RE-PRESENTING POWER

A Revisionary Perspective on Representational Politics and Images of Power in Hilary Mantel’s Wolf Hall and Bring Up the Bodies

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Word of Thanks

When I first started writing my master dissertation, I would have never imagined that it would take me nearly two years to bring this task to completion. Having to come to terms with extreme performance anxiety at the very end of my educational career was a trying, yet also incredibly enriching experience, during which I learned a lot about myself — both as a person and as a scholar. This is why I would like to express my sincerest thanks to everyone who has offered a helping hand and listening ears during this time. First and foremost, I want to extend my gratitude to my classmates Floor, Hanne and fellow “perfectionist” An-Sofie who kindly invited me into their dorms to move academic mountains together, and who have never ceased to reassure and inspire me in the process. The same goes for my better half Cyril, who I thank profusely for providing me with an obscene amount of tea and crisps, and for running me a hot bath in times of academic distress. I also owe thanks to my parents, for supporting my decision to prolong my presence at Ghent University with another year. Of course, I can not forego mentioning Dr. Guido Latré, my promotor, whose kind words of encouragement and trust have inspired me to push through — even when I thought I no longer could. And last but not least, I extend my gratitude to Dame Hilary Mantel, whose Cromwell-novels will never cease to fascinate me. Even after three years of mutilating her work with coloured markers, dog’s ears and post-it notes, I still find something new with every lecture. Though I look eagerly forward to the publication of *The Mirror and The Light* in 2020, I think I will refrain from writing any papers about it — at least for the time being.
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1. Introduction

1.1. Representational Politics in Past and Present, Fact and Fiction

1.1.1. Contemporary Representational Politics

In the last fifty years — from the final quarter of the twentieth century onwards, and continuing into the early twenty-first century — a profound shift in the conduct and nature of politics has occurred, which has affected the way in which people think of those who occupy positions of power, from heads of state to local politicians (Sharpe, 3). An excellent example is the presidential election campaigns the United States, where involvement of the families of the presidential candidates is an indispensable part of any campaign, irrespective of whether it is Democratic or Republican. Spouses and children are staged — often quite literally — in order to convey a spiffing image of the American nuclear family, with the intention to gain sympathy from the voter. For the victor, this close scrutiny — by press and public alike — continues for the entirety of their mandate. A charismatic First Lady may increase a president’s popularity, in the same way as any controversial statement or action by a close or more distant family member may negatively affect the opinion of the public — remember for instance Melania Trump’s unstrategic choice of jacket in the summer of 2018. What is more, a BBC article from earlier that year considers ‘the ability to entertain’ as ‘one of the main
requirements of modern-day political success’ (Bryant, n.p.), and ranks current US president Trump’s ‘talent as a performer’ before his ‘limited grasp of policy and world affairs’ (Bryant, n.p.).

Overall, it is widely accepted that contemporary politics have shifted their primary source of power from ‘institutions, issues and policies, or parliamentary and democratic procedures’ (Sharpe, 3) to ‘image, appearance and representation’ (Sharpe, 3-4). The specific techniques which support these ‘politics of representation’ (Sharpe, 4) are, amongst others, ‘carefully crafted rhetoric, posed images, (and) choreographed spectacles’ (Sharpe, 4), in which a combination of text, image and movement self-evidently evokes the idea of a play, of power as a kind of theatre. However, these representation-based politics also have a darker side, where they quickly descend into a deceiving politic of ‘misrepresentation’ (Sharpe, 4).

Though described as a recent development, this method has its precedents; Ronald Reagan was an actual actor-become-president, and John F. Kennedy used television to (re)present himself to the people of the United States in much the same way as Roosevelt made use of radio (Bryant, n.p.). Each of these politicians made use of the available media of their time to represent themselves to the best of their abilities, and — more importantly — did this to their personal political advantage. This is however not an exclusively modern practice.

1.1.2. Representational Politics in the Past

Looking beyond the twentieth century, similar practices can be detected, all determined by the media and other (im)possibilities of their time. From Elizabeth I’s England
in the latter part of the sixteenth century, to nineteenth century Bali, as well as Victorian England, power and representation have concurred in various ways (Sharpe, 5). The first two periods provided material for ethnographer Clifford Geertz to deduce a solid theory which highlights the theatricality of power (Sharpe, 5). From the latter period, an unequivocal example can be singled out, namely that of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert donning the costumes of the predecessors Queen Philippa and Edward II during an official appearance (Sharpe, 13). By dressing up, they meant to — quite literally — embody a positive aspect of the nation’s memory (Sharpe, 13), and align themselves with another successful, popular royal couple in order to endow themselves with ‘greater imperial sway and popularity’ (Sharpe, 13). The construction of power by means of representation is thus nothing but an ‘old thing(s) freshly presented’ (Own parentheses, Wolf Hall, 118). And there are some older examples still.

During the entirety of the Tudor and Stuart periods, new techniques for royal representation in print and portraiture stimulated and ‘transformed the presentations and perceptions of princes’ (Sharpe, 1). Early Tudor monarchs were endowed with the task of ‘the consolidation and strengthening of the English state’ (Norton, 532) after the damage done to the nation’s image and stability during the Wars of the Roses, as well as with that of securing their relatively new dynasty (Norton, 532). Already during Henry VII’s reign, some so-called ‘acts of representation’ could be observed, albeit ‘probably from pragmatic considerations rather than personal preference’ (Trussler, 55). Regardless, these did contribute to ‘a much stronger central authority ’ (Norton, 533).

Following in his father’s footsteps, Henry VIII elaborated ‘the traditional court pageants of the Christmas and New Year season’ (Sharpe, 160) and representational politics as a whole, making them ‘more polemical and personal’ (Sharpe, 132). This change in policy
was necessary against a background of religious strife and profound changes in the king’s personal life, but also conveniently suited Henry’s extravagant taste (Trussler, 55). His successful combination of politics and entertainment transformed his reign into what seems an ‘endless sequence of tourneys, disguisings, entertainments and pageants’ (Qtd. Fox, Sharpe, 159), but also resulted in an ‘actual theatricalisation of public life’ (Greenblatt, 28).

1.1.3. Representational Politics in Literature

The elaborate representational programme of Henry VIII will serve as the main focus in this dissertation. The two primary sources in which descriptions of Henry VIII’s representational policies will be explored and analysed, are Hilary Mantel’s novel *Wolf Hall* (2009) and its successor *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012).

Although these fictional sources may seem an odd choice, the advantages provided by the literary medium for exploring this topic are numerous. First of all, literature has been credited as one of the first disciplines that studied the topic of representational politics (Sharpe, 4), before its adoption by mainstream historiography. Today, novels still distinguish themselves from — or rather contribute to — historiography by means of their intention to ‘reconstruct a world’ (Shaw, 25) and simultaneously include ‘a glimpse of human nature’ (Shaw, 25). Not only does Mantel aim to do both, she absolutely excels in these objectives by providing the reader with an almost tangible rendition of sixteenth century England — for instance by including sensory details, such as smell ‘blossom mashed and pinched […] so scent rises like smoke’(Wolf Hall, 463) and touch ‘Mary’s hand creeps back; absorbed, she strokes him’ (Wolf Hall, 136) — as well as by explicitly focussing on historical
characters as real people with real emotions, for her primary interest lies with the ‘interior
drama of (my) character’s lives ’ (Mantel, “The Day” 5). This “personal approach” to history
allows an exploration of (the construction of) power on different levels of society, and of
various personal attitudes towards and interactions with power. The manifestation of all these
layers which contribute to this rendition, representation, or reconstruction of power — for it is
an abstract concept — can be described by means of a befitting metaphor: like her
protagonist, Mantel offers a look behind ‘the screen at the back of the hall’ (Bring Up, 301) —
her novels provide a look behind the scenes of power. With an author as unique and surprising
as Mantel, one can only marvel at what one will find there.

1.2. The Tudors in Literature

1.2.1. Tudorism

Another longstanding alliance is that between literature — and by extension other
areas of cultural production — and the Tudor Dynasty. Ever since Henry VII’s enthronement
in 1485, stories about the Tudors have appealed to the imagination of many. In an anthology
by the same name, Tatiana String defines this particular interest as “Tudorism”, a
phenomenon which is not exclusive to literature — a field in which spans from Victorian
horror stories to contemporary homoerotic fan-fiction — but which is likewise present in the
contemporary phenomenon of the renaissance fair, in architecture, in French historical
painting, and many other aspects of culture (Bull & McCaslin, 1-2).
Hilary Mantel chose to publish Wolf Hall in the anniversary year 2009, (which marked the 500th anniversary of Henry VIII’s enthronement) because she supposed ‘it would be difficult to sell a book about Henry’ and that everybody would be ‘sick of him’ (MacFarquhar, 23) after this date. This conviction has even crept into the dialogues of her main character Thomas Cromwell, who proclaims the following: ‘A generation or two, or three… four … and these things are nothing’ (Wolf Hall, 406). It is however highly likely that the Tudors will continue to serve as a source of inspiration for Britain and the rest of the world in the future, for they have done so for the last five centuries (Bull & McCaslin, 1). For indeed, contrary to her own beliefs, Mantel’s novels did sell incredibly well after 2009. This may in part be contributed to her particular approach to the past, which makes her stand out within a thoroughly explored — but not yet exhausted — tradition.

1.2.2. Hilary Mantel’s Tudorism: *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*

*Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012) are the first and second instalments of Hilary Mantel’s Cromwell-trilogy. Set in the England of the sixteenth century, these novels recount the life of Thomas Cromwell as he advances from the abused son of a Putney smith, to a runaway mercenary, to lawyer-become-salesman and eventually councillor and right hand of the infamous King Henry VIII of England. In the first novel, his soaring social mobility is set against the background of Henry’s Great Matter, which allows Cromwell to demonstrate his talent by doing what his former master — Cardinal Wolsey — was not able to do: dissolve Henry’s marriage to Katherine of Aragon. What is more, he makes Henry the head of the new-
born Church of England, and makes him a husband again in his second marriage to Anne Boleyn. As history teaches us, this marital bliss did not endure, and in *Bring Up the Bodies* a turbulent year — significantly shorter than the multiple years which *Wolf Hall* spans — at Henry’s court is depicted. Within this short period, Anne Boleyn’s failure to conceive a son as well as Henry’s infatuation with her exact opposite, the chaste Jane Seymour, culminates in yet another dissolution, with a final *acte de presence* on the scaffold for Anne. At the end of the novel, the reader finds Baron Cromwell (*Bring Up*, 482) at presumably the height of his power. However, there is so much more to these novels than martial turbulence and ambition alone.

1.2.2.1. Revisiting the Tudors

As mentioned earlier, many events from the Tudor period have been given a second life in literature. Several writers, including Hilary Mantel, have chosen to stretch the story across extensive series, such as Philippa Gregory’s *The Other Boleyn Girl* series, or Allison Weir’s *Six Tudor Queens* series, both consisting of no less than six subsequent novels.

Mantel’s series distinguishes itself not only by fewer books, but also by a higher degree of historical accuracy — which will be discussed below — as well as a fresh perspective on the subject matter. She achieves this by selecting the rather rare point of view of Thomas Cromwell, whose low birth not only made him an outsider in the higher circles of court, but also pushed him into the position of an outcast in English history. Contrary to ‘the sixteenth-century Himmler’ (MacFarquhar, 23) which the public had formerly encountered in works such as Ford Madox Ford’s novel *The Fifth Queen* (1906), and Robert Bolt’s play *A Man for All Seasons* (1960), Mantel’s idea of Cromwell coincides with that of Cambridge
historian Geoffrey Elton, who forwarded an alternative interpretation of Cromwell as ‘a farseeing modern statesman who had transformed the English government […] to a bureaucratic parliamentary structure’ (MacFarquhar, 23-24) in the 1950’s. Regrettably, his effort was not sufficient to subvert either the popular or the academic image of Cromwell which soon after Elton’s publications reverted back to its original form (MacFarquhar, 24).

Half a century later, Mantel thus recovers the fruits of Elton’s work in her breakthrough trilogy. Not only does she distance herself from the common representation of Cromwell ‘as the devil incarnate’ (Greenblatt, 2), she also uses this opportunity to reverse the appeal of the ‘towering rituals’ More and Cromwell (Benfey, 1) — something which her protagonist gives a very clear account of in the novel itself: ‘You call history to your aid, but what is history to you? It is a mirror that flatters Thomas More. But I have another mirror, I hold it up and it shows a vain and dangerous man…’ (Wolf Hall, 566). What is more, this allows her to reassess every other historical character in her novels, and their relation to one another.

This tendency allows us to categorise Mantel as an author of revisionary historical fiction, i.e. fiction that intends to ‘rewrite’ canonic texts from the past, and hence call to account formative narratives that have arguably been central to the construction of our consciousness’(Widdowson, 1). Her revision affects, amongst others, the image of Henry VIII, whose prevailing portrayal as a strong, masculine king is replaced by a portrayal which includes weakness, effeminacy and even childishness (Robbeets, 32), and whose incompetence stands in stark contrast with the competence of his advisor Cromwell (MacFarquhar, 24). Henry’s impotence and lack of power is not only implicitly, but also explicitly present in Mantel’s novels, wherein characters are so bold as to question the king’s authority: ‘Isn’t the king master, over all the enemies?’ ‘You would think so.’ (Wolf Hall, 63).
1.2.2.2. Revisiting Historical Fiction

What is more, Mantel not only subverts popular images, but at the same time also reverses the reader’s expectations of the historical novel. Although the reader becomes a witness of many important turning points in English history, there is an equal or even larger amount of attention attributed towards Cromwell’s — as well as other characters’ — psychological and personal life: the reader “visits” Whitehall as often as they visit Austin Friars and the streets of early modern London. Much like her protagonist, Mantel regards people as ‘the key’ to power (Wolf Hall, 43), and sees it as her task as novelist to work ‘at the point where […] politics meet psychology’ (Mantel, “The Day” 5), as she tries to reconcile the greatness of her powerful characters with their undeniably human psychological makeup (Mantel, “Adaptation” 3). Another characteristic of her historical fiction is that it is the result of a meticulous balancing act between accuracy and probability — an exceptional feat, for which she is much praised — which will be discussed below.

1.3. Hilary Mantel’s Oeuvre

Although the Cromwell novels will be used as primary sources in this dissertation, other works from Mantel’s rich oeuvre contribute to both a description of her authorship in general, as well as to that of some particularities which are relevant to the following analysis of Wolf Hall and Bring Up the Bodies. Since these novels are already her tenth and eleventh publication, it would be a mistake to disregard the vast amount of earlier publications under her name, for these may provide insights into Mantel’s style, interests, topic and can even help
to explore the roots of her later successes. From her debut novel *Every Day is Mother’s day* (1985) to her historical novels *Fludd* (1989) and especially *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992) — which deals with the French Revolution (MacFarquhar, 5) — as well as her other works in between, several significant characteristics of Mantel’s oeuvre can be deduced.

### 1.3.1. Mantel and the Historical

When discussing the treatment of historical subject matter in Mantel’s oeuvre, *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992) provides a productive starting point. First and foremost, its topic is a revolution, a moment of profound political and social change which partially resembles the various changes during the Henrican Reformation. This revolution is not described from the point of view of aristocrats or royals — a social group which speaks strongly to the contemporary imagination — but from that of commoners. These common people distinguish themselves from others within their social class by means of their ‘extreme ambition’, which leads to ‘political achievement’ (MacFarquhar, 6), a description which can not only be applied to Mantel’s Robespierre but also to “her” Cromwell.

Secondly, the angle from which she approaches her writing of historical novels remains the same over the course of her career as an author, and eventually became one of the aspects of her work for which she is most lauded by the public and the critics. Mantel is able to transcend the problematic nature often attributed to historical fiction — it being a hybrid form, ‘halfway between fiction and non-fiction’ (MacFarquhar, 3) — by presenting her story as ‘only one possible true history based upon evidence’ (Phillpott, 3). This is based on her conviction that all drama should be taken from real life (MacFarquhar, 25), and that facts should not be disrupted ‘just to make it more convenient or dramatic’ (MacFarquhar, 25).
substantial part of her writing process is thus attributed to researching and learning about the characters and period she is writing about (MacFarquhar, 23), but with ample attention for the gaps in history which she allows herself to fill in (Mantel, "Iron Maiden” 8). She does this mostly by means of her vivid imagination, but always with regard for what is most probable, and thus makes ‘every attempt ... to represent a true account of Cromwell and his world’ (Phillpott, 3). Though she is cautious with facts, which results upon multiple occasions in her quoting directly from the historical record (MacFarquhar, 5), she is equally experimental with form — something which will be addressed the next few paragraphs.

1.3.2. Mantel and the Theatrical

Mantel entertains an interesting relationship with the theatrical throughout her diverse oeuvre. Although her direct experience with theatre “limits” itself to her cooperation on the stage adaption of both novels by playwright Mike Poulton for the Royal Shakespeare Company, and she had no experience as nor ambition to become a playwright at the outset of writing her Cromwell trilogy (Brantley, 2), her oeuvre seems to demonstrate an inclination towards both the style and theme of theatre, in her historical and non-historical novels alike.

A first aspect of this ‘theatrical inclination’ can be found in the form of language used in her novels. As a lover of theatre, especially of the Naturalist playwright Bertolt Brecht, she gravitates towards the use of dialogues, which in some places of the novel results in the total disappearance of descriptive prose (MacFarquhar, 5). This is already discernible in *A Place of Greater Safety* (MacFarquhar, 5), and attributes a very play-like character to her novels. The same can be said for her Cromwell-trilogy, where dialogue remains a prominent aspect of Mantel’s writing.
What is more, this particular use of language can also be linked to the period about which she writes in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. Firstly, it should be remarked that state pageants — not only in England, but in various other countries — were mostly based on dialogue (Sharpe, 48). These pageants ‘drew from a common stock of ideas’ (Sharpe, 48), but were continuously adapted and ameliorated ‘as rulers vied to suppress each other in magnificent display and learning’ (Sharpe, 48). Secondly, this tendency closely resembles the preference for using the dialogic form in writings and arguments during the Renaissance (Sharpe, 36). The reason for this rhetorical style was that it was able to create a place for two or more arguments to exist beside one another. In a dialogic form, other positions are not suppressed, but both speakers are able to re-authorise, to re-write the alternative argument for themselves (Sharpe, 36). This is very similar to Mantel’s insistence on creating only one of many possible truths, and her insistence on her perspective not canceling out any other truths which already exist (Phillpott, 3).

Not only on the level of the formal and the ideological, but also on a thematic level, Mantel showcases a strong interest in the theatrical or — perhaps more suitable — the performative. Her ‘oeuvre is densely populated with fiends and pretenders’ (Jernigan, 12), whether they are historical characters such as the Elizabethan alchemist-turned-priest in *Fludd* (1989) or more contemporary fictional characters, such as the protagonist Muriel Axton in *Vacant Possession* (1986) (Jernigan, 12). The latter, a discharged mental patient is even described as someone who ‘fashions herself’ (Jernigan, 12) through identity theft. This wording is reminiscent of another kind of fashioning — self-fashioning — which is omnipresent in the Cromwell-novels, and the topic of a master dissertation by UCL alumni Salomé Ory in 2018. This civilising practice, popularly described by Stephen Greenblatt, involves the altering of both body and mind, of both the self and others (Greenblatt, 3), which
can be argued to border on or even coincide with the theatrical and will be of great importance in the first chapter of this dissertation.

Finally, Mantel also employs the language of performance in order to explain the relation of the historical writer to the past they intend to describe. In the first of her Reith lectures, she mentions that history ‘is no more the past than […] a script is a performance (Mantel, “The Day” 4), that ‘it is the plan of the positions taken, when we stop the dance, to note them down’ (Mantel, “The Day” 4). In another lecture in the series, she reuses this trope: ‘But the past is not a rehearsal: it is the show itself.’ (Mantel, “The Iron Maiden” 6); indirectly expressing the impossibility of the modern author to fully reproduce the past in their work.

Although theatre is never the main topic in Mantel’s novels, there is always some aspect of theatre hidden behind the plot. Her frequent employment of theatrical metaphors and other references to theatre promises a profound yet subtle incorporation of the mechanisms of representational politics in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*.

1.4. State of the Art

Historical novels with a refreshing contribution to a well-explored theme, as well as a strong claim to historical accuracy, can be sure to attract academic attention. In the past few years, there has been a substantial amount of publications about *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, though most of them focus on one or two particular character(s), often in comparison to their portrayal elsewhere. Such is the case for Anne Boleyn, who Anne Roders studies in relation to a dual popular image: the victimised Anne and the calculating, sexual Anne (Roders, 275-276). Roders concludes that Mantel combines both images, thus resulting in
Anne’s imprisonment ‘in one of two equally negative extremes’ (Roders, 584). This is also the case for more peripheral characters, for example Elizabeth Barton. She is explored from a feminist perspective by Robinson Murphy, who also highlights the fact that Henry is presented as less powerful, since the low-born Barton ‘seeks to undermine his authority’ (Murphy, 162). Mantel thus leaves room for the appropriation of power from unexpected corners.

The corpus of academic writings about Mantel’s Henry VIII is relatively small, which is why a reference to my own bachelor paper has to be made. Its aim was to examine how Mantel’s novel subverts the common conception of King Henry VIII, a protagonist in English history but a secondary character in *Wolf Hall*. From a consideration of the ambiguous image of the king, who is portrayed as physically strong and masculine yet mentally weak, feminine and childish (Robbeets, 17-19), an in-depth consideration of these weaknesses as expressions of the king’s childishness emerged. The third and final part of the paper explores the exploitation of Henry’s weaknesses by other characters in order to usurp the king's power (Robbeets, 27). Mantel presents power as dynamic and continuously changing hands (Robbeets, 28) and while it temporarily falls into those of Cromwell, it also passes through the hands of others, who all have certain degree of influence over the king but presumably employed different methods to gain this influence (Robbeets, 28).

On the other hand, there are the works that have managed to pick up on the theatrical in Mantel’s Cromwell-trilogy. A first, and decidedly very unique approach to the theatrical in the Cromwell trilogy is proposed by Anita Manuel. She discusses its incorporation in the plot structure of the novel, claiming that the first and second book correspond to respectively the first and second act of a traditional Elizabethan or Jacobean revenge tragedy (Manuel, 107). This structural approach will not be adopted, but is an interesting addition to Mantel’s broad
range of theatrical devices. Other sources present a more conventional approach. In Exoticizing the past in Contemporary Neo-historical Fiction, Rosario Arias attributes a chapter to the so-called exoticisation of the Tudors, and notices several theatrical elements therein. They bring a discrepancy between private and public (Arias, 25) to light, and state that ‘Mantel very aptly makes use of the notion of disguise and play-acting to transpose Cromwell’s story’ (Arias, 30). The two epigraphs, respectively excerpts from Vitruvius’ De Architectura (c. 27 BC) and Skelton’s morality play Magnificence (c. 1520), a play directed at no other than Henry VIII (Arias, 30), introduce this topic. It is extended throughout the novels in the form of a figurative language which ‘underlines the duplicity of those who hold power’ (Arias, 31) and an apparent notion of ‘appearance versus reality’ (Arias, 31), as well as a motif of disguise (Arias, 32).

Certain connections can be made between this work and my aforementioned bachelor paper. Firstly, a description of Henry’s ambiguous or even “double personality” (Robbeets, 17-19), which can be split up in a public and private personality, implicitly calls forth the idea of a performance or role — similarly to the figurative language which Arias describes (31). This idea is supported by the description and explanation of several of the king’s deliberate behaviours. Henry’s attempts to cover up his baldness (Robbeets, 15), which can be interpreted as being part of a costume or disguise, as well as his calculated body language and movements — such as ‘Henry […] turns, rather slowly, to show his majesty to better effect…’ (Mantel, “Wolf Hall” 182-183) — testify to the calculated nature of these actions. Additionally, by redirecting the reader’s attention to the reaction of other characters in the novel (Robbeets, 12-13), the importance and participation of onlookers — of an audience — to this performance is also established, something which Arias does not touch upon.
1.5. Thesis Statement

On this intersection between the study of power and the study of theatrical motifs in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, a reference to the concept of representational politics — which has been introduced in the first paragraphs of this extensive introduction — is indispensable. This notion provides a coherent framework upon which a structured, meaningful discussion of these seemingly disparate aspects of Mantel’s novels can be founded.

Mantel’s vivid, detailed descriptions of events which were of fundamental importance to this particular method of gaining and sustaining power, such as ‘tourneys, disguisings, entertainments and pageants’ (Qtd. Fox, Sharpe, 159) provide her contemporary audience with valuable insights into the workings of power during Henry VIII’s reign. What is more, due to the author’s profound inspiration by theatre and theatrical language, they highlight the inherent theatricality of not only these events, but of the impact of representational politics in sixteenth century England in general.

However, when studying a representation — or rather, reconfiguration — of (political practices from) the past in literature, a comparison of the novel’s primary material to secondary historical and historiographical sources will by no means prove productive, for historiography and historical(ly accurate) literature are not complementary, but supplementary to one another. The aim of this dissertation is thus not to evaluate *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*’ faithfulness to the past, but rather to uncover how these novels reflect the past in their own particular way. How does Mantel present the past from a point of view that is informed by both historical sources and her personal sensibilities? By extension, how does this shape
her depiction — or re-presentation — of a past which we think to know and understand almost half a millennium later?

