place. Nothing was said against her as a wife and as a Queen. This



scene, though, is placed right before the scene dedicated to Anne Boleyn, which can make us wonder how much Henry really grieves in abandoning Katherine.

Scene four is the scene of Katherine's trial, in which Katherine defends herself as a wife and as a Queen, and refuses to be cast aside, and then refuses to have Cardinal Wolsey as her judge. When she leaves, the king orders to call her back again, but she says she will not, and there the queen makes his first speech in this scene. He starts by saying "Go thy ways, Kate" (*H8*, 2.4.130), using a diminutive, perhaps showing thus affection, and then praises her affirming:

"That man i'th' world who shall report he has / A better wife, let him in naught be trusted / For speaking false in that. Thou art alone – / If thy rare qualities, sweet gentleness / Thy meekness saint-like, wife-like government, / Obeying in commanding, and thy parts / Sovereign and pious else, could speak thee out – / The queen of earthly queens. She's noble born, / And like her true nobility she has / Carried herself towards me" (2.4.131-139)

The portrait he pictures is that of a 'perfect woman', wife and queen. The footnote suggests this praise could be considered either as wistful (since Henry is losing such a woman), or as hypocritical (he wants an annulment, and he also wishes to marry Anne). While it is true that the king wants his divorce -and the fact that he will not stop at the trial to get what he wants proves it- this praise could also be read as a sincere praise: the queen is indeed a wonderful woman, noble, sweet, and pious, and obedient. But she can not get the king what he wants, an heir, therefore he casts her off. This is what actually happened, historically. And even though he wants to get rid of her, this does not mean that he does not really think that his wife possesses these virtues.

King Henry then assures Wolsey that he was not the one who made him doubt the validity of the marriage, "I free you from't" (*H8*, 2.4.154). Despite the fact that many regard Wolsey as the one who is guilty, the king even arrives to the point of saying that the cardinal never wanted to have anything to do with the matter: "You ever / Have wished the sleeping of this business, never desired / It to be stirred" (*H8*, 2.4.159-161) The king explained how he first started thinking about it, saying that it was the Bishop of Bayonne who made him have doubts, when he questioned the legitimacy of Princess Mary. When the king talks about his conscience, there is something feminine about the way he presents himself: he talks about his bosom and his breast, and says that conscience "entered me, / Yea, with a spitting power" (*H8*,

2.4.179-180). He first thought God was not in his favour, because he and Katherine could not have a male heir, and “hence I took a thought / This was judgement on me, that my kingdom [...] should not be gladdened in’t by me” (*H8*, 2.4.190-193). He is not just worried about himself, but also about his kingdom, and the fact that he might leave it with no heir to reign. He realised he was putting the kingdom in danger and “that gave me / Many a groaning throe” (*H8*, 2.4.195-196). Henry explains here that he was really suffering, also physically, for this problem. Comparing his conscience to the open sea, he says “I did steer / Toward this remedy whereupon we are / Now present here together” (*H8*, 2.4.197-199). This matter is so serious that it needs a remedy, a cure, just like an illness. In fact, he then says he summoned “all the reverend fathers of the land / And doctors learned” (*H8*, 2.4.202-203) to solve the matter, but he still “feel full sick, and yet not well” (*H8*, 2.4.200-201). This problem is evidently consuming him. After Lincoln’s answer to him, Henry proceeds by saying he asked for everybody’s opinion, and “therefore go on, / For no dislike i’t’h’ world against the person / Of the good Queen, but the sharp thorny points / Of my alleged reasons, drives this forward” (*H8*, 2.4.219-222). He refuses, again, to blame Katherine. From his point of view, it is solely his conscience that told him he was being wrong, and he has reasons to want to divorce from her. These men know it, and they can prove it. If they prove his marriage valid and lawful, “we are contented / To wear our mortal state to come with her, / Katherine, our Queen” (*H8*, 2.4.224-226). He says that to show, again, that it is the validity that worries him, not his wife in herself. But he also says “before the primest creature / That’s paragoned o’t’h’ world” (*H8*, 2.4.226-227), which can be a reference to Anne. Campeius affirms that, Queen Katherine being absent, the court needs to be adjourned, and Henry, to himself, says “I may perceive / These cardinals trifle with me. I abhor / These dilatory sloth and tricks of Rome” (*H8*, 2.4.233-234). If not really angry, he sounds at least spiteful and displeased. Even though he previously said he wanted Katherine to have scholars defend her case, and that if the court decided that his marriage was valid, he would return back to her, now he thinks the cardinal are trying to delay the sentence, and that they are trying to trick him into staying married with his wife. He wishes for Cranmer’s return, calling him “my learned and well-beloved servant” (*H8*, 2.4.235).

Scene one of act three is the one where the cardinals go to Queen Katherine, bringing their advice, and this is the scene in which it is possible to see the relationship between the king and the queen from another point of view, that of Katherine's. Campeius tells her to "put your main cause into the King's protection" (*H8*, 3.1.93), and she is outraged by this proposal. "Would you have me [...] / Put my sick cause into his hands that hates me? / Alas, 'has banished me his bed already; / His love, too, long ago" (*H8*, 3.1.115-120). Here Katherine gives us another image of the king: not a king, who, troubled by his conscience, decides to do what he can to settle the matter of his marriage, but a king who stopped loving his wife a long time ago, and who does not want her in his bed anymore. Henry does not care about her anymore, that is what she thinks. Still, as a faithful wife, even when her husband did not love her anymore, she has continued loving the king, obeying him, being so fond of him to the point of idolatry. "And am I thus rewarded?" (*H8*, 3.1.133). The king is not just cold, and unlovingly, but also ungrateful. Campeius, later on, tells her that "The King loves you / Beware you lose it not" (*H8*, 3.1.161-162), suggesting her not to make him become a 'true enemy' of hers, which also underlines that the king might not be as gracious as he is now, were Katherine to cross him in any way.

Her fate is not a particular bright one, in fact, she is sent away from court, and ends up living in Kimbolton Castle. In the first part of scene two of act four, Katherine and her servant Griffith talk about Wolsey. Then, after her vision, a messenger is sent to her by the king, Lord Caputius (Eustache Chapuys). The king sent him there because he "grieves much for your weakness and by me / Sends you his princely commendations / And heartily entreats you take good comfort" (*H8*, 4.2.117-119). To be fair, the king is the one responsible for sending her there, and we do not know whether he really worries about Katherine's health, but still, he sent somebody to visit her. Katherine replies that the comfort comes too late, while the king, says Chapuys, is in good health. To which Katherine says "so may he ever do" (*H8*, 4.2.125), without accusing him, and then she says she has written a letter for him, in which she has "commended to his goodness / The model of our chaste loves, his young daughter" (*H8*, 4.2.131-132), and asked him to "give her virtuous breeding" (*H8*, 4.2.134). She also asks the king to have pity on her ladies, all virtuous and honest, and find them a good husband. Her last request is for the men

who served her, that are very poor because she could not pay them, and still refused to leave her side, that the king should pay them. Katherine begs Chapuys to “urge the King / To do me this last right” (*H8*, 4.2.157-158). She puts her hopes in the king, that he may act rightly, because he owes that to the Queen, now a dying woman. She thinks he could do it, but only if asked it with enough insistence – “urge the king”. In her last speech, Katherine thanks Chapuys, and asks him to say to the king that “his long trouble now is passing / Out of this world” (*H8*, 4.2.162-163) because that is what she thinks the king considered her. And immediately after, she says “Tell him in death I blessed him, / For so I will” (*H8*, 4.2.163-164). Katherine, too, before dying, blesses the king, just like Buckingham and Wolsey had said they prayed for him. Ultimately, they are all wishing the king well.

#### 2.2.5 The king’s relationship with Anne

While still married to Katherine, the king meets the woman who will become his second wife, Anne, whose depiction in this play is generally a positive one. In the play, the meeting takes place at Wolsey’s house. A servant announces the arrival of some foreigners, and then the king and others enter, dressed like shepherds, pretending not to speak English, and the Lord Chamberlain says they have come there because they heard so much about the Cardinal. Then, they all choose ladies to dance with, and King Henry chooses Anne Boleyn. The king says “The fairest hand I ever touched. O Beauty, / Till now I never knew thee” (*H8*, 1.4.75-76). His infatuation with Anne seems to start immediately, as soon as he sees her and touches her hand, even before starting dancing. He then asks the Lord Chamberlain who is the lady he danced with, and he gets to know it is Anne Boleyn. He says she is “a dainty one” (*H8*, 1.4.94), then he calls her sweetheart, and tells her he was rude, because he did not kiss her before (the footnote<sup>186</sup> explains that, at the end of a dance, the man kissed the woman, and the woman did a curtsy). Wolsey notices that Henry is a little heated, because of the dance, and suggests the king to calm down, to go “in the next chamber” (*H8*, 1.4.102), where the air is fresher. “The next chamber”, though, might be a hint to ‘the next wife’, since king Henry will pass from one to

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<sup>186</sup> Shakespeare, William; Fletcher, John, *King Henry VIII (All is True)*, p. 265.

another. The king tells all the gentlemen to lead the ladies to the chamber, and says “let’s be merry” (*H8*, 1.4.104), announcing that he will drink to all those fair ladies, and he will dance. This is also depiction of King Henry’s cheerful nature, usually associated to the first part of his reign.

At Buckingham’s trial, the two gentlemen are already talking about rumours of a divorce, and in scene two, when some gentlemen discussing about the king, the Lord Chamberlain says Henry is “full of sad thoughts and troubles” (*H8*, 2.2.14). This reminds us of a similar situation in *When You See Me, You Know Me*, when the king was on his own after Jane Seymour’s death, very sad, and nobody ventured to enter his presence for fear of his anger. Here, though, the king is not mourning. The Lord Chamberlain suggests the king’s conscience is disturbed by the fact that he married Queen Katherine, his brother Arthur’s wife, while Suffolk suggests that the king is thinking about Anne. In fact, in scene three, the Lord Chamberlain enters the room where Anne and her companion are, and he says that “the King’s majesty / Commends his good opinion of you, and / Does purpose honour to you no less flowing / Than Marchioness of Pembroke” (*H8*. 2.3.60-63), which shows that Henry, infatuated with her from the moment he danced with her at Wolsey’s, is already courting her, bestowing her titles and money.

After Wolsey’s fall, the gentlemen at court inform us that the king has already married Anne, following Campeius’s return (or rather flight) to Rome, and Cranmer’s return. Scene one of act four sees Anne’s coronation. When the second gentleman sees Anne, he observes that “Our King has all the Indies in his arms, / And more, and richer, when he strains that lady. / I cannot blame his conscience” (*H8*, 4.1.45-47). Anne Boleyn is in fact criticised by Wolsey, and mocked by her old companion, but all the other characters have only words of praise for her. The third gentleman, not much later on, describes the coronation, and again praises Anne Boleyn, and even Queen Katherine does not say anything against her. Here the gentleman thinks the kingdom has a great treasure in his arms, and also refers to the king’s famous conscience. He cannot blame the king if his ‘scruples of conscience’, which can in this case be interpreted as the king’s attraction to Anne, led him to marry such a lady.

In scene one of act five, when the king is playing with Suffolk, Queen Anne is already in labour, and Henry seems to be quite concerned about it: he cannot play anymore, asks Lovell news about her, and, when Lovell says that she is suffering, the king says “Alas, good lady” (*H8*, 5.1.69). Therefore, he does not seem only worried about whether he will have a son or not, but also about his wife. He even asks Suffolk to remember the Queen in his prayers, before going to sleep. But when the old lady enters, the king asks her whether the Queen has had the baby, and adds “Say ‘Ay, and of a boy’” (*H8*, 5.1.163). Here, unlike in the previous scene, he is concerned about their baby being a male child. The old lady says that because the king told her to, but she adds that the baby is actually a girl. King just orders Lovell to pay the lady, and immediately goes to the Queen.

We do not get to see Anne’s side of the story as we did with Katherine. We can see she speaks humbly and graciously with the old lady and the Lord Chamberlain, accepting the title the king has given her and thanking him for that, and worrying about Queen Katherine and pitying her. Some characters, like the commenting gentlemen and the Lord Chamberlain seem to be full of praise for her, while the old lady thinks she is quite a hypocrite in saying she would never want to be Queen, and Wolsey loathes her. It is to notice, though, that Wolsey is presented as a villain in the play (until his final repentment), so the fact that he does not like Anne plays in her favour rather than in his. The play, of course, also does not deal with what happened afterwards to Anne Boleyn, so the relationship between her and the king seems to be an affectionate one.

#### 2.2.6 The king’s relationship with Elizabeth

The only other woman King Henry has a relationship with in this play is actually his daughter, Elizabeth, who is born at the end of the play. She is just a baby, but she has a role, especially due to the prophecy of her future kingdom. Henry wishes Anne to have a boy, but in the scene of the baptism, after Cranmer prophesises about the wonderful reign of Queen Elizabeth, he seems to be amazed and happy. Scene four sees in fact the noblemen come into the scene, the king last of all. This is when Cranmer makes his prophecy, and the king comments “Thou

speakest wonders" (*H8*, 5.4.55). Henry also says "O lord Archbishop, / Thou hast made me now a man. Never before / This happy child did I get anything" (*H8*, 5.4.63-64). Of course, Elizabeth's (and her successor, James's) praise has a reason since, when the play was written and performed, King James was the king, and Queen Elizabeth had died ten years before. It has already been noted that it is slightly strange for the king to say that he was not a man before that. After all, he is in a very high position for a man: he is the king, and reigns over England. If we consider this in relation to his becoming a man only after having had an heir, his heir, Elizabeth, is not a son, and not being able to have a son was the very reason he wanted to annul his previous marriage to Katherine in the first place. Moreover, he already had a daughter, Princess Mary (though now Mary falls behind Elizabeth in the line of succession). But the wonders told about Elizabeth's future reign by Cranmer might have moved and convinced him. Henry thanks all the lords, and tells them the Queen will want to thank them as well. His last words are: "This day, no man think / 'Has business at his house, for all shall stay: / This little one shall make it holiday" (*H8*, 5.4.73-75). He uses a term of affection for his daughter, and declares that day a holiday.

#### 2.2.7 The king's anger and changes of mood

Even though the king here can not be seen as a comic character, or violent in a funny way, he does seem, at times, quick-tempered and prone to anger, which reminds us of his character in Rowley's *When You See Me, You Know Me*. For instance, when Henry is interrogating the surveyor, he has an outburst of anger, exclaiming: "Ha? What, so rank? Ah, ha! / There's mischief in this man" (*H8*, 1.2.187-188), showing here his character trait that was quite predominant in Rowley's play, even with the same exclamation, "Ha!".

In act two, when the gentlemen talk together, the second one asks the first one whether he has heard of the intention of the king to divorce, and the first one answers saying that "when the King once heard it, out of anger / He sent command to the Lord Mayor straight / To stop the rumour" (*H8*, 2.1.149-151). Here the king acts again, for the second time in the play (though here not directly, he is just reported to

have done so), with choler. Right after the already mentioned scene in which the king is reported to be sad, and the court gentlemen give different opinions to why he that is so, Suffolk and Norfolk go to the king, who is angry at them, and exclaims “How dare you thrust yourselves / Into my private meditations? / Who am I? Ha ?” (*H8*, 2.2.63-65), which reminds Rowley’s king Henry asking whether or not he was the king. Suffolk explains the reason of the visit, the king dismisses him, saying that is not “an hour for temporal affairs” (*H8*, 2.2.71).

When the court gentlemen refer to the fact that Campeius has fled England, being an accomplice to Cardinal Wolsey’s plots, Suffolk says that “I do assure you / The King cried ‘Ha!’ at this” (*H8*, 3.2.60-61), the expression he utters when he is particularly angry. Also, in the case of the Council’s plot against Cranmer, King Henry frowns at the councillors and scolds them.

## 2.2.8 An overall picture of the king

Saccio writes that:

“Shakespeare’s Henry is a character out of romance, at times more like Prospero or Mozart’s Sarastro or Tolkien’s Elrond Halfelven than he is like any man who ever ruled England. He is not quite perfect; he is sometimes testy (as in Prospero); he is sometimes crucially ignorant of the designs of evil men; but he becomes a numinous center of righteous power, eventually and effortlessly seeing that good will triumph”<sup>187</sup>

which is a good summary of Henry’s figure throughout all the acts of the play. Henry does come across like a graceful, wise king, in general, but he does more so in the second part of the play, when he takes the power into his hands, and decides to stand by the side of an honest man he respects, unmasking the plans of his Council, and even setting things straight himself, without delegating anybody else to do it. He appears as a good king and a friend to Cranmer, and he is delighted by Cranmer’s prophecy of Elizabeth’s future. Still, the king has his flaws. For instance, he does not react with composure at all times. He is not depicted as a particularly violent man, or comically angry (unlike Rowley’s Henry VIII), yet he has his moments of anger. Rightly so, when he finds out about Wolsey’s inventory and about his plots, and when he scolds the Council for the way they treated Cranmer; maybe less rightly so

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<sup>187</sup> Saccio, Peter, *Shakespeare’s English Kings: History, Chronicle and Drama*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.210.



when he snaps at the noblemen who want to talk to him, because he is busy thinking about his marriage, and when, in anger, he asks the rumour of him wanting to divorce the Queen to be stopped (after all, the rumour was true). Henry also shows off his suspicious nature when he thinks the cardinals are delaying the trial on purpose.

In respect to his two wives, the king has nothing but kind words: it has already been remarked that he speaks highly of Katherine (and says he is sorry to have to leave her), and he is gallant to Anne Boleyn at first, and worries for her when she is giving birth. And yet, from Katherine's words, we know he stopped loving her at a certain point, and that he has other reasons other than his conscience for casting her off. We can agree with her that he is treating her loyalty and obedience unjustly.

An aspect of his character that has often been highlighted is Henry's passivity in the first part of the play, which does not make him a bad person or an evil character, but more like a victim in the hands of the villain (then, reformed) cardinal Wolsey. It is to be stressed out, though, that the blame is never put on him, but always on the cardinal. If only, what the king needs to do, according to the other courtiers talking in the play, is that he should open his eyes. Moreover, he is not so unfair as to have other characters be angry at him to the very last moment: even the ones that fell during his reign remember him in his prayers.

His figure is not the straightforward figure of a just king, rather the figure of a king that learns from his mistakes and becomes just as the play proceeds. But there is no denying some negative aspects of his figure. He is not a bawdy, comic character, nor a blood-thirsty man: his representation lies more on the positive and celebrating side, but with some flaws. It is somehow a 'rosier' version of the historical king Henry, who, to quote Saccio "certainly had virtues as well as vices"<sup>188</sup>. It is also worth noticing that the play only takes into account a part of King Henry's reign and it does not focus on what happened afterwards, including for instance More and Cromwell's beheadings, Anne's execution and the wives who came afterwards. The audience at the time knew it, but still, it is not part of the play.

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<sup>188</sup> Saccio, Peter, *Shakespeare's English Kings*, p. 210

This part of King Henry's reign seems to be a quite popular subject among writers: the first part of his reign, when he was a handsome young king, is usually overlooked, and so are usually his last days. The real interest always seems to be linked to his decision to separate from Catherine because he wants an heir, and his meeting Anne, with all the consequences that arise from that. That is, for instance, the point of departure of Hilary Mantel: her novel *Wolf Hall* begins when Henry is still married to Catherine, but he is already looking forward. It has also been said before that the king in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* is often shown through other characters, and the relationship they have with him, and this expedient of using another figure through which we can see the king, rather than the king himself, is used as well in *Wolf Hall* as in other contemporary depictions of King Henry. This will be discussed in chapter three.

