

# WOLF HALL BRING UP THE BODIES



HILARY MANTEL

Adapted for the stage by

MIKE POULTON

**Hilary Mantel**  
**Mike Poulton**  
**Wolf Hall & Bring Up  
the Bodies: RSC Stage  
Adaptation - Revised Edition**

**Аннотация**

A new, revised edition for the London transfer of Mike Poulton's expertly adapted two-part adaptation of Hilary Mantel's hugely acclaimed novels, featuring a substantial set of character notes by Hilary Mantel. Mike Poulton's 'expertly adapted' (Evening Standard) two-part adaptation of Hilary Mantel's acclaimed novels 'Wolf Hall' and 'Bring Up the Bodies' is a gripping piece of narrative theatre ... history made manifest' (Guardian). The plays were premiered to great acclaim by the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon in 2013, before transferring to the Aldwych Theatre in London's West End in May 2014. 'Wolf Hall' begins in England in 1527. Henry has been King for almost twenty years and is desperate for a male heir; but Cardinal Wolsey is unable to deliver the divorce he craves. Yet for a man with the right talents this crisis could be an opportunity. Thomas Cromwell is a commoner who has risen in Wolsey's household – and he will stop at nothing to secure the King's desires and advance his own ambitions. In 'Bring Up the Bodies', the volatile Anne Boleyn is

now Queen, her career seemingly entwined with that of Cromwell. But when the King begins to fall in love with self-effacing Jane Seymour, the ever-pragmatic Cromwell must negotiate within an increasingly perilous Court to satisfy Henry, defend the nation and, above all, to secure his own rise in the world. Hilary Mantel's novels are the most formidable literary achievements of recent times, both recipients of the Man Booker Prize. This volume contains both plays and a substantial set of notes by Hilary Mantel on each of the principal characters, offering a unique insight into the adaptations and an invaluable resource to any theatre companies wishing to stage them.

WOLF HALL

and BRING UP THE BODIES

*Adapted for the stage by*

Mike Poulton

*From the novels by*

Hilary Mantel

*With an introduction by Mike Poulton and character notes by  
Hilary Mantel*



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These adaptations of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* were originally commissioned by Playful Productions and were first produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, on 11 December 2013. The productions transferred to the Aldwych Theatre, London, on 1 May 2014, presented by Matthew Byam Shaw, Nia Janis and Nick Salmon for Playful Productions and the Royal Shakespeare Company, Bartner/Tulchin Productions and Georgia Gatti for Playful Productions. The cast was as follows:

MARK SMEATON	Joey Batey
CHARLES BRANDON, DUKE OF SUFFOLK	Nicholas Boulton
KATHERINE OF ARAGON/ JANE BOLEYN, LADY ROCHFORD	Lucy Briers
JANE SEYMOUR/ PRINCESS MARY/LADY WORCESTER	Leah Brotherhead
MARY BOLEYN/LIZZIE WYKYS/MARY SHELTON	Olivia Darnley
THOMAS HOWARD, DUKE	Nicholas Day

OF NORFOLK	
ENSEMBLE	Mathew Foster
GREGORY CROMWELL	Daniel Fraser
BARGE MASTER/ WOLSEY'S SERVANT	Benedict Hastings
LADY IN WAITING/MAID/ MARJORIE SEYMOUR	Madeleine Hyland
CARDINAL WOLSEY/ SIR JOHN SEYMOUR/SIR WILLIAM KINGSTON/ ARCHBISHOP WARHAM	Paul Jesson
ANNE BOLEYN	Lydia Leonard
ENSEMBLE	Robert MacPherson
THOMAS CROMWELL	Ben Miles
CHRISTOPHE/FRANCIS WESTON	Pierro Niél Mee
KING HENRY VIII	Nathaniel Parker
GEORGE BOLEYN, LORD ROCHFORD/EDWARD SEYMOUR	Oscar Pearce
STEPHEN GARDINER/ EUSTACHE CHAPUYS	Matthew Pidgeon