Considering Mantel’s earlier classification as an author of revisionary historical fiction (Widdowson, 1 & Robbeets, 6), as well as earlier conclusions from my bachelor paper which demonstrated a subversion of the power relation between Henry VIII and his advisor Cromwell (Robbeets, 32), it can be assumed that Mantel’s descriptions of various representational strategies to a lesser or greater extent challenge, question, or even oppose our common understanding of them. Additionally, other defining aspects of Mantel’s oeuvre present an opportunity for Mantel to shed a different light on the common conception of early modern English politics. Take for instance Mantel’s aforementioned attention for what she calls the gaps in history (Mantel, “The Iron Maiden” 8), in combination with her preference for common, yet powerful people (MacFarquhar, 6), as well as her profound interest in the inner lives and psychology of historical characters (Mantel, “The Day” 5). These characteristics, in combination with Mantel’s revisionary tendencies, enable an exploration of Henry VIII’s representational policies from a very distinct angle; more specifically and angle which takes the personal experiences and contributions of common subjects in the construction of royal power in mind. Both of these can be considered gaps in history, for the not only is this personal experience of acts of representation a psychological process, and thus invisible and (mostly) undocumented, the participation and influence of commoners — including ‘popular agency’ (Sharpe, 50), a freedom to understand and react to representations — has remained a peripheral topic in the study of representational politics. Even founding researchers such as Foucault and Geertz did not leave ‘much room […] in their models of the performance of symbolic systems’ (Sharpe, 50) for the description of this popular agency and popular participation (Sharpe, 50).
The aim of this dissertation is to thus reveal the power relations between a monarch and his people which lay at the root of — as well as resulted from — these public representational strategies, and how Mantel’s taste for revision and subversion results in a different, a revised or even a subverted image of the cultivation of power during the Henrican Reformation.

To conclude this introduction, the previous paragraphs can — and should — be paraphrased into once concise research question. How does Hilary Mantel’s depiction of acts of representation in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* — including but not limited to tourneys, progresses, courtly entertainments, coronation entries — inform an alternative, revisionary perspective on the system of representation politics in sixteenth century England, which includes a particular focus on the position and influence of the common subject in this intricate process of gaining and sustaining power, and also considers the possibility of the appropriation of representational mechanisms and techniques of the monarch(y) by the people in order to give rise to popular power?

1.6. A Note on Methodology

In order to pinpoint this assumed re-presentation of representational politics by Mantel, her description of various acts of representation will be closely considered — through close reading and a comparison to historiographical sources which describe these events as well as their broader socio-cultural context — in order to discern whether Mantel presents her readers with a formally faithful rendition of the events, but primarily to discuss how her descriptions of these events contribute to an elucidation of the mechanisms behind such acts
of representation, of the respective roles of the many people involved in them and of their various mentalities towards the proceeding, including their reception of the images presented in them.

It goes without saying that, although literature has played a significant role in the emergence of the study of representational politics in historiography, the conclusions made in this dissertation only apply to Mantel’s representation of the past, and do not aim to make any assumptions about the actual past. Still, in order to understand and make well-informed assumptions, a wide range of historiographical sources about early modern (representational) politics, monarchy, (theatrical) arts and society — by Roy Strong, Kevin Sharpe, Lacey Smith, Patricia Barry, Simon Trussler and many others — as well as works of literary criticism — by for instance Stephen Greenblatt and Rosario Arias — has been used to support the claims made in this dissertation.
2. The Construction of Royal Authority through Representational Politics

‘It is the processions that matter, the exchange of gifts, the royal games of bowls, the tilts, jousts and masques: these are not the preliminaries of the process, they are the process itself.’

(Wolf Hall, 391)

2.0. A Preliminary Note on Structure

The general objective of this dissertation — to reveal the revisionary aspects of Hilary Mantel’s depiction of Henry VIII’s representational politics and its consequences for accepted ideas about the division of popular and royal power in Wolf Hall and Bring Up the Bodies — first of all necessitates a clear distinction between the roles of the monarch on one hand, and his common subjects on the other, for they were both indispensable in this intricate process of constructing, sustaining and increasing power. The system of representational politics in countries across Europe in the sixteenth century was profoundly collaborative in its nature (Sharpe, 50), yet its implementation was also marked by an insistence on a clear distinction between its participants, and especially between the respective roles which were expected to be performed by either of them (Sharpe, 50). This distinction between monarch and subject will likewise be reflected in the structure of this dissertation.

In the first two chapters of this dissertation, Mantel’s depiction of Henry VIII’s representational strategies will be discussed from the perspective of the monarch, with special focus on their attempts to give rise to royal power and legitimacy. The orchestration of royal
acts of representations, the images of the monarchy which are presented in them, as well as the mechanisms, inspirations and ideologies behind them will be discussed. The discussion of specific images of the king — and his family — are an important link within this dissertations, for they will be revisited in the second part of this dissertation — which focusses on the people’s interactions with power — in order to discuss the people’s interaction with, and possibly their resistance against these images.

Whereas the first chapter focuses on what can be considered “standard” acts of representation (i.e. representational strategies which have been studied and described by historiographers such as Strong and Sharpe), the second chapter focusses on Mantel’s incorporation of the language, images, techniques, behaviours pertaining to those standard acts of representation into the description of a very different kind of public event, in order to demonstrate the influence and permeation of the protocols pertaining to representational strategies ‘into the conduct of everyday life’ (Mulryne, 8), and into the orchestration of public events which construct and realise royal power in a very different way. Together, these chapters aim to demonstrate Mantel’s profound understanding of representational politics, and her subtle yet powerful incorporation of a wide variety of representational strategies into *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*.

2.1. Introduction

This initial chapter presents a comprehensive — though unavoidably inconclusive — list of the various manifestations of royal acts of representation in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. These can in their turn be situated within a larger repertoire of representational tactics
which were available to Renaissance monarchs as means to support their sovereign status, amongst which architecture, poetry, sculpture, portraiture and even coinage (Sharpe, 16, 21).

Within this wide range of methods, some categorisation should be provided. Based on mostly formal characteristics, Roy Strong provides a model which distinguishes three “representational genres” (23). Mantel’s rendition of the formal characteristics of these genres will be discussed briefly, for this categorisation solely intends to provide some structure to what may otherwise be considered an incoherent enumeration of events.

More important than this initial categorisation, is the dedicated discussion of the different types of (inter)actions between the sovereign “performer” and his audience during acts of representation which lies at the heart of this chapter. Not only does this emphasis on the contributions of both parties highlight the aforementioned distinction between them, it also emphasises Mantel’s ability to reconstruct and reconfigure the past by offering glimpses into the lives of the very real people — not just the iconic historical figures — who lived back then (Shaw, 25). This attention towards the inner workings of tournaments, progresses and coronation ceremonies, as well as of the ideologies and psychology upon which these events are founded gives her work a status beyond that of a mere description of the past. If — in Mantel’s own words — history is the script of a play, and the past is the play itself (Mantel “The Day”, 4), then Mantel aims for an approximation of the actual play rather than a reproduction of its script.

Much like Mantel’s description of the difference between historiography and literature, representational politics were highly inspired by theatre. For this reason, a brief discussion of sixteenth century (English) theatre is included in this chapter, which provides a succinct body of information about the cultural context in which these socio-political practices emerged.
The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate Mantel’s an awareness and depiction of the various representational genres, and a profound understanding of their inner workings in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*.

### 2.1.1. Representational Politics in the Sixteenth Century

#### 2.1.1.1. The Emergence and Development of Representational Politics

Before elaborating on the alliance between theatre and politics in early modern England, the prior endeavour of Renaissance monarchs to construct ‘a national self-image’ (Mulryne, 4) needs to be considered first. Various social and cultural factors, amongst which the Reformation (Mulryne, 4) motivated rulers all across Europe ‘to direct a programme of representation’ (Sharpe, 20) and although monarchs had ‘always been concerned with their image’ (Sharpe, xxv), new and innovative ‘attempts to control images of power’ (Sharpe, xxv) emerged, which ranged from miniatures (Sharpe, 131) to architecture (Sharpe, 147) to more functional objects like tableware (Sharpe, 145) — all of which had been ‘carefully crafted […] posed and choreographed’ (Sharpe, 4).

Initially, the court occupied an important position in this development of a programme of representation, for it ‘was a centre of culture as well as power’ (Norton, 533) which accommodated various rituals as well as aristocratic patronage of the theatre (Dillon, 32). This type of patronage had already established itself as an indicator of social status and heralded a continuing alliance between performative arts and social advancement in the course of the
sixteenth century (Dillon, 17). The incorporation of theatre into these programmes of representation owes much to the rediscovery of classical texts during the Renaissance, wherein theatre was defined as a tool for education (Trussler, 53). As a result, theatre became favoured by ‘rulers and/or their ministers […] as a means of persuading audiences to adopt a position, or of proclaiming and publicising power’ (Sharpe, 17). As with any socio-cultural change, it did not happen overnight. Unsurprisingly, Mantel hints at this idea of a gradual evolution in her novels. Her large cast of characters allows the representation of a wide variety of ages, personalities and stances towards Henry’s representational programme. Characters like the imperial ambassador Chapuys, whose every move ‘is like something an actor does’ (Wolf Hall, 193) demonstrate how early modern England embraced the techniques of representational politics, indeed extending its protocols into the everyday (Mulryne, 8). Other characters represent a more conservative stance, and instead of heralding these new sociopolitical practices, they stubbornly oppose them. The figurehead of this stance can undoubtedly be identified as the Duke of Norfolk, who is very outspoken on this topic. Not only does he say not to ‘care for this proceeding’ (Wolf Hall, 396) — aiming at Anne’s and Henry’s mingling with the public after Mass — he also mocks and thus underestimates the importance of the audience during these interactions between the monarch and his subjects, by saying that the people would ‘cheer a Barbary ape. Who cares what they cheer?’ (Wolf Hall, 238). Not only is ‘Uncle Norfolk […] missing the show’ (Wolf Hall, 462), he is missing the point of Henry’s representational efforts entirely.

Returning to the early modern impulse which motivated this alliance between politics and theatrics, this change of course also resulted in the transformation of existing types of performances with the aim of acquiring and carrying out a new, profoundly political character (Strong, 16). An excellent example of this phenomenon is the transformation of the
widespread tradition of Catholic liturgical spectacles (Strong, 21), a celebratory ritual which also had its roots in the Middle Ages. Before the English Reformation, liturgic ceremonies in England consisted of ‘baptisms, marriages, exorcisms, and funerals’ (Norton, 537), which were of a more quotidian character, and of the occasional, much more spectacular ‘festivals, Saint’s days and other holy days’ (Norton, 537). Inspired by the humanistic thinking of the sixteenth century, these traditional — and thus familiar — forms of religious apotheosis were ‘transmuted […] into a vehicle for dynastic apotheosis’ (Strong, 22-23), and appropriated by the state, providing each ruler with the freedom to adapt ‘ritual forms for his or her very different personal (as well as political) circumstances’ (Sharpe 51). In Protestant countries, England included, this adaptation of the catholic liturgy into ‘a liturgy of state’ (Strong, 22) was fairly extensive: saints’ days and other religious festivals were almost completely replaced with celebrations of important moments in the life of the monarch, such as his ascension, his birthday or the birth of an heir (Strong, 21-22). However, in Mantel’s “version” of early modern England, saint’s days were still being celebrated by the people: ‘St George’s day. All over England, cloth and paper dragons sway in noisy procession through the streets’ (Bring Up, 294). Religious veneration was not suddenly replaced by celebrations of the monarch(y), and thus Mantel describes them as holding on just a little longer, and then slowly fading out. Finally, even though these intrinsically popular entertainments were gradually being appropriated by the ruling class, their adoption and alteration of the genre did in fact not result in the emergence of a new elite genre (Sharpe, 48). On the contrary, since state celebrations ‘required popular attendance and participation’ (Sharpe, 48), they remained inherently popular and thus changed the appearance of politics rather than that of the forms of public entertainment which it made use of.
2.1.1.2. Theatre in the Sixteenth Century

Thus far, the notion “theatre” has been referred to relatively often, but the concept itself has not yet been defined. The nature of this work’s primary sources — two contemporary historical novels — necessitates a consideration between two interpretations of the concept, namely early modern theatre (Sharpe, 28) or early Tudor theatre (Trussler, 50) and contemporary theatre. In the case of Wolf Hall and Bring Up the Bodies, which are both profoundly determined by their adherence to the historical record (MacFarquhar, 5), it is more productive to explore theatre from a historical perspective than from a contemporary one.

Early modern theatre differs drastically from contemporary theatre, mainly because of its lack of ‘a boundary around what should be classed as theatre’ (Dillon, 1). This lack of definition applies to several of its features. Firstly, English early modern theatre is often immediately associated with the ‘permanent, freestanding public theatre’ (Norton, 555) of the Elizabethan era. England’s rich and vital theatrical tradition did however stretch back several centuries (Norton, 555), and in the early years of the sixteenth century theatrical performances depended heavily on either the arrival of a troupe of travelling players, or on the efforts of enterprising individuals who staged plays in the privacy of their home or yard (Dillon, 1). In other words, theatre was not yet a readily available, scheduled entertainment. It should however be mentioned that plays which were ‘tied to festivals or other special occasions’ (Dillon, 24), such as mystery plays (Norton, 555), were often associated with a particular date, time or season. A similar tendency can be observed with regard to the location of performance. Although most plays were made to be adaptable ‘to any kind of location’ (Dillon, 1) there were certain genres which were inseparable from a particular
performance location (Dillon, 3), for instance the court masque, which will be discussed further in this dissertation.

Secondly, early sixteenth century theatre was a compound of various performative disciplines, such as dancing and music-making. These disciplines developed into autonomous genres only from the eighteenth century onwards (Dillon, 95).

A third defining aspect of early modern theatre is its inseparable association with religion. Not only were some theatrical genres, like mystery plays, part of festivals which were at once civic and religious (Norton, 555), but every performance incorporated at least some element of religion, for ‘religious and secular life were so closely intertwined as to be at times almost indistinguishable’ (Dillon, 23). Therefore it would be profoundly anachronistic to construct a binarism of respectively religious and secular theatre (Dillon, 23). What is more, the profound influence of Catholic liturgical spectacles on courtly theatre only reinforces this alliance between religious and secular of theatre (Strong, 21).

Finally, the introduction of classical theatre blurred any remaining distinctions, as both classical and medieval traditions, as well as classical and vernacular genres coalesced, making sixteenth century theatre a true melting pot of genres (Trussler, 52 & Dillon, 150).

2.1.2. Reciprocity in Representational Politics

Cooperation is a cornerstone in representational politics, a system which is essentially based on ‘a web of interactions, mutualities, and reciprocities’ (Sharpe, 50). Within this system, two participants have already been distinguished, namely the king — or members of his family, or a royal representative — and his audience. The king is generally staged as protagonist and performs ‘in the habit and role of a king as scripted by himself, by custom and
by the expectations of nobles, gentry and commoners.’ (Sharpe, 157). This central position of the king aligns with Walter Bagehot’s definition of the monarchy as ‘a government in which the attention of the nation is concentrated on one person doing interesting actions’ (Bagehot qtd. Sharpe, 11). Mantel emphasises this close scrutiny to which Henry VIII, his family, and even his mistress were subjected — ‘What was she wearing? […] He prices and sources her, hood to hem, foot to fingertip’ (Wolf Hall, 207) — but also how the king himself encourages this scrutiny, by adjusting his every movement in order to attract the people’s attention: ‘He crosses the room, flings open his arms’ (Wolf Hall, 513) and ‘The king’s thread is deliberate, his step is slow’ (Bring Up, 271). What is more, Mantel also describes Henry’s awareness of popular expectations: ‘A king should show himself, sometimes, don’t you feel?’ (Wolf Hall, 254). Henry was thus not solely focused on himself in his self-representation.

With regard to the monarch’s audience, Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly defines two roles which can be performed by them: the first being a passive role, namely ‘as a witness […] without [whom] the event would not be legal or binding’ (16), whereas the second role is considerably more active, and expects the audience to ‘act out their social role[s] vis a vis the monarch (16). Although Watanabe-O’Kelly defines these roles as strictly separate, and associated with specific occasions for royal representation — the first pertaining to what Mulryne calls ‘ceremonies’ (8) and the other to what they call ‘spectacles’ (8) — this distinction will not be made in this dissertation. What is particularly interesting about this reciprocality, is that the monarch was likewise required to acknowledge and respond to his audience (Sharpe, 160). Not only was the monarch thus transposed into an observant role which closely resembles that of the audience — thus creating an interesting, almost equalling dynamic between subject and monarch — he was likewise expected to immerse himself, and take part in this reciprocal process. The idea of a monarch who has to adhere to the
expectations of his subject superimposes and complicates the presumption of a highly individual orchestration of the monarch’s self-representation based solely on his ‘personal (as well as political) circumstances’ (Sharpe 51).

It can thus be said that these interactions between monarch and subject transform state rituals into ‘dialogue(s) with […] sovereign power’ (Sharpe, 161) instead of propagandistic proclamations of power (Sharpe, 161). Combined with a profound taste for dialogue which developed during the Renaissance (Sharpe, 36), this dialogic structure may have been (one of) the key(s) to the success of representational politics in the sixteenth century.

2.1.3. Classification of Representational Genres

With regard to the particular kinds of royal self-representation which were available to Renaissance rulers, the prominent historian Roy Strong defines three types: ‘the royal entry, the exercise of arms and the indoor divertissement’ (23) or in other words: the ‘royal entry’ (23), the ‘tournament’ (37) and the ‘indoor fête’ (49), all of which can be unified under the common denominator ‘spectacle’ (Sharpe, 21). The following chapter will make use of this classification, though a relative absence of tournaments in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* should be kept in mind, which results in a stronger emphasis on the entry and the fête and their respective subcategories.
2.2. Court Fêtes: The Indoor Fête

The elaborate court festivals or court fêtes (Strong, 37) of the sixteenth century consisted of a combination of various smaller fêtes which can be categorised into indoor and outdoor fêtes; with ballets de court (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 15) and interludes (Sharpe, 171) as examples of the former, and tournaments (Strong, 37) — which will, according to Strong’s categorisation, be considered separately — and carrousels (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 15) as examples of the latter. In true Renaissance fashion, these various kinds of court fêtes were not only combined with one another, but independently they likewise incorporated more than one ‘field of artistic endeavour’ (Strong, 19) at once.

Though court festivals may at first glance seem to serve a purely recreational purpose, they were based on the idea of ‘power conceived as art’ (Strong, 76), which transformed these elaborate celebrations and performances into undeniably political events (Sharpe, 171). Art, which very often manifested itself in the form of theatre, was thus employed as an ‘instrument[s] of social and political control’ (Mulryne, 5). From their first emergence at the start of the sixteenth century, court fêtes evolved rapidly, until they became the dominant ‘form of princely magnificence’ (Strong, 49) towards the end of the same century. The effectiveness of this alliance between art and authority was thus affirmed by the ever-increasing predominance of this form or royal celebration. Towards the middle of the seventeenth century, court fêtes would become inherent, “natural” parts of the Baroque monarch’s state apparatus (Strong, 16).

The imposition of control within the court was of profound importance, for power was something obtained ‘in proximity to the royal body’ (Norton, 533). This meant that the many
subjects who flocked to the court were not necessarily attracted by the appeal of the court, but rather by promises or opportunities for physical proximity to the king, who was in fact the true ‘centre of […] power’ (Norton, 533). This is overtly manifested during court fêtes, during which the monarch was able to assign his many courtiers a particular ‘place in the round of ritual’ (Strong, 21) where they acted ‘out their social roles vis a vis the monarch’ (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 16) and correspondingly vis a vis their fellow courtiers. This enactment or visualisation of courtly hierarchy reinforced the monarch’s authority, while also keeping a powerful elite in check under his watchful eye (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 16). Referring back to Bagehot’s definition of the monarchy, one should keep the central position of the monarch during these proceedings in mind, for he did indeed remain the central point of attention of the nation — or in this case, the court (Bagehot qtd. Sharpe, 11) — at all times. Simultaneously, the king used this opportunity to present ‘a tamed nobility’ (Strong, 21) to more peripheral members of the court; to his servants, his visitors and any foreign representatives present. In the discussion of banquets, civic entries and royal progresses, Mantel’s visualisation of hierarchy will be explored in more depth, including her very specific depiction of changes to this hierarchy.

Another important aspect of court fêtes — and all other acts of representation — is how these events were reported. Even the court fête, which may seem to exclusively address ‘a small coterie audience’ (Norton, 533), always envisaged the entirety of the king’s subjects as its secondary audience (Mulryne, 16). The problem with these performances was however that they were inherently immediate and especially ephemeral (Strong, 19). The organising court was able to overcome this transience by putting out a ‘vast corpus of literature printed to commemorate these events’ (Strong, 19). These were ‘sent to […] courts […] beyond the borders of the territory’ (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 19-20) en lieu of — or in support of — any
reports by foreign ambassadors. These accounts were however heavily idealised and mediated (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 20). Additionally, the court was a large community where many people came and went in order to visit and attend on ‘the king or his wives, his minister and courtiers’ (Sharpe, 157), which enabled first-hand witnesses to recount their experiences of these events outside of court as well. These complemented the written, official reports and together constructed ‘a more general reputation’ (Sharpe, 157) of the king, but did not necessarily contribute to the construction of a ‘shared myth’ (Sharpe, 12) about the king. The various kinds of reports, their divergent contents and their respective contributions to the people’s perception of the king will be explored in the final chapter of this dissertation.

The court masque, a typically English and highly theatrical example of one of those many ‘new forms of fêtes’ (Strong, 49) which emerged during the sixteenth century, will be the first of two types of courtly fête discussed in this subchapter. Afterwards, the banquet will be examined. Although this form has less distinct theatrical qualities, it provides an excellent example of the extension of ‘the mental protocols of festival into the conduct of everyday life’ (Mulryne, 8). What is more, upon closer consideration of the inner mechanisms of the banquet, some striking similarities to the mechanisms of the masque arise.

2.2.1. The Court Masque and Other Courtly Plays

As one of the few sixteenth century theatrical genres which was ‘specifically tied to one performance location’ (Dillon, 3), the masque was inherently associated with the court, and especially so with that of Henry VIII. During his reign, this genre — originally of Italian origin — was introduced at court and evolved into a dominant courtly genre and a ‘regular
feature of the court year’ (Sharpe 171). Mantel describes this particular type of play as an important part of the court’s Christmas period (Wolf Hall, 67 & Bring Up 152, 391), otherwise described as ‘the season of licence’ (Bring Up, 152) during which certain excesses and freedoms were granted that were otherwise frowned upon. On one hand, this type of play was meant to be ‘an enjoyable social recreation’ (Wickham, 210) which accompanied various celebrations. On the other, it was ‘a genre aimed at a powerful and elite audience, including the King himself’ (Dillon, 209) and, as a result, ‘had to […] be taken seriously’ (Dillon, 209) — just like any other kind of courtly celebration.

The masque was predominantly employed as an important ‘representation of the king and indication of his inclinations in matters of state’ (Sharpe, 172). Its first purpose, that of representation, was usually fulfilled by the monarch’s — or his wife’s or children’s — participation as actor in the masque itself, but could also be fulfilled by their presence in the audience (Sharpe, 171). In Wolf Hall, Henry's presence enables him to respond positively to a performance — ‘he laughs…’ (Wolf Hall, 266) — in an effort to transmit an image of a self-assured king (Sharpe, 131), notwithstanding the fact that ‘…if you could get close you would see that his eyes are afraid’ (Wolf Hall, 266). Even from his seat in the audience, the king was acting out a role. Secondly, these performances announced ‘policy as well as ‘dance’ moves’ (Sharpe, 171), meaning that a masque could either announce or reflect changes in the political sphere (Sharpe, 171). This establishment of a connection between the real and fictional world is especially remarkable since these entertainments were ‘far from […] realistic’ and sixteenth century performances were ‘never […] remotely naturalistic or understated’ (Wickham, 98); take for instance the participation of actors dressed as dragons (Bring Up, 151) or devils (Wolf Hall, 266). Regardless, these fantastical plays were understood by the courtly audience, who were familiar with their strange vocabulary, but
which nowadays have become hard for a contemporary audience to understand (Strong, 56). Additionally, the sixteenth century English subject was also well-acquainted with the use of ‘theatrical language to describe government’ (Sharpe, 175). Masques thus duly fulfilled their role as both ‘a cultural and political force’ (Mulryne, 4).

Of all royal acts of representation, the masque, as an actual type of play is — rather obviously — the most overtly theatrical. In line with Renaissance taste, it was a profoundly ‘composite form’ (Strong, 213), which combined text — both ‘dialogue’ (Sharpe, 171) and ‘poetry’ (Norton, 533) — music, dance, decor, and machinery (Strong, 213) all in one ‘elaborately costumed performance’ (Norton, 533). This last characteristic is perhaps the masque’s most distinctive feature, though similar costumed entertainments had formerly existed in England under the names ‘disguising’ and ‘mumming’ (Norton, 559). These did however gradually disappear from courtly records ‘from the middle of the fifteenth century onwards’ (Wickham, 195). In Wolf Hall or Bring Up the Bodies several of Mantel’s characters don a costume or guise at some point, some of which are realistic and mimetic, for example those one worn by Henry Norris ‘his Moorish drapery, […] face blacked’ (Bring Up, 152) and William Brereton, in the costume of ‘an antique huntsman, wearing […] real leopard skin’ (Bring Up, 152). Less realistic costumes are also described, for instance Francis Weston’s full-body dragon costume (Bring Up, 151), and even costumes which of a strongly allegorical nature, which was the case for ‘the ladies […] costumed as Virtues’ (Wolf Hall, 67), as well as Anne dressed as ‘Perseverance’ (Wolf Hall, 67).

Other characteristics of the masque will be discussed based on excerpts from The Cardinal’s Descent into Hell, a play performed at Hampton Court shortly after cardinal Wolsey’s death (Wolf Hall, 266-267). It should be mentioned that this entertainment was not a “real” masque, for it is described by Mantel as an ‘interlude’ (Wolf Hall, 266) — a popular
as well as courtly theatrical genre in which ‘dialogues on religious, moral and political themes’ (Norton, 556) were staged. However, since very different definitions exist for both genres, this particular entertainment shall not be defined as either a masque or an interlude, especially since definition and delineation is not the main intention of this dissertation. Instead, *The Cardinal’s Descent* will be used as an illustration of both genre-specific as well of more general characteristics of courtly theatre; and since both the masque and interlude explore political topics, similar reactions of the audience can be expected. It is in the study of these reactions and these reciprocities that the power of courtly theatre can be uncovered.