### 3. Contemporary representations of Henry VIII: *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*

Henry VIII has appeared as a character in many different works in recent years. This chapter will mention a few of the novels, films, and television series where King Henry appears as one of the characters; then, it will briefly focus on the historical novel and postmodernism; then it will discuss in particular two novels by Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. Finally, it will attempt to give an explanation as to why the figure of King Henry is still very popular and continues to be exploited by various media.

#### 3.1 Contemporary representations

##### 3.1.1 Novels

King Henry VIII has appeared as a character in many novels, whether as a protagonist, or as a secondary character (often seen through the eyes of another character, be it one of his wives, or one of his servants). Already in 1881, he had appeared in Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*, where the prince of the title is Prince Edward, his son; and in 1898, in Charles Major's novel *When Knighthood Was in Flower*, where the protagonist is Henry's sister Mary Tudor, whom he forces to marry King Louis XII. In more recent years, we can find *The Morland Dynasty* books<sup>189</sup>, a series of romance-history novels written by Cynthia Harrod-Eagles, which cover British History from the War of the Roses to the 1930s. The second book is called *The Dark Rose*, it was published in 1981, and it takes place during the reign of Henry VIII. One of the characters is in fact a maid-in-waiting of Anne Boleyn, and "witnesses at first hand the events leading up to the rift with Rome, her mistress's execution, and the further efforts of the sad, ailing king to secure the male succession"<sup>190</sup>. *The Autobiography of Henry VIII: With Notes by His Fool, Will*

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<sup>189</sup> Cynthia Harrod Eagles website, "Dynasty 2- The Dark Rose", (available at <http://cynthiaharrodeagles.com/index.php/books/the-dark-rose>, last visited: 02/02/2016.)

<sup>190</sup> *Ibidem*.

*Somers*, by Margaret George<sup>191</sup>, was published in 1986. Here the story is told from the king's point of view and there are comments from his fool inserted in the text. Philippa Gregory wrote a series of books dedicated to the Tudor court, starting with the famous *The Other Boleyn Girl*<sup>192</sup>, published in 2001, where the protagonists of the story are the two Boleyn sisters, Mary and Anne. Other books in the series where Henry VIII appears as a character are: *The Constant Princess*<sup>193</sup>, published in 2005, where the central figure is Catherine of Aragon; *The Boleyn Inheritance*<sup>194</sup>, 2006, written from the points of view of Jane Boleyn, Anne of Cleves and Catherine Howard; *The Taming of the Queen*<sup>195</sup>, 2015, where the central character is Catherine Parr. Philippa Gregory makes the novels revolve around Henry's wives (or other women), rather than around him. She also published, in 2014, a novel called *The King's Curse*<sup>196</sup>, where Henry VIII is seen through the eyes of Margaret Pole. Another author who dealt with women is Carolly Erickson, who, in 2006, wrote *The Last Wife of Henry VIII*<sup>197</sup>. Sandra Byrd wrote romances in a series known as "Ladies in waiting", where the court of King Henry is seen through the eyes of a lady in waiting to Anne Boleyn in *To Die For: A Novel of Anne Boleyn*<sup>198</sup>, published in 2011, and another where the protagonist is a lady in waiting to Katherine Parr in *The Secret Keeper: A Novel of Kateryn Parr*<sup>199</sup>, published in 2012. C.J. Sansom, a writer of crime novels, wrote a series of books<sup>200</sup> in which the protagonist is a lawyer who works for Thomas Cromwell in *Dissolution* (2003) and *Dark Fire* (2004); for

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<sup>191</sup> Margaret George website, "The Autobiography of Henry VIII", (available at <http://www.margaretgeorge.com/books/the-autobiography-of-henry-viii/readers-guide/>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

<sup>192</sup> Philippa Gregory website, "The Other Boleyn Girl", (available at <http://www.philippagregory.com/books/the-other-boleyn-girl>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

<sup>193</sup> Philippa Gregory website, "The Constant Princess", (available at <http://www.philippagregory.com/books/the-constant-princess>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

<sup>194</sup> Philippa Gregory website, "The Boleyn Inheritance", (available at <http://www.philippagregory.com/books/the-boleyn-inheritance>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

<sup>195</sup> Philippa Gregory website, "The Taming of the Queen", (available at <http://www.philippagregory.com/books/the-taming-of-the-queen>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

<sup>196</sup> Philippa Gregory website, "The King's Curse", (available at <http://www.philippagregory.com/books/the-king-s-curse>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

<sup>197</sup> Macmillan website, "The Last Wife of Henry VIII", (available at <http://us.macmillan.com/thelastwifeofhenryviii/carollyerickson>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

<sup>198</sup> Sandra Byrd website, "Ladies in waiting", (available at <http://www.sandrabyrd.com/books/historical-fiction/ladies-in-waiting/>, last visited: 15/02/2016.)

<sup>199</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>200</sup> C. J. Sansom website, "The Shardlake Series", (available at <http://www.cjsansom.com/Shardlake>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

Thomas Cranmer in *Sovereign* (2006) and *Revelation* (2008); for Queen Catherine Parr in *Heartstone* (2010) and *Lamentation* (2014). Many novels tell the story specifically from Anne Boleyn's point of view, including, other than the already mentioned ones, *Murder Most Royal* (1949) by Jean Pleady<sup>201</sup>, *Sow the Tempest* (1960) by Jane Lane<sup>202</sup>, *The Concubine* (1963) by Norah Lofts<sup>203</sup>. In more recent times, there are *A Lady Raised High* (2006) by Laurien Gardner<sup>204</sup>, and *Mademoiselle Boleyn* (2007) by Robin Maxwell<sup>205</sup>. The list is extremely long, and De Groot underlines<sup>206</sup> that Miriam Burstein made a survey of the portrayals of Anne Boleyn in fiction and analysed forty-five texts. The historical novel is not the only literary genre that features Henry VIII as a character. It has even come to the point when so called 'paranormal romance' books dealing with vampires and druids are set at his court, and modern retellings are used as well, for instance in a book called *Anne & Henry*<sup>207</sup>, where the story of the relationship between the two characters is updated to a dull high school romance. Anne and Henry are two American students in a private school, and the plot and style are definitely extremely simple.

### 3.1.2 Films

De Groot writes that "other than on television, the key form for visualised engagement with an imagined, constructed past is film"<sup>208</sup>. The films in which Henry VIII appears as a character are many, and they date back to the 1910s. The aforementioned novel *The Prince and The Pauper*, for instance, has been adapted more than once. Among the most famous films is *A Man for All Seasons*<sup>209</sup>, the 1966 film based on a play by Robert Bolt, where the role of Henry VIII went to Robert

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<sup>201</sup> De Groot, Jerome, *The Historical Novel*, p. 71.

<sup>202</sup> Ivi, p. 73.

<sup>203</sup> Ivi, p. 71.

<sup>204</sup> Ivi, p. 75.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>207</sup> Dawn Ius website, "Anne & Henry", (available at <http://www.dawnius.com/the-books/contemporary-ya/anne-henry>, last visited: 28/02/2016.)

<sup>208</sup> De Groot, Jerome, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*, London: Routledge, 2008.

<sup>209</sup> Internet Movie Database, "A Man for All Seasons", (available at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0060665/>, last visited: 13/02/2016. )

Shaw. The point of view is that of Thomas More: the story begins when the king decides to divorce from Queen Catherine, and ends with Thomas More's execution. In 1969, another film was made from a play, in this case, it was *Anne of The Thousand Days*<sup>210</sup>, where King Henry was played by Richard Burton. In recent times, in 2008, *The Other Boleyn Girl*<sup>211</sup> was made into a film, starring Eric Bana as Henry VIII, but the king is here more of a secondary character than anything else: his limelight is stolen by the two Boleyns, more often on scene than he is. He is represented as a tender man in his relationship to Mary Boleyn, only to abandon her when he falls in love with Anne, with whom he behaves cruelly.

### 3.1.3 Television Series

King Henry's most known representation on television, described by De Groot as "television drama biog-history"<sup>212</sup> include the television adaptation for *The Other Boleyn Girl*<sup>213</sup>, made by the BBC in 2003, where Henry is played by Jared Harris; *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*<sup>214</sup>, a 1970 BBC production which included six plays, each one of them dedicated to one of Henry's wives, with Keith Mitchell in the role of King Henry; and another *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*<sup>215</sup>, a mixture between a television series and a documentary, divided into four episodes, where the king was played, in the first two episodes, by Chris Larkin, while in the third and the fourth by Andy Rashleigh. A very popular television series, which was broadcasted from 2007 to 2010 and had thirty-eight episodes, was *The Tudors*<sup>216</sup>. It was produced by Showtime, in association with Reveille Production, Working Title Television, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and was originally broadcast by BBC Two,

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<sup>210</sup> Internet Movie Database, "Anne of the Thousand Days", (available at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0064030/>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

<sup>211</sup> Internet Movie Database, "The Other Boleyn Girl (2008)", (available at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0467200/>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

<sup>212</sup> De Groot, Jerome, *Consulting History*, p. 213.

<sup>213</sup> Internet Movie Database, "The Other Boleyn Girl (2003)", (available at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0357392/>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

<sup>214</sup> Internet Movie Database, "The Six Wives of Henry VIII (1970)", (available at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0066714/>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

<sup>215</sup> Internet Movie Database, "The Six Wives of Henry VIII (2001)", (available at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0358884/>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

<sup>216</sup> Showtime website, "The Tudors", (available at <http://www.sho.com/sho/the-tudors/home>, last visited: 13/02/2016.)

CBC Television, Showtime, and TV3. Drifting away quite frequently from real historical events, it was very popular and translated into many languages. Henry was played here by Jonathan Rhys Meyers. *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* were also made into one miniseries in six episodes<sup>217</sup>, broadcast by the BBC in 2015, with Damian Lewis in the role of King Henry.

## 3.2 The Historical Novel and Postmodernism

### 3.2.1 The Historical Novel

The origins of the historical novel are generally traced back to the nineteenth century, when Sir Walter Scott wrote his famous novels. It can be argued, though, that stories set in the past were written even before that period, and the first one which can actually be considered a novel is, as De Groot writes<sup>218</sup>, the French work *La Princesse de Clèves* (*The Princess of Cleves*, in English) by Madame de Lafayette, written in 1678. Moreover, the end of the eighteenth century also witnessed the rise of gothic fiction, and some of these novels were actually set in the past. For instance, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole, set in the Middle Ages; or Ann Radcliffe's novels, including *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), set in 1584. In their case, though, the story takes place in the past, but the gothic element is the predominant one. Sir Walter Scott was the one who made the historical genre popular, writing novels that presented both the lives of its characters, and the political situation of the time. For example *Waverley*, his first novel, published in 1814, is about the Jacobite Rising in Scotland in 1745. *Waverley* was extremely successful, and that led him to write a long series of historical novels.

Historical novels often present a division in themselves because of the target they address: historical romances, are, for instance, considered to be for women, and this genre is indeed very popular. They include continuations of classics (such as continuations of Jane Austen's novels), rewritings, and the use of female historical

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<sup>217</sup> BBC, "Wolf Hall", (available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02gfy02>, last visited: 11/02/2016.)

<sup>218</sup> De Groot, Jerome, *The Historical Novel*, London: Routledge, 2010, p. 12.

figures, one of whom is Anne Boleyn<sup>219</sup>, who has, in fact, been very popular as a protagonist in these novels. Historical novels for men, on the other hand, often include adventure and war.

De Groot describes the historical genre as “a genre that is increasingly studied on university curricula and discussed at research level; it is also an immensely popular form, with global audience reach”<sup>220</sup>. The historical genre can also intersect with other genres, as, for instance, fantasy, detective, gothic, children’s books, and many others. It is written for different types of public and in different ways. The work of a historical novelist is different from that of a historian, and De Groot takes into account a definition taken from Manzoni’s “On the Historical Novel” where Manzoni writes that the novelist does not only give “just the bare bones of history, but something richer, more complete. In a way you want him to put the flesh back on the skeleton that is history”<sup>221</sup>. Hilary Mantel herself states she has respect for the sources, but where there are no sources she uses her imagination. She collects evidence, but she also invents conversations that we have no record of, for example. In a discussion with David Starkey, filmed in the Upper Bell Tower in the Tower of London and uploaded on YouTube by the Royal Historical Palaces channel, Mantel states that writing fiction is also giving a portrait of the private life of these men, or what she calls “the dark side of the moon”<sup>222</sup>. She underlines that readers know that this is the novelist’s work, which differs from that of the historian.

De Groot says that the historical novel requires a form of response from the reader, because even though it shares with other novels “a concern with realism, development of character, authenticity”<sup>223</sup>, it is also somehow ‘alien’ to the reader, who finds himself in front of things and settings that are unfamiliar to him. He also underlines that historical novels seem to be “obsessed with paratexts”<sup>224</sup>, that is, they include footnotes, maps, and bibliographies, and sometimes they even state the degree of education of the author. In the case of *The Other Boleyn Girl* by Philippa

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<sup>219</sup> De Groot, Jerome, *The Historical Novel*, London: Routledge, 2010, p. 69.

<sup>220</sup> Ivi, p. 2.

<sup>221</sup> Ivi, p. 3.

<sup>222</sup> Royal Historical Palaces (uploaded by), “Hilary Mantel and David Starkey discuss Henry VIII-part 2”, (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2mBYSIWQpM>, last visited: 01/02/2016.)

<sup>223</sup> De Groot, Jerome, *The Historical Novel*, p.4.

<sup>224</sup> Ivi, p. 63.



Gregory, for instance, it is specified that the author has a PhD, and that is stated to legitimise her as an author. In order to sell historical novels nowadays it is important both to present the best-selling authors as a brand, and to use a certain cover image, to attract the target readers of a certain type of novel. The text written by the author is not the only thing that matters in the market.

### 3.2.2 Postmodernism

Historical novels have been hugely popular in our contemporary age, an age that is perhaps still interested by what is usually called postmodernism. It is quite complicated to identify what postmodernism is, when it started, and when it ended, or when it will end, since it is hard to pinpoint it in time. Postmodernism goes against- or at least questions- notions of order, continuity, control, authority, certainty.

Referring to postmodernist writing, Steven Connor underlines Brian McHale's "influential suggestion"<sup>225</sup>, that is, that while modernist fiction is "concerned with problems of knowledge and understanding, postmodernist fiction is ontological- that is, concerned with the creation and the interrelation of worlds of being"<sup>226</sup>. Therefore, "the latter is an intensification of the former"<sup>227</sup>. Lyotard, on the other hand, wrote that both modernist and postmodernist art "attempt to conceive the inconceivable, express the sense of the inexpressible, and take the measure of the immeasurable"<sup>228</sup>. The difference is that modernist artists have tried to reduce the experience into a form that is recognisable, while postmodernist artists have not. They know that their work "cannot match up to what goes beyond comprehension in contemporary experience"<sup>229</sup>. This incommensurability often results in questioning "quantity, ratio, or proportion"<sup>230</sup>.

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<sup>225</sup> Connor, Steven, "Postmodernism and Literature", in *The Cambridge companion to postmodernism*, edited by Steven Connor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 65.

<sup>226</sup> Ivi, p. 66.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>228</sup> Ivi, p. 67.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibidem*.

Another element of postmodernist works is that of multiplicity, which was already present in modernist works, as an “effect of the power of language in the world”<sup>231</sup>. In postmodernism this issue became “a chattering polyglossary”<sup>232</sup>. As far as time is concerned, fiction can also be organised in a way that is not even temporal, on the model of other types of texts (like encyclopedias or dictionaries) and “one is encouraged to make dips and forays into the text in the way in which one consults a dictionary, rather than being carried along on the temporal line of the fiction”<sup>233</sup>. Time can be distorted, narrations can be not linear, and fragmented. This can also lead to a work of fiction having multiple endings, or an arbitrary closure.

What has been considered as a typical part of postmodernist fiction is intertextuality, and the reference to other works, or even the discussion of these works. According to David Leon Higdon, contemporary writers have used three methods when referring to earlier works. The first is that “they have adapted the tradition and even the form of earlier fiction, thus continuing the tradition in transformed shapes”<sup>234</sup>. The second one is that they have started a dialogue with earlier works “thus complementing and often completing its silences”<sup>235</sup>. The third method has been that of rebelling against earlier authors, and parodying them. Parody, according to Hutcheon, is also a “strategy of the other ex-centrics [...] trying to come to terms with and to respond [...] to the still predominantly white, heterosexual male culture”<sup>236</sup>. Hutcheon also stresses out that “postmodernism [...] also retains his contradictions”<sup>237</sup> and that it is “in no way absolutist”<sup>238</sup>. Intertextuality can also lead to pastiche, which can be a mixture of different genres inside the same work, or even a mixture of different styles.

Postmodernist works also offer a change in perspective, as Linda Hutcheon underlines: there is the importance of the marginal, of what she calls the ex-centric,

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<sup>231</sup> Connor, Steven, “Postmodernism and Literature”, p. 69.

<sup>232</sup> Ivi, p. 70.

<sup>233</sup> Ivi, p. 77.

<sup>234</sup> Higdon, David Leon, *Shadows of the Past in Contemporary British Fiction*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985, p. 10.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>236</sup> Ivi, p. 35.

<sup>237</sup> Ivi, p. 43.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibidem*.

“be it in class, race, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity”<sup>239</sup>. With postmodernism, in any kind of art, the gap between what is popular and what is élite has been reduced, and some works can even belong to both categories.

Metafiction is something that postmodernist fiction has experienced, so that the reader will no longer be immersed in the book, he will not suspend his disbelief, the fictionality of the book will be made evident to him, and the author’s role as well.

Postmodernism is absolutely anti-traditional, but, while in the modernist period the reaction to history was that of using the past to “deploy its ‘presentness’”<sup>240</sup>, the postmodernist reaction is that of having a view of the past that “takes the present powers and limitations of the writing of that past into account. And the result is often a certain avowed provisionality and irony”<sup>241</sup>. Authors ask themselves *whether* we can know the past in the present time, and if yes, *how* we can get to know it. That is what Hutcheon calls “historiographic metafiction”. Hutcheon also argues that “historiographic metafiction suggests that truth and falsity may indeed not be the right terms in which to discuss fiction”<sup>242</sup> because “there are only *truths* in the plural”<sup>243</sup>.

Higdon thinks that postmodernist novels, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, have “turned to retrospective narratives”<sup>244</sup>, where the characters have fled their past, but, by confronting it, they can feel healed or redeemed. The past is used, in a way, to unlock the present.

### 3.3 *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*

*Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* are two novels written by Hilary Mantel, the former published in 2009, the latter in 2012. Both novels won a Man Booker Prize, and the series will be completed by a third novel, which will be called *The Mirror and the Light*. The protagonist of these novels is Thomas Cromwell: the

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<sup>239</sup> Hutcheon, Linda, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, London: Routledge, 1989, p. 12.

<sup>240</sup> Hutcheon, Linda, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, p. 88.

<sup>241</sup> Ivi, p. 90.

<sup>242</sup> Ivi, p. 109.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>244</sup> Higdon, David Leon, *Shadows of the Past in Contemporary British Fiction*, p. 20.

reader meets him as a boy in the first chapter of *Wolf Hall*, to find him later as a servant of Cardinal Wolsey's, and then of King Henry's.