THOMAS MORE/HENRY NORRIS	John Ramm
HARRY PERCY/WILLIAM BRERETON	Nicholas Shaw
RAFE SADLER	Joshua Silver
THOMAS CRANMER/ THOMAS BOLEYN/ PACKINGTON/FRENCH AMBASSADOR	Giles Taylor
THOMAS WYATT/ HEADSMAN	Jay Taylor
MUSICIANS	Rob Millett, Greg Knowles, Adam CrossDario Rossetti-BonellCatherine Groom
<i>All other parts played by members of the company.</i>	
<hr/>	
<i>Director</i>	Jeremy Herrin
<i>Designer</i>	Christopher Oram
<i>Season Lighting Designer</i>	Paule Constable
<i>Wolf Hall Lighting Designer</i>	Paule Constable
<i>Bring Up the Bodies Lighting Designer</i>	David Plater

<i>Music</i>	Stephen Warbeck
<i>Sound Designer</i>	Nick Powell
<i>Movement Director</i>	Siân Williams
<i>Fight Director</i>	Bret Yount

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

*Mike Poulton*

Over three years ago I was asked if it might be possible to adapt Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* for the stage. At the time of asking, *Bring Up the Bodies* did not exist. I'd read *Wolf Hall* and been gripped by it – from the first page to the last – page 653. It's an extraordinary read. To call it a historical novel diminishes it – for me it's a deeply serious piece of literature that happens to be set in and around the Court of Henry VIII. I can think of no other contemporary work of period fiction that comes near it. It's that rare thing – a novel that richly deserved its fame and the accolades and prizes heaped upon it. I knew that Hilary was at work on a sequel and I was counting the days. I read *Wolf Hall* again. I said that I thought it could be made into a play if the right adapter could be found. 'Might you be the right adapter?' I was asked.

I had never worked with a living author. Earlier collaborators, Schiller, Chekhov, Turgenev, Chaucer, Malory, were all long dead. Hilary is very much alive, and I knew that for the project to work she and I would have to get on together, and agree about how best to engineer the transformation. I imagined it would

be like taking apart a Rolls-Royce and reassembling the parts as a light aircraft. After three years together I can say that our collaboration has proved to be, for me at any rate, the most rewarding part of the experience. I have learned so much. Hilary has been generous and committed in every way with advice, with time, with invention, with challenges – all coming out of a deep knowledge of her subject, and easy familiarity with the complex minds of the characters she has created. Fortunately, she also has a love and instinctive understanding of the workings of theatre. Above all it's been fun – a lot of fun. Her attitude from the first was that she had brought Cromwell and company to life, and I was free, within the limits of the story and the requirements of historical accuracy, to move them about on the stage as I saw fit. Though on many occasions she has had to pull me out of holes into which I've dug myself. I've never had that sort of help from Friedrich von Schiller.

So what were the problems we faced at the outset? I felt that, in terms of staging – in order to create a workable dramatic framework – we had to get to the death of Anne Boleyn. If we could do that, we'd have a strong tragic arc – the ascendancy of Anne followed by her rapid decline. If Thomas Cromwell's rise from obscurity was to be the story of the play, the Court of Henry VIII must be the stage upon which he acts, and the rise and fall of Anne Boleyn the engine that drives the action. I knew Hilary was working on a sequel to *Wolf Hall*, to be called *The Mirror and the Light*. Could she take me as far as Anne's

execution? Yes, of course she could. But by the time she reached the summer of 1536 we had another book, *Bring Up the Bodies*, and so much tempting new material that the original play was rapidly becoming two plays. Since that time the only heartbreak in the process has been deciding what to set aside.

Structurally, the new material was exactly what was needed. *Wolf Hall* would take us to Anne's coronation, and *Bring Up the Bodies* to her execution. But the growing scale of the project and size of the cast meant that we needed a new partner and a new home. The Royal Shakespeare Company, under its brightly shining, new-minted Artistic Director, Gregory Doran, welcomed us in. This was a turning point. I'd worked five times with Greg, and I knew that from the RSC we'd get the expertise, support and resources the plays needed and deserved. We have not been disappointed.

It might be thought that the sheer length of the two books would present problems. I never thought so. The way a novel is structured cannot be reproduced on the stage – there could be no question of simply putting two whole novels on their feet. They had to be completely re-imagined as plays. The immediate questions were what would be lost, and what, if anything, would be gained in the stage versions? We set out to convert our difficulties into opportunities.