Before elaborating on the political significance of this type of entertainment, its most remarkable formal characteristics will be briefly discussed. Mantel’s descriptions, which should be interpreted as Cromwell’s observations, concentrate heavily on the actors’ elaborate costumes, which provides a strong impetus for associating this interlude with the genre of the masque. The king’s fool, Sexton, ‘dressed in scarlet robes’ (Bring Up, 302) and described as ‘a vast […] figure, supine’ (Wolf Hall, 266) impersonates the late cardinal Thomas Wolsey, who is ‘dragged across the floor, howling, by actors dressed as devils’ (Wolf Hall, 266), played by four of the king’s gentlemen, dressed up in ‘masks and […] hairy jerkins’ (Bring Up, 391). When these actors ‘pull off their hairy bodies’ (Bring Up, 302), an eerie image is created in which the actors seem to be shedding their skin, describing the striking verisimilitude of these costumes almost as a physical embodiment of this role. Again, the thin line between reality and fiction is carefully tiptoed.

Mantel also describes another set of material aspects which contribute to the enhancement of the spectacle’s verisimilitude as well as its extravagance, such as decor pieces — ‘canvas cloths painted with scenes of torture […] screens […] hung with flames’ (Wolf
— and even pyrotechnics — ‘fireworks blast out from corners of the hall’ (Wolf Hall, 267).

The masque also has a set of defining non-material characteristics, namely ‘dialogue, movement, music and performance space’ (Sharpe, 172), all of which can be perceived in Mantel’s descriptions of this ‘interlude’ (Wolf Hall, 266). The first aspect manifests itself in a comic dialogue between Cardinal and the devils: ‘the scarlet mountain […] asks, ‘What wines does he serve?’ […] they assure him, the devil is a Frenchman’ (Wolf Hall, 267). Secondly, ample movement is provided in the struggle between the cardinal and the devils, with the former rolling ‘across the floor, kicking out at at the demons’ (Wolf Hall, 266-267). Although no music is described, its absence can either be explained or compensated by the obtrusive presence of songs and shouts from the audience — ‘the court cries, Let him down! Let him down alive!’ (Wolf Hall, 267) as well as noises produced by the actor’s struggle — ‘he hears their grunts’ (Wolf Hall, 267). Finally, ‘frames upon which to drape canvas cloths’ (Wolf Hall, 266) are used to delineate the performance space within the great hall of Hampton Court.

Undeniably more important than the performance itself was the audience’s reaction to it, which one can suspect to have been similar for the masque and interlude alike, for both genres had similar content. The political ‘dance move’ (Sharpe, 171) which is described in *The Cardinal’s Descent*, is Wolsey’s degradation as Lord Chancellor, and the loss of his position as ‘Alter Rex’ (Wolf Hall, 153), which is followed by his disappearance from the earthly stage altogether. Here, the performance functions, in the words of Sharpe, as ‘a public affirmation of what had taken place’ (166). What this performance aims to present, is an image of Wolsey as not only a sinner in the face of God — who is punished for his rapaciousness by being dragged off to hell, to ‘Beelzebub’ (Wolf Hall, 267) — but also as a traitor in the face of his country, as someone who deserves to be punished. This second part
of this image is constructed by subjecting the fictional Wolsey to most cruel stage of the traitor's penalty, namely ‘conscious public disembowelling’ (Wolf Hall, 623). This bloody spectacle is described in a very graphic way: ‘lengths of scarlet woollen bowel [...] as the hangman would draw them’ (Wolf Hall, 267). They give such an impression of reality that Cromwell actually ‘sees a woman run away, a hand over her mouth’ (Wolf Hall, 267). Again, the boundary between play and fiction is explored. Anne Boleyn expresses her approval of these punishments by ‘laughing, pointing, applauding’ (Wolf Hall, 266), with other members of the court ‘laughing and chanting’ (Wolf Hall, 266) as well. Another group is described as uttering ‘catcalls and whistles, and songs’ (Wolf Hall, 266), while others ‘yelled and shook their fists, [...] swore and mocked’ (Bring Up, 391). This last reaction is not an expression of disapproval, but appears to be directed towards the presented image of the cardinal. Simultaneously, the audience expresses the accuracy of the representation as well as their disapproval of his character. The spectators respond to events in the play as ‘if it had been real’ (Bring Up, 391), and thus — for a third time — cross the border between reality and fiction. This immersion of the crowd in the spectacle is likewise apparent in their requests to ‘Let him down! Let him down alive!’ (Wolf Hall, 266), and may remind the reader of the ‘groans and shouted threats’ (Wolf Hall, 55) uttered by the people who witnessed Wolsey’s actual degradation and his subsequent removal from York Place.

Another aspect of Anne’s reaction to the play, namely her proclamation that this play is ‘good enough to be printed’ (Wolf Hall, 266) should be considered as well. Henry’s government produced a ‘vast corpus of literature printed to commemorate these events’ (Strong, 19), which contained ‘descriptions and [...] commentaries [...] to enable those who were not there to savour the transitory wonder and to grasp its import from afar’ (Strong, 21). These written reports did indeed bridge the inherent immediacy and
ephemerality of these entertainments (Strong, 19), but Anne endows them with an additional function. Not only does Anne expresses her desire that these plays should be printed and disseminated, she also wants these written versions to enable to ‘play it all over again’ (Wolf Hall, 266). Official reports gain a second function, namely as a script for a reenactment. It can be presumed that the intention of reenactments of these play had the intention to further engrain this particular image of the cardinal into the people’s minds and to have an ‘example made’ (Wolf Hall, 360) on a later date.

Mantel’s descriptions of masques and similar entertainments demonstrates her understanding of both the theatrical and political aspects of this typically English act of representation, which communicates its role as ‘a cultural and political force’ (Mulryne, 4) to the reader. What is more, by encouraging the reader to take parts in a constant balancing act between reality and fiction, and by describing the passionate participation of the audience in the event, she brings her contemporary audience closer to the actual experience of the sixteenth century audience.

### 2.2.2. The Banquet

Another type of indoor entertainment fundamental to Henry VIII’s political strategy which is described in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, is the banquet. The importance of this type of event was observed by — and commented on — by its contemporaries, especially by sixteenth century playwrights (Barry, 41), whose depiction of the banquet — as an imitation of the ‘pomp, ceremony, and decorum surrounding royalty in real life’ (Barry, 14) — meant to reveal ‘royalty's function as performance’ (Barry, 7). Hilary Mantel shares this interest, and describes not one, but several banquets throughout *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. For
lack of a singular, comprehensive description — there is not one particular banquet which stands out amongst the rest — descriptions of various banquets are combined in order to reveal how Mantel illustrates how ‘Henry’s taste for [...] banquets [...] profoundly affected the(ir) conception of power’ (Greenblatt, 28). What is more, the enhancement and expansion of communal dining, which is perhaps one of the most essential and universal rituals performed by humankind hereby functions as an excellent example of how ‘the mental protocols of festival [extended] into the conduct of everyday life’ (Mulryne, 8). Although our contemporary notion of the banquet does bear some resemblances to its sixteenth century counterpart the latter was, in true sixteenth century fashion, of a much more spectacular nature.

Mantel describes the banquet in the context of the celebration of solemn events such as Thomas Boleyn’s ‘elevation to [...] Earl of Wiltshire’ (Wolf Hall, 199) or Anne’s coronation (Wolf Hall, 462). In her descriptions of these crowded dinners, Mantel makes reference to music, — ‘the musicians carrying in pipes and lutes, harps and rebecs, hautboys, viols and drums’ (Wolf Hall, 388) — singing — ‘The king sings to the lute’ (Wolf Hall, 390) and dancing — ‘the dancers are resting [...] from the galliards, pavanes and almanes (Wolf Hall, 390) — during and/or following the meal. Mantel describes these entertainments as marginal, peripheral aspects of the banquets, which is surprising, since this plays down the spectacular, theatrical character of the banquet significantly. However, as a matter of compensation, Mantel transposes an overt sense of abundance onto the dinner table, where guests are offered no less than ‘twenty-three dishes’ (Wolf Hall, 473). What is more, theatre literally makes it way onto the dinner table, as the guests are given ‘marzipan figures, [...] to make plays with after supper’ (Wolf Hall, 114). This insistence on abundance is only a slight compensation for a relative lack of spectacle; the reader is offered a more easily digestible
version of an otherwise — keeping with the same figurative language — heavily “seasoned” event.

Still, Mantel manages to highlight the banquet’s inherent theatricality. By describing the large amount of attention which her characters attribute to the banquet’s seating chart, she reveals an important underlying level of theatricality to the banquet. Courtiers have formerly been said to take ‘place in the round of ritual’ (Strong, 21) during performances at court, but the importance of arrangement is almost nowhere as literal as during the banquet. For this reason, Stephen Greenblatt’s description of the banquet as ‘ceremonial’ (28) suits Mantel’s portrayal of the banquet better than Barry’s emphasis on spectacle, due to a prevalence of ceremony (and decorum) over spectacle.

Much like the presence of the monarch during the masque, the presence of the monarch ‘at the head of the table’ (Bring Up, 278)’ was of profound importance during the banquet. When absent, the monarch was represented by his Lord Chamberlain, who likewise took place ‘at the top table’ (Bring Up, 123); during Anne’s coronation banquet the newly-crowned consort occupies this central position, while her husband retreats a concealed ‘gallery, high above’ (Wolf Hall, 470-471), not entirely dissimilar from his attendance of his wife’s coronation in ‘a box screened by a lattice, sequestered into the painted stonework’ (Wolf Hall, 465). For once, Anne is the protagonist of the spectacle; and her description as ‘the flower of the court and the nobility of England’ (Wolf Hall, 470-471) underscores the figurative implications of her literal central position: the event evolves around her, and her alone. Again, ‘the attention of the nation is concentrated on one person doing interesting actions’ (Bagehot qtd. Sharpe, 11). Even though she is not the monarch, she is likewise able to represent him and his values.
Not only did the king — or his representative — occupy a central position, he and his consort were seated ‘at the dais’ (Wolf Hall, 387), which is ‘a raised surface at one end of a […] room’ (“Dais”). This raised structure closely resembles a stage, a resemblance which is reinforced by the presence of a ‘canopy of state’ (Wolf Hall, 473), which further demarcates the royal couple’s ‘performance space’ (Sharpe, 172). Additionally, a canopy was not just an element of interior design, but an highly recognisable monastic symbol. Its presence on the dais strongly resembles the presence of thrones, crowns, sceptres and other royal attributes on the early modern stage, where they were used to signify the power and majesty pertaining to the king’s character (Barry, 23-24, 27).

Another remarkable aspect of the banquet is the relative debasement of any other attendees as a result of the king’s elevation. Whereas Anne ‘sits beside Henry at the dais’ (Wolf Hall, 387), his advisor Cromwell takes place at ‘a table, somewhat lower in status, but served with due honour, for functionaries like himself’ (Bring Up, 123). Not only does Cromwell describe his — literally as well as figuratively — lower position, his description of being served with honour indicates the presence of even lower tables, and of the presence of a high-to-low hierarchy in the dining hall. What is more, even within the highest echelons of power, this high-low hierarchy is present: Mary Tudor ‘will not sit below the little princess’ (Wolf Hall, 553). This idea of a connection between a figuratively lower position in the courtly hierarchy and a literal “lower” position during the banquet is confirmed when Anne offers Mary the freedom not to dine with her half-sister, ‘so no question of her lower rank will arise’ (Bring Up, 175). Mary’s refusal to take a seat below her half-sister actually marks a powerful act of resistance to, which will be discussed in more depth in the third chapter.
Court life was governed by a strict hierarchy (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 16), and the banquet presented an opportunity to visualise this hierarchy, and lay it out for all to see. The guests taking place at the table, also take their ‘place in the round of ritual’ (Sharpe, 21). Regardless of them remaining seated, this careful orchestration around the dinner table resembles a strictly choreographed dance, or even a game of musical chairs. This metaphor will be revisited in the third chapter of this dissertation.

Why was this visualisation of court hierarchy so important? A first reason for the high-low orientation of the court, can be linked to a sixteenth century ‘philosophy which believed that a truth could be apprehended in images’ (Strong, 56) — thus providing a link between the observation of a literal difference in height and the internalisation of a figurative difference in rank. In her novels, Mantel forwards some other possible reasons. First of all, the elevated position of the king and members of the royal family may have had the intention ‘to show [their] majesty to better effect’ (Wolf Hall, 168). As a result, those seated below the dais were reduced to the role of an audience and encouraged to behold their king, again concentrating ‘the attention of the nation […] on one person’ (Sharpe, 11), effectively elevating the king (and by extension his family) to the protagonists, or ‘principal actor[s]’ (Sharpe, 172) of these events. Furthermore, the concept of gaining access to power in ‘proximity to the royal body’ (Sharpe, 533) supports the impression that those sitting closer to the king were also higher in rank — and thus more powerful. Additionally, these people could much more easily observe changes in the countenance of their king, some of which revealed weaknesses of both his body and his mind (Robbeets, 32) which turned out to be an instrument through which they could assert some form of power over their ruler (Robbeets, 27). Finally, the top tables had the best position from whence they were able to observe the banquet in its entirety, for ‘the closer one was to the king, the nearer one’s eyes were to reading the unfolding spectacle
with his eyes’ (Strong, 73). This allowed them to observe to those of lower rank, and respond to their behaviours if needed. Again, we see how the reciprocity in this particular act of representation is of great importance, even when its theatricality is much less overt.

This brings us to a description of some of these ‘interesting actions’ (qtd. Bagehot, Sharpe, 11) which the king was able to perform during banquets, and their consequences for his reception by the people present. Henry’s most memorable performance at the table in Wolf Hall and Bring Up the Bodies was based around a carefully orchestrated *acte de presence* of his daughter Elizabeth. Henry displays the princess Elizabeth to the court, as he ‘bounces her in his arms […] coos to her. Up to the sky he says, and tosses her up’ (Bring Up 173). This loving, playful behaviour provides a drastic contrast with Henry’s otherwise robust countenance. He intently shows himself as a kind, fatherly figure to his “perfect” daughter. However, when her mood turns around, Elizabeth is ‘plucked up, wrapped up, swept away and […] exits, in procession.’ (Wolf Hall, 493). By presenting himself as a father to his child, he also intends to present himself as a paternal figure to his nation, to whom ‘he wants to be Henry the Beloved, a father to his people, a shepherd to his flock’ (Bring Up, 244). What is more, he almost simultaneously affirms Anne’s second pregnancy — for ‘the first time […] in public’ (Bring Up, 173) — followed by the statement that Elizabeth ‘looks forward to seeing her little brother’ (Bring Up, 173). He seizes the opportunity to depict his marriage as (very) fertile, and announces the birth of a male heir. The latter equates to the promise of continued Tudor dynasty, and subsequently of a stable, peaceful England. All these promises were perfectly timed, for promises of stability were of fundamental importance after the Dowager Queen’s recent passing. Her death provides the perfect opportunity for the her late husband to present his marriage to his second wife in a whole new light, in order to give those who had
clung onto Katherine as their ‘rightful queen’ (Wolf Hall, 465) the opportunity to realign their unwavering loyalty.

Returning to the powerful images which Henry presented to his court, it should be noted that their reach extended well beyond the walls of the court: ambassador Eustache Chapuys is ‘informed’ (Bring Up, 178) of Henry’s and Elizabeth’s performance by an undisclosed source. Quite similarly, the Wolsey household had also ‘heard of it’ (Wolf Hall, 199) when Anne first sat down at the top table. Although the banquet may come across as a much more private and less overtly political event — especially in comparison to the politically charged character of the masque — banquets were reported outside the walls of court in a very similar way. Again, the king’s subjects at large were kept in mind ‘as the wider audience’ (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 16). After all, every ‘interesting action’ (qtd. Bagehot, Sharpe, 11) by the king was relevant, and every image of the king was therefore made to be disseminated.

The combination of fixed places, the prominence of the royal table and the guarantied report of banquets, brings us to the power of banquets to reflect changes in the political landscape. When ‘Anne sat where Katherine should sit’ (Mantel, Wolf Hall, 199), a seemingly slight alteration of the banquet’s setting instantly promotes Anne to one of the highest positions in the realm. As she occupies the place closest to the king, she thus acquires the power which Katherine simultaneously loses. These modifications of the seating chart call forth an image of the power dynamics at Henry’s court as a game of musical chairs. Much like the dynamic nature of the masque moved its audience to react and thus participate, these alterations of the banquet’s structure sparked reactions from the audience. Due to the resistant character of the reactions described, these reactions as well as the trope of the musical chairs will be considered more closely in the third chapter of this dissertation.
And thus, the banquet transformed one of the most mundane acts of survival — eating — into an opportunity for spectacle, image-making and rigorous orchestration, with the king and members of his family at the centre of not only their guests’ attention, but of that of their entire nation.

2.3. Civic Fêtes

The description of the court as the king’s ‘principal stage’ (Sharpe, 157) is challenged by the presence of another important type of festival during Henry’s reign, namely the civic fête or civic festival. Even though ‘many below the levels of nobility had access to the court’ (Sharpe, 144), both directly and indirectly (i.e. via report), and recent developments in print provided an ever-increasing number of subjects with access to official and unofficial printed records of courtly acts of representation (Sharpe, 144 & 157), most people would never set a foot in court. Instead, they gained access to courtly splendour and representations of royal power by attending civic festivals (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 16). This also allowed them access to the physical body of the king, which they otherwise only perceived in two-dimensional woodcuts and illustrations, or in the even less tangible written word (Sharpe, 141).

There were several reasons for the monarch to invest in civic festivals, the first being that civic festivals presented yet another opportunity for the king to display his taste for ‘abundance […] and overpowering insistence on cost’ (Greenblatt, 29). This was especially true for Henry VIII, who was known for a strong personal tendency toward representation, and he did not only implement his elaborate representational programme based on “mere” pragmatic considerations (Trussler, 55). Secondly, civic fêtes were heavily inspired by
catholic liturgical spectacles, which were inherently popular and made to be experienced by many people at once (Sharpe, 48). What is more, civic festivals actually benefited from being beheld by many, because ‘large audiences […] enhanced the authority of the performers and the impression the day left (Sharpe, 169). Thirdly, the city was considered a fundamental location with regard to ‘the initiation and maintenance of a common culture’ (Mulryne, 1), ideally a common culture in which a shared ‘Tudor Myth’ (Trussler, 51 & Sharpe, 12) was deeply engrained. The cultural process of a monarch’s legitimation could namely be enacted ‘by means of fictions as much as truths’ (Sharpe, 12), with the fiction in this case being the image which the monarch presented of himself across a wide variety of state spectacles. Finally, this diversification of location enabled a different, more diverse set of subjects to observe a royal act of representation (Sharpe, 161) and thus participate in the construction of royal authority. An additional benefit to this wider dissemination of an immediate, physical image of the king was that it was able to alleviate the impact of heavily mediated or subverted images of the king which the people received through report. This dissemination of alternative, popular images of the king will be discussed the fourth chapter, where these will be labeled as a powerful act of resistance — and by extension, as an act of appropriation of power.

Henry VIII’s reputation is strongly defined by his nearly incessant organisation of extravagant civic celebrations. The most notable of these excesses was the Field of the Cloth of Gold meeting between Henry VIII and Francis I in 1520, which was succeeded — though not superseded — by Emperor Charles V’s entry in London in 1522 (Sharpe, 163-165).

Mantel’s novels manage to cover a wide range of these civic types of representation, ranging from ‘grand state occasions’ (Sharpe, 24) to ‘more quotidian royal performances’ (Sharpe, 24). What is more, Henry VIII is portrayed as a ruler who expresses
an eagerness to present himself to his people: ‘A king should show himself, sometimes, don’t you feel? It would be amusing, yes?’ (Wolf Hall, 254). Mantel portrays the powerful monarch as willing to engage in the — at times complex — negotiations of ‘power and authority […] between rulers and subjects’ (Sharpe, 9). Regardless of Henry’s description of these events as ‘amusing’ (Wolf Hall, 254), these *actes de présence* had a profoundly political core.

The following subchapter focusses on Mantel’s descriptions of acts of representation which took place outside of the court. The civic entry is a “true” civic festival, whereas the progress was an act of representation which was not bound to a specific (urban) location but relied on a change of location instead. They are however included in the same chapter because they address the same audience — the common Englishmen. Regardless of this correspondence, these two types of representation represent respectively a highly occasional and a highly frequent act of representation.

### 2.3.1. The Civic Entry

Of all royal acts of representation, the royal entry is undoubtedly ‘the most public’ (Strong, 24). The tradition of orchestrating a solemn entry for a monarch who visited a town can be traced back to a military practice in classical antiquity, and primarily symbolised the monarch taking ‘possession of a city of town’ (Strong, 24). Having evolved over the course of many centuries into an elementary, “demilitarised” welcome of a monarch into a city, it was further elaborated in the late fourteenth century, when street pageants began to flank the monarch’s entry (Strong, 24). Soon after this expansion, this genre of royal veneration was redefined once more. Whereas Italian entries returned to the imagery of the
classical imperial triumph, in which the sovereign was presented ‘as a victorious hero’ (Strong, 25), the English tended less towards these classicisms. Instead, they retained the original (fourteenth century) pageantry, in the form of ‘tableaux vivants and street theatres’ (Strong, 36-37), which the Italians on their part had omitted.

2.1.3.1. From Military Victory to Family Affair

Mantel describes various civic entries throughout *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, some of which actually predate the Henrican Reformation. In the second novel, she describes a markedly older type of civic entry through a short flashback, which is presented as a collective memory. The entry which is described was orchestrated for Henry VIII’s father, Henry VII, who rode victoriously into London at the end of the War of the Roses. On this occasion, the young Henry accompanied his father ‘perched on the saddle of a warhorse, six feet from the ground and gripping the pommel with fat infant fists’ (Bring Up, 178). One can easily discern the profound military character of this entry, which makes this entry reminiscent of Italian entries. However, this military character was actually emblematic of the representational programme of Henry VII, as well as of that of Henry VIII during the first two decades of his reign. For twenty years, the young Henry ‘drew heavily on the precedent of his father’ (Sharpe, 131), a tendency which was quite apparent in his portraiture (Sharpe, 131). In general, the young Henry VIII tended to focus on a representation of his ‘martial prowess and England’s military might’ (Sharpe, 131), with the intention of presenting himself — as well as the nation which he essentially embodies — as ‘ready and able to fight’ (Sharpe, 158). As the years went by, the influence of personal and external circumstances on ‘the image of the king and […] and modes of (his) visual representation’ (own parentheses, Sharpe, 132) increased
significantly. Henry’s divorce from both Katherine and the Pope was a true catalyst in this
process, and resulted in a shift of his self-presentation towards more ‘polemical and personal
modes of [...] representation’ (Sharpe, 132). From then on, he preferred to show himself as a
self-assured and dignified Renaissance ruler (Sharpe, 131), and shifted from highly
impersonal, military imagery to a highly personal, sometimes even intimate self-
representation, with the aim of bridging ‘the distance between ruler and subject’ (Sharpe, 11).
This also resulted in the aforementioned representation of Henry as an affectionate pater
familias. Not only does this flashback explain (the development of) certain aspects of Henry’s
representation, it also emphasises differences between Henry VII and Henry VIII’s
representational programmes, and elucidates just drastically Henry VIII changed the
experience and construction of power in order to fit his personal tastes, intentions and
situation. Still, not every aspect of Henry VII’s representational programme was replaced
entirely. Henry namely continued — or rather reconfigured — the image of the ‘martial
prince’ (Sharpe, 158) in his self-representation as a ‘man of action’ (Sharpe, 159). Mantel
reflects this tendency in Henry’s love for hunting (Wolf Hall, 86), archery (Wolf Hall, 235)
and tennis (Wolf Hall, 351).

Mantel thus presents Henry’s self-representation as it was: a careful balancing act
which was ever-evolving, but also heavily shaped and inspired by the past. This brief
deviation from the discussion of royal entries provides a solid basis for the understanding and
determination of Henry’s mode of representation throughout the discussion of civic entries,
royal progresses as well as tournaments.
2.1.3.2. The Coronation Entry

The specific civic entry upon which our discussion of civic entries will be based, was simultaneously one of the rarest types of entries, as well as the second greatest entry of Henry VIII’s reign (Sharpe, 166). In *Wolf Hall*, Mantel describes the entry of Anne Boleyn into London as part of the celebrations surrounding her coronation. This event is yet another excellent example of Henry VIII’s harmonisation of his public and private life, for this event marked a great event in both. As mentioned in relation to Henry’s performance as a loving *pater familias* during a banquet, ‘family, marriage and sexuality were […] public as well as private spheres’ (Sharpe, 11), which enabled the monarch to merge his public and private body, and subsequently ‘bridge the distance between ruler and subject’ (Sharpe, 11). Henry takes this effort to a higher level, by merging the official appointment of his wife as his consort — for his marriage was solemnised ‘almost in secret, with no celebration, just a huddle of witnesses’ (Wolf Hall, 425) — with a public affirmation of her pregnancy — ‘He kisses her without formality, scooping back her gown, pinning it at her sides to show her belly to England.’ (Wolf Hall, 462).

Living up to her reputation as a novelist who was able ‘to recreate the texture of lived experience: to activate the senses, and to deepen the reader’s engagement through feeling’ (Mantel, “Can These Bones Live” 3), Mantel describes this event in minute, vivid detail. With descriptions of the technological feats of this time — ‘an aquatic dragon spitting fire’ (Wolf Hall, 462) — and even living gargoyles — ‘the city’s uncounted population of stone men and women and beasts […] shrieking and sniggering above the populace’ (Wolf Hall, 464) — Mantel describes a world which ‘at times ‘becomes unreal before our eyes’ (Greenblatt, 29). Again, the reader is encouraged to notice and explore this boundary
between reality and fiction. To compensate for these fantastic sights, Mantel also describes the sounds — ‘music rising around them like a shallow tide, silver ripples of sound’ (Wolf Hall, 471) — and smells — ‘blossom mashed and minced under the threading feet […] so scent rises like smoke’ (Wolf Hall, 463) — of the entry, allowing the reader to immerse themself into the unreal spectacle of these events via a more familiar path.