### 3.3.1 The author

Hilary Mantel<sup>245</sup> is an English author, who studied law at the London School of Economics, and then finished her studies at the University of Sheffield. It was when she moved to Botswana with her husband that she started writing stories, due to the isolation she had in her situation in a foreign country and also due to a medical condition. Before moving back to England, she also lived in Saudi Arabia. Her first novel, published in 1985, was *Every Day is Mother's Day*, followed a year later by its sequel *Vacant Possession*. Her experience in Saudi Arabia led her to write a thriller called *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* in 1998. *Fludd*, a novel set in the 1950s, came out in 1989. One of her most successful books is *A Place of Greater Safety*, published in 1992, which tells the story of the French Revolution from the points of view of three of its protagonists: Georges Danton, Camille Desmoulins and Maximilien Robespierre. In 1994 *A Change of Climate* was published, influenced by her experience in Botswana, and the year after the novel *An Experiment of Love* came out. In 1998 she wrote another historical novel, this time set in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, called *The Giant, O'Brien*. She also wrote a memoir called *Giving up the Ghost* and a series of short stories, *Learning to Talk*. Her book *Beyond Black* was short-listed for the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2005. Her most popular novels, though, are actually Man Booker Prize winners *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. After these, she wrote a collection of short stories, *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher*, published in 2014.

### 3.3.2 Conceiving the novel

Author Hilary Mantel has stated her reasons for writing this book series in

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<sup>245</sup> Cunningham, John, M., "Hilary Mantel", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Hilary-Mantel>, last visited: 24/02/2016.)

various interviews. In a 2015 interview by the BBC History Magazine<sup>246</sup>, she affirms that she had had the idea of writing this novel in mind for about forty years, but decided to start writing it in 2005, since 2009 was the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of King Henry VIII's accession to the throne: she decided that the moment had come. In a video uploaded on YouTube by The Royal Society of Literature, recorded on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2014, at Union Chapel, in London, she is interviewed along with actress Harriet Walter<sup>247</sup>. Mantel says that the crucial point for her when writing was the point of view. When she began writing *Wolf Hall*, she did not decide immediately how the book was going to be structured. Yet, she could hear a voice in her head, and this voice was saying "So now, get up"<sup>248</sup>. Then she could picture a scene:

a sideways angled view of a boot, it was a close up, it was the stitching of the boot, it was a knot in the twine of the stitching, and the cobbles, then you feel the cobbles onto your cheekbone, and then you can't see anything, because there's blood in your eyes<sup>249</sup>.

She realised she was inside Thomas Cromwell, as a boy, and she felt death to be imminent. The other decisions about the novel originated from this initial view, from the decision that Thomas Cromwell would be the narrator of the story, and it was natural for her to tell the story in the present tense: she did not even have to decide which tense would have been better. When the interviewer asks her whether she stays inside the character's mind for the whole writing process, she answers she does. She narrates from Cromwell's viewpoint because she is interested in those characters who "step suddenly into the spotlight of history"<sup>250</sup>, people who "are manufacturing their own legend day by day, when they become self-conscious"<sup>251</sup>. A thing she thinks her book, and the stage adaptation as well, does, is to change people's preconceptions. Many people have an idea in their mind of what Henry VIII is like,

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<sup>246</sup> Attar, Robert, "Wolf Hall: author Hilary Mantel talks Tudors, historical accuracy and winning the Man Booker Prize", in *BBC History Magazine*, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015 (first published in the *Malmesbury History Weekend souvenir guide*), (available at <http://www.historyextra.com/feature/tudors/wolf-hall-author-hilary-mantel-talks-tudors-historical-accuracy-and-winning-man-booke>, last visited: 10/04/2016.)

<sup>247</sup> Royal Society of Literature (uploaded by), "Hilary Mantel in conversation with Harriet Walter (Full)", (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msEaOzzRS0U>, last visited: 30/01/2016.)

<sup>248</sup> Royal Society of Literature, "Hilary Mantel in conversation with Harriet Walter (Full)".

<sup>249</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibidem*.

“what a monster he is”<sup>252</sup>; she says people even compare him to Bluebeard. But, in the play, the actor playing Henry VIII looks in the eyes of the people in the public, explaining them what his troubles are, and why he wants to have a divorce from the queen. That is how preconceptions disappear, and people are not so sure Henry is a monster anymore. They leave the stage (or the page) with questions. It is also important, she thinks, to picture the characters in a certain period of time, that is, the present moment in which they are living, not using the hindsight we possess.

In two interviews uploaded on the 4<sup>th</sup> Estate YouTube Channel, Hilary Mantel talks about Anne Boleyn<sup>253</sup> and Thomas Cromwell<sup>254</sup>. She says her depiction of Anne is that of Cromwell’s “worthy opponent”<sup>255</sup>, because she thinks this is how Cromwell might have considered her. She recalls that during the three years in which Anne was queen her relationship with the king was full of arguments, and we know that Anne did not give the king a son, and was executed on accuses of adultery, incest and witchcraft. The representation of Anne Boleyn she gives is not a definitive one, because, she says, we will never know the whole truth about her and what happened. Therefore, Mantel affirms that she tried to keep the mystery and ambiguity of the figure. As to Cromwell, Mantel states that the story of Henry’s reign had been told many times before, but she wanted it to be told from the perspective of a character whose life had been intriguing and whose personality had been unexplored. We know what Cromwell did in politics, and we know he was a key figure, close to King Henry. But we do not know much about Cromwell’s personal life: the first thirty, even forty years of his life are quite obscure. What we know is that his father was a brewer and a blacksmith, that he was poor, and he ran away from his family of origin. Mantel believes that the strength of a novelist is that of making an old story new, and that is the secret of the success of *Wolf Hall*.

Concerning the character of the king, she discusses his figure with David

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<sup>252</sup> Royal Society of Literature, "Hilary Mantel in conversation with Harriet Walter (Full)".

<sup>253</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Estate (uploaded by), "Hilary Mantel talks about Anne Boleyn", (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ohx2Lec6dtko>, last visited: 01/02/2016.)

<sup>254</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Estate (uploaded by), "Hilary Mantel talks about Thomas Cromwell", (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ohx2Lec6dtko>, last visited: 01/02/2016.)

<sup>255</sup> *Ibidem*.

Starkey, in the three videos uploaded in 2009 by Historical Royal Palaces<sup>256</sup>, that is, when the second novel had not been written yet. She says that she thought very hard about the figure of Henry in the novel, because of the many preconceptions people seem to have about him, and decided to make her own version of him. People often think King Henry was a rather grotesque figure, and she thinks this depiction of him works more if we think about the end of his life, but not most of it. In her novels the reader gets to see a version of Henry mirrored through other people's opinions and reactions.

Mantel also says that it is important to be historically accurate: "I can't see the point of doing it otherwise"<sup>257</sup>. Yet she adds "of course nobody can guarantee 100 per cent accuracy [...] but I think you have to take your research seriously"<sup>258</sup>, and "if you don't like research [...] it's better [...] to leave the historical novel alone"<sup>259</sup>. She also states that she does not falsify dates, nor does she falsify items of information. The job of the historical novelist is that of filling the gaps, and by doing that you "can offer some glimpse of this moment-by-moment complexity: the incredibly rich texture of life"<sup>260</sup>, and she thinks the historical context helps a writer out in that, and that the author should not just stop at documents, but should also "explore the texture of everyday life"<sup>261</sup>.

### 3.3.3 The plot

The story of *Wolf Hall* begins in 1500 with a young Thomas Cromwell being beaten by his father, and the next chapter is set twenty-seven years later, Thomas Cromwell being now an adult who works for Cardinal Wolsey. We are also given a

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<sup>256</sup> Royal Historical Palaces (uploaded by), "Hilary Mantel and David Starkey discuss Henry VIII- part 1", (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRQbyjvpYwU>, last visited: 01/02/2016); Royal Historical Palaces (uploaded by), "Hilary Mantel and David Starkey discuss Henry VIII- part 2", (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2mBYSIWQpM>, last visited: 01/02/2016); Royal Historical Palaces (uploaded by), "Hilary Mantel and David Starkey discuss Henry VIII- part III", (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BuOptp5sCKA>, last visited: 01/02/2016.)

<sup>257</sup> Attar, Robert, "Wolf Hall: author Hilary Mantel talks Tudors, historical accuracy and winning the Man Booker Prize".

<sup>258</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibidem*.

representation of Cromwell's private life, with his wife and his sons and daughters, and also with the apprentices he hires at his household, Austin Friars. The story gets quite fast to 1529, when York Place is taken away from Cardinal Wolsey, only to go back immediately after to the years between 1521 and 1529. We are told who Anne Boleyn is, how the king fell in love with her, and we know that the Cardinal has been attempting to obtain the annulment of the king's marriage with Catherine of Aragon. During the same period of time, the sweating sickness strikes, and Cromwell's wife and two daughters die, while he gets the disease but survives. The trial for the king's divorce takes place, but the court is adjourned by Cardinal Campeggio, sent from Rome. Wolsey is accused, and Cromwell continues to serve him, and even goes to King Henry to plead for Wolsey, which leads the king to grant the cardinal a better living situation. Cromwell starts getting his way at court, and even tries to convince Anne Boleyn that the cardinal can help her, but she is opposed to this idea. In 1531, Catherine is sent away from court. In January 1533 Henry and Anne get married. Anne is pregnant and her daughter Elizabeth is born in September. Cromwell's portrait is being painted by Holbein, who brings him the finished work in 1534. Thomas More refuses to take the oath on the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Succession, and he is then brought to the Tower and later executed.

Despite the title of the novel being *Wolf Hall*, this estate owned by the Seymour family does not actually appear in the book: it is just mentioned by the characters, and, at the very end of the novel, Cromwell writes down a note saying that he (and the king) will go there in five days. This refers to the house itself, and to the fact that the Seymours are coming into the picture. It could also have a symbolic value if we think about men being wolves, dangerous to other men. This final passage at Wolf Hall will serve as a connection to the second novel, *Bring Up the Bodies*, which opens up with a hunting scene at Wolf Hall, where Cromwell, the king, and other noblemen are. In this novel Anne Boleyn's position is threatened, and the Seymours are rising. The book starts in 1535, and the king is becoming interested in Jane Seymour, and does not want to be married to Anne anymore. He wants Cromwell to find a way to end their marriage. Cromwell tries to end the matter in a consensual way, asking Anne's father and brother George if a dissolution of the bond is possible, but Anne's brother does not consent. Moreover, George's wife, Lady



Rochford, refers gossips about the queen to Cromwell. It is said that she has encounters with other men in her rooms. Therefore, what Cromwell does is collecting evidence to build a case against the queen, so that she can face a trial. In the end she is not only tried, but also executed, along with the men accused with her. Cromwell realises that the accuses were probably false, but his plan was successful. At the beginning of the novel, he was Master Secretary in the Privy Council, in the end, King Henry grants him a barony. The novel takes place entirely between 1535 and 1536, therefore, unlike the first one, it covers a limited amount of time.

### 3.3.4 The novels

The two novels are told in third person, with the use of the historical present, from the point of view of one of the characters, Thomas Cromwell, often referred to just as “he”, even when one might think that the pronoun “he” in a sentence refers to another male character mentioned in the previous sentence. As has been said, the author imagined herself inside Thomas Cromwell, and decided to lead the story entirely from his point of view, so there are no scenes in which the reader can experience other characters interacting without Cromwell being present and filtering what they do and say. The narrator, though, is not what would be called an unreliable narrator, which is a device that has been used in postmodernist literature. The events are historical, and the author herself specified that she based herself on what really happened: when she did not have any sources, she used her imagination, as is the case with Cromwell’s private life, or with most conversations. She knows the historical facts, she does not know what the historical figures, here characters, exactly told each other in any moment.

Cromwell’s thoughts analyse the other characters and the reader gets to know what he thinks about them, but he does not lie to the reader, nor does he manipulate the reader. The reader knows that Cromwell has to be cautious when he talks to members of the court, he cannot be completely sincere if he wants to keep his position. His thoughts underline what he thinks about characters and situations, and we get to be part of them, as readers. Cromwell can be quite partial to some characters and have a dislike for others, but he also seems to balance their flaws and

their virtues. This results in a sympathetic view of his mentor Cardinal Wolsey, often portrayed in other works as an arrogant greedy man, and in a not entirely positive view, for example, of Anne Boleyn, whom he initially helps and whom he works for, even though it is clear that he does not really like her. Yet, he does not defend the king in all matters, or at least, he does not do so in his thoughts. For instance, he thinks the king to be extremely cold to her when she loses her baby, and he defines him as childish a couple of times. Through the observant eyes and the sharp mind of Cromwell, the author gives us nuanced representations of most characters. Mantel says that “some readers think I’ve been too easy on Cromwell”<sup>262</sup>, that is, that Cromwell is a villain, and the books offer a view of him that is much more sympathetic than it should be. But she affirms “if a villain, an interesting villain, yes? My first explorations challenged my easy prejudices”<sup>263</sup>. Cromwell is the one who is telling us the story from his point of view, and the author uses him as “an arch-plotter, smarter than Henry though not meaner”<sup>264</sup>, not the villain he is portrayed to be, for instance, in *A Man for All Seasons*. This has nothing to do with not being able to trust his narration, the question is rather if the readers like the way Cromwell is portrayed, in comparison to what they know from history, or from what they have read in other books, seen in films, if they feel he is a convincing character.

Also, it is interesting to consider whether Cromwell could be seen as a marginal character or not. It is true that, as Mantel herself has said, he was just a normal person who stepped into history. He was not an aristocrat who came from some important family, he was just the son of a blacksmith, who ended up occupying a position of great importance at the court of the king. That said, he could not be considered as a marginal in postmodernist terms. He is a white heterosexual male, and a powerful one as well, who is at the centre of the court. He is not the king of England, yet he is very much in a central position, that he acquired himself as a ‘self-made man’.

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<sup>262</sup> Mantel, Hilary, “Hilary Mantel: how I came to write *Wolf Hall*”, in *The Guardian book club*, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2012 (available at <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/dec/07/bookclub-hilary-mantel-wolf-hall>, last visited: 10/04/2016.)

<sup>263</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibidem*.

According to Green, who wrote an article about Mantel's novels, their adaptations, and the language used in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, "there are three registers of language in these novels"<sup>265</sup>. The first is the language of politics and law, and he thinks it is essentially modern, but mixed with terms that would have been used in the Tudor period. Hilary Mantel does not use too many words that sound ancient, and the type language she uses does not seem made up of two different ones, the old and the new, because they are skilfully intertwined. Concerning this type of language, Mantel herself said that she tried to find real words the historical figures said or wrote, or even paraphrased contemporary versions of their words, because if you have their words "you can take them as your starting point and then the challenge is to make your invented dialogue smooth in and out of that unnoticeably"<sup>266</sup>. She says that "you don't want pastiche, which can be grim, false and very often embarrassing"<sup>267</sup>. She wants her language to be comprehensible, and she wants it to suggest how they could have spoken during that era, rather than try and make it authentic, which is impossible.

"The other two registers of language are interior"<sup>268</sup>, affirms Green. The second one is the way Cromwell speaks, as a "wry and blunt Londoner"<sup>269</sup>. The third one, Green thinks, is a voice that is not Cromwell's personal one, nor the language of politics. It is the voice of the author, even if she does not step in the novel to proclaim her thoughts, and even though the voice is not omniscient. Green believes it can be perceived when Cromwell thinks. He thinks that "these, for all his intelligence, are frequently unreliable narrations"<sup>270</sup>, though it can be argued, first of all, that there is nothing really unreliable in what Cromwell says. The readers already know that, when they read a historical novel, not everything will be exactly as it happened in real life: there are holes in our knowledge regarding certain figures and time periods, because we cannot know everything that happened, especially in private, between a person and another. Readers expect accuracy, but they do not

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<sup>265</sup> Green, Dominic, "Wolves Hall", in *The New Criterion*, vol. 33, May 2015, p. 25.

<sup>266</sup> Attar, Robert, "Wolf Hall: author Hilary Mantel talks Tudors, historical accuracy and winning the Man Booker Prize".

<sup>267</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>268</sup> Green, Dominic, "Wolves Hall", p. 25.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibidem*.

think they are going to read a history text book. This does not mean that we cannot trust Cromwell as the narrator of the story, that he twists the events, or that he forgets things. Cromwell tells us the things as he sees them, so, rather than being unreliable, it could be said that he just presents things from his point of view, and that always offers a different version of the story, which could probably be connected to the fact of there not being one single Truth, but many truths, according to who is telling the story. Still, that does not mean that Cromwell is lying, or only telling us some parts of the story and not others, or confusing us: he is simply presenting things as *he* sees them. Secondly, this third voice as Green himself calls it, is not exactly Cromwell's, as Green himself stated: it is more like the author's. In fact, Green also says that "their ghostly overlap is that third voice, oceanic, passionate, poetic—as fatal as language and history"<sup>271</sup>. The 'ghostly overlap' refers to the fact that Mantel said that Cromwell "seemed to be occupying the same physical space as me, with a slight ghostly overlap"<sup>272</sup>. One of the sentences that is expressed by this third voice is, for instance, this one, which can be found at the very end of the first book:

"England is always remaking herself, her cliffs eroding, her sandbanks drifting, springs bubbling up in dead ground. They regroup themselves while we sleep, the landscapes through which we move, and even the histories that trail us; the faces of the dead hide in other faces, as a spine of hills into the mist."<sup>273</sup>

These sentences actually seem to be a comment that goes beyond Cromwell's thoughts, yet that does not necessarily make him unreliable as a narrator. This third voice is for Green "a bridge between past and present"<sup>274</sup>, and if we agree with his view, this is probably the only way these novels actually put past and present in relation. No part of the books is set in the present: there is no alternation between nowadays and the time of King Henry, no such device as a character external to the story that discovers a diary or letters of that time. There are no characters like the ones mentioned by Higdon, who have to look back to the past to resolve some conflict in the present<sup>275</sup>: it is not a retrospective situation. It is the story told from Cromwell's point of view, which might eventually lead to reflection about England

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<sup>271</sup> Green, Dominic, "Wolves Hall", p. 25.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>273</sup> Mantel, Hilary, *Wolf Hall*, London: Fourth Estate, Harper Collins, 2010, p. 649.

<sup>274</sup> Green, Dominic, "Wolves Hall", p. 25.

<sup>275</sup> Higdon, David Leon, *Shadows of the Past in Contemporary British Fiction*, p. 20.

and its destiny. For example, Green also underlines that in these novels nothing is fixed, certain, immutable. The first thing that comes to mind is the insecurity of the dynasty, given the fact that Henry does not have a male son, an heir. Were he to die, the result would be chaos, as can be seen when he has an accident during a tourney and the courtiers believe him to be dead. This can also be seen in how “Cromwell’s house is under permanent renovation”<sup>276</sup>, or taking into account the succession of Henry’s wives and love interests. This is also why “England is always remaking herself”, and one could think whether this continuous construction is true today or not.