The content of the books cannot be condensed. You can't repaint the jewel-like miniature scenes of the original with broad brushstrokes. You can't ask an actor to play a summary of events

– actors need detail. Adaptation is the process of choosing vital and dramatic details from the novels and relaying them like stepping stones along a clear route from a beginning, through a middle, and then in a headlong rush to the end. Pace is everything. To falter on stepping stones is to end up in the river.

Losses and gains? Strong characters are the life of Hilary's books. So in terms of character, nothing could be changed. I wanted Cromwell, Wolsey, Anne and Henry – and all the other powerful characters we've included – to leap alive and fully formed from the pages of the books onto the stage of the Swan. If this could be accomplished, I felt the spirit of the book would remain intact. Incident has been lost. Obviously, we can't reproduce every scene and every conversation we read in the original work, so we've had to be highly selective. There's no doubt that readers will have favourite scenes that are not shown in the plays. But the story should gain a different sort of pace and drive in the playing. In the novels it's as if we're standing at Cromwell's shoulder observing what he observes and sharing his thoughts. Seeing events through Cromwell's eyes was the prime requirement of the adaptation. Sometimes what works perfectly in a novel won't read in a live performance. Some of the most memorable images in the books are formed in Cromwell's head: his reflections, his plotting, his private anguish, and, most of all, his barely contained laughter. Cromwell is very often on the point of dissolving into mirth. We decided at an early stage not to indulge in 'pieces to camera' – monologues delivered chorus-

like by Cromwell to the audience. So in working with RSC actors through the drafts – there have been nine – we decided to give Cromwell two confidants, one from his household, one from Court, with whom he can share his thoughts: Rafe Sadler and Thomas Wyatt. And we have also provided him with a few completely new scenes which have no equivalent in the books.

Once the characters were comfortable, and sure-footed, on stage, it became possible to give them their heads in order to drive the plotting forward. There are many fewer characters in the plays than in the novels – a cast of one hundred and thirty would overcrowd the intimate playing space of the Swan – but other characters have risen to prominence and have been given more to do in the telling of the story. Christophe, for example, in some ways a model of Cromwell's younger self, seems to be everywhere, and is usually up to mischief.

Our choice of theatre – the Swan is always my first choice – suggested, or rather insisted upon, a particular tone and style for our two plays. It's a small space with a deep thrust stage. Wherever you sit, you feel you're part of the action. Instead of looking over Cromwell's shoulder, as in the books, throughout the plays you're on stage with him. And he is on stage all the time. There's spectacle – masques at Court, dances, courts of inquiry, even a coronation and a deer hunt. There's detail – quiet scenes at home in Austin Friars, a fire in the Queen's chambers in the middle of the night, scenes of intrigue and interrogation, and ghostly visitations. But there are no elaborate stage tricks –

no revolves, lifts, nor clever-clever scene changes – everything has to be accomplished by the actors. They have their voices, their costumes, music, lighting, props, and an infinitely flexible playing space that can carry us in seconds from King Henry’s bedchamber, where he huddles for warmth over a fire, to a cold night on a boat in the middle of the River Thames. The Swan is the perfect theatre for storytelling. I’d previously worked through the twenty and more stories of *The Canterbury Tales* there, and there were valuable lessons to be learned from that experience. As I re-read *Wolf Hall*, and later *Bring Up the Bodies*, many more times, I tried to gear scenes to what I knew would work well in the Swan. And I knew – from touring *Canterbury Tales* – that if a play works in the Swan, it will play well in other theatres.

In bringing these two great novels to the stage, I have tried to replace the private pleasure of reading with the communal excitement of live theatre. When you read *Wolf Hall*, Cromwell and company get inside your head – they look as much through your eyes as you look through theirs. When you watch *Wolf Hall*, I hope we’re offering you a completely different experience – it should be like stepping into the world of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* – being rowed down the Thames with a dejected Wolsey, sitting at dinner with the King, chasing rats with Christophe, being in the Tower with Thomas More, or waiting to take a turn at swinging the headsman’s sword.

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