Mantel describes Anne’s coronation celebrations in great detail, including its preparations — ‘There will be pageants to design, banquets, and the city will be ordering gold and silver plate […] Talk to the Hanse merchants […] Get them planning. Secure yourself the work’ (Wolf Hall, 37). More important however are the descriptions of no less than three processions with Anne at their centre, all of which precede her actual coronation: the first by barge from Greenwich Palace to the Tower (Wolf Hall, 462), the second from the Tower to Westminster Abbey (Wolf Hall, 463) and the third in the Abbey, ‘seven hundred yards […] on the blue cloth that stretches to the altar’ (Wolf Hall, 466). Elements of these three processions will be combined — from the clothing of their participants down to the decoration of the streets through which they marched — but it is in Mantel’s descriptions of Anne’s actual entry into the city, which was the most elaborate event of the coronation celebrations (Strong, 24) that the importance of the people’s participation in the queen’s investigation, as well as the imagery which was designed for her are most apparent.

In describing the formal aspects of Anne’s entry, Mantel mostly describes the streets of London which have been transformed almost beyond recognition. The presence of pageants and living statues ‘at every turn on the route’ (Wolf Hall, 463), define this entry as typically English (Strong 37). In addition to these elaborate spectacles, heraldic images provide a more subtle, static counterpart: ‘her white falcon emblem crowned and entwined with roses […] tapestries and banners’ (Wolf Hall, 463). Both made use of, or were based on images and
symbols which were very well-understood by the average sixteenth century citizen, but to a contemporary audience comes across as ‘strange attributes which we can no longer easily read’ (Strong, 56), which is perhaps why Mantel does not describe them in detail. In addition to — or functioning as a compensation for — these “illegible” images, Mantel describes how there were ‘recitations of her virtue’ (Wolf Hall, 463), which demonstrates exactly what these ‘strange attributes’ (Strong, 56) meant to communicate to the audience. This is one of Mantel’s many attempts ‘to make the Tudor age intelligible for us’ (Arias, 22), which is an intrinsic aspect of her work as an author of historical fiction.

On this city-turned-stage, the new queen performs the principal part in a ‘procession’ (Wolf Hall, 463) which combines various visual elements into a dazzling whole. First and foremost, Mantel once again describes how the court’s (and realm’s) hierarchy is visualised. As Anne is carried by sixteen knights ‘in a white litter hung with silver bells’ (Wolf Hall, 463), she is lifted once again — literally as well as figuratively — to a higher level: at the top of the event, and consequently at the top of the hierarchy. What is more, her being carried not only results in her being raised above her entourage but can also be interpreted as a visualisation of the “support” of the court to her new title. Not only is she presented on top of, but also in the middle of everything: she is positioned in the midst of a shoal of dignitaries, preceded by ‘the retinue of the French ambassador. The judges […] the Knights of the Bath […] the bishops, Lord Chancellor Audley and his retinue, the great lords ’ (Wolf Hall, 463) and followed by ‘ladies on palfreys […] and ancient dowagers’(Wolf Hall, 463). The importance of Anne’s central position has already been discussed in relation to her placement at the coronation banquet, where it emphasised her position in the centre of everyone’s attention.
The image presented was thus not ‘just of one […] woman but of an entourage’ (Sharpe, 20). What is more, the various cuts and colours of the clothing of the people within this entourage signals their respective places within the (courtly) hierarchy. By dressing the ‘judges in scarlet […] Knights of the Bath in blue-violet […] great lords in crimson velvet’ (Wolf Hall, 463), they were all assigned a visible marker of their respective rank, in order to present an image of a ‘tamed nobility’(Sharpe, 20) who had subjected themselves not only to the king’s new wife and queen, but — perhaps more important with regard to Anne’s coronation — to the now significantly higher position of someone who was once their peer. The importance of the royal entourage is also emphasised in the description of Anne’s procession to the Tower, during which she is accompanied by ‘her women, her guard […] all those proud and nobles souls’ (Wolf Hall, 462). There was also a material aspect to these processions. As will be described in the analysis of Mantel’s descriptions of royal progresses, the display of ‘all the ornaments from the king’s court’ (Wolf Hall, 462) was an effective and relatively common representational strategy which Mantel gladly adopts in her novels. Sharpe defines these ornaments as ‘movable goods, jewellery, clothes and suchlike’ (Sharpe, 151). Anne’s entourage thus unified an externalisation of courtly hierarchy and obedience with an externalisation of the court’s material splendour, creating an effect of overall awe.

Having discussed Anne’s “visual context”, the next thing to discuss is Anne’s individual representation. As mentioned earlier, Anne’s virtues are recited alongside the entry’s route (Wolf Hall, 463). Though these are not specified, Mantel describes the virtues of a queen as follows: ‘She must have all the virtues of an ordinary woman, but she must have them to a high degree […] more modest, more humble, more discreet, and more
obedient’ (Bring Up, 256). Although these values do not seem to be reflected in the lavishness which surrounds her, they may be integrated in Anne’s personal presence and performance.

Sharpe describes Anne’s representation during her coronation as resembling ‘a classical heroine, saint and fertile mother’ (Sharpe, 167), in which the aforementioned values of modesty and obedience can indeed be recognised. Mantel’s descriptions of Anne focus mostly on her representation as a saintly figure. The combination of descriptions of her static countenance — ‘her face held in a conscious solemn smile’ (Wolf Hall, 463) — with descriptions of her ‘shimmering […] strange skin’ (Wolf Hall, 463) creates the impression of Anne being made of marble or glass, and resembling a statue. What is more, her being carried by ‘sixteen knights […] in a white litter hung with silver bells’ (Wolf Hall, 463) calls forth images of the procession of a saint’s statue during their celebration. The celebration of Saints’ days was one of the many occasional Catholic liturgical spectacles upon which the civic fête was so strongly inspired. (Norton, 537 & Strong, 21). The representation of a new queen upon her entry in the capital as the statue of a saint in procession is a perfect example of how the rituals formerly belonging to catholic liturgical celebrations had appropriated as ‘a vehicle for dynastic apotheosis’ (Strong, 22-23). The adoption of this established, recognisable image facilitated the apprehension and acceptance of a positive image of Anne by the public. In addition to Anne’s saintly representation, subtle references to her virginal state — the trademark of nearly every female saint — are made. The colour of the Anne’s clothing as well as the litter on which she is carried, is white (Wolf Hall, 463), which fulfils its quintessential role as a very recognisable western symbol of purity and virginity. Mantel also describes how Anne wears ‘her hair loose’ (Wolf Hall, 463), a coiffure which she describes earlier as ‘virgin-style’ (Wolf Hall, 387). Anne’s visibly pregnant state could be seen as a complication or even opposition to this virginal status, but simultaneously presents an opportunity to impose yet
another layer of identity on Anne. In her representation as both a virginal saint and a ‘fertile mother’ (Sharpe, 167), Anne approximates the highest and most recognisable model of modesty, namely the Virgin Mother Mary — the Queen of Heaven. This incorporation of crystal-clear Catholic imagery makes an even stronger point for Mantel’s awareness of the continuation and extension of pre-Reformation ecclesiastical language and imagery within this early modern ‘liturgy of state’ (Strong, 21-22). Although the uneducated reader might not instantly make this connection, the image of Anne still leaves quite a striking impression.

Taking a step back from the integration of Anne’s pregnancy into her representation as a saint, Anne’s pregnancy in and of itself had another important function beside offering a glimpse into the king’s private family life — and thus bridging the gap between him and his subjects (Sharpe, 11). The image of a childbearing queen is synonymous to that of a fertile queen; of a woman who reassured her husband but also his subjects of not only the continuation of the Tudor dynasty, but also of a stable England (Sharpe, 162). Additionally, the image of Anne as a mother complements Henry’s aforementioned representation as a strong *pater familias*. If Henry presents himself as a loving father to his people (Sharpe, 169), then should be presented as their caring mother.

Finally, Mantel also includes Anne’s representation as a ‘classical heroine’ (Sharpe, 167) in *Wolf Hall*, but limits the scope of this representation to the private sphere of Anne’s apartments in the Tower. There, on the walls of her chambers, ‘Minerva’s owl [and] a barefoot Diana’ (Wolf Hall, 449) are painted. Both make a clear reference to chaste, virginal goddesses from classical antiquity. Instead of “embodying” these goddesses herself, the fresco’s “embody” Anne, for Cromwell had ordered the painters to give ‘*All goddesses […] dark eyes*’ (Wolf Hall, 449) which mimic Anne’s ‘dark glance’ (Wolf Hall, 204). Although these images will most likely never be perceived by largest part of the king’s subject, they — like courtly
entertainments — might be seen and reported by the painters themselves, or by one of the many courtiers and servants who surrounded Anne; again, a ‘wider audience’ (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 16) is kept in mind.

These concurrent representations of Anne as both a Catholic saint and an ancient Greek goddess, each in their respective “performance location”, exemplifies how Mantel very effectively presents the reader with a disentangled — and thus more easily readable — yet complete image of Anne. Although her representation as ‘classical heroine, saint and fertile mother’ (Sharpe, 167) is skilfully disassembled, it still retains some complexity in the contrasts between virginity and fertility, and Roman polytheistic and christian imagery. What is more, these contrasting images can be interpreted as another attempt by Mantel to emphasise the gradual character of the ‘shift in iconography and imagery’ (Strong, 36-37) which took place in early modern England.

In conclusion, the coronation entry was an ‘aggregate[…] of images’ Strong, 64) in which Anne was presented not just as a queen — which was essentially also a role, performed by a woman adorned with the necessary props: ‘the sceptre, the rod of ivory, […] the crown of St Edward’ (Wolf Hall, 485) — but also equalled to various other women of both virtue and power. Again, the necessity to represent a new queen in such an elaborate fashion should be emphasised. Anne’s elaborate coronation ceremony owed much to the situation of England at the time of her coronation: with the Henry’s councillors and courtiers divided over the his divorce and remarriage, ‘Henry was more than ever concerned to claim popular support’ (Sharpe, 168) and spared time, money nor effort to do so. After all, in times of division, a public ritual was essential, for it was able to fulfil ‘its most important role […] as an official and public affirmation of what had taken place’ (Sharpe, 162). The coronation
entry and the other celebrations and rituals surrounding it were meant to accelerate and ensure Anne’s “adoption” as queen of the English people.

Still, the participation of the public during the coronation entry remained of profound importance. When it comes to the actual reception of Anne’s representation by the public, the protagonist herself claims the support of the people, saying that ‘The streets cheered for me. I heard them’ (Wolf Hall, 469). Indeed, the ‘applause of the citizens’ (Sharpe, 160) was an essential part of entries, for it allowed the spectacle’s protagonist to respond to the people ‘with thanks and warm words’ (Sharpe, 160) and thus enable them to take part in a ‘dialogue(s) with […] sovereign power’ (Sharpe, 161). Interestingly, the enthusiasm with which the audience greets Anne is challenged by imperial ambassador Eustache Chapuys, who states that ‘My men who were among the press today say they heard few voices raised for the concubine’ (Wolf Hall, 465). By questioning whether the audience behaved orderly and according to the event’s protocols, Chapuys actually makes an attempt to undermine the event’s “efficiency” in the construction of power and authority for Anne. After all, any sign of disorder — or in fact any slight divergence from the correct order — ‘threatened to puncture the ideals of harmony expressed’ (Sharpe, 170) in the event and was able to subvert the (effect of) the ritual (Sharpe, 170). This very apparent discrepancy between reports actually has another effect on the construction of power, which will be explored in depth in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Still, the behaviour of the crowd was not the be-all-and-end-all of the construction of Anne’s power. During the ‘entry of a royal bride into her capital city, the presence of her new subjects lining the streets constitutes her official recognition as a consort’ (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 16). Indeed, the presence of a public ‘validated the occasion’ (Sharpe, 169) in much the same way as the audience’s responses to the spectacle. In addition to making note of (the
importance of) their presence (and behaviour), Mantel emphasises the magnitude of the audience, by making a reference to them as ‘thousands of eyes’ (Wolf Hall, 476). Not only does this emphasise just how many people were present as witnesses — thus “emphasising” Anne’s validation — but the magnitude of the audience actually enhanced ‘the authority of the performers’ (Sharpe, 169). These fundamental aspects of public representation will be explored in more depth in the following chapter, which explores the people’s attempts to undermine and resist the construction of royal power.

A final remark which should be made about the audience’s role during civic ceremonies, is that even though ‘many witnessed a coronation entry’ (Sharpe, 21), not every subject was able to attend. Mantel gives a very clear account of the report of the coronation entry ‘when this is remembered, and told to those who were not there’ (Wolf Hall, 464). This confirms the continuation of the relevance of this, as well as any other act of representation long after they had transpired. These descriptions and […] commentaries [enabled] those who were not there to savour the transitory wonder and to grasp its import from afar’ (Strong, 21), and thus also allowed them to become (second-hand) witnesses. In the final chapter of this dissertation, the people’s engagement with these reports — both official and unofficial — will be discussed, which reveals the turbulent afterlife and profound impact of these descriptions on the construction of power.

The civic entry, which in this particular case should be more narrowly defined as the coronation entry, incorporates many aspects of the formerly discussed court fêtes: its insistence on reaching a larger, predominately common audience - both immediately and through report —, its unmistakable, almost over-the-top theatricality, its transformation of the designated performance location and a clear visualisation of courtly hierarchy, et cetera. In more than one way, the civic entry can be interpreted as an externalised, enlarged and
exaggerated version of the court festival. Finally, her dissection of Anne Boleyn’s intricate, layered mode of representation into separate but still partially overlapping images is an exceptional feat worth mentioning. It facilitates the contemporary reader’s understanding of Anne’s actual representation, which would otherwise come across as outdated, strange and complex.

2.3.2. The Royal Progress

Civic festivals and ceremonies, of which the coronation entry is only one of many types, were witnessed by many subjects (Sharpe, 21), and thus effectively increased the people’s direct — though not unmediated — access to images of the monarchy. Still, this particular type of representation addressed only a limited, predominantly “urban” public. In the hope of reaching a larger and more diverse audience, Renaissance monarchs were able to resort to another type of procession: the royal progress, which quite literally took ‘the royal show on the road’ (Sharpe, 173). Of all the representational genres discussed in this dissertation, the progress is the least dependent on a specific or delineated performance location, and was in this aspect very similar to early modern theatre (Dillon, 1).

What is more, the royal progress also compensates for the occasional or even rare nature of civic entries by being one of the most frequent and predominant forms of representation employed by Henry VIII, who was ‘a king often on the move’ (Sharpe, 173) and ‘spent a considerable time on progress [...] between royal residences or on the routes between London and Greenwich or the ports’ (Sharpe, 157). Mantel faithfully depicts Henry’s “wanderlust”: from an extensive ‘summer progress’ (Wolf Hall, 223) in which the king rides
‘west […], as far as Bristol […] from Windsor, then to Reading, Missenden, Abington, moving across Oxfordshire’ (Wolf Hall, 648) to his more limited perambulation during the winter months, on an ‘acclimated circuit: Greenwich and Eltham, […] Whitehall and Hampton Court’ (Bring Up, 123), Henry is always planning his next move.

Although his visits to ‘his friends in Wiltshire, in Sussex, in Kent, […] his own houses, or the ones he has taken…’ (Wolf Hall, 223) may seem to serve a primarily leisurely objective, one should keep in mind that the king’s travels were an important aspect of the reaffirmation of his authority (Sharpe, 174). Mantel describes how, during the king’s visits to other estates, ‘Every household strives to put forward its best show for the king (Bring Up, 6), an effort which was reciprocated by Henry, who would seize this opportunity to ‘display(ing) his athletic skills or virtues’ (Sharpe, 174). Mantel illustrates the latter by emphasising Henry’s taste for hunting during these trips — ‘He means to hunt out of Chertsey for a few days. […] Then he will ride by way of Guildford to visit Lord Sandys […] From there, depending on the weather, and the game, he will go to William Paulet at Basing.’ (Wolf Hall, 290). What is more, she underscores the performative nature of these hunting trips by describing its participants continued attention to decorum: ‘Early in the day he lost his hat, so by custom all the hunting party were obliged to take of theirs. The king refused all offers of substitutes’ (Bring Up, 4). Mantel also makes a clear note of (some of) the virtues which Henry exhibits during his progresses: ‘You cannot see Henry and not be amazed […] His height is six feet three inches, and every inch bespeaks power. His carriage, his person, are magnificent. […] a father of an ideal sort […] he is the pattern of knight errantry’ (Bring Up, 42-43). Some of these ideals are reminiscent of images of the king which have been discussed in relation to previously discussed acts of representation. In this interaction between the king and his hosts, a mutual need — or even urge — to take part in deliberate acts of representation
is demonstrated, which emphasises the dialogic relation between the king and his noble subjects to an hitherto unequalled extent.

Once again, the king can be described as not only answering to a personal desire to travel, but also to the expectation to ‘show himself, sometimes’ (Wolf Hall, 254); for his people had a profound ‘desire to see the king’ (Sharpe, 140). This ‘sometimes’ acquires somewhat of an ironic character when considering the fact that Henry’s reign was in fact an ‘endless sequence of tourneys, disguisings, entertainments and pageants’ (Qtd. Fox, Sharpe, 159). Mantel also provides the reader with a more straightforward comment on Henry’s near-constant preoccupation with self-presentation, by letting Cromwell compare Henry to a travelling player — albeit in his particularly ironic Cromwellian tone: ‘If he had been called to a lower station in life he could have been a traveling player, and leader of his troupe’ (Wolf Hall, 437). Regardless of — or rather, due to — his occupation of the highest office in the realm, Henry is required to constantly perform the role of king, and his travels are no exception.

Another aspect of the royal progress which Cromwell addresses in this comment, is the involvement of ‘a troupe’, for a king never travelled alone. What is more, progresses deliberately ‘displayed the royal household’ (Sharpe, 51), again providing its spectators with ‘an image not just of one man or woman but of an entourage’ (Sharpe, 20). And thus, as a result of Henry’s frequent travels, ‘the court too was ever in motion’ (Sharpe, 173). Turning back to the previous discussion of the coronation entry, it has been made clear that this entourage was not just meant as accompaniment but actually fulfilled an important role in the construction of royal power. Furthermore, both the size and the configuration of this entourage had a profound impact on the reception and effect of these processions. First off, these royal entourages were by no means modest: The number of participants in ‘the royal
train’ (Bring Up, 5) could amount to up to ‘800 [people]’ (Sharpe, 173) or even ‘two thousand strong’ (Wolf Half, 390). Their sheer magnitude alone makes these progresses awe-inspiring, even without taking into account the pageants and civic entries which could be incorporated along the way (Sharpe, 51). A second characteristic of the king’s entourage was more subtle, yet by no means less effective. The participation of courtiers of various ranks meant to — once again — display and enforce ‘the hierarchy of court society’ (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 16) outside of court. In Wolf Hall, Mantel describes the visualisation of this hierarchy during progresses by means of a description of the limitation of individual courtiers’s entourages: ‘to a duke an entourage of forty, to a marquess thirty-five, to an earl twenty-four, while a viscount must scrape by with twenty’ (Wolf Hall, 390). A restriction of the amount of people which these powerful nobles and functionaries were allowed to take on progress can be interpreted as a restriction of the amount of space which they were allowed to occupy. This is a powerful symbol of the limitation of their power under their ruler, who Mantel often describes as occupying a considerable amount of space in support of his power. What is more, Sharpe perceives a similar tendency in Henry’s portraiture, wherein he likewise ‘dominates his space’ (Sharpe, 137). Mantel communicates this to her readers by means of descriptions of Henry’s impressive physique — ‘A broad man, a high man, Henry dominates any room’ (Bring Up, 31) — , through exaggerations of his physical appearance by means of clothing — ‘his big bejewelled chest’ (Wolf Hall, 144) — , a technique which his first wife also employed — ‘… as wide as she is high, stitched into gowns so bristling with gemstones…’ (Wolf Hall, 84) — , and finally though the (deliberate) alteration of his movements: ‘He spins around the room, arms wide …’ (Wolf Hall, 210) which has been mentioned earlier.

Not only is this a much more subtle way of visualising hierarchy, this limitation of the courtier’s entourages can also be interpreted as a literal interpretation of courtiers taking (a
predetermined) ‘place in the round of ritual’ (Strong, 21). What is more, by including the entourages of the monarch’s tame nobility, the representation of their obedience is extended to a representation of a tame court; and as this image is presented to the common audience, it implores them to behave similarly (Sharpe, 20). During progresses abroad, Mantel describes how Henry was accompanied by the possible claimants to the throne, and literally states Henry’s intention ‘to show how tame they are and how secure are the Tudors’ (Wolf Hall, 391). Henry’s deliberate representation of the obedience of both friend and enemy in the far corners of his realm as well as outside of it, makes the progress a very strong representation of his claim to the throne. Additionally, when returning to Cromwell’s comment on Henry’s status as a ‘leader of [his] troupe’ (Wolf Hall, 437), Henry can actually be interpreted as the court’s choreographer or stage director, who carefully measures and orchestrates his entourage of friends and foes. What is more, this comparison allows us to interpret Henry on progress in terms of Castiglione’s ideal prince, who is at described as being once the impresario and principal actor (Sharpe, 172).

A final implication of Cromwell’s ironic description of Henry as a traveling player has to be discussed still; namely the difference between an “actual actor” and the king. A king, as opposed to a traveling actor, did not have the option to refrain from acting when travelling between two performance locations or estates. The royal show was taken ‘on the road’ (Sharpe, 173) both figuratively — the king and his court brought their splendour to different parts of the realm — as well as literally, for a large part of the spectacle of the progress transpired on the road itself.

Focussing now on the implementation of this representational genre and its portrayal in writing by Hilary Mantel, two central aspects of the progress will be considered, namely
the participation of the common audience and the incorporation of so-called ‘movables’ (Sharpe, 48) in spectacles.

As mentioned multiple times before, the acts of representation — including the royal progress — depended strongly on the representation of ‘an image not just of one man or woman but of an entourage’ (Sharpe, 20). The members of this entourage have been defined as the nobles and other courtiers who surrounded Henry both at court and during his travels, but the progress also included a significant amount of material assets in addition to these human assets. Much like the coronation entry, which featured ‘the ornaments from the king’s court’ (Wolf Hall, 462), the progress made use of ‘movables’ (Sharpe, 48). Mantel expresses their large number by emphasising the extensive preparations for Henry’s summer progress, which is likened to ‘the evacuation of a fort’ (Wolf Hall, 293-294). This is no exaggeration, considering that no less than ‘six couples of hunting dogs’ (Wolf Hall, 293) as well as ‘the king’s furnishings’ (Wolf Hall, 294) are all taken along for the ride. Other goods, such as ‘jewellery, clothes and suchlike’ (Sharpe, 151) were also taken along, for it was ‘a matter of public policy’ (Sharpe, 151) for the king to open ‘his tapestries and cupboards of plays to public view’ (Sharpe, 151). Turning back to Cromwell’s comparison of Henry VIII to the leader of a troupe of travelling actors, one can consider these material components of the progress as the troupe’s props, which were staged as essential parts of the display of the monarch’s magnificence (Sharpe, 151).

But what is the use of an elaborate performance by well-trained actors and the display of such splendorous props if there is no audience? As with any other act of representation described in this dissertation, the presence of an audience enabled various essential ‘interactions’ (Sharpe, 50) between ruler and subject during this performance. What is more, progresses specifically allowed a ‘space(s) for difference’ (Sharpe, 50) in the interaction
between a king and his people, more so than any other act of representation. This resulted in a performance which was manifestly enacted in both directions (Sharpe, 50): from king to people, and from people to king. The progress thus not only meant ‘to represent the monarchy to subjects’ (Sharpe, 50), but also presented an opportunity for ‘the king to observe and listen to the people’s concerns’ (Sharpe, 50), making the progress perhaps the most dialogic act of representation. In *Wolf Hall*, the king’s subjects do not let this chance to voice their opinions go to waste: ‘They rise up out of ditches, and shout about Katherine’ (*Wolf Hall*, 587), beseeching or advising Henry to ‘take her back’ (*Wolf Hall*, 587). This interaction allows the king to perceive what the general opinion of him was ‘in village alehouses up and down England’ (*Bring Up*, 43), and — if he was willing — to engage in this complex negotiation of ‘power and authority’ (Sharpe, 9). Although Henry’s eagerness to take part in these negotiations has been described earlier — he describes these interactions as ‘amusing’ (*Wolf Hall*, 254) — Mantel also presents another side of Henry, as she describes his hostility towards the advice which his audience offers him: ‘How would they like it if I told them how to order their houses and wives and children? (*Wolf Hal*, 587). The monarch’s reaction to the negative responses by the audience, and their impact on the construction of power will be examined in the fourth chapter.

In conclusion, the progress can be seen as an increasingly more public, but less geographically defined extension of the civic entry — and thus also of the court fête. The most remarkable contribution of this subchapter to the discussion of the dialogic system of representational politics, and the role of the audience within this system, is Mantel’s representation of what will later be called popular agency (Sharpe, 50) — of the audience’s freedom to respond freely, and thus also negatively to royal representation — as well as of the
impression given of the possibility of a royal reciprocation in response to these popular expressions of disapproval.

2.4. Tournaments

The final “representational genre” which will be discussed in this chapter, is the tournament. Although this type of entertainment is less prominent in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Mantel still provides some important insights into its characteristics and its value as a political instrument.

The main reason for the relative absence of the tournament, which has briefly been touched upon in relation to the evolution of the civic entry in England, is the timeframe of the novels. During the Reformation, Henry’s self-representation gradually moved away from the image of ‘martial prince’ (Sharpe, 158), whereas before the Reformation, tournaments were employed by this same monarch to display his ‘personal courage and skill’ (Sharpe, 159). By presenting himself as such, he not only managed to display his own strength, but also that of his family as the current dynasty, the monarchy as an institution, and England as a whole (Sharpe, 159). This identity was not exclusive to Henry, but instead bore witness to a continued ‘fascination with the old chivalric code of behaviour’ (Norton, 534) in early modern times. By compounding and dramatising this medieval battle practice, the vitality of the tournament was able to survive well into the sixteenth century, but from the Reformation onwards its popularity and prevalence started to dwindle (Sharpe, 37 & Strong, 41). Mantel portrays this downward evolution in her novels: ‘This, surely, is the last day of knighthood. What happens after this — and such pageants will continue — will be no more than a dead
parade with banners, a contest of corpses’ (Bring Up, 342). Still, it survived, albeit in an “empty”, highly theatrical form.