The structure of the novels is almost always linear and chronological, but there is an exception at the beginning of *Wolf Hall*. The novel starts out with a young Cromwell being beaten by his father, in 1500, and then it gets to 1527, then to 1529 (when Cardinal Wolsey has to leave York Place), without telling us anything that happened in between, when Cromwell fought for France, lived in Italy and in the Low Countries. These are events that are just referred to by Cromwell or by other characters, but the reader does not get to read about them, probably also because there is a lack of information and sources on the subject (not much is known about Cromwell and his private life, what is known is what he did on the court of King Henry), and probably because the author did not want to focus on this part of Cromwell’s life. Then, the story goes back in time again: there is a flashback. The reader has seen a boy running away from his home, and then a man who works for a powerful Cardinal now in disgrace, and wonders what made Cromwell acquire his position, and what made the Cardinal lose his status. So there is an explanation of what happened from 1521 onwards, and the readers are informed about why the king wants a divorce, and everything that this desire ensued. After this flashback, the story returns to 1529, and from that moment on, it is told in chronological succession. Mantel states that “*Wolf Hall* attempts to duplicate not the historian’s chronology but the way memory works: in leaps, loops, flashes.”<sup>277</sup> The fact that the story is not always extremely linear is probably one of the few elements that can relate this novel to elements that are typical of postmodernism, as for instance the discontinuity in

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<sup>276</sup> Green, Dominic, “Wolves Hall”, p. 25.

<sup>277</sup> Mantel, Hilary, “Hilary Mantel: how I came to write *Wolf Hall*”.

time and narration. But, as has been said, the narration is not always discontinuous, and after this initial going back and forth in time the story proceeds in order. If anything, the characters remember what happened in the past in their words and thoughts, but the whole story does not go back and forth. The narration is not a retrospective narration, either, there is no part of the story being set in the present, no character from modern days that finds something that relates to the Tudor era and goes back to it.

When asked whether what she writes is still the “traditional novel”, Mantel answers that “today any historical novel is also a historiographical novel because we can’t write in the unselfconscious way that people perhaps did in the 19th century”<sup>278</sup>. She says she wants to make the story accessible to the readers, and so she questions her work, but “not always overtly on the page”<sup>279</sup>, and she affirms that her third (still unpublished) novel in the ‘Cromwell series’, *The Mirror and the Light*, has this title because “it holds up a mirror to its own workings and to what has gone before. It casts a searching light and is very consciously examining its own processes”<sup>280</sup>. Therefore, the third novel will probably present us with a reflection on the novels themselves, more so than the first two novels, which do not really show this aspect.

In fact, the aspects that these two contemporary novels do not share with postmodernist novels are more than the ones that could be related to postmodernism. As has been said, the fact that there is a jump forward in time, and then a flashback (and the fact that the characters remember past events), does not make the novels actually discontinuous.

Also, the fact that various types of ‘languages’ can be identified in the novels does not make them into a “chattering poliglossary”. The language used in the books does not feel as a composition of different languages, and, even though one could find few sentences that are not in English (like an Italian song that Cromwell remembers), there is no pile of different languages thrown together, to the effect of representing a variety of voices.

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<sup>278</sup> Attar, Robert, “Wolf Hall: author Hilary Mantel talks Tudors, historical accuracy and winning the Man Booker Prize”.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibidem*.

The story does actually come from the point of view of a character that is not *the* central character at court (the king), but Cromwell's is the only point of view we are presented with: we do not get to see the situations through other characters, and, as has been underlined, the narrator does not fit into the category of unreliable narrators. Also, even though Cromwell is marginal in the sense that he is a commoner that acquired a position at court, and he is not the king (if we take the king at the centre of the analysis), he is not an outcast, and there are actually no instances of different races, or sexualities. The people that appear in the novels, whether they are men or women, noble or not, are all European. As far as women are concerned, they are present in the novel, but we see them through a man's point of view. The women in Cromwell's personal life are more absent than present, especially since his wife and daughters die, so, we are left with his sister-in-law, who comes to live at Austin Friars. The women at court, like Henry's wives, do not get to tell the story from their point of view, they are of course given to the reader through Cromwell's narration.

The novels do not try to "conceive the unconceivable"<sup>281</sup>: they tell us a story, from a new point of view, but they analyse facts and characters (and their relationships with other characters), and causes and effects, everything being originally taken from history. They do not try to overcome limits or to understand the incommensurable.

The endings of the two novels are very clear: in both cases, they foreshadow what will happen in the next book (with *Wolf Hall* ending with Cromwell reading the next stops of the king's progress, including Wolf Hall; with *Bring Up the Bodies* ending with the title of Baron bestowed on Cromwell, who thinks of it as the beginning of something new), but they are not open in the sense that the readers have to imagine what happened or interpret an unclear ending.

As far as intertextuality is concerned, the author surely did read historical sources, but there is no referencing other works in the novels, and no parodying them. It can be said, of course, that the character of Cromwell can be quite ironic, but this does not have anything to do with parody.

The thing that relates these novels the most to postmodernism, and to a

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<sup>281</sup> Connor, Steven, "Postmodernism and Literature", p. 67.

contemporary approach to history in fiction in general, might be that they give us not history and *the* definitive version of how the story went, but Cromwell's version of the story. That said, all the other elements mentioned above make it impossible to label *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* as postmodernist novels.

### 3.3.5 Relationship with the sources

Even if *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* follow the historical facts, therefore, they contain some elements that are also present in Holinshed's Chronicles, or Shakespeare's play, or Rowley's, though not all of them, and some of them are presented differently. Wolsey's fall is presented by Holinshed, Shakespeare, and Rowley, and it is presented in *Wolf Hall* as well, along with the accusations made to the cardinal. A detail that Holinshed wrote about (and was also reprised by Shakespeare) was Wolsey's unwillingness to surrender and give back the great Seal of England. Holinshed reports that Wolsey did not want to surrender to the Earl of Northumberland, but then he did when he saw a member of the Privy Chamber. In Mantel's novel, it is Cromwell himself that suggests that the Master of the Rolls is the one who can take the seal away, therefore, the noblemen must come back. Unlike Shakespeare's play, in *Wolf Hall* we do not get to see a direct confrontation between the king and the cardinal, since we see everything through Cromwell's eyes. The close relationship between Wolsey and Cromwell, though, actually recalls the one that Shakespeare depicts after Wolsey's repentance. In both works, the cardinal is a sort of paternal figure for Cromwell. The reader gets to know of Wolsey's death because another character reports about it: in Shakespeare it was Griffith telling it to Queen Catherine; in *Wolf Hall* it is George Cavendish, Wolsey's servant, that refers it to Cromwell.

A scene that is present in Holinshed, Shakespeare and Mantel is that of the trial of Queen Catherine. In Mantel it is Cromwell who explains us what is going on, reporting the dialogue. The queen does not speak directly: it is him who tells us what she said. Later on in the novel, and also in *Bring Up the Bodies*, Cromwell visits the queen in Kimbolton, and his encounters remind us of the visits Wolsey and Gardiner made to her in Shakespeare, and Chapuys, before her death. She even gives



Cromwell a letter to send to the king, as the dying Queen in *Henry VIII* did with Chapuys.

The accuses against Buckingham and his trial, an important part in both Shakespeare and Holinshed, are not present here, while the Field of the Cloth of Gold, again present in both works, is referred to. Cromwell does not go there, the cardinal does.

The coronation of Anne Boleyn is present both here and in Shakespeare (where one of the gentlemen refers that Cromwell was there as well), and, when the king and Anne are in Calais, Mary Boleyn tells Cromwell, they swear love by holding a Bible in a sort of secret marriage, and the king promises her he will marry her again in England, and Holinshed briefly refers to that as well.

The scene of Cranmer being accused by the Council, and King Henry intervening to help him, is present in both Foxe and Shakespeare, but it is not present here.

Mantel herself in the author's note at the end of *Bring Up the Bodies* says that she is "indebted to the work of Eric Ives, David Loades, Alison Weir, G. W. Bernard and Retha Wernicke"<sup>282</sup>, and also thanks other historians without naming them. In the author's note at the end of *Wolf Hall* she makes reference to George Cavendish's *Thomas Wolsey, late Cardinal, his Life and Death*, which is "not always accurate"<sup>283</sup> but "very touching, immediate and readable"<sup>284</sup>.

### 3.3.6 King Henry in *Wolf Hall*

Henry VIII is represented in the novel through the point of view of Thomas Cromwell, as has been said. Thus, his thoughts and actions are always filtered through Cromwell's narration, which gives us the picture of the king as a complex character.

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<sup>282</sup> Mantel, Hilary, *Bring Up the Bodies*, London: Fourth Estate, Harper Collins 2013, p. 484.

<sup>283</sup> Mantel, Hilary, *Wolf Hall*, p. 651.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibidem*.

### 3.3.6.1 The king's physical appearance

Henry does not appear on the page for quite a long, initial part of the first novel. In fact, characters talk about him, but the reader only sees him when he talks with Cromwell. We are given a few descriptions of the king, and every time they focus on a different part of him: we never get a full description. During the first meeting between Cromwell and Henry, the king smiles: "That fine curl of the red lip. He has a pretty mouth, almost like a woman's; it is too small for his face." (*WH*, 181) Cromwell individuates something feminine about his figure, and he will again later on.

When Cromwell comments on the king's prowess with bow and arrow we are given another brief physical representation. Cromwell says that, when Henry draws the bow, he uses "his height, the beautiful trained muscles of his arms, shoulders and chest" (*WH*, 253) underlining the beauty of the king's body. Therefore, he depicts a king that is still young and athletic.

In a scene in which Henry asks Cromwell for advice for what he has to do with his daughter Mary, the king is in distress, and he takes his cap off. There is another description of the king: "his hair is thinning, and it exposes the shape of his massive skull" (*WH*, 445). Cromwell even compares him to a statue, or to a "simpler form of himself" (*WH*, 445), as if the king belonged to an ancient race of giants. The fact that the king is a big man is underlined, even to the point of comparing him to a mythological race. He is also getting old, and this portrayal is more similar to the one we can see in the second novel.

What is said about the king's appearance can be directly related to his character. For instance, his lips are similar to those of a woman, just as, later on, Cromwell will describe the king's voice as shrill when he gets angry. The king wants to appear as a manly, powerful figure, but still this femininity in some of his traits cannot be hidden to an acute observer. The description of the king's strong body, on the other hand, underlines the best features of the king, in which he takes pride of. When Cromwell talks about the fact that the king is starting to lose his hair, the author emphasises the sense of distress that derives from this scene, along with the fact that the king is getting old, a process that will intensify in the second novel.

### 3.3.6.2 The notion of majesty

King Henry thinks that a king must be strong, brave, and powerful. He does not like his manliness and military prowess, which are part of being a man and even more so of being a king, to be diminished. During the very first meeting between Cromwell and the king, Cromwell states that he knows how a certain French town looks like, because he has been there. He can see “a flash of anger” (*WH*, 182) in the king, who replies “and so have I, at the head of my army.” (*WH*, 182) Henry reminds Cromwell of the time when he spoke against the war, said that it would have been too expensive. At the time, Cromwell also said that the king could have been captured and England would not have been able to pay the ransom. Therefore, Henry asks him whether he should not fight and “huddle indoors like a sick girl?” (*WH*, 182) This behaviour is not a behaviour that befits a king: a king needs to be strong, and lead his army into battle. In the same part, Cromwell states that fortitude is an important quality, but it does not just mean courage in battle, which seems to be the meaning for Henry. “Stamp, stamp, stamp in his riding boots; he is ready for *la chasse*. He turns, rather slowly, to show his majesty to better effect: wide and square and bright” (*WH*, 182-183). Henry likes to impress, and his moves are not entirely natural: they are done in order to cause a certain effect in the person he is talking to. When Cromwell says that King Francis thinks too much about war and too little about trade, Henry replies: “to me that is the remit of a king” (*WH*, 220). Here the different characteristics of the two men, and even the values that they deem important, are expressed by a Mantel through a discussion, a change of opinions, which is quite fast-paced, and which actually feels as if Henry is chasing Cromwell, or rather, as if they are fighting each other. It is also quite easy to visualise Henry stomping in his boots, the words used by the author transcribe immediately to a scene in the reader’s mind.

When Cromwell sees Henry drawing his bow he can “see now he is royal” (*WH*, 253). Whether he is at home or not, in war or in peace, “the king likes to practice several times in the week” (*WH*, 253). Cromwell notices, though, that he does not use the bow as a real archer, but he is satisfied with himself nonetheless: “his grandfather was royal; his mother was royal; he shoots like a gentleman

amateur, and he is a king through and through” (*WH*, 254). Cromwell is good with bow and arrows, and he explains he is because his household has a match every Sunday. The king asks whether he could come for the match, in disguise, just like Shakespeare’s Henry VIII went to Wolsey’s house in disguise, or Rowley’s king went into the streets of London at night in disguise. “A king should show himself, sometimes, don’t you feel? It would be amusing, yes?” (*WH*, 254). Henry gives an idea of what it means for him to be king (including showing his presence to his subjects), but also seems to be wanting to run away from court, and doing something ordinary. Here we are given an insight into what the king really feels, even though, as usual, it is Cromwell that understands it, as we never know anything exactly from the point of view of the king. This is conveyed by Mantel also through the king’s hesitation, his looking for Cromwell’s approval.

In April 1532 Henry makes Cromwell Keeper of the Jewels House. He seems very satisfied to have power over people, and says: “what you are, I make you. I alone. Everything you are, everything you have, will come from me.” (*WH*, 360), with an insistence on the personal pronoun “I” and the indefinite pronoun “everything”, which stress the concept he is explaining. “I” is indeed a pronoun that the king uses very often throughout the novel to instate his authority. Cromwell states that “the thought gives him a pleasure you can hardly grudge” (*WH*, 360).

Cromwell even discusses the particularity of the situation of the king, who can do what other men cannot, when talks to his nephew Richard about his upcoming marriage. He tells him that the king wants to have Mary for himself, since Queen Anne is pregnant and he will not touch her. Richard is quite relieved he does not have to marry Mary, but he is surprised and replies: “he is the head of our church. No wonder foreigners laugh” (*WH*, 447). Cromwell affirms he does not care for him to be a model for his private life, but rather for his political life. “But if he were not king” (*WH*, 447), insists Richard, and Cromwell affirms: “you’d have him locked up” (*WH*, 447). Precisely for the fact that he is a king, people cannot complain about his behaviour with women, or about his infidelity. He is a man like the others, when it comes to having sons, but not for other matters. Here, in his simple affirmation of “you’d have him locked up”, Cromwell expresses himself in a very blunt kind of way, which could be related to the voice of Cromwell Green referred to.

### 3.3.6.3 The king's anger and sudden changes of mood

In a passage already mentioned, in which Cromwell and the king discuss about war, Henry asks Cromwell whether he should stay inside and avoid battle like a girl, and Cromwell's answer is "that would be ideal, for fiscal purposes" (*WH*, 181). We are told that the king has "been shouting. Now- and it's a narrow thing- he decides to laugh" (*WH*, 181). This line alone underlines the king choleric temperament and his sudden changes of mood. The structure of the sentence itself seems to suggest a sudden change: first we have "now", then a parenthetical "and it's a narrow thing", that comments on the action, and then, immediately after "he decides to laugh". Later on, Cromwell keeps exposing the reasons why the king should not go to war. He does not know whether the king is about to burst out in anger or not. "He bites his lip. Is he in a slow fury, simmering, bubbling to boiling point?" (*WH*, 183) But his mood has changed again, "his smile is sunny" (*WH*, 183).

In spring 1532, the king is angry because the clergymen are refusing to take the oath. Cromwell describes his voice as a high voice for a big man, and "it rises when he is angry to an ear-throbbing shriek" (*WH*, 339). He expects his subjects to be absolutely loyal to him, and he is very angry at the thought they do not consider it their duty. Just like before, when Cromwell noticed how the king's lips were quite feminine, now he notices the same thing about his voice. He naturally keeps these ideas for himself, because the king would be obviously angry if his manliness were thus undermined.

In these instances of the king's anger, the author gives the reader a description of what the king is saying, but also of how he appears, how he reddens, he cries, he bits his lips. Mantel, in the words of Cromwell, even describes him as "simmering, bubbling" as if he were a liquid that is being heated. There is a very physical aspect to his anger, which makes it immediately recognisable to his interlocutors, even before he starts shouting. At the same time, the fact that he can suddenly become calm again is also underlined.

#### 3.3.6.4 The king's character

In the first dialogue with Cromwell, Henry talks about hunting, compares it to going to war, and reminds Cromwell that he said, some years before, that England could not afford a war. Cromwell thinks: “there’s no point backing off; do that and Henry will chase you down. Advance, and he may just falter.” (*WH*, 181) It is as if the king is actually hunting him. If Cromwell takes back what he once said, the king will remind him what he said and accuse him, because he remembers every word he said. If he restates his opinion, obviously not criticising or insulting the king personally, Henry’s accusations might be stopped, or at least he might hesitate. Henry does not forget things.

When Cromwell discusses the financial settlement of the Cardinal, he is surprised by the financial knowledge demonstrated by the king. “Wolsey has always said that the king has a fine mind, as quick as his father’s, but more comprehensive” (*WH*, 185). The king’s qualities are emphasised here, in contrast to his father’s. Henry VII was narrow, and he preferred to be feared rather than to be loved, but Henry VIII is different. Cromwell would like to know how he is different, but Wolsey’s answer is “I should write you a handbook” (*WH*, 185). The king has a complex personality, so much that one would need guidelines to know how to deal with him. Cromwell is almost writing a handbook of King Henry while he tells the story, in a way.

The king is also nostalgic; he likes to recall episodes of his youth, and talk about his old friends. When he is being told that Edward Courtenay is a traitor, he finds it hard to believe. Cromwell thinks that the problem with people like these is that they always talk about pedigrees, and childhood friendships, and they cannot believe evidence put in front of them. This suggests a certain naivety in the king, and a love for the old times. Thomas More himself says: “he had a sweet disposition. But then he changed the company he kept” (*WH*, 634).

An aspect of king Henry is also the childish part of his character. When the king asks Cromwell whether he could come to his Sunday archery matches as well, Cromwell does not think it would be amusing, and it seems to him there are tears in the king’s eyes. He tells the king they would win if he were on their team, and “it is

what you would say to a child” (*WH*, 254). He is hiding his true opinions about it, and appeasing him like you should do with a child. At Christmas time in 1530, the king calls Cromwell in the middle of the night, because he dreamed of his brother, and he wonders why his brother is appearing now, when he has been king for twenty years. Cromwell thinks “because you are forty and he is telling you to grow up” (*WH*, 277), comparing the king to a spoiled child for the second time. There is often a certain impatience that is conveyed through Cromwell’s thoughts, contrasting with his more patient words, that helps underlining how the king can be exasperating.

### 3.3.6.5 Visions and dreams

As has just been said, the king gets to the point of summoning Cromwell in the middle of the night because he has had a dream of his brother. Arthur did nothing in the dream, but Henry thinks he was silently accusing him of taking his kingdom and his wife. He says “he has come back to make me ashamed”. (*WH*, 275) Perhaps that is the king’s conscience really speaking: the king dreams of his brother, he sees him as if he were a ghost, and he is afraid of this dream. Henry thinks he alone must bear his brother’s accuses. Cromwell reminds him that Arthur did not make accuses, so perhaps the king has misunderstood his intentions: Arthur visited him because he wants Henry to exert his kingship. Henry has to be the king Arthur could not be. Cromwell’s skill with words is indeed great: he can make the nightmare into a good, almost prophetic dream, and with his words, convince even the king.

Another similar episode is the meeting with Elizabeth Barton, the Holy Maid. This time, though, it is not the king who dreams about a family member. When the Holy Maid tells what she claims to have seen to Henry, he manages to laugh it off at first, but becomes unsure when she tells him that she has seen his mother in the vision. He is afraid that something might happen to his kingdom.