Royal representation was a near-constant preoccupation during Henry VIII’s reign, but often cooccurred with a celebration of some sorts. Tournaments were likewise utilised to celebrate ‘a treaty […] or to mark a great marriage’ (Strong, 44). In Wolf Hall, jousts are organised to celebrate the birth of Anne’s first child. However, when a daughter is born against all odds, Henry orders to ‘Cancel the jousts.’ (Wolf Hall, 484). Another tournament is described as a part of the elaborate celebrations surrounding Anne's coronation: ‘And tomorrow the jousts’ (Wolf Hall, 474).

In her sporadic descriptions of tournaments, Mantel does not elaborate on the specific ‘rules, protocols, judges to see fair play’ (Wolf Hall, 534) which regulate these entertainments, but instead she focusses on the highly scripted, theatrical character of these entertainments. She describes the king’s propensity for winning: when the king ‘does run a course […] he is likely to win (Wolf Hall, 587). And indeed, ‘the monarch […] was always the victor’ (Strong, 44) in the tiltyard — or at least in the official records. Mantel correspondingly describes how these made sure to emphasise that ‘our Sovereign Lord the king has jousted best of all’ (Bring Up, 194). The “script” of these events was not only written in advance, but — if needed — heavily altered afterwards as well. This mediation of the court’s official reports of an entertainment is reminiscent of the mediation of reports of Anne’s coronation ceremony, but comes across as considerably less negative or “censoring”. A possible reason for this can be the overtly theatrical character of these events.

Since the ‘sole aim’ (Bring Up, 193) of tournaments — for all its participants — was not ‘to bring your opponent down’ (Bring Up, 193), but rather to make ‘a show’ (Wolf Hall, 586), it did in fact not matter who was victorious. However, when Cromwell tells his son not
to be ‘concerned about what showing he will make’ (Bring Up, 193), the double meaning of showing as both ‘a performance in a competitive activity’ (“Showing”) and ‘an opportunity for the public to see something’ (“Showing”) can make this advice come across as rather ambiguous. When keeping the intention of the tournament in mind, it becomes clear that the opportunity to show oneself, and be seen by others, was much more important than excelling at what you were seen to be doing.

This particular approach to the tournament captures the sixteenth century sensibility for all things theatrical, but could also be interpreted as a superficial and empty spectacle. This perspective is provided through Cromwell, who remembers a conversation with an old Portuguese knight, who described these “new” kinds of tournaments as a mere ‘display of idle luxury’ (Bring Up, 195). Much like the Duke of Suffolk, the knight functions as a window on the past. In his role as a representative of a culture and mindset of the past, he lays bare the roots — and subsequent evolution — of this representational genre.

Mantel further emphasises the theatricality of these tournaments by focussing on the participants’ armour, and thus pointing out their ‘use of costumes’ (Sharpe, 16). The armour which was worn in the lists is described as ‘armour of show quality’ (Wolf Hall, 437); it was beautiful — ‘the kind you buy from Italy to impress your friends’ (Bring Up, 260) — but was very different to ‘the kind you fight in’ (Bring Up, 260). Although it did not offer protection, it provided the participant with a refined appearance which emphasised their wealth and status and thus added to their self-presentation. What is more, by describing two kinds of armour — the fighting kind and the peacocking kind — Mantel once again demonstrates her awareness of the gradual evolution of the tournament into its early modern form. Finally, it was also possible for pageants and other entertainments and rituals to accompany a tournament, which then added to their already highly theatrical character (Sharpe, 159).
With regard to the audience of tournaments, Mantel focusses mostly on the noble part of the audience, who were treated with due honour: ‘pages […] placing silk cushions for the ladies’ (Bring Up, 341). These people were seated ‘in the towers that overlook the tilt yard’ (Bring Up, 341) — similarly to how the king was elevated during banquets — in order to bring the essential task of “seeing” to a good end. Though this is not specified by Mantel, this also allowed the audience to be seen by other members of the audience, as well as by the performers. This dynamic of seeing and being seen, of being both audience and performer is thus inherent to nearly all acts of representation which have been discussed in this chapter.

Although the crowd’s reactions to tournaments are not described directly by Mantel, they are indirectly represented in her description of a game of bowls, which also presented an opportunity for Henry to present himself as ‘a man of action’ (Sharpe, 159) — albeit in much more toned-down version, and in an increasingly less solemn context. The atmosphere of this game is said to be ‘as noisy as a tournament’ (Wolf Hall, 407), and its players are loudly ‘whooping, groaning, shouting of odds, wails, oaths’ (Wolf Hall, 407). Interestingly, these reactions very closely resembles the behaviour of the audience during public treason trials, for which ‘a fulminating crowd, shouting the odds’ (Bring Up, 433) is described.

Tournaments also allowed the king to truly take part in the spectacle and this — similarly to his participation in masques (Sharpe, 171) — could be realised in two distinct ways: either by being a participant in the tiltyard, or watching over the tournament from the audience. Mantel portrays Henry VIII at a later age, when ‘his bad leg forces him to sit with the spectators’ (Wolf Hall, 586), which results in a prevalence of the latter kind of participation. Ironically, Henry describes himself, from his position in the audience, as ‘not an actor at all’ (Bring Up, 343) even though — as has been established at the start of this chapter, — the attention of everyone present, was (supposed to be) concentrated on him at all times
Still, Mantel provides some minor insights into Henry’s participation in these entertainments, and how it contributed to his self-presentation as a martial prince (Sharpe, 158). She describes how ‘When he was still a minor the council forbade him to joust, but he did it anyway …’ (Bring Up, 29), and thus presents the young Henry as highly preoccupied with the construction of a strong, individual mode of representation. What is more, the dying down of this martial mode of representation is likewise illustrated: ‘it is hard to give up what you have worked at since you were a boy’ (Bring Up, 194), and presented as a result of the king’s personal, psychical circumstances. Again, the description of Henry’s creation of the image of himself as a martial prince, as well as his forced abandonment of this mode of representation shows how the tournament was a form which was still developing over the course of Henry VIII’s reign.

The tournament is presented as generally quite similar to the other types of representation described in this chapter, but apart from its similarity to the execution does not have any surprising or remarkable characteristics.

2.5. Conclusion

Overall, Mantel’s depictions of royal acts of representation, regardless of their occasion, location, or relative frequency are all marked by a high degree of historical accuracy and attention for detail — from the colour and cut of costumes, to the many stops along the road during royal progresses, to captivating sensory details. However, the level of accuracy of Mantel’s renditions goes far beyond surface level. In dividing the reader’s focus between the respective participation of the the king — and, by extension, his family, his representatives and his entourage — on one hand, and the king’s audience on the other, Mantel diverts their
attention away from this ‘one person doing interesting actions’ (Sharpe, 11) in order to present an image of an entire society engaged in interesting actions and reactions in response to those performed by their ruler. As a result of this, a much more dynamic impression of Henry VIII’s representational policy is given, in which a true ‘dialogue(s) with [...] sovereign power’ (Sharpe, 161) is presented to the reader. In representing representational policies, both sides of the dialogue need to be given a voice, otherwise these events transform into dazzling, but meaningless soliloquies of sovereign power. This disposition to present a dynamic, nuanced representation of the past extends itself into Mantel’s constant emphasis on the enduring emergence and establishment of these representational strategies, and — consequently — their enduring acceptance by the early modern English society.
3. Beyond Representational Politics: The Theatricalisation of Punishment

‘And everybody laughed except the dying.’ (Bring Up, 437)

3.1. Introduction

Similarly to how Mantel does not present an England where Henry VIII is the sole proprietor of power (Robbeets, 28), she does not present a society wherein acts of representation are the sole method through which royal power is constructed. Based on Mulryne’s description of the permeation of ‘mental protocols of festival into the conduct of everyday life’ (Mulryne, 8), other important events in Mantel’s novels can be discussed in similar terms. By doing so, is is possible to explore the transposition of (some of) the techniques and/or language pertaining to the formerly discussed representational genres onto other areas and events in which Henry likewise aimed to assert his power as monarch.

3.1.1. Forms of Persuasion: Cooperation Versus Oppression

Although the socio-political structure of the early modern period is primarily associated with the emergence of representational political structures, it should also be said that during the Reformation some ‘more brutal measures to enforce the royal will’ (Sharpe, 168) resurfaced, alongside other ‘cruder forms of propaganda’ (Sharpe, 168). These materialised in the form of
‘armies, law enforcement agents and instruments of force and punishments’ (Sharpe, 8), which are usually labeled as the dominant authoritative methods of the middle ages (Sharpe, 8). As a result, and contrary to what one may expect after the previous chapter, the Renaissance monarch was not entirely dependent on the compliance of his people, and remained able to exert or even impose his will (Sharpe, 9) by making use of these ‘brutal’ (Sharpe, 168) or ‘effective means’ (Sharpe, 8). It should however be mentioned that representational politics never took ‘second place to cruder mechanisms of persuasion and enforcement’ (Sharpe, 168) during this period. Still, these measures contributed strongly to the later construction of an image of Henry as an imperious, ruthless king, which would dominate his representation for the centuries to come (Robbeets, 14).

In *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, an awareness for the coexistence of these two seemingly paradoxical ‘forms of persuasion’ (Sharpe, 168) — one of which is based on reciprocity between ruler and subject, the other of which is clearly imposed by the former onto the latter — contributes to earlier classification of Mantel’s novels as works of revisionary historical fiction (Robbeets, 10). This coexistence — or, as will be argued below, coalescence — of political strategies pertaining to two distinct historical periods in her novels, further adds to Mantel’s depiction of Henry VIII’s reign as a period of transition, instead of as a radical turning point in history, and thus complements rather than complicates her aforementioned faithful portrayal of more “standard” acts of representation.
3.1.2. Types of Punishment

In her effort to paint a more nuanced picture of the politics structure of England during the sixteenth century, Mantel describes a variety of these ‘brutal measures’ (Sharpe, 168) which Henry could likewise employ to keep his subjects in check.

Henry VIII’s approach to punishment is described by Cromwell as the king’s ability to deprive a courtier of ‘all he has, at an angry man’s whim’ (Wolf Hall, 97). The emotional trigger, and the suddenness of this exertion of Henry’s power makes for a stark contrast with the rational humanist and classical inspiration which provided the foundation for his elaborate system of representational politics (Strong, 52). An exploration of Mantel’s description of Henry’s punitive policies thus elaborates mostly on the ways in which the author exhibits the king’s ‘protean quality’ (Jernigan, 12) and his ‘reputation for cruelty’ (Jernigan, 11), whereas the discussion of his representational policies mostly focussed on his taste for spectacle, splendour and ‘superabundance’ (Greenblatt, 28) and their respective impact on his construction of power.

Having defined Henry’s “style” of sanctioning, the types of punishments which he handed out should be defined next. What exactly does Henry deprive people of? Throughout *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Mantel describes three main types of punishment: dismissal from office, exile — either from court or from the country — and execution. Subjects can thus be deprived of either titles and/or offices, from their place of residence, or — in the most extreme cases — from their life. For the sake of conciseness, this chapter will focus solely on the execution, for a few reasons. First off, the execution is undoubtedly the most public type of punishment — it was public by definition until the early nineteenth
century (Mantel, “The Iron Maiden” 8) — whereas the presence of an audience was of a lesser or even no importance to the other two types. This focus on the presence and participation of an audience immediately provides a link to Henry’s representational strategies, which actually ‘required popular attendance and participation’ (Sharpe, 48). What is more, although Mantel’s descriptions of exiles and dismissals are laced with references to theatre, performance and other concepts connected to representational politics — court officials are quite literally described as actors ‘Everything Chapuys does, he notices, is like something an actor does.’ (Wolf Hall, 193) and their dismissals are consequently demonstrated by a deprival of the props and/or costumes pertaining to their office or role: ‘He is not wearing the Lord Chancellor’s chain […] Do you suppose that is the Seal of England […] the king […] is waiting with open hand.’ (Wolf Hall, 366) — she only includes direct references to “standard” acts of representation in her depiction of executions. Another reason for excluding these types of punishment, is the fact that it remains largely inconclusive whether these highly theatrical descriptions are a result of the author’s general preference for a theatrical style of writing (MacFarquhar, 5) or whether they reflect Mantel’s understanding of the extension of representational strategies and techniques not only ‘into the conduct of everyday life’(Mulryne, 8), but also into the realm of punishment. A discussion of Mantel’s depiction of the many degradations and exiles throughout her Cromwell novels might thus better be transposed to a separate paper, which focusses less on representational politics and more on Mantel’s style of writing.

Finally, this exploration of the contribution of executions to the construction of royal representation and power enables the discussion of a particular type of resistance against royal power which was exclusive to “participants” in executions, which can be found at the end of the following chapter.
3.2. The Execution

Another reason for exploring the relation between executions and more joyous acts of representation, is the contribution of this political strategy to Henry VIII’s ‘reputation for cruelty. (Jernigan, 11). The prevalence of executions — an age-old and extremely effective ‘mechanism […] of persuasion and enforcement’ (Sharpe, 168) — during his reign was pivotal in the later construction of his image as ‘a brutal ruler’ (Sharpe, 174): from the execution of his fathers’s advisors Empson and Dudley (Smith, 475) to the executions of not one, but two of his wives, as well as those of several other noblemen, churchmen and other unfortunate subjects, Henry’s mercilessness cast a dark shadow over his reign.

In much the same way as discharging and relocating courtiers created more distance — either literally and/or physically — between courtier and king, thus withdrawing them from the ‘centre of power’ (Norton, 533) — treason trials and their subsequent executions were ‘considered an instrument to remove those who had become too powerful’ (Smith, 472), albeit in a much more radical and permanent way. Instead of repositioning people on the stage of power, they were removed from the production all together. And thus, in a political system which was predominantly reliant on image-making, ‘public beheadings and hangings were common’ (Norton, 589).

In *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Mantel depicts a fair number of executions, but the most elaborately described is without a doubt that of Anne Boleyn. Due to its high amount of detail, as well as the incorporation of direct references to her participation in public acts of representations before her fall from the king’s grace, its provide the perfect basis for the following discussion of Mantel’s portrayal of executions. References to other executions in
Mantel’s Cromwell-novels will be made in order to support or provide nuance to any claims made on the basis of Anne’s execution.

Mantel’s inclination toward the use of theatrical metaphors and imagery demonstrates itself very clearly in her — as well as in her character’s — descriptions of executions (MacFarquhar, 3). These references range from quite general — Cromwell describes executions as ‘a necessary art’ (Bring Up, 162), which is a rather perverse and cruel description of someone’s involuntary and untimely death — to more specific references to various kinds of performative arts: a ‘spectacle’ (Wolf Hall, 623), ‘a graceful performance’ (Bring Up, 454) or even a ‘comedy’ (Bring Up, 437). Anne’s execution is described similarly; not only is her executioner described as an ‘expert in his art’ (Bring Up, 461), he is also described as whirling ‘like a dancer on the spot, his arms held high’ (Bring Up, 467), thus becoming a performer in this exciting yet perverse spectacle. What is more, this link between executions and performances goes beyond appearance; the intention of the execution was not simply ‘to kill’ (Bring Up, 393), but to do so ‘in public, and mount a show’ (Bring Up, 393). This discourse is not exclusive to Mantel, for even historians describe the execution as ‘a principal theatre of authority’ (Sharpe, 24) and ‘a grim but compelling spectacle’ (Norton, 559).

Similar to her faithful and detailed depiction of the various representational genres employed by Henry VIII, Mantel describes the various aspects and facets of executions. First of all, she focusses strongly on the strict orchestration and protocol upon which these events relied. A first example of this is presented right on the scaffold. As a true ‘expert in his art’ (Bring Up, 461), Anne’s executioner ‘bob(s) to his knees to ask pardon’ (own parentheses, Bring Up, 471), however this motion is not executed with due diligence, for ‘his knees barely graze the straw’ (Bring Up, 471). By adding this small detail, a respectful reverence is
reduced to an empty ‘formality’ (Bring Up, 471). A more ironic commentary on the protocols surrounding the execution is provided by Cromwell, who asks: ‘How can she die, when the appropriate officials from the city are not here?’ (Bring Up, 465). Not only does this emphasise the cruel absurdity of the protocol surrounding executions, but it also clarifies the involvement of multiple actors in this performance. Unfortunately for Anne, she ‘is not familiar with the protocol’ (Bring Up, 465). When she looks ‘about as if for direction’ (Bring Up, 471), an impression of the presence of stage director or souffleur is created. What is more, Anne’s bid for guidance is actually answered by her executioner, who ‘motioned Anne to kneel’ (Bring Up, 471). Mantel presents protocol as both an indispensable aspect of the execution, as well as something which transforms these proclamations and confirmations of power into absurd events.

Although Mantel describes Anne as not entirely acquainted with the exact protocol of her final event — ‘and why would she be?’ (Bring Up, 465) — she did not come unprepared. When Anne changes her headgear — ‘she raises to lift off her hood […] Her hair is gathered in a silk net […] One of the women gives her a linen cap, she pulls it on.’ (Bring Up, 470) — she undergoes a transformation from one role to another, thus visualising and acknowledging her transformation from untouchable queen to convicted commoner. Mantel transposes herself into the role of a sixteenth century playwright, as she transforms Anne into an “Actress Queen” — a term loosely based on Barry’s ‘Actor King’ (Barry, 234) — who, on her final stage, exemplifies the duplicity of her royal character (Barry, 234). This discrepancy between Anne as a private person, and Anne as the woman or actress who performs the role of queen is also made apparent by Mantel in the following excerpt: ‘Since Henry rode away from her yesterday, she has been an impostor, like a child or a court fool, dressed in the costumes of a queen and now ordered to live in the queen’s rooms. (Bring Up, 360). In her final
performance, Anne finally steps out of this role by taking off her costume. **What is more, she — by lack of a better word — executes this costume change with such skill and control, and despite a ‘tremor that has seized her entire body form head to foot’ (Bring Up, 470), that it seems like ‘she must have rehearsed with it’ (Bring Up, 471). The evocation of a dress rehearsal for an execution adds to the event’s absurdity, and further underscores its inherent sense of cruelty. Another example of a rehearsing convict is provided by Mantel, as she describes how Little Bilney ‘put a hand in the candle flame, the night before he died, testing out the pain’ (Wolf Hall, 615). This “rehearsal” creates an increasingly more human and vulnerable impression of him, whereas Anne’s final performance conveys a sense of distance and fabrication, of the ‘transparent pretence’ (Barry, 234) which was inherent to royal representation. In their final moments of life, Mantel describes convicts as principal actors who navigate themselves through an intricate web of protocols and, in some cases, well-rehearsed performances of their own fabrication. Although these pre-determined aspects of the execution have thus far given an impression of the execution as a degrading spectacle, there was also a very different side to these events.

Other parts of executions allowed those ‘confronted with a traitor's death’ (Smith, 498) to ‘maintain(ed) a certain grandeur’ (own parentheses, Smith, 498). In Mantel’s depiction of Anne’s route to the scaffold, many references to Anne’s participation in a spectacle of an entirely different nature are made. During her ‘solemn procession’ (Bring Up, 469) to the scaffold, Anne is accompanied by ‘the city […] aldermen and officials, then the guards’ (Bring Up, 469), which closely resembles her being surrounded by ‘the retinue of the French ambassador. The judges […], the Knights of the Bath […] the bishops, Lord Chancellor Audley and his retinue, the great lords […] ladies on palfreys […] and ancient dowagers’(Wolf Hall, 463) during her coronation entry. What is more, her position ‘in the
midst [...] with her women’ (Bring Up, 469) recreates her central position during the
coronation entry, and by extension during any official function as queen, and presents her at
the head of a tame entourage which is — quite literally — loyal to her until death. However,
Mantel describes how Anne is being escorted out of the city ‘through Coldharbour
Gate’ (Bring Up, 469), and thus describes a civic entry in reverse. What is more, Mantel
makes direct reference to this moment ‘Three years ago when she went to be crowned’ (Bring
Up, 469), but describes some remarkable differences. Whereas Anne used to be ‘so heavy
with child that the onlookers held their breath for her’ (Bring Up, 469), she now has a ‘body
hollow and light’ (Bring Up, 469), and is thus stripped of her fertile, motherly charm. Still,
during her procession to the scaffold there are ‘just as many hands around her, ready to
retrieve her from any stumble and deliver he safely’ (Bring Up, 469). However this time, she
is to be delivered ‘to death’ (Bring Up, 469). Even in Mantel’s emphasis on the grandeur of
the event, its cruelty remained apparent. In addition to these parallels between Anne’s
execution and her coronation entry, a reference to a different representational genre is made,
by locating ‘the scaffold [...] in an open place, where once they used to hold
tournaments’ (Bring Up, 466).

Regardless of the rehearsed nature and apparent grandeur of the performance of these
unfortunate principal actors, the convicts’ personal input into their own execution was limited.
As Anne makes her final address to the crowd, her words are described as ‘the usual ones on
the occasion’ (Bring Up, 470). This description encourages the reader to recollect the final
words of the four gentlemen condemned alongside her, who ‘All proclaimed themselves
sinners, all said they deserved to die’ (Bring Up, 462). Although Mantel makes it clear to the
reader that these people are indeed ‘victims of the most completely fabricated
evidence’ (Smith, 476) — the evidence and allegation against Anne is described as ‘as mass
of tissue born shapeless; it waited to be licked into shape as a bear cub is licked by its mother.” (Bring Up, 438), and as something which Cromwell and his men were ‘just making it up as we go’ (Bring Up, 445) — she still lets these convicts ‘act(ed) out this […] farce to its bitter end’ (Smith, 483). By describing Anne’s final words as ‘the usual ones’ (Bring Up, 470), Mantel alludes to the imposition of a ‘prescribed formula for scaffold addresses’ (Smith, 481). In this formula ‘Both innocent and guilty […] almost invariably acknowledged their […] offences in terms of glittering generalities’ (Smith, 476). This formula actually makes its first appearance long before Anne’s and the gentlemen’s death. It is references in Henry’s most private imaginations, as he pictures Katherine ‘dying […] she will be making speeches and forgiving me’ (Bring Up, 113). This perverse imagination demonstrates the sheer prevalence of these obedient final words, and the people’s internalisation of them. Although it is suggested by Smith that these compliant words could have been ‘the ultimate expression of obedience to a discipline and a way of thinking which had been inculcated from birth’ (Smith, 488), they were most likely the result of vigorous mental coercion (Smith 483). Representatives of the king were able to sway convicts by offering to ‘commute the sentence to the more humane sentence of beheading’ (Smith, 484) in exchange for these compliant final words. Mantel describes this coercion as very subtle, and reliant on the convict’s earlier attendance of executions: ‘The king […] might grant you mercy as to the manner of your death. Or not. The traitor’s penalty, as you know, is fearful and public. […] I see you do know, you have witnessed it’ (Bring Up, 399). In Anne’s case, it is suggested to ‘hint to her, delicately, that her cooperation now will spare her pain.’ (Bring Up, 450). Again, these words are whispered into the convict’s ears by Cromwell, or at least by his suggestion, thus further establishing his role as the king’s stage director ad interim. This coercion of convicts takes a more forceful route when it is suggested to them that ‘They have to think of their families left
behind […] that alone should still any protest, prevent any strident pleas of innocence’ (Bring Up, 433-434). Smith confirms this, and describes how ‘the fear of leaving one’s family destitute and unprotected entered into the willingness of the prisoner to forfeit their ideals and accommodate themselves to the purpose of the sovereign’ (Smith, 485). Cromwell’s coercion of Anne is described similarly: ‘…you can do nothing for yourself. But you may do something for your daughter Elizabeth. The more humbly you hold yourself […] the less bitterness will His Majesty feel when your name is raised hereafter.’ (Bring Up, 408). Mantel thus demonstrates how convicts’ final words were thus ‘either actually written or at least carefully perused by the government’ (Smith, 483) and spoken by the convict after cunning persuasion by the authorities. This transforms even their last words, usually the most genuine and heartfelt words spoken over the course of one’s life, into a travesty, into yet another performance which aimed to reinforce the king’s power. What is more, for some traitors, such as Elizabeth Barton, this admission of guilt was elaborated into a separate ‘Public confession’ (Wolf Hall, 500). Again, this is described as a necessary ‘show’ (Wolf Hall, 514), but her show was performed at multiple locations — from ‘Paul’s Cross’ (Wolf Hall, 513) to ‘Canterbury’ (Wolf Hall, 514), almost resembling a royal progress, in order to ‘break the hold of these people […] It is necessary to dispel the terror they create.’ (Wolf Hall, 514). The aforementioned orchestration of executions not only included the convict’s interaction with their executioner and with the crowd, but also manifested itself in the presence of a script which the convict — as principal actor of the event — was forced to follow.

Another function of these ‘carefully perused’ (Smith, 483) final words can be determined still. When Anne asks the audience to ‘pray for the king, for he is a good, gentle, amiable and virtuous prince’ (Bring Up, 470), she presents an image of her prosecutor which is positive without reproach — which is remarkable to say the least. This can be framed
within a wider context, namely that of the deliberate absence of the king — the reason for which will be explained in-depth in the next chapter, and goes beyond the possibility of ‘demonstrations in favour of Katherine’ (Wolf Hall, 623). During executions, the king was represented by the members of his court. Still, these representatives were wearing masks (Wolf Hall, 623), similarly to Anne’s ladies, who ‘have veiled themselves’ (Bring Up, 469) for the occasion. The reason for the latter’s disguise is made explicit by Mantel: ‘They do not want their future lives to be associated with this morning’s work. They do not want their husbands or suitors to look at them and think of death’ (Bring Up, 469). The same can be presumed of the monarch, who does not want his subjects to associate him — and his entourage, for they were an inherent part of his public representation (Sharpe, 21) — with death and punishment, which would strongly contradict his self-representation as a benevolent, loving and fatherly prince (Sharpe, 169). This makes for an interesting contrast with the executioner, who in the sixteenth century had not yet put on a mask (Mantel, “The Iron Maiden” 3), and was thus freely recognised by all as someone who implemented death.

This discussion of images of the monarch and their respective interpretation by the execution’s public gradually redirects our attention from the stage onto the audience. Not only were executions public by definition (Mantel, “The Iron Maiden” 3), Mantel presents their efficiency as equally dependent on the behaviour and reception of the audience as on the skill of the executor. As was the case for other acts of representation, the presence of the people mattered. Fortunately, they ‘turn[ed] out by the hundred to see any such show’ (Wolf Hall, 623). As was the case for civic entertainments and any other act of royal representation, the audience’s participation was also of importance in Mantel’s descriptions of executions.

Mantel also describes protocols which did not remain constrained on the scaffold, for the public was likewise expected to act — literally and figuratively — according to certain
expectations. The most obvious formality which Mantel describes, is the act of ‘bow[ing] their knee and doff[ing] their hats to mark the passing of the soul’ (Wolf Hall, 636), or in a slightly different description upon another occasion: ‘we kneel, and we drop our eyes, and pray’ (Bring Up, 466). Other favourable reactions of the crowd included ‘cheering’ (Wolf Hall, 355) and wanting to get a better look at the events, which they attempted to do by ‘swaying forward’ (Bring Up, 470). Furthermore, the crowd is described as exhibiting behaviours similar to that attending a play; there were for instance ‘pies on sale’ (Bring Up, 437). The latter further contributes to the aforementioned sense of cruelty and absurdity of these events — however this time, it was not imposed by, or in the name of, the monarch.

Mantel describes something equally, or perhaps even more important than the visible behaviour of the audience: whether the execution was ‘well-received’ (Bring Up, 437) by them. Similarly to the images of power which were represented across Henry’s various acts of representation, the execution had to interpreted correctly and distributed correspondingly. In much the same way as the humbled final words of traitors set them up as examples of obedience and subordination (Smith, 481), these “entertainments” indeed served as ‘a warning to all such traitors’ (Bring Up, 21), and convicts were ‘held for an example’ (Bring Up, 362) of disobedience. Consequently, the audience was expected to interiorise the cautionary message of a traitor’s ‘fearful and public’ (Bring Up, 399) death. Mantel emphasises this underlying message in her description of the execution of a Lollard woman, which is presented as a flashback to Cromwell’s youth. Cromwell is encouraged by another onlooker to watch this proceeding from the front of the crowd, with the following motivation: ‘so he always goes to Mass after this and obeys his priest’ (Wolf Hall, 353). The execution of religious dissidents might be interpreted as a source of inspiration for the later orchestration of traitors of king and country, similarly to how earlier celebrations of Saint’s days and of the
monarch’s relation to the church served as inspiration for the development of a ‘liturgy of state’ (Sharpe, 22). Instead of being inspired to go to Mass and recognise the authority of the church, the audience was implored to always attend state festivals and obey their king — or else. Another important aspect of the propagation of this particular message, was the fact that executions were reported in much the same way as acts of representation were. During Anne’s execution, Cromwell reminds himself to ‘Remember those plumes’ (Bring Up, 470) in Anne’s hat, because he expects the following question: ‘How did she look’ (Bring Up, 470). As a first-hand witness, ‘He will be able to say she looked pale, but unafraid.’ (Bring Up, 470).

In conclusion, Mantel’s depiction of executions in executions in Wolf Hall and Bring Up the Bodies presents the reader with an event which bears a striking resemblance to the acts of representation which have been discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Their insistence on the presentation and propagation of the image of a obedient subject which coincides with a favourable image of the king, alongside direct references to royal progresses, civic entries and tournaments and more general impressions of an orchestrated entertainment for an enthusiastic audience, combine in an impression of the execution as an alternative act of representation, of a hybrid format halfway between early modern representational tactics, and medieval law enforcement. One should however remain cautious not to disregard any of the differences between this alternative act of representation and the so-called standard acts of representation, for they present their audience not only with a very different principal actor — who embodies very different values — but the theatricalisation of death also results in an abundance of perversities and absurdities which know no counterpart in (Mantel’s descriptions of) acts of representation.
4. Popular Resistance and Popular Power

‘She is crowned, she is proclaimed, her name is written in the statutes, in the rolls: but if the people do not accept her as a queen…’ (Wolf Hall, 181)

4.1. Introduction

4.1.1. From Royal to Popular Power

In a transition which closely resembles the shift of subject in the preceding excerpt from *Wolf Hall* — from queen Anne to the common English people — this chapter redirects our perspective on representational politics from that of the ruler to that of the subject, and simultaneously from the construction of royal power to (opportunities for) the construction of popular power. The previous discussion of the ‘processions […] exchange of gifts, […] royal games of bowls, […] tilts, jousts and masques’ (Wolf Hall, 391) as well as that of the election as an atypical or hybridised act of representation reveals how Henry VIII endeavoured to present himself as an authoritative, benevolent and legitimate ruler. Special attention has been attributed to the images which contributed to this reception of the monarch, as well as to the indispensable participation of the public in the process of constructing royal power.

However, by focusing more closely on the participation of the public in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* — but keeping Hilary Mantel’s revisionist tendencies in mind — multiple instances surface upon which the king’s subjects do not display the expected behaviour during public acts of representation; instead, they act on their own account. As popular compliance makes place for popular agency (Sharpe, 50) or even popular resistance,
the process of consuming, construing, and disseminating favourable images of the king — and by extension his family, court, country and rule — is interrupted. However, when Mantel presents actions of subjects which (potentially) result in a loss of power on the part of the king, does she present these same actions as simultaneously enabling these subjects to gain some of this power? If so, what are the mechanisms behind this appropriation of power, and how effective are they?

In the second part of this dissertation, the construction of what will henceforth be called popular power will be explored — a type of power which emerges as a result of a reconfiguration or reinterpretation of the expected role of the public in the royal acts of representation. This third chapter explores how Mantel’s descriptions of various forms of resistance during acts of representation in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* obstruct the construction of royal power, and possibly contribute to the construction of popular power.

### 4.2. Resistance in Representational Politics

As mentioned in the first chapter, the construction of royal authority ‘required popular attendance and participation’ (Sharpe, 48). Although that chapter confirms how Mantel’s descriptions of acts of royal representation clearly indicate and acknowledge the fundamental importance of various kinds of reciprocity (Sharpe, 170), she also indicates in it how this same reciprocity provides a ‘potential for resistance on the part of the common people’ (Sharpe, 50) by including not only (references to) situations where (a potential for) resistance arises, but also by describing various kinds of resistance in action.
4.2.1. Revisionary Fiction and Representational Politics

Mantel’s incorporation of popular resistance in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* attests strongly to the classification of these novels as works of revisionary historical fiction. First and foremost, it allows for a further subversion of the common conception of Henry as a powerful, even tyrannous king (Sharpe, 174). Not only do Mantel’s characters directly question the king’s power — ‘He thinks to indicate, I as King of England am master in my own house. Oh, but is he?’ (Wolf Hall, 167) — they also suggest the usurpation of royal power by other influential courtiers, such as ‘Lady Anne […], or Thomas Boleyn? (Wolf Hall, 167). In my bachelor paper, these statements have been confirmed by revealing various weaknesses of the king, which Mantel describes as opportunities for courtiers — with Cromwell as leading example — to usurp the king’s power (Robbeets, 32). In this chapter, these methods are complemented by a variety of strategies through which courtiers and commoners alike gain power during entertainments and other public events which are supposed to lend power to the monarch(y) alone. Additionally, the idea of a commoner gaining access to power is much more radical than that of a (noble) courtier — whose close proximity to the king already endowed them with power (Norton, 533) — taking the reins of power in hand, thus undermining the idea of Henry as an imperious king to a considerably higher extent.

A second contribution to the novel’s revisionary character is related to the position of literature in the study of representational politics. Mantel can be seen as reassuming the pioneering position of literature in this field, since the representation of resistance within representational systems has remained largely marginalised, even in the leading models provided by Foucault and Geertz (Sharpe, 50). By describing popular agency and resistance in
her novels, Mantel manages to reinstate the function of literature as a pioneering medium in the study of this interesting dynamic between a king and his people, especially since most historiographical texts — including the ones used as sources for this dissertation — still focus predominantly on the role of the king in these proceedings. This makes the Cromwell trilogy not only subversive in its contents — in its portrayal of Henry VIII’s and his power — but also in the utilisation of its medium. By making historical fiction so much more than an entertaining time capsule for the twenty-first century reader, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* may be able to function as inspiring, immersive document in the field of study of representational politics. However, it goes without saying that her historical novels, nor any analysis of them, should never be considered or used as an actual historiographical source.

4.2.2. The Mechanisms of Resistance

The mechanisms behind this alternative engagement with acts of royal representation and the images presented in them are relatively simple. Whereas the audience’s ‘orderly behaviour’ (Sharpe, 169) acknowledged and upheld the images or ideals presented in royal performances, the slightest deviation from this conventional behaviour immediately threatened to oppose these same ideals (Sharpe, 170). The main reason for this is that acts of representation aimed to support ‘ideals of harmony’ (Sharpe, 169). Not only were these ideals ‘expressed in verse and song’ (Sharpe 169) — take for instance the proclamations of Anne’s virtues during her coronation entry (*Wolf Hall*, 463) — but they were likewise replicated, embodied and visualised in a harmonious performance wherein ruler and subject, performer and audience were supposed to performed their respective parts, and never sang out of tune.
The ability of the audience to ‘respond[ed] variously’ (Sharpe, xxiv) to the images and ideals of harmony presented during royal acts of representation was a result of the audience being relatively unrestricted in their interpretation of the images which their monarch presented to them, thus locating ‘the ultimate meaning of the occasions […] in the eye of […] the common beholder (Sharpe, 170-171), instead of in the images themselves. This freedom of interpretation allows for different — favourable as well as unfavourable — readings of the spectacle. After all, not even the most competent monarch could ‘command the hearts of the people’ (Sharpe, 170). Because of this, representational politics distinguishes itself from ‘simple propaganda’ (Sharpe, 170), since propagandistic images of the monarch were systematically orchestrated with the intention of ‘controlling the image projected’ (Sharpe, 20), in order to ensure a “correct” apprehension by the audience, which would thus enforce — instead of negotiate — ‘the compliance of people’ (Sharpe, 161). In the representational system, the audience was allowed to freely participate ‘in the construction of images of power’ (Sharpe, 9) and negotiate its meaning.

And thus, in a political system which relied on images and representations to construct authority, yet still allowed their subjects the freedom of interpretation, the common sixteenth century Englishman was not only a reader of images of power, but transcended this seemingly passive position and actually became their ‘shared author’ (Sharpe, 9). One should however be prudent not to confuse this shared authorship with the “shared” authorship of another group which was involved in the construction of civic acts of representation, namely that of the city merchants who ‘planned, constructed, paid’ (Sharpe, 166) for civic entertainments. Not only did this group’s realisation of civic acts of representation rely strongly on the court’s tastes and suggestions (Sharpe, 166), they were also situated — in terms reminiscent of
Jakobson’s functionalist model of language — at the end of the sender instead of at the end of the receiver.

Additionally, this “processing” of images does not limit itself to their mere apprehension and internalisation, but is also reflected in both immediate and belated responses to images of power, which will be discussed in this chapter as well as in the successive final chapter. This freedom of interpretation, but also the freedom to act according to this interpretation of the images presented by the monarch can both be united under the aforementioned term of ‘popular agency’ (Sharpe, 50).

4.3. Types of Resistance

Hilary Mantel presents a wide array of alternative responses to the monarch(y)’s self-presentation in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, which range from seemingly innocent mockery of the monarch to direct confrontations between the king and his subjects. For the sake of a concise and structured discussion of these various kinds of resistance, two structuring parameters will be used. The first parameter is the moment at which resistance arises: either during an act of representation or in its aftermath. This chapter deals exclusively with resistance during acts of representation, whereas the following chapter focusses on “belated” popular resistance.

Within the first category of “concurrent” popular resistance, some further categorisation is required. Based on Sharpe’s respective requirements of ‘attendance and participation’ (48), two additional subcategories can be established. Within “concurrent” popular resistance, resistance through a refusal of attendance — or absence — is discussed, as
well as the resistance of participation, which can also be described as an alternative participation or even as a total refusal to participate. Within the category of “belated” popular resistance, which is the focus of the fourth and final chapter, a much more subtle and intricate kind of resistance will be described.

4.4. Resistance During Acts of Representation

Similarly to how Sharpe emphasises the contrast between the ‘silence’ and ‘hissing of the crowd’ (Sharpe, 50) during acts of representation, this section differentiates between two very different kinds of popular resistance. The monarch’s subjects were able to express themselves either through silence — which acts as a metaphor for the aforementioned absence — or noise, in its turn used as a metaphor for disorderly behaviour — or, more generally, for an alternative mode of participation which includes the refusal to participate. These two types of resistance can also be described as respectively passive and active resistance, which will be the terms used from here on.

As mentioned before, any kind of digression from ‘orderly behaviour’ (Sharpe, 169) can be understood as resistance, not matter whether these digressions were deviations from a spectacle’s specific protocol, whether they were subtle or obvious, loud or silent, active or passive, for they all signal a refusal to replicate and thus acknowledge the ideals expressed on stage (Sharpe, 170).
4.4.1. Active Popular Resistance

4.4.1.1. Anticipating Resistance

Although popular discontent is not Mantel’s primary interest, various kinds of resistance are described in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. Descriptions of resistance both in the form of report — ‘The authorities in Yorkshire have rounded up their rioters’ (Wolf Hall, 648) — as well as in direct descriptions of (minor) insurgences make sporadic appearances throughout her Cromwell novels.

Moreover, Mantel’s characters actually demonstrate an acute awareness of resistance, which is apparent in their anticipation of, and attempts to prevent resistance, for instance when organising Anne’s coronation (Wolf Hall, 463) and the execution of disloyal members of the clergy (Wolf Hall, 622). Not only does this confirm the possibility of resistance, this anticipation is also highly indicative of the power which popular resistance harbours.

One particular measure taken at Anne’s coronation entry, was the decision to keep ‘the crowds […] restrained behind rails in case of riots and crush’ (Wolf Hall, 463). This infrastructural measure clearly aims to limit physical violence by the audience. Another preventative measure which Mantel describes is Cromwell’s advise against Henry’s presence at the execution of ‘four treacherous monks’ (Wolf Hall, 622). The king’s loyal advisor presents this measure as truly preventing — rather than merely limiting disorderly behaviour — and sees it as a solution for the fact that ‘there may be demonstrations in favour of Katherine, still a favourite with the […] crowd’ (Wolf Hall, 623), which might take away from the exemplary message of the execution. Although removing Henry from the scene is
presented as a way to ease this tension and support the “main message” of the event, this motivation is complicated by a suggestion in the second chapter that the absence of the monarch at executions was motivated by the intention to preserve his image as a good, benevolent king, and to present his brilliant image from being defiled by the blood of his enemies. Apparently, the presence of the king at any representational event — not just royal progresses — could be seized as an opportunity for the people to address concerns to their king (Sharpe, 166), even if these concerns had no particular relation to the event. When Henry rides out ‘the people shout at me. They rise up out of ditches, and shout about Katherine, how I should take her back.’ (Wolf Hall, 587). This type of resistance repeats itself in a similar address by a woman at Cromwell’s gate who ‘shouts at him, ‘God help us, Cromwell, what a man the king is! How many wives does he mean to have?’ (Bring Up, 432). Although Cromwell is not the king, one should keep in mind that he fulfil the role of the king’s representative, or even that of the Alter Rex (Robbeets, 33). The king's formal as well as informal outings were not just opportunities for self-presentation, but also ‘an opportunity for the king to observe and listen to the people’s concerns’ (Sharpe, 173). By removing the king from a spectacle, an attempt is made to prevent his image — and its accompanying message of power and greatness — from being overshadowed by a contradicting message of the audience. Moreover, the king’s removal can be regarded as a kind of censure, for even if the protesters were only ‘the more verminous portion of every crowd’ (Wolf Hall, 623), ‘the ragged populace […] turn out by the hundred to see such show’ (Wolf Hall, 623), which would result in many others being exposed to their seditious utterances. After all, it is easier to quiet a portion of the crowd, rather than muffling the ears of all people present.
4.4.1.2. Role Reversal through Resistance

The powerful consequence of popular resistance which is described by Mantel, is their radical subversion of the predetermined roles of the monarch and the audience. As such, they do not just undermine the message of the monarch’s representation but also the actual structure of this representation.

When the audience takes the floor — when ‘They rise up out of ditches, and shout’ (Wolf Hall, 587), — the king is required to listen, similarly to how the king is required ‘to acknowledge the applause of the citizens and to respond with thanks’ (Sharpe, 169) during other moments of state rituals. This dynamic subverts the aforementioned basic principle of monarchy, namely that the nation’s attention was to be at all times concentrated on the monarch (Qtd Bagehot, Sharpe, 11). For a short while, this attention was directed to the people and thus towards the nation itself, instead of towards the person who embodied the nation. This signals a true appropriation of power, for the king’s subject are temporarily the protagonists in their ruler’s act of representation.

Still, neither of the measures described above was sufficiently effective to truly suppress resistance. Not only did it ‘belongeth a king once in a year’ — at the very least — ‘to show him in his state royal and best array’ (Sharpe, 160), which made it impossible to shield the king from his people’s opinions forever, but not even the sturdiest barriers were able to protect the monarch and his family from the ‘sounds of hooting and booing’ (Wolf Hall, 54) of their opinionated subjects.
4.4.1.3. Types of Resistance During Royal Acts of Representation

For every representational genre which was available to the Renaissance monarch, a form of resistance was available to his subjects. These could range from straightforward to complex, from loud to silent, and from literal to symbolical — and far beyond.

4.4.1.3.1. Verbal Attacks

First of all, Mantel’s descriptions of active resistance describe the various vocal expressions of disapproval which were available to the people, with the most straightforward form being abuses such as ‘Putain!’ and ‘Great Whore of England’ (WH 395). A more “elaborate” expression of essentially the same opinion were ‘obscene songs’ (Wolf Hall, 395), the words of which are described by Mantel as ‘not repeatable in […] company’ (Wolf Hall, 385). Both kinds of abuses were directed towards Anne by the ‘people lined up at the harbourside’ (Wolf Hall, 395) in Calais. This demonstrates that although ‘popular presence constitutes […] official recognition’ (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 16) of a royal person or policy, not every person who showed up was there to show their approval of the queen. On the contrary, they were there to express the opinion of ‘the people on the streets’ (Bring Up, 10) — the construction and circulation of which will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation — who also took to calling Anne ‘a goggle-eyed whore’ (Bring Up, 10).

Although Mantel’s choice of the audience’s expletives might not seem very specific, they are in fact very efficient at counteracting the images which the monarchy presented of itself, and in this particular case of its queen. Rather than run of the mill obscenities, these exclamations specifically alluded to sexual promiscuity and immoral behaviour, which stood
in stark contrast with Anne’s representation as ‘a classical heroine, saint and [...] mother’ (Sharpe, 167). These representations were underscored heavily at her coronation, which was the moment \textit{par excellence} for defining her mode of (self-)representation. Not only do these utterances subvert her pious and chaste character, but by calling Anne a whore, they also indirectly dispute the parentage of her future children, and by extension the legitimacy of any forthcoming heir to the Tudor throne which she produces. This was dangerous for a monarch who was actively engaged in stabilising and reinforcing a relatively young dynasty (Sharpe, 162).

Furthermore, beside articulating their opinion of Anne, the audience drives a wedge between what is presented and what is real — instead of blurring the lines between fiction and reality. In what can be interpreted as an approximation of the practices of sixteenth century playwrights, the popular audience creates this distance with the intention of revealing the ‘duplicity of the royal character’ (Barry, 234) and the ‘transparent pretence’ (Barry, 234) of royal performances (Barry, 234)

4.4.1.3.2. Alternative Images

Beside resorting to straightforwardly negative discourse, there was also more subtle routes available to members of the common public who wished to express their disapproval of the state of the monarchy or country. During Anne’s coronation entry, ‘plenty [...] called upon God to bless Katherine, the rightful queen.’ (Wolf Hall, 465), which can be defined as an act of popular image-making; as an effort of the people to represent “their” queen, with the instrument or medium most readily available to them — their voices. One can see how these utterances might symbolically impede Anne’s occupation of the role of queen, for another
actor was already being cast in this part by the audience. Again, the public unmasksthe
‘transparent pretence’ (Barry, 234) of the entry and by doing so, counteract Anne’s occupy
occupation of the role of queen.

What is more, Mantel indirectly demonstrates the effectiveness of this kind of
resistance, for even though Anne ‘crowned, […] proclaimed, her name is written in the
statutes, in the rolls’ (Wolf Hall, 181), and is blessed with holy oil and all the attributes
pertaining to royalty (Barry, 27) — with props such as a ‘sceptre, […] rod of ivory and […]
the crown of St Edward (Wolf Hall, 467) — Katherine’s blessing with “mere words” signals
the people’s disapproval, and renders all other official affirmations of Anne’s royal status
weak, or perhaps even useless. In Mantel’s novels, the question is thus not ‘if the people do
not accept her as a queen’ (Wolf Hall, 181), but rather how they do not accept her.

4.4.1.4. Responses to Active Resistance

On the receiving end of these expressions of resistance, Mantel describes a variety of
responses by the royal protagonists of these proceedings. As mentioned in the first chapter,
their central, often elevated position was the best position from which to behold the elaborate
spectacle revolving around them (Strong, 73). Simultaneously, this position also provided
them with the best view on (the reactions of) their audience, and — as will be elaborated upon
in the final chapter — also provided them with opportunities to engage with them.

During the early days of Anne’s ascension at court, her awareness of the crowd’s
behaviour is quite apparent: as the royal couple ‘walks out among the crowds’ (Wolf Hall,
396), ‘her head darts, on the slender stem of her neck’ (Wolf Hall, 396) in order to ‘catch the
comments that come her way’ (Wolf Hall, 396). However, at her coronation entry, Anne seems
to be either blissfully unaware or in stubborn denial of the resistance against her, saying that ‘The streets cheered for me. I heard them.’ (Wolf Hall, 469). Still, other witnesses, who were amongst the crowd, ‘say they heard few voices raised for the concubine’ (Wolf Hall, 465), and thus contradict Anne’s statement. When Cromwell chimes in — ‘Did they? I don’t know what city they were in.’ (Wolf Hall, 465) — his contribution to the conversation is marked by the typical Cromwellian irony, and is emblematic of the court’s tendency to alter official reports of these events (Smith, 483). In the next chapter, Mantel’s dedicated depiction of this method of “smoothing over” resistance will be explored. For now, it should be remarked that Anne found herself in the middle of the procession, and not ‘among the press’ (Wolf Hall, 465), which made it harder to overhear the whispers of more cautious members of the crowd during this high-profile event, whereas Chapuys’ men had direct access to them by mingling with the populace.

Henry’s interaction with the crowd is markedly different: ‘How would they like it if I told them how to order their houses and wives and children?’ (Wolf Hall, 587). Mantel describes a negative interaction with the crowd, which shows how Henry is indeed aware of the audience’s remarks, but does not demonstrate Anne’s eagerness to receive these comments and interact with them. Instead, he is infuriated by their disturbance of his self-representation. Henry’s stern refusal to respond to the requests and/or suggestions of the audience within a political system based on reciprocity and dialogue effectively undermines the creation of a more personal or even intimate bond between monarch and subject (Sharpe, 11). Even Henry, a key figure in the expansion of representational politics in England (Sharpe, 160) does not always seem to understand the “rules” and implications of refusing to cooperate within this inherently dialogic system of constructing power (Sharpe, 161). Mantel’s description of Henry as a king who refuses to listen to his people thus presents the reader with an image of a
king who simultaneously elaborates and undermines his political system; an opposition which
adds to the broad range of dichotomies — male versus female, weak versus strong, parent
versus child (Robbeets, 18, 33) — which Mantel attributes to “her” Henry VIII.

4.4.1.5. Resistance during Executions

In the introductory paragraph to this chapter, one type of resistance has not been
mentioned. Though it is an undoubtedly active form of resistance, it neither coincides with
nor follows in the wake of what has earlier been defined as a “standard” act of
representation, nor is it executed by the public. Instead, it is exclusively available to those
who fulfil the role of principal actor during an execution, a public event which has earlier
been defined as holding the middle between an act of representation and a more brutal
enforcement of the royal will (Sharpe, 168). As discussed in the second chapter of this
dissertation, Mantel faithfully describes how these convicts presented themselves — or were
coerced to present themselves — as ‘villains of the deepest dye’ (Smith, 486) in their final
performance, during which they obediently parroted a ‘prescribed formula for scaffold
addresses’ (Smith, 481). However, occasionally a convict would express their defiance or
innocence on the scaffold (Smith, 480). This tendency was most often observed in religious
dissidents, who uttered ‘impassioned […] words of defiance’ (Smith, 479) in their final
moments.

Again, Mantel does not ignore this type of resistance in her novels. In Wolf Hall, an
excellent example is provided: ‘He thinks of what Bainham said, before they burned him; in
England there have been […] just six years of truth and light […] since the gospel in English
began to come into the kingdom’ (Wolf Hall, 454). Bainham, who was convicted for
professing his protestant faith in the midst of Sunday mass (Wolf Hall, 361), not only proclaims his innocence, but at the same time shares his dissenting religious message with an even larger public. Although he is standing with one foot in the grave, he uses his last words wisely — there was no more risk of him being punished afterwards.

Although Mantel does not describe the exact reaction of the public, the reader can imaging a mixture of disapproving murmurs and affirmative whispers among the crowd, and perhaps even a boisterous, heated reaction similar to that of the court to *The Cardinal’s Descent into Hell*.