The use of visions and dreams, which are possibly something that some people are lead to believe in, is used in this context to stir the king’s doubts, to tickle his conscience. Even though, in both cases, the king is at first bothered by the visions, but then decides not to give importance to them, and act in the opposite direction.

### 3.3.6.6 The relationship with Wolsey and Cromwell

After Wolsey's fall, the king tells Cromwell he misses Wolsey. He whispers, telling him to bring Wolsey money, without telling others. This emphasises the fact that he felt, probably, real affection towards the cardinal in this novel. But, not long after, Henry states that he wants the revenues from Ipswich school and Oxford College. At a certain point Cromwell asks him permission to speak, and the king says "Oh for god's sake [...] I wish someone would" (*WH*, 219). Cromwell understands that "Henry wants a conversation, on any topic" (*WH*, 219). That is what he needs, that is what he did with Wolsey. The king is a man as well as a king, and even though he himself wants to make it clear that he is superior to the others, and that they should be deferent to him, sometimes he would just like to have someone who will tell him the things as they are (not too brutally though, and not in any way that might disrespect him or offend him), or someone who will spend time talking to him, being his actual friend.

One day after Mass, the king wants to speak alone with Cromwell, he speaks about the dissolution of the marriage, he "is about to cry" (*WH*, 444), because his sister is dying, and he then "scrubs his tears away" (*WH*, 445). This is a very intimate portrait of the king, who seems to suffer for what he is doing. Then he tells Cromwell that "it is a solace to me [...] not to have to talk and talk. You were born to understand me, perhaps" (*WH*, 445). He is at his ease with Cromwell, he knows he can be silent if he wants to, he has trust in him. Later on he says that he can trust him: Cromwell had remained faithful to his first master, Wolsey, as now he is faithful to him. Cromwell notices that "he speaks as if he, personally, hadn't caused the trouble; as if Wolsey's fall were caused by a thunderbolt" (*WH*, 541). The king likes to remember people and events nostalgically, and talks about Wolsey with affection, as if he had no part in his fall. Just like he treats people with affection before, and then has them killed or disgraced. Immediately after, in fact, he says he is disappointed with Thomas More. He tells Cromwell he considers him a friend again, after he nominates him Master Secretary. Then, he even talks to Cromwell about his childhood.



### 3.3.7 The king's figure in *Bring Up the Bodies*

The figure of King Henry VIII in this second novel still has many nuances, and it is possible to analyse his character from different perspectives, but it is also becoming quite evident how Cromwell finds him sometimes unbearable, as his character and mood are getting worse.

#### 3.3.7.1 The king's physical appearance

In this second novel there are a couple of descriptions of the king, mainly emphasising his size. This king is definitely aging, and the descriptions underline that as well. At Wolf Hall, Henry is walking in the gardens with Jane, and Cromwell observes them, noticing the difference in size between the two, Henry being “a massive figure” (*BUTB*, 31), Jane's head not even reaching his shoulders. “A broad man, a high man, Henry dominates any room; he would do it even if God had not given him the gift of kingship” (*BUTB*, 31). Cromwell even thinks his head is getting bigger, which is not really flattering.

The fact that Henry is becoming bigger goes hand in hand with his decline also from the point of view of his character. As his health gets worse, and his body fattens, the king becomes more suspicious and angrier than he was before.

#### 3.3.7.2 Majesty and the king's business

When Henry is talking with Jane, the king's appearance strikes Cromwell. His physical aspect is majestic in itself, he has an imposing presence. “Any qualities they [other kings] have, Henry reflects them back, double the size” (*BUTB*, 43) is another one of Cromwell's observations. This seems like a genuine comment coming from Cromwell, rather than a sarcastic one.

In a passage when Cromwell and the king are talking about George Boleyn, who does not agree on the dissolution of the marriage between the king and his sister Anne, Henry is irritated, because it is not his job to talk to George, “his business is more kingly: praying for the success of his enterprises, and writing songs for Jane”

(*BUTB*, 303). Here Cromwell is telling us he is the one who manages the king's business in every aspect, while the king is busy with trivial activities. There is a use of irony by the author that is usually associated with Cromwell's sharp mind, a critique of the king that can only be present in his thoughts.

### 3.3.7.3 The king's character

King Henry wants people to do exactly as he commands, even if what he wants contradicts some of his previous orders. The important thing is, that he does not want to appear in a negative light. When Cromwell and Henry are talking about George Boleyn, the king affirms that George should know that "I do not change my mind" (*BUTB*, 303). Cromwell thinks it is true in a way, "like a crab the king goes sideways to his destination, but then he sinks his pincers in" (*BUTB*, 303). Once again, Hilary Mantel uses a simile to explain the process of Henry's actions and behaviour. Just like he was a hunter when attacking Cromwell over something the man had said in Parliament, here he is a crab.

In another dialogue with Cromwell, Henry tells him that, if another way to get rid of Anne does not exist, there is still the fact that he used to have a relationship with her sister Mary, but he does not want that to be brought up unless it is really necessary. In fact, he swore that he had nothing to do with Mary, when he needed that to marry Anne. "You don't want history to make a liar of you" (*BUTB*, 283), Cromwell thinks. Henry does not want to be wrong, he always uses facts at his own advantage.

Cromwell himself gives a very detailed explanation of the king's character:

As a child, a young man, praised for the sweetness of his nature and his golden looks, Henry grew up believing that all the world was his friend and everybody wanted him to be happy. So any pain, any delay, frustration or stroke of ill-luck seems to him an anomaly, an outrage. Any activity he finds weary or unpleasant, he will try honestly to turn into an amusement, and if he cannot find some thread of pleasure he will avoid it; this to him seems reasonable and natural. He has councillors employed to fry their brains on his behalf, and if he is out of temper it is probably their fault; they shouldn't block him or provoke him. He doesn't want people who say 'No, but...' He wants people who say 'Yes, and...' He doesn't like men who are pessimistic and sceptical [...] Do not expect consistency from him. Henry prides himself on understanding his councillors, their secret opinions and desires, but he is resolved that none of his councillors shall understand him. He is suspicious of any plan that doesn't originate within himself, or seem to. You can argue with him, but you must be careful how and when [...] be sinuous in argument and allow him escapes: don't corner him, don't back

him against the wall. Remember that his mood depends on other people [...] remember he wants more than to be advised of his power, he wants to be told he is right. He is never in error. It is only that other people commit errors on his behalf or deceive him with false information. Henry wants to be told that he is behaving well, in the sight of God and man. (*BUTB*, 247-248)

This is a summary of what Henry is like, and how he acts throughout the novels. His character is a direct consequence of the way he was spoiled, as a child. He avoids what he does not want to do, and he always wants everyone to please him, to say he is right. He does not want to be criticised.

#### 3.3.7.4 The king's relationship with Catherine

Catherine has always refused to submit to the king's requests of surrender, because she believed herself to be his true wife and queen of England. In a visit to her, Cromwell realises that she still loves her husband. She still has the silk roses Henry gave her when she was pregnant, even before knowing that the child would be a boy. And that present will always remind her how he loved her once. These are the subtle moments in which the author reminds us that Henry is mistreating Catherine, but he *was* in love with her once.

Throughout the books, though, Henry seems to consider her as a burden, right from the beginning he does not want Chapuys to talk to him about her, and wishes her to be in her grave as soon as possible. He is actually relieved when he knows she has died. But later, when he decides to give to Jane a small jewelled Bible he says: “‘It was my wife’s’ [...] then he checks himself and looks away in shame. ‘I mean to say, it was Katherine’s’” (*BUTB*, 363). Catherine is dead, and he seemed relieved, if not even happy about that, but now that he wants to get rid of Anne, the only woman he can think of having been married with is Catherine, thus returning to the mindset he had before deciding to annul his marriage with her.

#### 3.3.7.5 The king's relationship with Anne and Elizabeth

In this novel, the king starts wanting to get rid of Anne Boleyn: he has not got a male child yet, and he is interested in Jane Seymour. But he has to find his reasons to separate from Anne. He thinks at first he might blame Anne for being engaged

with Harry Percy before, or with Thomas Wyatt. In the end, she is accused and executed.

At first, he is still playful and tender with their daughter, Elizabeth. In January, at court, Henry has princess Elizabeth in his arms, he tosses her up, catches her, and kisses her. Lady Rochford observes “Henry has a tender heart, does he not? Of course, he is pleased with any child. I have seen him kiss a stranger’s baby in much the same way” (*BUTB*, 173). If this scene of the king being an affectionate father could suggest that Henry loves Elizabeth, it also suggests that she is not special to him, he would treat any child this way. And, of course, she is not the son he wants.

Cromwell is later woken up in the middle of the night because the pregnant queen’s room is on fire. When he gets to her, she is safe, and the king is “tearful, hugging her, and the heir who is inside her” (*BUTB*, 187), once again, an act of tenderness and concern towards his wife, but also towards his unborn child. He keeps saying that, if he were with her, he could have put her out of danger. Cromwell notices that Anne is irritated by “his solicitude, his doting, his clinging” (*BUTB*, 188), three nouns repeated to underline how much the king worries about her. Cromwell realises that the positions now are reversed, usually, during the day, it is Anne who clings to the king, he, who stiffens and pulls away. The king is worried about the health of their child, but he is not so tender to Anne anymore, at least, not in public.

When Anne loses her baby, Henry is extremely cold with her and tells her she is the only one to blame. The king reinstates once again what it is to be a monarch, saying: “if a king cannot have a son, if he cannot do that, it matters not what else he can do” (*BUTB*, 219). Henry blames himself, in a way, for not being able to have a son, but, at the same time, he thinks there must be something wrong in his wife. He starts to believe that she bewitched him to lead him to marry her.

One night, Henry’s illegitimate child comes to bid him goodnight. Henry embraces him, “his face wet with tears” (*BUTB*, 378). He thinks Anne would have poisoned him, his only son, and even Mary, and “made that little blotch she spawned the heir to England” (*BUTB*, 378). These words he says about Elizabeth express nothing but disgust, and make a striking comparison to the portrait of the father who

once played with his daughter. He even adds: “I doubt a child of hers could live. She was too wicked” (*BUTB*, 378). He declares the marriage to Anne was illicit, and he grips his son so much that Cromwell is reminded of a mother bear who crushes her cub. Henry insists that his first marriage was invalid, but that he was blind in marrying Anne. “Why have I been cursed with women who destroy the children in their own wombs?” (*BUTB*, 379). The author can give here a portrait of a man for whom a reader might feel sorry for, and yet, at the same time, a man that can be harshly criticised.

#### 3.3.7.6 The king’s relationship with Jane

With the king’s desire to take Jane Seymour as his mistress, Cromwell knows that he will even give her an income or favour her family members. Many times it is underlined how the Seymours will advance their position using Jane, and they will do it intelligently, not selling the sister cheap, and also how different pale and mild Jane is from Anne Boleyn, in looks and in character.

When Henry writes a letter to Jane, she sends back his letter, and Henry talks about her as too pure and innocent, and resolves to talk to her only when a member of her family is there too. Jane is all of that, but she is also much more intelligent than people (including her family) think, and Cromwell realises that and appreciates her. Right from the beginning of the novel, Jane manages to do small things other people cannot force themselves to do: just like risking waking up the king who has fallen asleep at the dinner table. She proved to be more sensible than anybody else, sweet and firm at the same time, and the king did not take offence in her doing so.

After Anne’s execution, the king marries Jane. He is satisfied with the motto chosen for the new Queen, “bound to Obey and Serve”. Cromwell sees that his eyes are serene now. He is starting over now, but he is somehow sad. He is afraid he will not have more children, because he is getting older.

#### 3.3.7.7 The king’s torments

The king’s conscience is tormented, because of the fact he does not have a

son yet, because he has to find reasons to divorce Anne, and because his kingdom is not secure. During the summer of 1535 the king has been on his progress, visiting various houses. Looking at him, “you would think [...] that he sits as secure on his throne as he does on his horse” (*BUTB*, 9) when he actually stays awake at night and asks Cromwell to save him from his problems, or Cranmer whether his soul is damned.

During a tourney, the king falls from his horse, and everybody thinks he is dead. He is surrounded by courtiers, there is no blood, there is chaos. Norfolk says he already told the queen, who fainted. Everybody seems to be worried about who will be ruling now. Cromwell worries about Mary, he wants to have her in his hands to protect her, but she is surrounded by Boleyns. Norfolk thinks about himself taking the position as regent. Then Cromwell realises the king is breathing. His sudden death would have left a situation of great political instability. The scene, in fact, is described as being absolutely chaotic, with all the characters talking over each other. The situation is not to be talked about: there was just an accident with the horse, nothing more. The king has to hide his weakness, and go back to his throne. But the fear of lacking a male heir to the throne intensifies.

#### 3.3.7.8 The king's anger and changes of mood

Just like in *Wolf Hall*, the king can be seen as angry and even cold, when it comes to his relationship to Anne especially. His anger usually arises from the way he is treated, or from his problems concerning his marriage and his son. When Lady Rochford tells the king Anne has miscarried her baby, and that he had the appearance of a boy, he is very angry, even though she is merely repeating the doctor's words. “Get away woman, you have never given birth, how would you know?” (*BUTB*, 216). Mary Shelton, who is there as well, and was the king's mistress, starts crying. The king is very nice to her, he tells her: “forgive me. Sweetheart, I did not mean to make you cry” (*BUTB*, 216), turning from anger to softness. The king is capable of calling his own wife “wicked” (as he did with Anne), and his own daughter “that little blotch she spawned”, while calling another woman “sweetheart”, and being gallant with her. These two ways of languages are often used by Henry VIII, who

does not seem to know a middle ground between the two.

### 3.3.8 Mantel's King Henry and past representations

If one tries to compare the figure of the king in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* to the king seen in *Henry VIII (All is True)* or, even before, to the king of *When You See Me, You Know Me*, several points can be made.

First of all, King Henry is here represented in two long novels, therefore, he is more present and his character is developed more, we can see more aspects of his character. The medium is also different. These are novels, the other two works were plays, and, if we want to take into account Holinshed and Foxe, they were meant as chronicles. In the plays, Henry was portrayed both by other characters talking about him, and by himself, with his own words. In the novels, his portrayal is filtered through Cromwell's words and thoughts.

Some elements are always present, like his anger, his changes of mood, his troubled conscience, his need to stress that he is the king. But if Rowley's Henry VIII was quite a comic character, along with being violent, and Shakespeare and Fletcher's King Henry was a graceful king with some flaws, Mantel's Henry VIII is represented with even more nuances. Of course, the novels also offer a physical representation, which lacks in the plays. The relationship with his wives is also explored more in the novels, and much more of his character is explained to us by Cromwell himself, not only indirectly, but also directly, when he gives a detailed account of the king's character. He literally writes us a handbook. The king in Mantel's novels is also quite nostalgic, he remembers episodes from his past, and he misses people he knew in the past, even people he himself brought down, a quite contradictory behaviour. At the same time, though, he does not want to be seen as a contradictory person, or as a liar. Shakespeare's Henry VIII is a nuanced character as well, but he matures throughout the play, starting out as dependent from Wolsey, and then, after getting rid of him, he becomes a more active character, who knows what is going on in his kingdom, and who is amazed by Cranmer's prophecy about Elizabeth in the end. On the other hand Mantel's Henry VIII is much more contradictory, displaying positive characteristics in a page, and negative

characteristics in others. If anything, he gets worse in the second book if compared to the way he is depicted in the first book.

Then again, chronology is different in the three works: Rowley mixed up various events and dates (to the point of having Cardinal Wolsey and Jane Seymour at the same time, and with Henry married with Catherine Parr by the end of the play); Shakespeare and Fletcher wrote about the period when the king divorces from Catherine and then marries Anne Boleyn; Mantel covers that last period as well, but by the end of *Bring Up the Bodies* the reader gets to see Anne's fall as well, something that the king in *Henry VIII* was not yet guilty of. Unlike Rowley's play, or Shakespeare and Fletcher's play, we are allowed to see how Henry slowly corrupts and decays, how he takes decisions for his reign and how he makes people around him act for him.

Mantel's Henry VIII is of course a Renaissance king: he has an imposing presence, he has a precise notion of majesty, even his movements are meant to impress, to show his power and nobility. He is the king, and he has to be obeyed in his any request. And yet, the author manages to give a portrait of the king that is not just that of a king, but also that of a man. The reader feels Henry's struggles, and even though he is a flawed character, who does actions that are reproachable, we get to see why he does them, how his mind works, his reasons for doing certain things. The portrait becomes very intimate at times, when Henry decides to confess to Cromwell that he would like to take part in his archery matches, or when he talks to him about his childhood. We even get to see him crying while embracing his son, and in terror after the dream he had of his brother. Of course, he is still a man living in the sixteenth century, but the readers get closer to him, and, since we follow Cromwell in every passage of the book, and he is very observant of very detail, it is as if we see Henry VIII when he sees him, there is a close perspective. We do not see the scene from the outside, as we did with Shakespeare or with Rowley. That helps getting to know the king more, and whether to like him more or to like him less because of that is a personal choice. We do not see him praised, or accused, we see him portrayed with his flaws and qualities, and his more vulnerable side. The reader feels that the king has emotions, he is not just a king's figure or an institution; nor is he presented as an example of majesty; nor as a comic character.



Mantel herself (as stated in paragraph 3.3.2) has said that people go to see the play that has been adapted on these novels with some preconceptions, and that these ideas are challenged when the actor that plays Henry VIII looks at them in the eyes and explains why he needs a divorce. Reading is different, since there is not a person looking at the readers in the eyes, telling them his torments, but the torments of the character are apparent nonetheless. By having Cromwell thinking about who the king is, what he wants, and how he behaves (which is vital for Cromwell to understand what he has to do in order to please him), we still get to see him as a human being, rather than just a page in a history book.

What Mantel does is not transforming a character usually considered a monster into a good or heroic character, drastically reversing a fact, a stereotype, or general opinion. This happens, to some extent, with the character of Cromwell, which has often been shown as the villain, while here the readers get to see the story through him, they empathise with him, and they also see his private life. With Henry VIII, on the other hand, the representation we are given is that of a human being, not just that of a graceful monarch, nor that of a tyrant. It is a figure modelled on what is historically known about him, with the addition of feelings, and humanity. He is much more of a modern figure if compared to the kings we could see in Rowley, Shakespeare and Fletcher, and not just because of the change in the language in Mantel's novels, which sounds appropriate and not too modern (as has been discussed), but also more immediately comprehensible by any modern reader. It is because we get to see him not just as a king's figure, but also as a man, and we get closer to him, rather than see him from a distance.

Also, Mantel gives the representation of a king that is gradually getting worse, whose flaws are more emphasised in the second novel rather than in the first one, unlike what happened in the representations of the king during the Renaissance. This element which will be reprised in the following paragraph.

### 3.4 The key of the success of Henry VIII

In order to understand why Henry VIII is such a successful character in

books, films and television shows, it is interesting to read what Irene Goodman<sup>285</sup> had to say about Anne Boleyn, often used as a protagonist of historical novels. She states that Anne Boleyn's story has everything: "It has sex, adultery, pregnancy, scandal, divorce, royalty, glitterati, religious quarrels, and larger-than-life personalities"<sup>286</sup>. It is both sensational from the private point of view and important from a historical point of view. Every novel, she affirms, needs to have a high point, which is "something that is instantly recognisable and appealing in a short phrase of sentence"<sup>287</sup>, and that is true of historical novels as well. She also says women love to read about other women, and that is why women figures are used in historical novels. These two reasons explain very well why the story of Anne Boleyn is so popular. De Groot also thinks that Anne is exploited as a character because of the type of woman she is often portrayed to be, "intelligent and cunning"<sup>288</sup>. And he also underlines that Anne was mistreated, and giving her a story allows her to express her own side of the story. The fact that we do not know everything about her biography also allows writers to have a certain degree of freedom in inventing details about the lives of their characters. Even though texts often focus on the relationship between Henry and Anne, which "fulfils the genre demands of a romance"<sup>289</sup>, there is much more. In order for Henry to marry Anne, another marriage is destroyed, there are political issues, the marriage is not happy in itself, and it ends in destruction.

Starting from these observations made by Goodman about Anne, it is natural to apply them to Henry VIII, a highly recognisable historical figure, even for a non-British public who might not be acquainted with many English kings. Novels about Henry VIII have the same kind of hook that make readers want to read about him as well.

First of all, in Henry's life there was more than one love story. And, if not love stories in the strict sense of the term, there were relationships and marriages. This is always a part of his life that attracts curiosity, a part of his life that people want to know more about. It also constitutes a good element to develop in fiction,

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<sup>285</sup> Goodman, Irene, "Why Anne Boleyn is the poster girl of historical fiction", in *Solander: The Magazine of the Historical Novel Society*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2005, p. 15.

<sup>286</sup> Goodman, Irene, "Why Anne Boleyn is the poster girl of historical fiction", p.15.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>288</sup> De Groot, Jerome, *The Historical Novel*, p. 70.

<sup>289</sup> Ivi, p. 73.

television and films. Unlike other monarchs who might have had one wife throughout their whole life, Henry VIII had six, which is already a detail worthy of notice and that draws the interest of readers or viewers, who want to know who these people he got married to were, and why it came that the king got married so many times. Henry's six wives all have a different story, though sometimes they experienced similar fates, and their stories can be exploited to let the readers or spectators see the king from the point of view of a woman, as has been said before with regards to Anne Boleyn. Many readers of historical novels are women as well, so they are interested in getting to know Henry VIII through his wives.

Catherine of Aragon was his first wife and her marriage to Henry was the longest lasting one. It could sometimes be forgotten, since Henry had six wives, that he married Catherine when he was young, and they were married for around twenty years. She is the representation of the loyal, faithful wife who had the misfortune of not having given the king a son; otherwise, the king might have probably not even married again. She is used as a fictional character often in opposition to Anne Boleyn: the older wife and the younger love interest, the fervent Catholic and the supporter of the Reform. She avoided an execution, but her end was nonetheless a not particularly bright one: she got stripped of her title of Queen of England, she was removed from court and from the company of her daughter, and she died of tumor. She can be seen as a tragic heroine, who was unjustly made to step aside, and who refused to say she was not the Queen of England, even though they took the title away from her.

Anne Boleyn is an interesting character who can offer various representations, she is the woman for whom, if we put things in a quite simplistic way, Henry cast away his former wife and his religion, the woman who marked the passage between the first part of Henry's reign and the second part of his reign. She is sometimes portrayed as a scheming woman (such as in *The Other Boleyn Girl*), but it can be argued that she was actually pushed by her family and her uncle Norfolk to do what she did. She encounters a tragical fate: she is arrested, she has to face a trial and she is executed, because of the accusations King Henry makes against her. She did not give him a son, his marriage to her did not change his hereditary line, even though it changed many things in politics and religion. She is hugely successful in

fiction, and novels that include her as a character or as a narrator are, as has been said, many. Her arrival in Henry's life marks one of the reasons why people probably want to read about him: their love story, the separation from the Catholic Church, her rise to power and her fall.

Jane Seymour marks a contrast with Anne, such as Anne did with Catherine. She is always represented as much milder than the vivacious Anne, starting from her motto "Bound to Obey and Serve". Eventually, she is the one who gives the king the so-desired male heir, the woman for whom the king took the black for many months, and the woman with whom he was buried. Her end was not dictated by Henry's will, but by complications of her giving child. Her relationship to Henry can show an aspect of him that is more on the positive side.

Anne of Cleves is actually the wife whose end was not as tragic as most of the others, and yet, at the same time, the wife Henry did not choose for himself, and did not even see before their betrothal. He was disappointed not just by her aspect, but also by her character; her education, different from that of the English ladies of the time, or even from that of European princesses like Catherine of Aragon; her inability to speak English. He was never attracted to her, he agreed to marrying her because of the alliance with the Protestant Countries that Cromwell favoured. She did not last long as Henry's wife, but her marriage to the king was what eventually cost Cromwell's death. She was spared a sad end to her life, because she accepted the annulment of her marriage to the king, and received the title of king's sister. Her figure is that of a foreign noblewoman, brought in a foreign court, just like Catherine of Aragon, but lacking the sort of education Catherine had. She can be seen as a victim of her family (as all these women are in a way or the other), but also as the woman who escaped a grim fate.

Catherine Howard was a young, naive girl that the king chose for himself, and her end, once again, was not a happy one. She had to answer charges of adultery, just like Anne, and she met the same fate. Henry, by now, was already an extremely suspicious man and his best days were passed. It is hard to see a love story between this aging king and this young girl, unlike what happened between him and Anne, and that is for example the approach used by Philippa Gregory in *The Boleyn Inheritance*. Part of the book is narrated by Catherine's point of view, and she is

more of a victim –though also particularly naive and quite silly- than anything else.

Catherine Parr had something that differentiated her from the previous wives of King Henry: she was already a widow. Her marriage to the king came to an end due to the king's death, and though her story might not be the most known one, especially if compared to Anne Boleyn's or Catherine of Aragon's, some authors have included her in their novels about King Henry.

These six women were all different from each other, but they are all bound, because of having been married to the same man. They are one of the main reasons why this king is so fascinating. Their existence also allows them to be used as characters and potentially narrators in fiction, so that the writers can give not only their own vision of Henry through these women's eyes (which might be used to reinforce or destroy the myth of Henry as Bluebeard), but also an insight to their own lives.

Secondly, Henry's political life is intriguing as well, and it is actually intertwined with his private life at times. In fact, he is the man who annulled his marriage to his wife of twenty years to get married again, hoping for a male heir, and he decided to take the step of separating the Church of England from the Catholic Church in order to obtain that. He put himself at the Head of the Church, not just at the Head of the State, and this process caused the deaths of some eminent figures, including his friend and former Chancellor Sir Thomas More. This also led to the Reform of the Church, to the dissolution of monasteries, to the uprising of the Pilgrimage of Grace in the North of England. Other interesting elements from a political point of view were the wars conducted by England at the time, and the continuous changing of sides from Spain to France.

Thirdly, King Henry had a court full of interesting characters, from his already mentioned six wives, to personalities like Sir Thomas More, Thomas Cromwell, Cardinal Wolsey, the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, the painter Hans Holbein, or poets like Thomas Wyatt. Even Henry's fool, Will Somers, who has been used in Margaret George's *Autobiography of King Henry VIII*. These characters all came into contact with King Henry, and they all have stories worth telling, that might be (or might already have been, in some cases) used in novels set at the king's court. One example is that of Thomas Cromwell in Mantel's novels.

Moreover, the figure of Henry VIII is a figure of excess. The reasons mentioned above could all be put into relation also by the fact that everything was excessive. The number of his marriages, his political choices, even, in part, his lifestyle, if one thinks about the young athletic man he was, and the big unhealthy man he became when he got older.

All these reasons that have been mentioned are what attracts people to the figure of Henry VIII, and all of them can be, as has been said, used in fiction and in other media to represent this king. And once readers and viewers get to realise that Henry has not always been the man he was towards the last years of his life, they see his story as a story of decay, and, as David Starkey says in the video where he discusses the king with Hilary Mantel, of corruption: “Henry is a kind of perfection, which is destroyed and turned against itself [...] it’s a theme out of fairytale, it’s a wonderful story”<sup>290</sup>. That could be the ultimate reason why stories about this king keep being so successful. This reason includes in itself all the elements that constitute the curiosity in this figure, and it explains why we keep going back to the same story again. As time goes by, as we follow the pages of books or watch the screen, we assist to this show of Henry falling down from his initial glory and splendour, and, really much like a fairytale going dark, we see him make big changes in his life and in his reign, we see him bring people down because they do not serve him the way they did before, we see him become suspicious and unhealthy. He goes from being a handsome prince into the grotesque figure he was in his last years. This ‘excessive behaviour’ he exercised changed him for the worse. Just like we keep reading fairy tales that have existed for centuries, we keep being interested in this story of degradation and corruption of what was once beautiful and glorious.

This is very evident in the television show *The Tudors*, and it is present in Mantel’s novels as well.

The opening credits of *The Tudors*, one of the television shows mentioned in this chapter, are an intelligent example of that. Right before the characters appear in front of us with the names of the actors written underneath, with music playing, we can hear the actor portraying Henry VIII saying: “you think you know a story, but

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<sup>290</sup> Historical Royal Palaces (uploaded by), “David Starkey and Hilary Mantel discuss Henry VIII-part3”.

you only know how it ends. To get to the heart of the story, you have to go back to the beginning". While this television show does not represent history accurately, the idea to lure the public is that of showing spectators how Henry VIII's life was (the show is actually called *The Tudors* but it does not focus on the reigns of other Tudor monarchs other than Henry, even though his children appear in the series). This show actually focuses, at least for the first two seasons out of four seasons in total, on a king that is still young, good-looking, and athletic. This is used of course as an element of attraction for the public, but it is also used to show that there is more than one might remember from history books. It is as if they are asking their public whether they knew that the king was handsome once, and but also whether they know why he did what he did, what were the thoughts behind his actions. Thus, they lead the public from the moment when Henry VIII is still young and handsome, to the moment of his death, they show a story of corruption of the king, they lead us through a downward spiral.

Concerning *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* in particular, it can be argued again that this story of corruption is there. We start more or less around the same period of time when *The Tudors* takes place, which often seems to be a favourite point of departure: the separation of the English Church from Rome and the divorce from Catherine give so many plot elements and possibilities. These events are diluted into many pages, in two novels, but they are all there. At the end of the second novel, we see Anne Boleyn's execution. Here, again, we experience what happens with the king through the passage of time, from the young king he was to the king he is gradually becoming. It is not hard to realise that the king is more unsufferable to Cromwell in *Bring Up the Bodies* than he was in *Wolf Hall*. His health gets worse, his control gets worse, even the uncertainty of his position on the throne intensifies. Everything he had worked for in the previous novels turns against him: his marriage ends, he executes his wife. And, even though we do not see it yet, in the third book of the series it will be possible to experience this even more, with the fall of Cromwell, for example. He rose to the best position and he is honoured, but he will lose everything he has and he will be brought down by the king who, in these first two novels, trusts him.

The element of 'fairy tale gone dark' is the main, imposing reason of the

success of this historical figure, used as a fictional characters. If other reasons are to be found, specifically concerning why Mantel's novels were so popular, several assumptions could be made. Here the character in charge of the narration, as has been underlined many times already, is Thomas Cromwell, a character that, unlike Henry's wives, had not been used before as the narrator of Henry's story. This is a new element introduced by these novels, and it helps setting these novels away from other historical novels set at the court of King Henry. Cromwell has been represented more as a villain before, rather than anything else, while she gives him the point of view of the whole story. The use of Cromwell as the narrator, and as the person through which the reader sees King Henry, contains in itself both the political and personal aspect of the figure of the king, which makes the novel so compelling to read. Cromwell is a political figure, and he deals with matters of state; he also deals with problems that are political and private at the same time, like the king's marriages (and their dissolution), and has conversations with both Catherine and Anne; he is the person the king sends for when in need, and a person the king likes to talk to. He probably cannot be defined as a friend of the king's, but still, he is the person the king summons in the middle of the night, when he has a dream about his brother, he is a man Henry himself encourages to speak his own mind at times (even though, of course, Cromwell is wise and knows what he can say to Henry and what he cannot), he is the man the king talks to about his childhood. By using Cromwell's point of view we can see the two interesting sides of the king, the political one and the private one, and we are presented with aspects that interest a wide range of readers. Cromwell is a character who had always remained quite to the side in previous representations, but Mantel identified his potential: he is a character that offers many possibilities in terms of fiction and invention, since not so much is known about his private life, if compared to what we know about his public life. Therefore, we, as readers, get to see his life at court (and so in relationship to the king and to other characters), but also at home. Mantel avoided telling the story from the point of view of one of the characters that have already been used many other times, as, for example, his wives, especially Anne Boleyn, and gave us a whole new perspective.

Also, Mantel writes historical novels, not romances, or novels that border



more on the romance rather than anything else (as, for instance, Philippa Gregory's novels), attracting a wider audience. This does not mean that novelists like Gregory are not successful, but Mantel's novels can attract an audience that would perhaps not read Gregory's books.

Moreover, even though the novels are historically accurate, and nothing feels out of place or out of time in her novels, the readers can easily immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the Tudor court, and the characters do not in any way feel distant: it is easy to relate to the them, to empathise with them, to understand the reasons why they are taking certain decisions. Henry VIII himself, as has been said before in this work, is of course a Renaissance King, he is modelled on what we know about the king thanks to historical sources, but at the same time, the reader can feel him as a human being and as a rather modern figure.

Throughout this work, it has been underlined how Henry VIII as a character has not only always enjoyed popularity, but also changed through time. Some elements, like his choleric temperament, seem to remain always constant, but there is a substantial difference between Rowley's king, the same character in Shakespeare's and Fletcher's play, and the figure created by Hilary Mantel. It is interesting to see that sometimes depictions of King Henry in fiction try to make him more understandable to the readers, and not like a monster, as Mantel herself has said<sup>291</sup>. These works underline both his positive and negative aspects, trying to challenge the preformed ideas of the readers. They do not deny his flaws, nor do they deny his responsibilities, and they do show how he gets worse with time, since that is the key to why we still keep reading about Henry VIII nowadays; yet, they allow the readers to look at the situation from different perspectives. Representations of the real King Henry VIII by his contemporaries were positive when referring to the first part of his reign, less so when referring to its second part. The figure of the king in Rowley's play certainly has some positive qualities, and he is not a completely flat character, but he is undeniably violent in an exaggerated, comic way, given the fact that *When You See Me, You Know Me* is a comedy. In *Henry VIII (All is True)* the depiction is no longer so light-hearted, as the king, who appears as a gracious monarch at first,

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<sup>291</sup> Royal Society of Literature (uploaded by), "Hilary Mantel in conversation with Harriet Walter (Full)".

can be seen as a passive political figure in the first part of the play, and a more active one in the second, and has different relationships within various other characters in the play. In modern day representations of the king, every author tries to convey their interpretation of the character, whether this results in keeping a rather stereotyped image of the monarch, or a complex one, such as in Mantel's two novels. There is certainly no need, nowadays, to present King Henry as a model of grace, as was the intention of Holinshed and Foxe (and perhaps, Shakespeare and Fletcher, since the play was performed at the times of James I, mentioned at the end of the last act in relation to princess Elizabeth, and no real critique of King Henry is present in the play). Nor do authors like Mantel feel the need to change the chronology (like Rowley did). It has been possible in Mantel's works to focus more on the downward path the king took, as documented by history, which presents us with so much difference between the first and second part of his reign, and show how he got there, never, though representing him just as the villain of the situation.

The success of Henry VIII as a character is still undeniable, and even more novels portraying him as one of the characters will surely be published in the future. Novels already in the making include Philippa Gregory's next book about Margaret Tudor (one of Henry's sisters), *Three Sisters, Three Queens*<sup>292</sup>, to be published during the course of 2016, and Mantel's last novel with Cromwell as a protagonist, *The Mirror and the Light*, where the readers will probably follow Cromwell until his last days as a servant of King Henry's.

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<sup>292</sup> Philippa Gregory website, "Books", (available at <http://www.philippagregory.com/books>, last visited: 06/03/2016.)

## Conclusion

The objectives of this work were to show how Henry VIII has been represented in history and fiction, starting from historical facts; to get to representations of him given by his contemporaries; to arrive to fiction, from the Renaissance to our age; and to try and find some reasons for his success as a literary character.

The first chapter illustrated Henry VIII's life and reign in its various aspects, and showed how he was regarded when he first accessed the throne, and later on in his life. It took into account letters and reports written at the time, but also Holinshed's and Foxe's histories. The second part of the chapter started giving a portrait of King Henry as a literary character in Rowley's play *When You See Me, You Know Me*.

The second chapter focused on Shakespeare and Fletcher's work, its attribution, the sources the authors used, and the figure of Henry VIII in the play. It highlighted various parts of his character, and tried to analyse how the figure changed and evolved throughout the play.

The third chapter gave an idea of how many different novels, television shows and films are produced nowadays about the court of Henry VIII, and include him as one of the characters. It introduced the historical novel and postmodernism, to then get, specifically, to Mantel's novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, explaining their plot, their structure and their characteristics. It then moved again in detail to the figure of Henry VIII, portrayed in these novels through the filter of the narrator of these books, Thomas Cromwell. The final part of the chapter attempted to state the reasons why this king is such an appealing figure in fiction and other media, even nowadays. The reasons are many and they are intertwined with each other.

The objectives that were set when starting this work were achieved, but, naturally, there is still a possibility of further research. For instance, other contemporary novels about Henry VIII can be taken into account, to see how various other authors have portrayed the king, which sources they have used, what kind of literary work they have written, through which point of view they have presented this character. This could also be extended to non-fictional works, such as films and

television shows, whether they were adapted from novels or not. Of course, another element which could not be taken into consideration when writing this dissertation, was the third novel in Mantel's "Cromwell's trilogy", *The Mirror and The Light*, which is yet to be published. This novel will surely add new aspects to the representation of King Henry VIII through Cromwell's point of view, since it will probably get to Cromwell's death by order of the king.

There is an ample choice of works that can be analysed in relation to the figure of Henry VIII and the contemporary novels considered in this dissertation were the object of a selection.

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## Riassunto italiano

L'obiettivo di questo lavoro è descrivere la figura di Enrico VIII, partendo dalla persona storica e da cosa i contemporanei scrivevano di questo re, per poi passare al personaggio letterario, prima nell'opera di Shakespeare e Fletcher, poi nei romanzi di Hilary Mantel, per cercare infine di fornire un'interpretazione del successo della figura di questo re.