As mentioned before, these breaches of decorum — or deviations from the execution’s script — were carefully smoothed over, and edited out of the transcription of these events in the official records, similarly to how expressions of defiance were edited out of the convicts’ “live performance” through coercion (Smith, 483). This practice can thus be interpreted as a form of censorship which court officials felt pressured to adopt after having failed at directing the convict during the “live performance”. Mantel provides the reader with a clear example of this practice, albeit in an oral rather than a written format: ‘Thomas More had spread the rumour that Little Bilney, chained to the stake, had recanted as the fire was set.’ (Wolf Hall, 649). One can however presume that in the court’s official records of the execution, More’s words are faithfully reproduced. When this fabricated report reaches Cromwell, he contradicts it immediately: ‘That is not what I heard from people who saw it.’ (Wolf Hall, 317). The discrepancy between More’s and Cromwell’s version of Little Bilney’s execution reveals the biggest shortcoming of this type of censorship: regardless of the court’s various attempts to draw a veil over popular resistance, ‘there were too many witnesses to these executions to permit […] fabricated versions of the dying words of the victims’ (Smith, 486). This statement can also be applied to the discrepancy between official reports of Anne’s coronation entry —
which were orchestrated by Cromwell — and the reports provided by ambassador Chapuys’ men. This dynamic between official and unofficial reports will be revisited in the final chapter of this dissertation.

4.4.3. Passive Resistance

Thus far, the audience’s participation during royal acts of representation has been defined as an important aspect of either their compliance to or resistance against (the construction of) royal power. However, the presence, or ‘attendance’ (Sharpe, 48) of this same audience can be interpreted as being of a more elementary importance than their ‘participation’ (Sharpe, 48). Although this observation may come across as redundant, one has to recognise that the audience’s attendance precedes — and thus enables — any kind of participation. This elementary role of the audience is confirmed and elaborated by Hellen Watanabe-O’Kelly, who defines the audience’s role as that of a ‘witness’ (16), a role which they fulfil passively, before engaging in event the slightest form of — by definition active — participation. The presence of an audience was thus not only elemental in the dissemination of the images presented by and of the monarchy (Sharpe, 157), but their simple presence actually ‘constitutes […] official recognition’ (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 16) of what was being shown or proclaimed during acts of royal representation. Popular attendance was what made these events ‘legal or binding’ (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 16). What is more, the magnitude of the audience actually enhanced ‘the authority of the performers’ (Sharpe, 169). Would it then be enough for the common audience — who functioned as both a prerequisite and gauge for
authority — to trade their loyal presence for a more disobedient — partial or even total — absence?

As with any post-factum assumption, this is up for debate. In theory, the ability of all subject(s) to stay at home would not only function as a clear testament to their discontent, but would likewise prevent them from lending legitimacy and thus power to the monarch(y); it would hinder the legalisation and recognition of their appointment in perhaps the most passive way possible: by knowingly escaping any of the monarch’s attempts to construct power. However, in Wolf Hall and Bring Up the Bodies, there is not a single event for which Mantel describes a significant lack of audience: even the most ardent opponents of the monarchy took the time out of their day to ‘line(d) up at the harbourside’ (Wolf Hall, 395) and express their disapproval. It can thus be assumed that if Mantel incorporates passive forms of resistance during acts of representation in her novels, they are presented in a more subtle, understated manner. In the following paragraphs, the aim is to explore these passive forms of resistance and to explain the mechanisms behind them.

4.4.2.1. Courtiers and Passive Resistance

The most remarkable characteristic which Mantel seems to attribute to passive forms of resistance, is that they are exclusive to a specific social class. Similarly to how the presence of a common audience was fundamental to many acts of representation, the presence of individuals of a higher social class was also of profound importance (Strong, 21), though not entirely for the same reason(s). The attendance of royal entertainments, outings and spectacles by members of the nobility and by those on the higher echelons of society in general was mostly meant to present this powerful elite as a part of the king’s tame entourage (Strong, 21),
where they were held up as examples of loyalty and obedience to the more common part of
the audience (Strong, 21). They effectively fulfilled the role of supporting actors in a
performance by the royal protagonist. In addition to describing the orchestrated participation
of these distinguished actors, Mantel describes how the common audience was — at least to a
certain extent — acquainted with these people. The popular audience’s ability to recognise
and identify people of higher ranks is illustrated by the commoners ‘pointing out the
liveries of the men’ (Wolf Hall, 320). Mantel not only used the clothing of the royal entourage
to emphasise the visualisation of courtly hierarchy during acts of representation such as the
civic entry and the royal progress, but also presented their “costumes” as a tool for the
audience to note the presence — and absence — of specific officials.

Though Mantel makes no specific note of a courtier’s absence, it should be mentioned
that absence, as an expression of resistance, did indeed damage the image of the king —
affecting it to an equal or even greater amount as the image of the courtier themself (Sharpe,
170). During Anne’s coronation, More’s absence was indeed noted, and perceived as a
damage to Henry VIII’s image by his contemporaries (Sharpe, 170). The refusal of courtier to
‘take place in the round of ritual’ (Strong, 21) thus had dire consequences on the common
people’s perception of their king.

As a result of the possibility of courtiers overturning this important hierarchy, Mantel
describes how members of the (extended) royal family kept their eyes peeled for any
unexpected — and unwanted — absences amongst the members of their “loyal” and “tame”
entourage, similarly to how they kept their ears open for seditious utterances from the
audience during these same events. Anne Boleyn, newly crowned, is described as benefiting
from her elevated position during the banquet in honour of her coronation, from whence she is
said to be ‘scanning the hall’ (Wolf Hall, 473) instead of eating. She did so in order to detect
any missing faces — and undoubtedly making a mental note of them for future reference — and thus ‘keep tabs on a nobility [she] was determined to tame’ (Trussler, 55). The aforementioned negotiation of power between king and subject (Sharpe, 9) is clearly visible in this intricate dynamic: though withdrawing one’s support to the king did indeed affect the monarch’s power, the courtier would not be able to retreat unscathed — for with great power comes great scrutiny.

### 4.4.2.2. Types of Passive Resistance

Just like its active counterpart, passive resistance comes in various shapes and sizes. The first type of passive resistance which will be discussed, which for now will be called “silence”, actually holds the middle between absence and participation, but has been included in this chapter as a result of the seemingly passive nature of silence. Although the silence of a crowd — or the silence of some of its members — can be interpreted as a refusal to participate, a silence was able to resound just as loud as the sound of a hundred ballads at once. What is more, the absence of one’s voice can be interpreted as a shrewd figurative absence. In this subchapter, silence — a term which can be applied to any type of refusal to participate — will be regarded an inherently passive but nonetheless immensely powerful sign of disapproval.

An excellent example of a refusal to partake in an act of royal representation is presented by Mantel in her description of the banquet where Anne first takes Katherine’s place at the top table (Wolf Hall, 199). The strong symbolical meaning of this change in the “choreography” of this event has been discussed in the first chapter, but the reactions to this change by the other guests around the table have not yet been discussed. Mantel’s description of Anne’s new position at the table — and by extension, at court — sparks remarkable
reactions from two highly opinionated, like-minded attendees: ‘The Duchess of Norfolk […] was furious’ (Wolf Hall, 200), and ‘The Duchess of Suffolk, refused to eat. Neither of these great ladies spoke to Boleyn’s daughter.’ (Wolf Hall, 199-200). Both ladies have postponed their participation, by refusing to take part in the conversation and, in the case of the Duchess of Suffolk, in the communal consumption of a celebratory meal. However, they are careful not to disturb the event’s decorum by any other means; they do not voice their displeasure, nor do they (dare to) leave the table.

The Duchesses’ behaviour is similar to that of many nobles present at Anne’s coronation banquet, who are described as ‘having […] eaten their words’ (Wolf Hall, 473), meaning that they have clearly been proven wrong in their underestimation of her ability to become queen, which Charles Brandon once expressed so confidently: ‘You expect her to wait on you? On Boleyn’s daughter? […] Make your mind up to it — that day will never come.’ (Wolf Hall, 392). This day has come, and a general resentment towards this proceeding and toward Anne also shows itself in the facial expressions of some of the nobles in Anne’s entourage during her coronation entry: ‘ancient dowagers in their chariots, their faces acidulated’ (Wolf Hall, 463).

Though these courtly voices remain silent, their actions and/or body language clearly communicate their displeasure — whether it be willingly or unwillingly — with this change within the court’s hierarchy, and this to such an extent that it could be observed and retold by others. Mantel’s depiction of these subtle resistances actually emphasise the author’s attention for the inner lives of her characters, whilst also revealing how passive resistance combined attendance with an alternative mode of participation. By only subverting one of the basic requirements for the audience, people were able to retain their access to power, which could only be found in physical proximity to the king and his family (Norton, 533) — during acts of
representation as well as during everyday life. For kings as well as for nobles, power depended heavily on these well-rehearsed performances, and on the amount of control they were able to exert over their emotions during them — it was not entirely without danger to show one’s emotions.

Still, there were those willing to take a risk. In a much bolder approach to proclaiming one’s disapproval of (certain of) the king’s policies, Mantel describes how other courtiers expressed their displeasure by means of a resolute refusal to be present. By doing so, they effectively undermined not one, but both requirements for the construction of royal power — ‘popular attendance’ as well as ‘participation’ (Sharpe, 48). Although they may not have been shouting their disapproval from London’s rooftops or scaffolds, the silence of their absence speaks strongly of their opinions — but this was not without any risk. An excellent example of this particular type of passive resistance in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* is undoubtedly Mary Tudor’s refusal to ‘grace(s) neither our dinner table nor supper table, because she will not sit below the little princess.’ (Wolf Hall, 553). At first glance, this refusal to partake in communal dining with her half-sister Elizabeth seems to stem mostly from a profound stubbornness, of a strong of self-respect, but it most likely emerged as the result of a conflict with Mary’s preferred mode of self-representation: Mary still regards herself as the rightful Princess of Wales, and Elizabeth’s presence — and representation according to this same role — prevents her to assume, to perform her rightful role. This is not entirely dissimilar to the people’s efforts to represent Katherine, as they ‘call upon her as their rightful queen’ (Wolf Hall, 465) in an attempt to prevent Anne from truly acquiring the role of queen. As a result of this clash between Mary’s preferred mode of representation, and the official mode of representation, she adopts a stern refusal to attend any (official) event. Her absence proclaims — silently yet loudly — her disapproval of this “new” hierarchy. Another
presumption which can be on the basis of Mantel’s novels is that, by refusing to comply to the careful orchestration of the dinner table, Mary actually manages to avoid the formal imposition of this lower rank altogether, and is thus able to retain her rank as Princess of Wales for the time being. As long as she has not been presented and seen as lower to Elizabeth, this power-shift between the (half-)sisters has not taken place — yet. Again, the importance of the visualisation of rank can be mentioned, as well as its connection to the Renaissance ‘philosophy which believed that a truth could be apprehended in images’ (Strong, 56). Again, Mantel describes an intricate balancing act between the image one presents of oneself, and the image which others present of you. This intricate process will be revisited in the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation.

Another character whose absence can be perceived as a defiant comment on the hierarchical status quo, is imperial ambassador Eustache Chapuys, who ‘would not go up to Peterborough for Katherine’s funeral because she was not being buried as a queen’ (Bring Up, 237). Although the refusal to pay someone a last respect is usually an expression of disrespect, Chapuys intends to signal the opposite: he refuses to attend Katherine's burial if it does not reflect her rightful status as queen. What is more, his attending the burial could potentially signal an agreement to Katherine’s new, lower status, which was forged not by herself, but by Henry VIII. This is especially important since Chapuys does not simply express his personal opinion in his actions: as the ambassador of Holy Roman Emperor Charles the Fifth, he expresses the opinions of his master, and by extension of the entire Holy Roman Empire. This gives rise to a second kind of motivation behind the absence of a courtier: a disapproval of how someone else is represented, which is not consistent with one’s own — or in this case, with one’s nation’s — interpretation of the proper hierarchy.
Passive forms of resistance can thus convey different messages through one very simple, subtle, yet often persistent action, and can serve both a personal and a broader, more selfless purpose.

4.4.2.3. Preventing Passive Resistance

As subtle as some of these expressions of resistance are, Mantel describes characters’ profound awareness of absences, silences and not-entirely-fullhearted participations — especially so in the case of members of the royal family and their entourage. However, similarly to their attention for active resistance — which newly-crowned Queen Anne was highly aware of— it was not always sufficient to keep an eye (or ear) out for signs of dissent. And thus, Mantel not only describes the efforts of court officials to suppress or prevent active resistance during acts of representation, but also their attempts to limit passive resistance.

Thomas Cromwell’s contributions to this effort are remarkable, to the extent that he can be regarded as the royal family’s personal acting coach — and a very strict one at that. As a part of the preparations of Anne’s coronation, he embarks upon a mission to persuade two of Anne’s most ardent opponents to attend her coronation. The first, Thomas More, is approached in an accommodating manner: ‘We hear you can’t come to the coronation because you can’t afford a new coat. […] The bishop of Winchester will buy you one himself if you’ll show your face on the day. […] Or the guildsmen will make a collection, if you like, for a new hat and a doublet as well’ (Wolf Hall, 456-457). As a result of to the crystal-clear irony in Cromwell’s voice — regardless of the addresses’ seemingly gentle and compliant character — it comes across as quite menacing. In fact, Cromwell is rather sure that More will not attend
and — personally — does not care about his attendance, but still makes an attempt to sway More, perhaps so that he cannot be reproached for the absence of his peer.

Another courtier who he tries to convince is Margaret Roper, whom he asks if she is ‘not [...] curious to see the queen crowned?’ (Wolf Hall, 457). With her family being fervent supporters of Katherine, it is not surprising that she is not interested at all, and her father soon interrupts Cromwell’s sweet talk: ‘It is a day of shame for the women of England.’ (Wolf Hall, 457). It comes as no surprise to the reader that neither of them end up attending the coronation. The reason for Cromwell’s — and by extension, Henry’s — insistence on the Roper’s attendance is the same reason behind Henry’s accompaniment by claimants to the throne during foreign travels: they intend ‘to show how tame they are and how secure are the Tudors’ (Wolf Hall, 391).

For many other courtiers, a general awareness of the possible consequences of their absence — sometimes in combination with some gentle coercion — was enough to reconsider the status of their RSVP. This resulted in the presence of several ‘dignitaries [...] who said [...] would not be here’ (Wolf Hall, 467). Though their presence and participation was not entirely their pleasure, they protected themselves by being present — even if they had to take part in a merry procession with their ‘faces acidulated’ (Wolf Hall, 467).

4.4.3. Active versus Passive Resistance: A Matter of Class

From this chapter, it can be concluded that either of these categories of resistance is best suited to a particular social class, and this as a result of their respective fulfilment of different roles during royal acts of representation.
The role of courtiers, nobles and other dignitaries in royal acts of representation was inherently more passive — they had to present themselves as tame and subservient to their king (Strong, 21) — which seems to result in equally passive forms of resistance. What is more, since they were constantly being monitored by both the royal protagonist(s) and the common audience, the undertaking of any act of active resistance would be a high-risk undertaking.

Members of the common populace on the other hand were shielded not only by the enormity, but also by the anonymity of the audience they were a part of. Mantel describes this relative safety of the audience as follows: ‘The protection of the stranger in the city; […] one pair of eyes among the thousands of eyes: you can hide a tree in a forest.’ (Wolf Hall, 475-476). Something as “massive” as an individual’s insurgence against the king could be reduced to something small and insignificant when it was “hidden” within a larger audience. What is more, the royal persons — who were able to look out on the audience, and to listen to their cries — were not able to recognise and identify in the same way as they were able to point out individual courtiers as a part of their large, but still limited entourage.

As a final remark in this conclusion about Mantel’s portrayal of both passive and active resistance, a single exception to this “rule” should be discussed. Over the course of the roughly 1000 pages which Wolf Hall and Bring Up the Bodies span, Mantel describes one instance of a courtier reverting to active resistance. During the performance of the court masque / interlude The Cardinal’s Descent into Hell, ‘Someone calls, ‘Shame on you, Thomas Howard, you’d have sold your own soul to see Wolsey down’ …’ (Wolf Half, 267). This vocal expression of disapproval may not have been directed at the king, but the addressee, Anne Boleyn’s uncle, was slowly but surely carving out his place in the extended royal family as a result of his niece’s royal liaison. What is more, one could say that to question someone in
proximity to the king is to question the king, for the king was the person who not only determines the composition of his entourage — thus fulfilling his ideal role as impresario (Sharpe, 172) — but also who built upon it an image of himself (Sharpe, 20). The only reason why this elusive person — ‘Nobody knows who has spoken; but he thinks it might be, could it be, Thomas Wyatt?’ (Wolf Hall, 267) — may have taken the risk to speak, was because they were concealed by a boisterous audience and a performance which was just as loud: ‘the court cries […] he hears their grunts’ (Wolf Hall, 267). Here we see a courtier, who may otherwise have been incorporated in the performance, immersive himself into the courtly audience, and use its relative, or perhaps temporary, anonymity as an opportunity for resistance.

Mantel thus presents active resistance as something reserved for the “voiceless”, for the poor, the numerous and — exceptionally — the brave, but always for the anonymous. Passive forms of resistance on the other hand were reserved for people who were critical of those in power, but who were also prudent enough not to be removed from their sphere of influence — or from this earthly stage altogether.
5. Rewriting the Image of the Monarch: The Construction and Dissemination of Popular Images of Power

‘Rumours crop in the short summer nights. Dawn finds them like mushrooms in the damp grass.’ (Wolf Hall, 481)

5.1. Introduction

In the introduction to the previous chapter, popular resistance against royal representation during acts of representation was categorised on the basis of its moment of expression, with a discussion of active as well as passive forms of ‘misbehaviour and indiscipline’ (Mulryne, 10) during acts of representation as a result. However, in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Hilary Mantel also presents the reader with unique insights into the aftermath of these profoundly public events, and — by extension — with the possibilities for resistance which emerge in their wake.

Although a large corpus of first-hand accounts of court entertainments and civic ceremonies exists as a part of the Tudor court’s official records (Strong, 19), these otherwise detailed — though never unedited or unmediated (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 20) — descriptions depict mostly (the formal aspects of) the events itself, and focus less on their reception by the public. Luckily, Mantel’s deliberate engagement with the so-called gaps in history (Mantel,
“The Iron Maiden” allows us to explore this back-alley of England's past, where loose tongues, gossip and rumours were able to roam freely. Not only does Mantel tread — carefully — beyond the limits of official sources (Mantel, “The Iron Maiden” 8), she also combines her quest for another possible version of the past with a special consideration for the exploration of the inner lives of her characters (Mantel, “The Day” 5) — many of which are of common birth (MacFarquhar, 6). By doing so, she is able to engage with an aspect of (the) history (of representational politics) in which the psychology of both the individual and the group was of profound importance. Again, the reader is offered a look behind ‘the screen at the back of the hall’ (Bring Up, 301) — a look behind the scenes of power. However this time, it is not the monarch who is the driving force behind this interaction with images of power.

5.2. The Audience as Witness

Following, or rather — due to their high frequency during Henry’s reign (Sharpe, 159) — in between various acts of representation, Henry VIII’s subjects remained actively engaged ‘in the construction of images of power’ (Sharpe, 9). These images were presented to them either by first-hand witnesses — which includes official, written reports as well as spoken and written reports by individuals — or, most notably, by second-hand witnesses, for ‘most subjects experienced royal representations through report’ (Sharpe, 21). In Mantel’s novels, this diversity of sources, as well as the dissemination of a large part of them in an unorchestrated public sphere — where subjects were largely unsupervised and mostly free from decorum and protocol — resulted in a wide disparity between the contents of these reports, as well as a wide variety of forms in which these reports were presented and
disseminated: from minor deviations in reports to completely fantasised rumours, and from casual gossip to carefully crafted ballads and imitations.

Mantel’s descriptions of these “alternative” and/or “belated” interactions with images of power describes how the king’s subjects disseminated, reconfigured, and even re-presented the images which were offered to them. As a result, the power of the audience as ‘common beholder’ (Sharpe, 171) who determined the meaning of royal representations fades ever so slightly into the background — for interpretation can be said to have taken place already — , whereas their role as ‘shared author(s)’ (Sharpe, 9) of these images is extended and emphasised. In Mantel’s case, this extended authorship presents yet another opportunity to subvert the common image of Henry as an all-powerful king (Robbeets, 14).

5.3. Through the Grapevine: The Dissemination and Reconstruction of Images of the Monarchy

In a society which focussed strongly on the appearance, movements and utterances of their king (Sharpe, 11), images of the king and his court — both arbitrarily shaped with an audience in mind, or less desirable images of the king which had slipped through the cracks of the king’s public countenance — made their way out of the court’s private chambers. In *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, Mantel provides the reader with beautifully crafted descriptions of this process of dissemination of images of royal power.

Before discussing this outward movement, it should be taken remarked that, similarly to how official reports of acts of royal representation were never unmediated (Watanabe-O’Kelly, 20), these reports by the people, by the “opposite” party — when regarding their
place opposite the king during acts of representation — can be expected to have been neither neutral nor unmediated.

5.3.1. Dissemination

In the following excerpt, Mantel’s description of the dissemination of news through court illustrates the manner in which report of the king’s actions, as well as images which he may or may not have intended to share with this subject, embarked on a long, interesting journey.

‘8 January: the news arrives at court. It filters out from the king’s rooms then runs riot up staircases to the rooms where the queen’s maids are dressing, and through the cubby holes where kitchen boys huddle to doze, and along lanes and passages through the breweries and the cold rooms for keeping fish, and up again through the gardens to the galleries and bounces up to the carpeted chambers where Anne Boleyn sinks to her knees and say, ‘At last God, not before time!’ (Bring Up, 172).

Mantel illustrates the dissemination of the news of the dowager queen Katherine of Aragon’s death, as it makes its way from the king’s private chambers to those of his second wife — and Katherine’s long-time contender. First of all, the king’s central position in the dissemination of news bears a striking resemblance to his central position during acts of representation, for example in the audience of the masque (Sharpe, 171) and by extension, his position at the centre of the nation’s attention in general (Sharpe, 11). The king's private chamber is the starting point of an accelerated tour of the royal court: Mantel’s sparing use of commas, as
well as her long-winded listing of places and passages results in a near-breathless passage, which is highly evocative of the speed which this news made its way through the court. What is more, it might also contribute an impression of the news being either “carried” by a person — by a servant or a page — but can also be interpreted as the news moving by itself, as an independent entity. Furthermore, Mantel describes a linear — though not without obstacles — journey to Anne’s chambers, who — when she receives the news ‘sinks to her knees’ (Bring Up, 172). This linear movement, followed by a downward movement of apotheosis is somewhat reminiscent of a domino effect, in which Anne the final stone to be knocked down, which — in combination with its speed — emphasises the new’s impact on its receiver.

During this turbulent journey across court, the news of Katherine’s death does not seem to be altered: it arrives in Anne’s chambers in its virginal state. However, only a few days later ‘they are saying on the streets that Katherine was murdered. They are saying that the king locked her in a room and starved her to death […] that he sent her almonds, and she ate, and was poisoned […] that you sent two murderers with knives, and that they cut out her heart, and that when it was inspected, your named was branded there in big black letter.’ (Bring Up, 183). On an even later date it is said that ‘poison was introduced to her in some strong Welsh beer’ (Bring Up, 213). Mantel seems to represent the dissemination of a piece of news, and the accumulation of rumours around it as having two stages: its initial introduction, and a later stage during which increasingly imaginative additions, exaggerations and fabrications seem to adhere themselves to the “official” news. What is more, in this second phase, news had made its way onto the streets, amongst the people — it did in fact not halt when it reached in Anne’s ears but only increased in speed and impact from thereon. In
her representation of the second stage of dissemination, Mantel makes use of an even stronger visual metaphor:

‘The duke’s words will be rolling down Gracechurch Street, rolling to the river and across the bridge, till the painted ladies in Southwark are passing them mouth to mouth like ulcers […] with or without him, news of Anne’s character will reach London and the world’ (Wolf Hall, 309)

In this description, the most apparent characteristic of the popular dissemination of images is the manner in which the ‘news of Anne’s character’ (Wolf Hall, 309) spreads. The evocation of a smooth, rolling motion, reminiscent of that of a wheel or a ball, emphasises not only the effortless nature of this dissemination, but also gives the impression of a considerable speed, which can be perceived as a continuation of the speed with which news had made its way through court. Although Mantel does not provide the reader with an exact indication of time, an excerpt from Bring Up the Bodies gives some insight into the usual time needed for news to make its way out of court. When Anne suffers a miscarriage, it is described how ‘It will take all day for the bad news to leak form the queen’s bedside’ (Bring Up, 215). The overall tone of this statement seems to emphasise that this was remarkably or unusually slow, which may have been a result of the tragic character of the event, and of this highly private and vulnerable image of the queen. Furthermore, Mantel describes how reports of other events was actually constructed on the spot: ‘One can see his brain turning, […] as he encodes his opinions for his dispatches to his master the Emperor.’ (Wolf Hall, 322). Aware of the swift dissemination of these reports, and of their potential to do harm to the king’s preferred mode
of representation, Cromwell explicitly prevented or postponed their dissemination: ‘Hold back your dispatches to your good master, do not write tonight.’ (Bring Up, 275).

In addition to describing the considerable speed with which news, reports and images was transmitted, Mantel also remarks their wide reach. The impression of the court as private, secluded place has already been challenged in relation to the report of court entertainments, for indeed ‘the subjects at large are always envisaged as the wider audience’ (16) of any representation of the king, queen or other members of their family. This remains true throughout *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, where the duke’s words quickly transgress the walls of the court, from whence they ‘reach London and the world’ (Wolf Hall, 309). An additional comment on this wide reach is provided by cardinal Wolsey, who very plainly — but with considerable exaggeration — states that ‘there are not safe places, there are no sealed rooms, you may as well stand on Cheapside shouting out your sins as confess to a priest anywhere in England’ (Wolf Hall, 199). As a result, reports of the king’s, his wife’s and his courtiers’ behaviours and appearance are quick to spread from the halls of court to not only London (Wolf Hall, 309), but also to ‘village alehouses up and down England’ (Bring Up, 43), and by extension into ‘the world’ (Wolf Hall, 309).

This emphasis on the fast dissemination and wide reach of courtly reports is reminiscent of the stimulus which the invention and development of print provided to the dissemination of news (Sharpe, 157). Mantel also makes note of this in her novels, by letting Cromwell make a comment about the consequences of this recent development: ‘Nowadays the products of some bought or poisoned brain can be disseminated through Europe in a month’ (Wolf Hall, 492), thus emphasising the dangers of this fast circulation of news.
Having focussed on the manner in which news, and fabrications on the basis of news, are disseminated, it is now possible to explore Mantel’s description of the contents of the reports and rumours which the English populace transmitted. However, based on earlier references to poisoned brains — and a poisoned queen — an educated guess can be made as to their nature. In the same quote which describes the fast dissemination of an image of Anne outside of court, Mantel describes the nature of this image. On the streets of Southwark, the news from court is eagerly passed by ‘painted ladies’ (Wolf Hall, 309) — a euphemism for prostitutes. Not only are these women emblems of sinfulness, they pass this image from ‘mouth to mouth’ (Wolf Hall, 309). This is evocative of the predominantly oral dissemination of report which common subjects were involved in, but because Mantel describes ‘the news of Anne’s character’ (Wolf Hall, 309) as ‘an ulcer’ (Wolf Hall, 309), an image of popular report as a sexually transmitted disease emerges, which is not only indicative of contamination (with fabrications and exaggerations of all kinds) and of an inherent coarseness, but also presents a judgement of the nature of gossip: it is vile, malicious and sinful. This negative portrayal of gossip, which is conveyed to the reader in terms of the body and disease, is also reflected in Cromwell’s request to ‘tell your wives to curb their poisoned tongues’ (Bring Up, 141). In its dissemination, Anne’s popular representation — or reputation — thus becomes laced with references to sexuality, promiscuity and is ultimately handed over to the mercy — or maliciousness — of the people.

A final characteristic of the dissemination of report outside of court is not pointedly present in the previous excerpts, but is described throughout *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. When discussing a piece of news — or gossip — its source is often referred to. Though reports are often attributed to ‘the servants in my household’ (Bring Up, 381) or to ‘drinkers in Kent alehouses, and the backstairs servants at court’ (Wolf Hall, 327), other
sources are far more obscure. Mantel frequently makes use of constructions in the third person plural — for example ‘they say’ (Bring Up, 62) or ‘they’re saying’ (Bring Up, 61) — which does not necessarily identify a group of people, but does emphasise the fact that there are is a group of people who is collectively of this opinion, or collectively supports and distributes a certain image or rumour. Another construction employed by Mantel is a passive construction, for example ‘word at court is’ (Bring Up, 459). First and foremost, makes the origin of this rumour even more obscure. What is more, one can even say that this impersonal construction effectively erases the involvement of people in the dissemination of this news. This type of imagery has already been discussed in relation to the dissemination of news within court, which seemed to move at own force — without any impetus or encouragement along the way. By creating an impression of the autonomous existence and movement of these reports, Mantel ascribes a ghost-like character to them. Not only does this endow popular reports with a profound sense of evasiveness, but also with an apparent impossibility to harness them — as well as their contents. This ghost-like imagery is actually a very typical aspect of Mantel’s style of writing, for references to the supernatural are not only present throughout her oeuvre — most notably in her 2005 novel Beyond Black (MacFarquhar, 18) — but are also present within the Cromwell-novels themselves. Cromwell is described as ‘a master of phantoms’ (Mulalić, 32) as a result of his cunning construction of Anne’s indictment, but more direct references to the supernatural — more specifically, to ghosts — are likewise present: ‘A ghost walks: Arthur, studious and pale. King Henry, he thinks, you raised him; now you must put him down.’ (Wolf Hall, 147).
5.3.2. Reconstruction

Having discussed how Mantel presents the dissemination of report as a fast and uncontrollable process, the actual contents of the people’s rumours and reports, as well as the reasons for their wide disparity — which has in part been illustrated already by the many rumours which surrounded former queen Katherine’s death (Bring Up, 183) — will now be considered in more depth.

Mantel describes the afterlife of Anne’s tragic miscarriage — an event which profoundly impacted her position as queen-consort, and direly complicated her former representation as a fertile mother — in vivid detail; however there seem to be multiple versions of this story:

‘I was there, I was there when Anne broke of her talk, I was there when she put down her book, her sewing, her lute […] I saw her face change. I saw her ladies close about her. I saw them sweep her to her chamber and bolt the door, and I saw the trail of blood left on the ground as she walked. (Bring Up, 214-215).

Beside its representation of multiple versions of the same event at once, the most remarkable characteristic of this excerpt is the narrator’s — or narrators’ — incessant focus on the self, by making use of a first-person singular construction where one might otherwise expect a third-person singular construction with the “protagonist” of the event as subject. However, when taking Cromwell’s statement which precedes this excerpt in mind — ‘Do you know what it’s like when a cart overturns in the street? Everybody you meet will have witnessed it. […] And
if all the people who say they were there had really been there, then the dregs of London would have drained to the one spot, the gaols emptied of their thieves…’ (Bring Up, 214). — it becomes clear that the intention of this first-person perspective is not to focus on the self, but on the position of the self as a first-hand witness. Mantel emphasises the people’s eagerness to position themselves as first-hand witnesses, and also remarks how many people took to presenting themselves as such — even when this was not actually the case.

This explains in part why all these “first-hand” reports do not correspond to one another. The enumeration of three different objects which Anne supposedly lays down — ‘her book, her sewing, her lute’ (Bring Up, 214) — strongly emphasises this discrepancy, whilst also emphasising the speed and ease with which these variations on the story have developed, and, as has been described earlier, have been passed on. Although these alterations can be regarded as minor details, or as simple slips of memory, Cromwell expresses his annoyance at the fact that people ‘have concentrated on the blood trail and left out the facts’ (Bring Up, 215). He laments the addition of unrealistic details, which may overshadow other important details; for example Anne’s reaction to her miscarriage. What is more, ubiquity of these exaggerated reports can be deduced from Cromwell’s statement that it was hard ‘to stop them complicating the story by rumours and fantasies, so that half England is dragged into it' (Wolf Hall, 514), which again emphasises the evasiveness and ghost-like nature of popular report.

The people’s freedom to interpret stories about the king and his family, and the images of members of the royal family which were presented in them, as well as their freedom to disseminate their personal interpretations — and any additional fabrications — of them makes the common English populace powerful shared authors of an alternative, complementary image of power. Their opinion of certain people, as well as their imagination influenced their interpretation, (re)construction and subsequent dissemination of report, which
promoted them from a passive role in the king’s audience to active participants in a collaborative process of popular image-making.
5.4. The Impact of Popular Images

Although Mantel describes popular report in terms of speed, evasiveness and considerable force, it has not yet been determined whether — and to which extent — the people’s alternative images actually influenced ‘the general reputation’ (Sharpe, 157) of the king and his family. Reputation, which was a product of the accumulation of first- and second hand witnesses and their subsequent dissemination, was actually ‘significant in shaping perceptions of the king’ (Sharpe, 157) and thus complemented — or opposed — the king’s many attempts to ‘create a shared myth’ (Sharpe, 12), to create a ‘Tudor Myth’ (Trussler, 51) which was presented to the people as something they could believe and participate in. In other words, to which extent did ‘Putney’s opinion of the fucking Bullens’ (Wolf Hall, 295) actually matter to the Boleyns and their mode of self-representation?

First of all, Mantel describes how Cromwell, the king’s loyal advisor and — as he has been described in the previous chapter — acting director, makes an attempt to curtail the people’s venomous gossip. His advice to his fellow city merchants to ‘tell your wives to curb their poisoned tongues’ (Bring Up, 141) is presented as a way to help the queen by polishing her reputation, and thus getting her back into the king’s favour — all by getting her into the favour of the people first. This further demonstrates the Mantel’s awareness of the inherently dialogic character of representational politics (Sharpe, 161). Mantel describes how seemingly harmless rumours affected a royal person’s actual situation — and not just their reputation — to a certain extent, in much the same way as the slightest deviation from ‘orderly behaviour’ (Sharpe, 169) during acts of representation immediately threatened to oppose the images and ideals presented in them (Sharpe, 170).
What is more, Mantel also describes the impact of popular images on the actual mode of representation employed by the monarchy. Towards the end of *Wolf Hall*, a highly imaginative negative image of the newborn princess Elizabeth has been compiled: ‘Stories have been put about that Anne’s child was born with teeth, has six fingers on each hand, and is furred all over like a monkey’ (*Wolf Hall*, 493). In a straightforward reaction to this harmful image, the princess is displayed to the court — in what may have been her first act of representation of her long and memorable career in representational politics (Sharpe, 5) — first by her mother ‘unswaddled, [...] placed on cushions at Anne’s feet’ (*Wolf Hall*, 493), and then by her father, who has her ‘shown [...] off naked to the ambassadors’ (*Wolf Hall*, 493). What is more, these representations of the princess are literally described as being orchestrated ‘in the hope of countering the rumours.’ (*Wolf Hall*, 493).

In her description of the royal couple’s reaction to a popular image of their daughter, Mantel emphasises how the process of image-making has come full circle. The royal family’s reaction to a popular image is not only emblematic of the impact of these images, but also emphasises the importance of the king’s response to popular concerns. Mantel’s Henry does not only display a ‘need to persuade subjects’ (Sharpe, 156) of his attractive, dazzling Tudor myth, but also knows how ‘to respond to public reaction and concerns’ (Sharpe, 156). In the royal couple’s response to rumours about their daughter, Mantel describes how not only progresses presented ‘an opportunity for the king to observe and listen to the people’s concerns’ (Sharpe, 173), but how an alert monarch could pay attention to the word at court and in the streets in order to adjust his image. Popular image-making can thus be interpreted as one of the specific ‘political[...] circumstances (Sharpe 51) to which Henry adapted his self-representation. In addition to this, Mantel also emphasises the importance of the
reputation of the royal couple’s child. This infant was not just a member of the royal family, but a living, breathing symbol of Anne’s and Henry's disputed marriage, as well as a promise of stability and strength of her parent’s blossoming dynasty.

Another instance where the people’s rumours influenced the representation of a royal person postdates Henry’s accident in the lists. Henry is ‘determined to show himself to his court, to counter any rumours that he is mauled or dead’ (Bring Up, 207-208). Again, Mantel describes the monarch’s deliberate interaction with his popular reputation, though this time he does not need to adjust his mode of self-representation. He only needs to reinforce his existing image as a physically strong king (Robbeets, 17-19). Still, this confirms the influence of the people’s whispers on the king’s “loud” self-presentation.

5.5. Popular Representation

In addition to these contributions to official image-making, Mantel describes yet another aspect of, or phase in the afterlife of images of the monarchy. Both of these popular interactions with royal reputation are of a highly theatrical character, and can thus easily be interpreted as popular acts of representation, for they propagate the images which circulated on the streets, in alehouses and spiralled up and down the staircases at court.

5.5.1. Imitations

The first popular representation of the images which they themselves had created or contributed to, can be observed in Mantel’s descriptions of popular performances. As
mentioned in the first chapter, theatre was not readily available to the public in the largest part of the sixteenth century, which spurred many individuals to stage ‘a version of her neighbour’s […] affairs in her back yard’ (Dillon, 1) to fulfil their needs for entertainment. As a result of their fast access to reports of the king’s (and by extension, the court’s) affairs, a very specific type of amateur theatre emerges in which royal and/or other powerful persons are imitated.

Mantel describes this as a particularly popular practice in the Cromwell household; so popular even that Sir Henry does not know if he should share a certain story with them, for he is almost certain that ‘You will make a play of it’ (Wolf Hall, 329). And indeed, the Cromwells turn everything into a play — they are performing one as Sir Henry is speaking. Mantel also describes how they regularly mock the Duke of Norfolk in ‘an interlude called ‘If Norfolk were Doctor Butts’ (Wolf Hall, 399). In this comic piece, they mock the old duke’s rash nature: ‘Got a toothache? Pull them out! […] Pain in the head? Slice it off, you’ve got another.’ (Wolf Hall, 399). These imitations, much like exaggerated rumours, magnified certain aspects of a person’s character, similarly to how sixteenth century king’s plays magnified — and commented on — the king as ‘the player of a dramatic role’ (Barry, 257).

What is more, common people likewise did not shy away from imitating their king — a practice which Mantel describes as taking many shapes and forms. In Cromwell’s household ‘On Christmas Eve Anthony sings ‘Pastime With Good Company’, in the person of the king and wearing a dish for a crown […] The king has a silly voice, too high for a big man.’ (Bring Up, 138). Two important aspects of this performance should be discussed first, namely its performer and the moment of performance. Anthony has been taken into Cromwell’s home as his jester (Wolf Hall, 137), which gives him licence; he is endowed with a freedom of speech — or rather, of performance — which other common subjects did not
have. What is more, the Christmas season is later described as ‘the season of licence’ (Bring Up, 152) which extends this opportunity to mock and mimic to others. The combination of both aspects makes this performance — although it is by no means harsh or offensive — much more acceptable. Mantel also describes how Anthony’s convincing portrayal of the king strikes Cromwell: ‘When has Anthony seen the king? He seems to know his every gesture.’ (Bring Up, 137), which makes Anthony a source of the king’s reputation rather than a window onto it. From his position as first-hand witness, Anthony seizes the opportunity to exhibit the king’s feminine side (Robbeets, 18), which contrasts with Henry’s predominantly masculine self-representation as an energetic man and a kind father (Sharpe, 169, 175).

Another important aspect of this performance is Anthony’s use of a dish as a crown. As has been mentioned in relation to Anne’s change of costume on the scaffold, popular sixteenth century playwrights tended to focus strongly on props like crowns and sceptres to emphasise the theatricality of the king’s role (Barry, 27). This re-presentation of the monarch in a small-scale, private performance indeed presented an opportunity for commoners to be ‘critical of the royal policy or person’ (Sharpe, 17) within the safety of their own home or community.

Although these popular performances may seem to be an end point for popular images of the monarch, Cromwell states that the young man under his command orchestrate these plays not because they ‘don’t believe the lion tale; it is just that they like to put their own words to it.’ (Wolf Hall, 328). Popular performances do not necessarily present popular images in their final form, but could be used as yet another link in the dissemination and (adaption) of images of royal and other powerful persons, and thus further contribute to the construction of popular images, as well as to that of a ‘general reputation’ (Sharpe, 157). What is more, Mantel even describes how these imitations could be imitated again. Wriothesly, an officer of state who used to ‘call Henry ‘His High Horridness. And imitate how he
walks.’ (Bring Up, 192) is in his turn imitated by Gregory Cromwell: ‘Gregory plants his fists on his hips and stamps across the room’ (Bring Up, 192-193). Although Gregory does indeed mock the king’s physical appearance, he also mock’s Wriothesly and his sudden loyalty to the king. Cromwell does not seem entirely opposed to this mockery, for ‘He raises his hand to cover a smile’ (Bring Up, 193)

Thus far, these imitations have been of a rather comic and innocent character, and not seemingly prone to inflicting any (significant) harm to the monarch’s or anyone else’s reputation. However, Mantel also describes another imitation of the king which is far less decent and harmless. The king’s coy expression ‘Don’t you think she must have pretty little duckies?’ (Bring Up, 264) — which is described as ‘the most he will venture’ in his admiration of women (Bring Up, 264) — is ravished by his gentlemen of the privy chamber, who twist his words into: ‘Has she not the wettest cunt you have ever groped?’ (Bring Up, 264). These gentlemen make a direct attack on something Henry is very cautious of in his public countenance; he aims to present himself as a true gentleman, as someone ‘who in speaking of women is never coarse.’ (Bring Up, 383). What is more, unlike Anthony the jester, these men do not have the slightest morsel of licence, and seem to be well aware of this fact. This is a private performance, which is halted as soon as soon as they realise that ‘Cromwell’s spy is about’ (Bring Up, 264) — this image of the king is not made to be disseminated outside of their company. Still, this limited audience responds to the performance with approval, which they express by means of ‘Giggles, complicit sniggers.’ (Bring Up, 264). They fear Cromwell not only for obvious reasons — he was the most powerful man beside the king — but also because he was known to closely monitor these alternative images of the king. Although he does tolerate many variations on the song the king wrote himself” (Bring Up, 95), Mantel describes his prescription of limits to his
peers. He allows variations of the song, as long as ‘the variations are only mildly obscene, or he would feel obliged to check them’ (Bring Up, 95).

It can thus be concluded that Mantel presents popular imitations — or re-presentations — of the king (and others) as a frequent and for the largest part harmless pastime. Although comments about the king’s physique seem to be accepted, a corruption of the king’s morals in these highly theatricalised forms of dissemination of popular images was less desired, and thus potentially harmful.

5.5.2. Ballads

The invention of new versions of a song composed by Henry VIII himself was not only indicative of his re-presentation in popular performances, but Mantel also presents the genre itself — the ballad — as an important aspect of the construction and dissemination of popular images of royalty. In the following paragraphs, the allure of this genre and its contribution to the construction of the monarch(y)’s reputation in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* will be examined.

When discussing active resistance, the people’s performance of ‘obscene songs’ (Wolf Hall, 395) during acts of representation has been mentioned already. Although it was possible that these were being composed on the spot, Mantel remarks the distribution of this type of song all over England, in the ‘taverns where they are singing the ballad of King Littleprick’ (Bring Up, 448). It was thus possible that the audience used the king’s representations as an opportunity to not only to ‘address concerns to their king’ (Sharpe, 166), but also present him with alternative images of himself or his entourage.
All the songs which Mantel describes in her novels, have the same rude character: ‘There are ballads [...] about Lady Anne — the words are not repeatable in this company’ (Wolf Hall, 385), as well as ‘a pretty ballad from the printer’s shop — Henry fingering the lute, while the lutenist fingers his wife’s quim’ (Wolf Hall, 348). By making overt references to the royal couple’s sexuality, the people drive the king’s attempt to conjoin his private and public body and thus ‘bridge the distance between ruler and subject’ (Sharpe, 11) one step too far. In these songs, the people also undermine Anne’s virginal image, as well as her saintly character by referring to her as ‘his wife the witch’ (Bring Up, 448). They can thus be seen as functioning similarly to the aforementioned abuses addressed to the king during his acts of representation.

Mantel also describes a slightly unexpected aspect of the people’s construction and dissemination of images of the monarchy. These rude songs would make their way in and out of ‘the printer’s shop (Bring Up, 348), thus resulting in a written account of the people’s representation of the king. Thus far, popular image-making has been defined as a primarily making use of oral transmission — which is also what the reader would expect — but Mantel also underscores how they, just like the opposite party, made use of the recent invention and development of the art of printing (Sharpe, 157), for popular performances were likewise ‘good enough to be printed’ (Wolf Hall, 266), and could thus also be disseminated in a material format.

Throughout this chapter, Mantel’s descriptions of the people’s active involvement in the construction — or re-construction — of images of the monarchy, as well as their efforts to present — or, again, re-present — these newly forged images to other members of the populace by means of performances and songs have been discussed. Mantel’s lively depiction of the people’s construction of alternative images of the monarch, which were based on first-
hand accounts as well as on heavily mediated reputation, shows how the people heavily
seasoned the images which the royal family and entourage — willingly as well as unwillingly
— presented of themselves. Mantel’s profound interest in the inner lives and psychology of
historical people — both of high and low birth — as well as her intention to fill the gap in
mainstream history converge in her reconstruction of the sixteenth century English rumour
mill, which seems to have been working overtime (Mantel, “The Day” 5), (Mantel, “The Iron
Maiden” 8). What is especially apparent about her depiction of rumours and the popular
images of the monarchy represented in them, is that Mantel presents them as actually
exercising direct influence on the royal family’s representation. What is more, their adoption
of so-called popular acts of representation — of imitations and ballads — can be seen as an
actual appropriation of the monarch’s methods for construction power, and can thus give rise
to popular power — but only if the monarchy listens and watches attentively, and acts
accordingly.
6. Conclusion

Hilary Mantel’s depiction of Henry VIII’s representational politics in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* is firmly rooted in her vivid, detailed — yet never-longwinded — and historically accurate descriptions of royal acts of representation. Her portrayal of multiple banquets, a dramatic court masque, two very distinct types of civic entries, multiple royal progresses, a select number of tournaments and several other occasions upon which the monarch fulfilled his role as ‘principal actor’ (Sharpe, 172) on the stages of the court, the city and even England’s rural roads provides the reader with a comprehensive account of Henry’s ‘public policy’ (Sharpe, 151).

Not only does Mantel describe a wide variety of representational genres, she also makes sure to describe the distinct formal and interactional characteristics of each separate genre and to contribute a fair amount of attention to the similarities between different acts of representation, mostly with regard to their inners workings and to the images which they present of the monarch(y). What is more, by carefully picking apart Mantel’s descriptions of executions — which are usually considered as enforcements, rather than as negotiations of royal power (Sharpe, 168) — and revealing their many similarities to the aforementioned, “standard” acts of representation, an additional (semi-)representational genre can be appended to Henry’s already extensive repertoire of representations.

What is more, this “hybridisation” of the execution is an important aspect of the nuanced and dynamic image of sixteenth century socio-political practices which Mantel constructs in her Cromwell-novels. Other indicators of this dynamic representation are Mantel’s many references to the past — to Henry VII, to the days of knighthood, to the public veneration of saints during Catholic liturgical spectacles and to Norfolk’s archaic attitude...
toward royal representation — which together create the impression of representational politics as a system which was not only firmly rooted in the past, but was also still evolving towards the future. After all, subtle as well as more profound shifts in royal representation did indeed occur as a result of the monarch’s ‘different personal (as well as political) circumstances’ (Sharpe 51); Mantel simply demonstrates the constant change to which representational policies were subjected. Furthermore, Mantel compensates for the ‘lost vocabulary’ (Sharpe, 56) of this ever-changing past by carefully unravelling complex images, eliminating redundant adornments and explaining any protocols, customs or symbolisms which have become incomprehensible to her contemporary audience (Sharpe, 56). In conclusion, Mantel’s tendency to overstep historiography’s strict delineations — of time, of genres, of exactness — results in a loosening of the potentially restrictive mould of “the historically accurate author” which she finds herself in. After all, Mantel’s intention is not just to depict the past, but actually make it come to life, and make it not only enjoyable but also meaningful for a contemporary audience.

Meaning is created on multiple levels in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, but in this specific dissertation Mantel’s observations and renditions of ‘complex negotiations between ruler(s) and subjects’ (Sharpe, 9) have been the central point of interest. From the perspective of the highly perceptive Thomas Cromwell, who was heavily involved in the formal as well as social orchestration of royal acts of representation but likewise mingled with its public, Mantel is able to reveal the intricate dynamic hiding underneath the pomp and circumstance of Henry’s self-representation. Her main intervention in representing the interaction between ruler and subject — between performer and audience — is a roughly equal division of her attention between the contributions of both parties. By making room for the description of popular agency and popular participation (Sharpe, 50), she restores the structure of
representational politics back to its original form as a societal dialogue — instead of as a royal soliloquy, a very one-sided interpretation of this same structure which is omnipresent in historical works (Sharpe, 50).

When focussing more closely on Mantel’s description of the many ways in which common English men and women participated in this dialogue, and thus contributed to the process of consuming, construing, and disseminating images of the king and the subsequent construction of royal power, her varied descriptions of popular resistance stand out. Active popular resistance, which surfaces during acts of representation, as well as a subtler, more intricate process of (re)constructing, disseminating and even staging images of the monarchy in the wake of royal representation suggests a variety of ways in which common people started — and not just chimed in on — conversations about power with their ruler. This is especially apparent in the people’s direct expressions of discontent during acts of royal representation, in which the people briefly occupy or appropriate the monarch’s role as, as well as in their successful attempts to (re)construct images of the monarch and his family and in their — subsequent or even simultaneous — performance of these images in order to encourage their dissemination by the rest of the public. The latter has been described as a “popular act of representation”, which can be seen as a confirmation of not only the people’s appropriation of the monarch’s representational apparatus, but also as an indication of their actual appropriation of power.

By describing the people’s “evolution” from obedient, yet mostly passive participants in royal acts of representation to active performers of alternative images of the monarchy, and as directors of similar entertainments in their own right, the author demonstrates how their participation describes a full circle: they interact with, and construct power in any way possible. What is more, in Mantel’s description of the monarch’s response to popular
resistance, and of popular reconfigurations of his “official” image, she likewise describes how the former protagonist finds himself positioned in a reactionary role which is not too dissimilar from the “original” role of his audience.

It can thus be concluded that Mantel very faithfully describes sixteenth century English representational politics with a sharp eye for both nuances and details, which results in the reconstruction of an intricate ‘web of interactions, mutualities, and reciprocities’ (Sharpe, 50). What is more, she describes the total permeation of English society by this representational state of mind, for even outside of official acts of representation, there is a constant tension between the representational efforts of the king on one hand, and those of his subjects on the other.

It can thus be concluded that Mantel’s rendition of the representational political system under Henry VIII duel compensates for the relative absence of common people — and their contributions to the construction of not only royal power, but also their successful efforts to construct power for themselves — in the academic discussions around early modern representational politics, and can thus be described as revisionary. What is more, Mantel’s “relaxed” approach to the strict delineations which prevail in these authoritative, yet in some ways incomplete sources about representational politics, presents the reader with a much more lively, intelligible and immersive image of Tudor England.

Although the author’s depiction of representational politics is overall much more revisionary than it is subversive, her descriptions of direct and active resistance, as well as her profoundly theatrically inspired depiction of executions, and — last but most definitely not least — her evocation of popular power do challenge the common contemporary image of Henry as an all-powerful ruler considerably.

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7. Works Cited


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