Il primo capitolo inizia considerando la sua vita e il suo regno. Nato nel 1491, figlio di re Enrico VII e di Elisabetta di York, aveva un fratello maggiore, Arthur. Alla morte di Arthur Enrico divenne erede al trono, e venne incoronato re nel 1509. Nello stesso anno, sposò Caterina d'Aragona, vedova di Arthur, ottenendo una dispensa papale. Nel 1512 iniziò una campagna contro la Francia, organizzata da Thomas Wolsey, che divenne amico e consigliere del re ed ottenne molti titoli, tra cui quello di Cardinale di York e Arcivescovo di Canterbury. Le guerre con Francia e Spagna continuarono, e l'Inghilterra prendeva talvolta le parti di uno stato, talvolta dell'altro. Nel 1521, il duca di Buckingham fu arrestato e successivamente giustiziato, in quanto fu accusato di aver complottato per uccidere il re e prenderne il posto. Nello stesso anno, Enrico rispose alle idee di Martin Lutero in un libro, e gli fu concesso dal Papa il titolo di 'Defensor Fidei'. Dal matrimonio di Enrico con Caterina era nata una sola figlia, Maria, ma il re necessitava di un erede maschio a cui lasciare il trono. Per questo motivo, a partire dal 1527, l'obiettivo del re fu quello di ottenere un annullamento del suo matrimonio da parte del Papa. Il Papa non acconsentì, e Wolsey non riuscì a intercedere presso di lui, motivo per il quale cominciò a perdere il favore di Enrico VIII. Inizialmente, fu allontanato da corte, e gli venne tolta gran parte dei titoli. Poi, accusato di aver complottato col Papa e con le potenze straniere, e di aver abusato della sua posizione, fu arrestato, ma morì nell'Abbazia di Leicester, durante il suo viaggio verso Londra, nel 1530. La soluzione per lo scioglimento del matrimonio fu separare la Chiesa d'Inghilterra dalla Chiesa di Roma, ponendone il re a capo. Thomas Cranmer, il nuovo Arcivescovo di Canterbury, dichiarò nullo il primo matrimonio del re, e unì in matrimonio Enrico VIII e Anna Bolena. Nel settembre 1533 nacque loro figlia, Elisabetta. I due Atti che servivano al re per garantire la propria posizione erano due,

l'Atto di Supremazia, che poneva il re come capo supremo della Chiesa d'Inghilterra, e l'Atto di Successione, che legittimava come eredi del re i figli avuti da Anna Bolena. Tommaso Moro, amico del re e Cancelliere, fu tra coloro che rifiutarono di prestare giuramento a questi atti, e venne giustiziato. Grazie all'aiuto di Thomas Cromwell, che aveva servito in precedenza Wolsey, Enrico riuscì anche a ottenere le ricchezze dei monasteri, che vennero sciolti in seguito alla proclamazione della nuova Chiesa. Nel 1536, ci fu una ribellione contro il re nel Nord del Paese, chiamata Pellegrinaggio di Grazia, ma terminò l'anno successivo, a sfavore dei ribelli. Il matrimonio con Anna durò solo fino al 1536, quando fu accusata di tradimento e adulterio, e giustiziata. In seguito, il re si sposò con Jane Seymour, che diede al re un figlio, Edoardo, nel 1537, e che morì non molto dopo il parto. La quarta moglie del re fu scelta da Cromwell: si trattava di Anna di Cleves, che avrebbe aiutato l'Inghilterra a cementare l'alleanza con gli stati protestanti. Il matrimonio non funzionò mai, e fu annullato dopo sei mesi. Il re si sposò poi con la giovane Caterina Howard, la quale fu giustiziata, in quanto aveva avuto relazioni con altri uomini prima di sposare il re, e fu accusata anche di adulterio. Il sesto e ultimo matrimonio avvenne nel 1543, con Caterina Parr, che sopravvisse ad Enrico, il quale morì nel 1547.

Il capitolo procede descrivendo in dettaglio il regno e la politica di Enrico VIII, le sue mogli, e la questione del divorzio, per poi passare alle descrizioni del re da parte dei suoi contemporanei, che sono, inizialmente, molto positive. William Blount, lord Mountjoy, scrisse in una lettera dell'incoronazione di Enrico VIII, definendolo un eroe, desideroso di virtù, gloria e immortalità; l'ambasciatore veneziano Pasqualigo, qualche anno più tardi, scrisse della sua bellezza, e delle sue abilità nelle lingue, nella musica, nel tiro con l'arco e nella giostra. Il nunzio apostolico in Inghilterra, Francesco Chiericato, lodò Enrico VIII, e lo stesso fece Sebastiano Giustiniano, che sottolineò le sue capacità mentali. Era considerato anche una persona piacevole, e William Roper, il genero di Tommaso Moro, scrisse che Enrico VIII andava a trovare Tommaso Moro, cenava con lui, e poi passeggiava con lui, circondandogli le spalle con il braccio, in maniera amichevole. L'immagine è quella di un re giovane, bello, dalle innegabili doti fisiche e mentali, dal carattere allegro. Ma, con il susseguirsi degli anni, ci furono dei cambiamenti. Dal punto di



vista fisico, Enrico iniziò ad ingrassare, specialmente dopo il suo quarantacinquesimo compleanno. Inoltre, risultava più rabbioso e incostante. I suoi cambi di umore potrebbero essere spiegati anche facendo riferimento alla sua cattiva salute, in quanto Enrico aveva un'ulcera infiammata nella gamba, che peggiorò dopo un incidente in una giostra nel 1536. Da quel momento in poi, non si dedicò più all'attività fisica come prima, e quell'anno fu fonte di molti eventi e preoccupazioni. Sempre nel 1536, infatti, Anna Bolena perse un figlio, fu arrestata e giustiziata; suo figlio Henry Fitzroy morì; ci furono le ribellioni nel nord del Paese. Dal 1536 inizia quindi il decadimento del re.

Una rappresentazione di Enrico VIII ci viene data da Holinshed, riconosciuto solitamente come autore delle *Cronache*, che furono in realtà scritte da molti autori. Sono considerate una fonte evangelica, ed Enrico è dipinto in una luce positiva, a differenza del Cardinale Wolsey, dipinto come un vero antagonista. Un'altra immagine viene dagli *Atti e Monumenti dei Martiri*, di John Foxe, scritta anch'essa in opposizione al cattolicesimo (in questo caso del regno di Maria I Tudor), che parla del rapporto tra Enrico e l'Arcivescovo di Canterbury, Cranmer.

Questi testi si presentano come fonti storiche, mentre, nel 1605, venne pubblicata un'opera teatrale intitolata *When You See Me, You Know Me*, del drammaturgo e attore Samuel Rowley. L'opera ha luogo alla corte di Enrico VIII tra il 1514 e il 1544, e condensa vari eventi e fa coesistere persone che non furono veramente a corte nello stesso periodo di tempo. Per esempio, Edoardo, figlio di Enrico VIII, è presente, così come Wolsey, morto in realtà anni prima della sua nascita. Il re è sposato con Jane Seymour, e alla fine si sposerà con Caterina Parr, ma non si fa alcun riferimento al matrimonio con Caterina d'Aragona, o Catherine Howard. Secondo Bullough, quest'opera potrebbe essere stata concepita in celebrazione di Edoardo VI. Il re è presentato come un marito affettuoso nei confronti di Jane, e devastato dalla sua morte. Il dolore lo rende però anche molto violento e infatti i nobiluomini di corte sono restii ad avvicinarlo, per paura. La sua violenza è spesso comicamente sottolineata da Will Somers, il buffone di corte, e la sua rabbia è mostrata più volte, sia contro Wolsey, che contro Brandon, che contro uno dei suoi servitori. Uno degli eventi dell'opera è la notte che Enrico decide di passare, travestito per non farsi riconoscere, a Londra, per vedere come è

amministrata la giustizia. Viene coinvolto in una rissa con Black Will, un criminale, e vengono entrambi arrestati. Mentre aspetta di essere salvato da Brandon, il re si rende conto che certi criminali possono farsi liberare pagando, mentre i più poveri non possono. All'arrivo di Brandon, c'è la rivelazione della vera identità di Enrico, che promette che coloro che sono finiti in prigione in quanto sono stati truffati dai suoi servitori verranno ripagati. La sete di giustizia del re è quindi unita a una scena comica. Enrico sembra inoltre molto preoccupato dell'educazione di suo figlio, che esorta a studiare. Viene successivamente convinto che la regina Caterina Parr sia un'eretica, e accondiscende a farla imprigionare. Ma è proprio Edoardo a intercedere presso la regina, dimostrandone l'innocenza. Il re quindi scioglie le accuse e dirige la sua rabbia verso i suoi accusatori, Gardiner e Bonner, ma, per amore di Caterina che gli chiede di risparmiarli, non li arresta. Il re viene poi a sapere del denaro e dei gioielli posseduti da Wolsey, e l'Imperatore, in visita in Inghilterra, sostiene che Wolsey sia stato impudente con lui. Enrico toglie al cardinale i suoi titoli, lo accusa di essersi appropriato di soldi e proprietà, e di aver abusato della sua posizione. L'opera si conclude con un ulteriore cambiamento d'umore del re, che accoglie benevolmente l'Imperatore.

Il secondo capitolo di questo lavoro si occupa di *Enrico VIII*, opera di Shakespeare su Enrico VIII, che si crede essere stata rappresentata per la prima volta non molto tempo dopo il matrimonio della principessa Elizabeth, figlia di Giacomo I, avvenuto il 14 febbraio 1613. Sappiamo che veniva rappresentata ancora a giugno, quando, durante una scena, il teatro del Globe prese fuoco. Se alcuni studiosi pensano che Shakespeare abbia scritto quest'opera da solo, altri individuano John Fletcher come co-autore. Fletcher fu un autore che visse tra il 1579 e il 1625, noto per aver collaborato alle opere teatrali di Francis Beaumont, ma scrisse opere in collaborazione anche con altri autori, oppure in maniera autonoma. L'attribuzione tradizionale delle scene di *Enrico VIII* è quella pensata da James Spedding, nel 1850. Egli attribuì 1.1, 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, la prima parte di 3.2 e di 5.1 a Shakespeare, e le altre scene a Fletcher. Nel corso degli anni, altri autori si sono confrontati sull'attribuzione delle scene, tra cui Hoy, che negli anni cinquanta analizzò le scene dal punto di vista delle preferenze linguistiche o Hope, che nel 1994 fece uno studio socio-storico-linguistico. Lo studio di quest'opera era già partito però nel 1758, quando Richard

Roderick fece uno studio sulla metrica e l'irregolarità dei versi. Molti furono gli studi che si susseguirono tra il 1800 e la seconda metà del 1900, e la questione continua ad interessare alcuni studiosi, tra cui Thomas Merriam, che ha attribuito a Fletcher alcuni versi tradizionalmente attribuiti a Shakespeare. Jackson ha contestato la sua idea, affermando che studi metrici e linguistici sostenevano l'attribuzione tradizionale, ma Merriam ha insistito che questi criteri non sono gli unici ad avere importanza. In generale, c'è una forte evidenza che suggerisce che l'opera sia stata scritta da entrambi gli autori, e l'edizione Arden Shakespeare usata per questo lavoro presenta sia Shakespeare che Fletcher come gli autori.

L'opera inizia con il ricordo dei nobili del Campo del Drappo d'Oro, e con l'arresto del Duca di Buckingham, nemico di Wolsey, che ha molto potere a corte. Un testimone riferisce al re che il Duca di Buckingham stava complottando per ucciderlo e prendere il trono. Il Duca viene sottoposto a processo e giustiziato, nonostante egli sostenga di essere innocente. Al momento dell'esecuzione, circolano già voci secondo le quali Enrico VIII desidera ottenere l'annullamento del matrimonio con Caterina d'Aragona, e, in una scena precedente, Enrico ha potuto conoscere Anna Bolena, alla quale concede il titolo di Marchesa di Pembroke. Infatti, il cardinale Campeggio viene inviato da Roma per prendere parte al processo. Ma Caterina si rifiuta di parlare se prima non avrà ricevuto consiglio, e se non sarà giudicata dal Papa stesso. Wolsey e Campeggio le fanno successivamente visita, ma si rifiuta di abbandonare il destino nelle mani del marito, che l'ha ripudiata. Successivamente, mentre i nobili parlano del cardinale Wolsey e di un modo per fermare la sua influenza sul re, si viene a sapere che il re ha sposato Anna Bolena e che Thomas Cranmer renderà la loro unione ufficiale. Nel frattempo, il re ha trovato, tra dei documenti inviatogli da Wolsey, un inventario di tutte le ricchezze del cardinale. Egli confronta Wolsey e gli lascia il documento tra le mani, e Wolsey capisce di essere caduto in disgrazia. Anna viene incoronata regina, mentre Caterina è malata, a Kimbolton Castle. Viene a sapere che il Cardinale Wolsey è morto, mentre si recava da York a Londra, e, addormentatasi, sogna una sorta di incoronazione celeste per se stessa. Poco dopo la visita dell'ambasciatore Chapuys, al quale affida una lettera per Enrico VIII, muore. Nel quinto atto, il re parla con Cranmer, avvisandolo che i membri del Consiglio hanno deciso di convocarlo per

accusarlo di eresia. Il re gli dà il suo anello, dicendogli che se dovessero cercare di portarlo alla Torre di Londra, dovrà mostrarlo per appellarsi al re. Anna partorisce una bambina, Elisabetta, e successivamente ha luogo la scena con il Consiglio. Cranmer agisce nel modo suggeritogli dal re, e il re, giunto sulla scena, rimprovera i membri del concilio per il loro comportamento. La scena finale vede il battesimo di Elisabetta, e la profezia di Cranmer sul suo futuro regno.

Tra le fonti utilizzate da Shakespeare per quest'opera, sono facilmente identificabili i già citati Holinshed e Foxe. Le scene presenti sia in *Henry VIII* che nelle Cronache sono molte: dal piano di Wolsey per far cadere Buckingham, al processo e la morte di Buckingham stesso; dal processo di Caterina, alla visita di Wolsey e Campeggio e alle ultime parole della regina; dalla accuse mosse nei confronti di Wolsey alla sua caduta. Da Foxe proviene la parte che concerne l'Arcivescovo Cranmer e il piano del Consiglio nei suoi confronti. Altre opere possono essere ritenute non fonti, ma 'analoghe' all'opera, o ispirazioni, come la stessa opera di Rowley.

Molte sono state le interpretazioni date a quest'opera, riassunte in questo capitolo, dove si è cercato poi di analizzare la figura di Enrico VIII in maniera dettagliata. Uno degli aspetti del re in quest'opera è la sua grazia, sottolineata fin dalla prima scena, in cui si parla dell'incontro del Campo del Drappo d'Oro. Ma questa immagine positiva non è l'unica a trasparire. Infatti, per la prima parte dell'opera, il re appare come una figura passiva e controllata dal Cardinale Wolsey, che riesce a manovrarlo a suo piacimento. E' a causa di Wolsey che Buckingham viene condannato e accusato, senza che il re gli conceda la grazia o intervenga per aiutarlo, ed è a causa di Wolsey che sono state istituite delle tasse di cui il re non era a conoscenza (nonostante comunque, grazie all'intervento di Caterina, il re decida che si tratta di tasse tiranniche e ordina di rimuoverle). A corte, tutti sembrano vedere come il re dipenda da Wolsey, tranne Enrico stesso. E' solo quando scopre le ricchezze possedute da Wolsey, e l'abuso compiuto da Wolsey della sua posizione a corte, che il Cardinale cade definitivamente, in una scena in cui il suo personaggio non sembra più l'antagonista che era prima, ma un uomo per cui si può provare quasi compassione. Da quel momento in poi, il re è molto più attivo dal punto di vista della gestione del suo regno, e questo è rispecchiato nella sua relazione con l'Arcivescovo

Cranmer. Se prima il re si fidava ciecamente di Wolsey, ora è sospettoso nei confronti del suo Concilio, e Cranmer non deve soffrire il destino a cui è stato abbandonato Buckingham. Il re interviene in prima persona per salvarlo da false accuse e intima ai propri consiglieri di rispettarlo.

La persona di Enrico VIII nell'opera si pone anche a confronto con tre donne: la sua prima moglie, Caterina; la sua seconda moglie, Anna; sua figlia, Elisabetta. Il comportamento del re nei confronti di Caterina è da principio garbato e cortese, e il re ascolta quello che ha da dire sulla questione delle tasse. Anche quando decide di separarsi da lei, ha solo buone parole per la regina, sostenendo che è solo la coscienza a suggerirgli di lasciarla (in quanto Caterina fu moglie di suo fratello Arthur, e questo secondo il re ha provocato una loro unione senza figli maschi). Arriva persino a lodarla, nella scena in cui Caterina lascia il processo. E' possibile che il re veda Caterina proprio come una buona moglie e regina, e che ne riconosca le qualità, ma che sia spinto, se non dalla coscienza come sostiene, perlomeno dall'urgenza di avere un figlio maschio legittimo, e dall'attrazione per Anna. Questa relazione viene presentata anche dal punto di vista di Caterina, che si vede senza colpa, e afferma che il re ha smesso di amarla molto tempo prima. Il re è freddo e privo di gratitudine nei suoi confronti, mentre lei è sempre stata una moglie leale. Alla fine dei suoi giorni, spera comunque che il re farà quello che lei gli chiede di fare, nella sua ultima lettera.

L'immagine di Anna Bolena è essenzialmente positiva. Ne vengono spesso sottolineate le qualità, e l'unico personaggio a considerarla negativamente è Wolsey, qui dipinto come antagonista. Il re sembra attratto e affascinato da lei fin da subito, e uno dei gentiluomini che appaiono commentando le scene sostiene che non può biasimare il re per aver lasciato Caterina per lei. In una scena con la vecchia signora che pare fare da compagna ad Anna, in cui le donne parlano della caduta dalla gloria di Caterina d'Aragona, Anna insiste più volte che non vorrebbe nemmeno per tutto l'oro del mondo diventare regina, nonostante le insistenze della vecchia compagna. Poco dopo, accetta però il titolo di Marchesa e il vitalizio, il che porta l'anziana signora a vederla come un'ipocrita, nonostante le sue belle parole. Il ritratto è quello di una donna dolce e onesta, ma questa scena suggerisce che Anna non è affatto avversa alla gloria di divenire regina come può sembrare. Il re, dal canto suo, sembra

innamorato di lei, e preoccupato per la sua salute quando sta per partorire (nonostante poi spera che il figlio sia un maschio). E' da sottolineare però, che vediamo solo una parte della loro relazione, e non quello che successe poi.

Elisabetta è solo una neonata, ma la scena finale profetizza il suo futuro da regina, e il re è contento e affascinato dalle parole di Cranmer, tanto da dire che prima di avere questa bambina, non era un uomo. Considerato che si tratta del re d'Inghilterra, ci si chiede come possa pensare una cosa simile. Se si ritiene un uomo per aver finalmente avuto un'erede, in realtà aveva già una figlia, Maria, ed Elisabetta non è l'erede maschio che voleva. Enrico è comunque meravigliato dalla promessa di questo futuro, e decide di rendere il giorno del battesimo un giorno di festa.

Una delle caratteristiche attribuite a Enrico VIII è la sua rabbia, unita ai suoi repentini cambiamenti di umore. Qui il re non è un personaggio violento in maniera comica come lo era nell'opera di Rowley, ma certi passaggi ricordano la rabbia di quell'Enrico VIII. In vari passaggi, viene usata l'interiezione 'Ha!' che il re sembra sempre utilizzare quando è particolarmente arrabbiato o innervosito. La sua collera viene indirizzata non solo al cardinale Wolsey quando scopre i suoi segreti, ma anche al suo Consiglio che decide di accusare Cranmer, e ai nobiluomini di corte, quando cercano di parlargli mentre lui è intento a pensare ad altro.

L'immagine generale del re è quella di un re sostanzialmente giusto, specialmente nella seconda parte dell'opera, quando riesce a prendere il comando nelle sue mani, e si dimostra un buon amico per Cranmer. Ma ha comunque dei difetti: non è un uomo particolarmente violento, ma nemmeno molto composto, e agisce con collera in più riprese, e mostra la sua natura sospettosa quando crede che Campeggio stia ritardando il suo processo di annullamento di proposito. Non ha che parole gentili per le sue mogli, ma da Caterina sappiamo che la sua coscienza non è l'unica ragione che l'ha spinto ad abbandonarla, dimenticando la sua lealtà e obbedienza. Nel corso della prima parte dell'opera si dimostra passivo e incapace di smascherare Wolsey, facendo invece affidamento su di lui. E' da sottolineare, però, che il re non viene mai veramente incolpato, la colpa ricade sul cardinale, mentre il re è da biasimare solo per non aver aperto prima gli occhi. Persino i personaggi che muoiono o cadono in disgrazia a causa sua lo ricordano nelle loro preghiere. Non è

un personaggio comico, né un tiranno assetato di sangue, ma una figura di monarca celebrato, seppur con dei difetti.

Il terzo capitolo inizia con un elenco di varie opere, letterarie, cinematografiche e televisive, ambientate alla corte di Enrico VIII, nelle quali egli appare come protagonista. I romanzi moderni che lo vedono come personaggio iniziarono a essere scritti già nel 1800, e proseguono fino ai giorni nostri, con autori come Margaret George, Philippa Gregory e C.J. Sansom. I film e le serie televisive sono spesso adattamenti di romanzi, o, come nel caso de *I Tudors* si basano sulla vita e la corte del re. Anche *Wolf Hall* e *Bring Up the Bodies* sono stati trasposti in una serie televisiva della BBC nel 2015.

Il capitolo poi si concentra sul romanzo storico, un genere sempre più studiato a livello universitario, che riesce a intersecarsi con altri generi letterari. A differenza del lavoro dello storico, il lavoro dell'autore di romanzi storici è quello di rendere viva la storia, e non solo di spiegare fatti storici. Viene preso in considerazione anche il postmodernismo, in quanto si tratta di un movimento artistico, e quindi anche letterario, dell'era contemporanea, e ne vengono indicate caratteristiche tipiche. Due romanzi contemporanei in cui è presente la figura di Enrico VIII sono *Wolf Hall* e *Bring Up the Bodies* (tradotto in italiano come *Anna Bolena, una questione di famiglia*) di Hilary Mantel, il primo pubblicato nel 2009, il secondo nel 2012, entrambi vincitori del Man Booker Prize. L'autrice, in un video caricato su YouTube dalla Royal Society of Literature, spiega che ha iniziato a scriverlo perché sentiva una voce nella sua mente che diceva 'Adesso alzati'. Poteva vedere tutta la scena dal punto di vista della persona a cui la frase era diretta, ossia un giovane Thomas Cromwell. Da lì, ha capito che il punto di vista sarebbe stato il suo, e che il tempo verbale che avrebbe usato sarebbe stato il presente.

La storia di *Wolf Hall* inizia nel 1500, quando il giovane Thomas viene picchiato dal padre, per passare subito dopo a ventisette anni dopo, quando Cromwell lavora per il Cardinale Wolsey. Si passa abbastanza presto al 1529, quando York Place viene sottratta al cardinale, e da lì a un flashback degli anni tra il 1512 e il 1529. Viene raccontato come il re si sia innamorato di Anna Bolena, e di come il Cardinale abbia cercato di ottenere l'annullamento. La malattia del sudore (o sudore inglese, in originale 'sweating sickness') colpisce Londra, e la moglie e le figlie di

Cromwell muoiono, mentre lui sopravvive. Inizia il processo per l'annullamento del matrimonio, e Cromwell cerca di intercedere presso il re e presso Anna Bolena a favore del cardinale, ma nonostante i suoi sforzi, non riuscirà. Nel 1531, Caterina è allontanata da corte, e nel 1533, Enrico sposa Anna, ed Elisabetta nasce a settembre di quell'anno. Thomas More e il vescovo Fisher rifiutano di prestare giuramento agli Atti di Supremazia e Successione e vengono giustiziati. Nonostante il romanzo sia intitolato *Wolf Hall*, la casa dei Seymour non appare nel libro, ma viene menzionata nell'ultima pagina, quando Cromwell dice che lui e il re si recheranno lì a giorni. Il titolo si riferisce alla casa in sé, ma anche alla futura ascesa della famiglia Seymour, e probabilmente alla natura degli uomini, che possono essere lupi pericolosi.

*Bring Up the Bodies* inizia proprio con una scena di caccia a Wolf Hall e, in questo romanzo, che inizia nel 1535, la posizione di Anna Bolena è minacciata, mentre i Seymour sono in ascesa. Enrico vorrebbe mettere fine al matrimonio con Anna, e Cromwell prova inizialmente ad ottenerlo per via consensuale, ma viene ostacolato da George Bolena. La moglie di George, Jane, riferisce a Cromwell dei pettegolezzi, dicendo che Anna riceve visite di uomini nelle sue stanze. Alla fine del romanzo Anna Bolena viene non solo accusata, ma anche sottoposta a processo e giustiziata, insieme a cinque uomini tra cui il fratello. L'intero romanzo si svolge tra il 1535 e il 1536, e alla fine la posizione di Cromwell è ancora più elevata.

Come è stato detto, l'immagine di Enrico VIII in questo romanzo passa attraverso il punto di vista di Thomas Cromwell, narratore in terza persona della vicenda, narrata in presente storico. Cromwell presenta gli eventi dal suo punto di vista, ma non può essere definito un narratore inaffidabile, in quanto non nasconde eventi o pensieri al lettore, non lo manipola. E anche se le sue visioni dei personaggi sono filtrate dal suo punto di vista, è possibile vedere qualità e difetti delle varie figure con cui interagisce. E' interessante considerare se Cromwell possa essere considerato un personaggio marginale, ma, nonostante sia un uomo di famiglia umile che si trova ricoprire una posizione importante, si tratta comunque di un uomo, bianco, che nei romanzi ha una posizione di potere, al centro della corte. Secondo Green, autore di un articolo sui romanzi di Hilary Mantel, è possibile individuare tre linguaggi, o registri, diversi nei romanzi: il primo è quello della politica e della legge, e qui Mantel riesce a mescolare parole antiche e moderne in maniera armoniosa ed



omogenea; il secondo è il linguaggio secco e diretto di Cromwell; il terzo, una sorta di lingua che non è di Cromwell, ma dell'autrice, anche se l'autrice non entra mai nella narrazione, è una terza voce poetica.

La struttura dei romanzi è quasi sempre lineare e cronologica, con l'eccezione dell'inizio del primo dei due, che inizia con il giovane Cromwell nel 1500, per poi passare a Cromwell adulto nel 1527 e nel 1529, quando il cardinale Wolsey viene costretto ad abbandonare York Place. Non ci viene detto cosa sia successo tra il 1500 e il 1527 e, dopo l'arrivo al 1529, un flashback racconta gli eventi avvenuti tra il 1521 e il 1529. C'è una certa discontinuità iniziale, e, nel corso dei romanzi, i personaggi ricordano eventi del passato, ma la discontinuità è prevalentemente presente all'inizio di *Wolf Hall*, mentre poi i romanzi scorrono in maniera cronologica. Infatti, questi romanzi non sembrano presentare molti aspetti in comune con i romanzi postmoderni, se non il fatto che presentano anch'essi l'idea che non c'è una sola Storia, ma ci sono varie versioni della storia. Qui la storia è infatti narrata dal punto di vista di Cromwell. Come già detto, Cromwell non è propriamente considerabile 'marginale' nel senso postmoderno del termine, e non è nemmeno un narratore inattendibile. Non è presente intertestualità, né parodia di altre opere (i testi utilizzati dall'autrice sono stati usati per fare ricerca, ma non vengono posti all'interno dei due romanzi); i finali di entrambi i romanzi aprono a ciò che succederà successivamente, ma non possono essere definiti finali aperti nel senso che non lasciano il lettore con delle domande a cui non avrà risposta. Inoltre, non ci sono varie lingue, se non per quanto riguarda qualche frase, né varie voci, in quanto il narratore è sempre lo stesso.

Alcuni degli eventi presenti nei romanzi sono presenti anche nelle fonti di cui si parla nel primo capitolo di questa tesi, o nell'opera di Shakespeare presentata nel secondo, ad altri eventi delle fonti è fatto solo riferimento, altre scene ancora non sono presenti.

Il ritratto che abbiamo del re fornitoci da Cromwell e dalle sue interpretazioni è un ritratto complesso. Enrico non appare in scena fino a quando Cromwell non lo incontra personalmente, momento in cui il lettore ha un ritratto anche fisico del re, la cui bocca è piccola e femminile. Più avanti nel testo, Cromwell parla della sua altezza, e dei muscoli delle sue braccia, spalle e petto, dando l'idea di un uomo forte

e allenato. Più avanti nel romanzo, però, Enrico si toglie il cappello, e sta perdendo i capelli, il che sottolinea la grossezza della sua testa, tanto che Cromwell lo paragona a un gigante.

Una caratteristica alquanto importante per Enrico è la maestà. Non vuole che il suo coraggio e la sua virilità, per lui parti integranti dell'essere re, siano oggetto di scherno. Inoltre, il re si aspetta che chiunque, qualsiasi posizione occupi, cada in ginocchio davanti a lui, vuole il rispetto dovuto. E' infatti molto soddisfatto nel concedere onori e titoli, perché sa che coloro a cui li ha concessi gli devono molta gratitudine e fedeltà. Enrico sembra anche pensare che, per essere re, sia importante farsi vedere dai propri sudditi, e sembrerebbe essere interessato, talvolta, a scappare dalla vita di corte, come quando vorrebbe partecipare a un incontro di tiro con l'arco insieme a Cromwell.

Se la sua maestà o la sua autorità vengono messe in qualche modo in discussione, il re risponde spesso con rabbia. Cromwell descrive la voce di Enrico, quando si arrabbia, come una voce molto acuta. Nemmeno Cromwell è esente dalla sua rabbia: quando discutono della questione di Tommaso Moro, il re si aspetta che Cromwell faccia quello che lui dice. E' stato il re a dargli la posizione che ha, ma potrebbe anche togliergliela se non viene obbedito.

Per quanto riguarda il carattere del re, già dal primo incontro Cromwell nota che il re è capace di attaccare il suo interlocutore come se lo stesse cacciando, e l'unico modo per reagire è non ritirare quello che si è detto, ma cercare di affermare le proprie ragioni senza offenderlo. Il re inoltre, dimostra una certa intelligenza, elevandosi rispetto ai livelli di Charles Brandon. Cromwell è infatti stupito anche da quanto il re si intenda di questioni di finanza. Talvolta, il re dimostra di essere nostalgico verso gli eventi e le persone del passato, persino in casi come quelli di Wolsey e Tommaso Moro, in cui lui è stato la causa della loro caduta, e c'è un aspetto infantile nella sua personalità. Egli è inoltre molto colpito da sogni e visioni, sia che sia lui a sognare, sia che siano altri a riferire le visioni, e non riesce a cancellarle facilmente dalla sua mente, pensando che debbano significare qualcosa.

Nel secondo romanzo, il re è presentato, anche fisicamente, come un re che sta invecchiando, e Cromwell nota spesso quanto sia grosso. E' un uomo che vuole che si ubbidisca ai suoi ordini, e nonostane talvolta i suoi ordini vanno a negare

decisioni prese precedentemente, non vuole che nessuno lo faccia notare, non vuole mai apparire sotto una luce negativa. Come dice Cromwell, Enrico non vuole passare come un bugiardo agli occhi della storia. Così come Wolsey nel romanzo precedente aveva detto a Cromwell che avrebbe dovuto scrivergli un manuale su come trattare con il re, Cromwell qui pensa che dovrebbe scrivere un libro su Enrico, su quale sia il modo migliore per servirlo.

Una descrizione abbastanza lunga viene proprio fornita da Cromwell stesso: il re, fin da bambino, è stato apprezzato per la sua natura e per il suo aspetto, e tutti lo volevano felice, quindi ogni sfortuna o infelicità, piccola o grande, ha un effetto enorme su di lui. Cerca inoltre di trasformare in divertente ogni attività per lui noiosa o spiacevole, e, se non ci riesce, la evita. I suoi consiglieri devono lavorare per lui, e se si arrabbia è probabilmente colpa loro. Non vuole persone che gli dicano no, ma persone che gli dicano sì, e ritiene che i suoi consiglieri non lo capiscano abbastanza. Nel discutere con lui, bisogna essere cauti, e non sopraffarlo. Vuole che gli sia riconosciuto che ha sempre ragione.

I suoi rapporti con le donne possono essere esemplificati nelle figure di Caterina, Anna, Elisabetta e Jane. Enrico sembra considerare Caterina un peso, tanto da sperare che muoia, mentre lei sembra avere ancora dei sentimenti per lui, ricordando che un tempo lui la amava. C'è da sottolineare però, che quando ha già deciso di mettere da parte Anna Bolena, e vuole regalare una Bibbia a Jane, dice che era di sua moglie, subito dopo correggendosi e dicendo che era di Caterina. Ha negato che il loro matrimonio fosse valido nel corso dei due romanzi, tuttavia, queste parole gli sfuggono prima che riesca a correggersi.

La sua relazione con Anna peggiora molto in questo secondo romanzo. Enrico è comunque molto preoccupato quando c'è un incendio nella stanza di Anna, in ansia per la salute di lei e del bambino, in quanto Anna è incinta, ed è molto tenero e sollecito con lei, la qual cosa pare irritarla. Cromwell nota che questo atteggiamento è l'opposto rispetto a quello che sembrano mantenere solitamente, con Anna che cerca di stare vicina al re, ma il re che resta distante. E' effettivamente preoccupato per il suo erede, e con Elisabetta sembra un padre tenero e affettuoso, ma Lady Rochford insinua sia così con tutti i bambini. Quando Anna, successivamente, perde il bambino, è molto freddo con lei e le attribuisce la colpa.

Incolpa anche se stesso per non essere riuscito ad avere un figlio, ma ora è convinto che il matrimonio non sia stato una buona idea, e accusa Anna di averlo disonestamente condotto a sposarla. Cromwell sostiene che Enrico vorrebbe cambiare il passato, vorrebbe non aver mai incontrato Anna, o perlomeno non averla sposata. E' tormentato, ma non può fare altro che eliminare quello che considera il suo problema.

Jane viene presentata come diversa da Anna sia per l'aspetto fisico, sia per il suo carattere mite. Enrico la considera pura e innocente, ma Jane si dimostra anche più intelligente di quanto la sua famiglia la ritenga, e sembra avere un'influenza speciale sul re. Dopo l'esecuzione di Anna, i due si sposano.

Il re è presentato come una figura tormentata, il cui regno non è affatto sicuro, come è chiaro nel passaggio in cui il re viene ritenuto morto dopo l'incidente in una giostra. E' sempre più importante per lui avere un erede, e Anna gli dà solo una figlia. Appare a volte freddo, altre rabbioso. In generale, l'immagine del re nel secondo romanzo appare più negativa rispetto al primo. Rispetto alle rappresentazioni precedenti, il re è più presente e il suo carattere più sviluppato, in quanto in questo caso appare in due lunghi romanzi, mentre negli altri casi si trattava di opere teatrali o cronache. Oltretutto, il re peggiora con l'avanzare della vicenda nei romanzi di Mantel, a differenza del re di Shakespeare che matura nella seconda parte dell'opera teatrale. E' da sottolineare come la cronologia di queste opere sia diversa dalle precedenti (se consideriamo, ad esempio, che il re di Shakespeare è ancora sposato con Anna Bolena, mentre in Mantel Anna viene giustiziata; o che in Rowley vengono mischiati vari eventi storici avvenuto in anni diversi). Alcuni elementi, come la sua rabbia, i cambi d'umore, la sua coscienza tormentata, sono sempre presenti, ma l'Enrico VIII di Hilary Mantel presenta più sfumature del re comico di Rowley, o del re, comunque complesso, di Shakespeare. Il personaggio di Enrico in queste opere è certamente un re del Rinascimento, ma l'autrice ci permette, tramite Cromwell, di vederlo da vicino, di osservarne sentimenti e dolori, presentandocelo come un personaggio più moderno, come un uomo oltre che un re.

Si è cercato inoltre di comprendere la chiave del successo di un re come Enrico VIII, tuttora sfruttato come personaggio da letteratura, cinema e televisione. E' interessante a questo riguardo leggere un saggio di Irene Goodman, che parla del

successo della figura di Anna Bolena nelle opere letterarie, definendola “ragazza immagine della narrativa storica”. La storia di Anna ha tutto quello che serve: è sensazionale, contiene tradimenti, un matrimonio, un divorzio, lo scandalo, personalità eccessive. Le storie su Anna possiedono una sorta di esca che spinge i lettori (spesso, secondo Goodman, lettrici) a volerle leggere.

Lo stesso accade per Enrico VIII, la controparte della relazione con Anna. Innanzitutto, la vita di Enrico VIII presenta varie relazioni, vari matrimoni, che sono sempre un punto di interesse per il pubblico, e possono essere sfruttati poi anche dalla letteratura, dalla televisione o dal cinema. Nel suo caso, non ha avuto una sola moglie, ma sei, ognuna delle quali con una personalità diversa dalle altre, ognuna delle quali può essere utilizzata nella finzione anche come narratrice della vicenda, per mostrarci il re da un punto di vista diverso. Un altro motivo è il fatto che anche gli eventi politici del regno di Enrico VIII sono interessanti, e spesso collegati a vicende private. Il distacco dalla Chiesa di Roma, per esempio, che gli permise di potersi risposare, e la successiva Riforma e il Pellegrinaggio di Spagna; le guerre contro Francia e Spagna. Inoltre, alla sua corte vissero personaggi molto interessanti: da figure politiche come Wolsey a Cromwell, alle già menzionate mogli, a poeti ed artisti. C'è anche da considerare, che Enrico VIII è una figura che rappresenta l'eccesso, sia nella sua vita privata che nella sua vita politica. Una ragione fondamentale per cui questa figura storica continua a suscitare curiosità, e viene quindi sfruttata anche in epoca contemporanea, è il fatto che la sua storia, come dice lo storico David Starkey in un video caricato su YouTube da Royal Historical Palaces, è una storia di corruzione, un tema tratto da un fiaba, di un re bello e glorioso che viene corrotto e decade, ed è causa del suo stesso male. Questo è un elemento che è identificabile in rappresentazioni contemporanee della sua figura, tra cui la serie televisiva *I Tudors* e i romanzi *Wolf Hall* e *Bring Up the Bodies*.

Oltre a questi elementi già nominati, i romanzi di Hilary Mantel presentano inoltre Cromwell come narratore, un'idea nuova rispetto alla narrazione della vicenda, ad esempio, da parte di una delle mogli di Enrico. Grazie a un personaggio come Cromwell abbiamo una visione sia del privato che del politico del re. Cromwell si occupa di affari di stato, è una personalità politica, ma si occupa anche di questioni a metà tra il politico e il privato, come i matrimoni del re, e le sue mogli,

e di questioni quasi personali, come quando il re lo convoca nel mezzo della notte perché ha sognato il fratello, o perché gli fa delle confidenze. Inoltre, i romanzi di Hilary Mantel, a differenza di altri, non si concentrano solo sulle relazioni amorose di Enrico VIII, rendendo i romanzi accessibili a un pubblico più ampio.

Nel corso di questo lavoro, è stato sottolineato come Enrico VIII, come personaggio, sia stato sempre popolare, e sia cambiato a seconda delle rappresentazioni che ne venivano date. Spesso le sue rappresentazioni in letteratura cercano di renderlo meno simile a un mostro rispetto a quello che viene tramandato da uno stereotipo. Solitamente, l'immagine positiva riflette la prima parte del suo regno, quella negativa, la seconda. Il suo successo è innegabile e romanzi che lo vedono tra i protagonisti saranno sicuramente pubblicati nell'immediato futuro.