

Huntington U Class: Hilary Mantel and Historical Fiction

Instructor: Mark Eaton, Research Professor of English, Claremont Graduate University

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Class meeting time/location: Wednesday, 10:00am-12:00pm; March 5 to April 9, 2025; Rogers Classroom, Huntington Library

Course Description: Huntington U is a college-style seminar with no homework or tests. This spring the series continues as Mark Eaton (Claremont Graduate University) leads participants on a six-week course to explore the work of the late Hilary Mantel, a writer who brought renewed interest to historical fiction through her acclaimed Wolf Hall trilogy. We will start the seminar with an excerpt (about 65 pages) of Mantel's earlier novel about the French Revolution, titled *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992). Then we will dive into the Wolf Hall Trilogy by reading excerpts from *Wolf Hall* (2009), *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012) in its entirety, and excerpts of *The Mirror & the Light* (2020). Throughout the course, we will think about what makes Hilary Mantel's historical fiction so compelling and so plausible. Participants will learn how to read historical fiction more critically by asking questions such as: How does Hilary Mantel strike an appropriate balance between historical accuracy and fictional embellishment? What kinds of archival sources does she use, and how exactly? What is different about historical fiction as compared to narrative nonfiction and history? Participants will also be privileged to learn from curators at the Huntington Library about archival materials in the Hilary Mantel papers that are part of The Huntington's collections.

Books to Purchase (paperback prices on Amazon.com shown below; any edition is fine):

1. Hilary Mantel, *A Place of Greater Safety*. Picador, 2006, 768 pages, \$18.39.
2. Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall*. Picador, 2021. 640 pages, \$11.99.
3. Hilary Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies*. Picador, 2021, 432 pages, \$16.11.
4. Hilary Mantel, *The Mirror and the Light*. Picador, 2021, 784 pages, \$11.49.

Proposed Schedule

You are encouraged to start early and try to have the pages read before each class session.

Session 1: Wednesday, March 5, 2025

Primary Reading: Hilary Mantel, *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992), read all of Part 1 and Chapter 1 of Part 2 (pages 1-65 in paperback, your pages may vary; please note that this reading is also available for free online through Google Books, though I suggest you purchase the paperback in case you want to continue reading to the end)

Background reading: Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), Book 1, Chapter 1: The Period, PDF provided

Session 2: Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Primary Reading: Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (2009), read Parts 1 and 2 only (pages 1-130 in hardcover; your pages may vary)

Archival materials shown in class: Box 97, Part II of the Mantel papers, Folder MN1826. Draft of the opening pages: Part 1. Across the Narrow Sea (9 pages, with one page of handwritten notes inserted). See pages 1-13 of *Wolf Hall*. Also handwritten note titled "Visitation" with a version of the final paragraph of "Visitation" on page 55 in *Wolf Hall*.

Film clip shown in class: *Wolf Hall* (2015, directed by Peter Kosminsky)

Session 3: Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Primary Reading: Hilary Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012); Part I (pages 1-153 in hardcover; your pages may vary)

Special Guest: Karla Ann Merino Nielsen, Senior Curator of Literary Collections, The Huntington Library

Film clip shown in class: *Wolf Hall* (2015, directed by Peter Kosminsky)

Session 4: Wednesday, March 26, 2025

Primary Reading: Hilary Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012); Part II, Chapter 1. The Black Book (pages 157-241, your pages may vary)

Background reading: Hilary Mantel, "I Met a Man Who Wasn't There," afterword to *Historical Fiction Now*, edited by Mark Eaton and Bruce Holsinger (Oxford UP, 2023), PDF provided (audio available here: <https://soundcloud.com/thehuntington/hilary-mantel-i-met-a-man-who-wasnt-there>).

Film clip shown in class: *Wolf Hall* (2015, directed by Peter Kosminsky)

Session 5: Wednesday, April 2, 2025

Primary Reading: Hilary Mantel, *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012), Part II, Chapters 2-3 (pages 243-407; your pages may vary)

Background Reading: William Kingston to Sir Thomas Cromwell, Letter, May 19, 1536; rpt. in Gilbert Burnet, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, Part 1 (Clarendon Press, 1865), p. 328. PDF provided. Also Bruce Holsinger, "The Fine Art of Error," *Historical Fiction Now*, edited by Mark Eaton and Bruce Holsinger (Oxford UP, 2023), PDF provided.

Film clip shown in class: *Wolf Hall* (2015, directed by Peter Kosminsky)

Session 6: Wednesday, April 9, 2025

Primary Reading: Hilary Mantel, *The Mirror & the Light* (2020), Part 6, Chapter 1. Mirror and Chapter 2. Light (pages 697-757, including Author's Note; your pages may vary).

Archival materials shown in class: Box 97, Part II of the Mantel papers, Folder MN1826. Two pages of handwritten notes/drafts for the ending of *The Mirror and the Light*, p. 753.

Suggested Viewing:

Sunday, March 23, 2025; on PBS @ 9:00pm Eastern (check local time)
Wolf Hall: The Mirror and the Light (2024, Directed by Peter Kosminsky)

Sunday, March 30, 2025; on PBS @ 9:00pm Eastern (check local time)
Wolf Hall: The Mirror and the Light (2024, Directed by Peter Kosminsky)

Sunday, April 6, 2025; on PBS @ 9:00pm Eastern (check local time)
Wolf Hall: The Mirror and the Light (2024, directed by Peter Kosminsky)

Sunday, April 13, 2025; on PBS @ 9:00pm Eastern (check local time)
Wolf Hall: The Mirror and the Light (2024, directed by Peter Kosminsky)

Sunday, April 20, 2025; on PBS @ 9:00pm Eastern (check local time)
Wolf Hall: The Mirror and the Light (2024, directed by Peter Kosminsky)

Suggested Further Reading:

Hilary Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost: A Memoir* (Picador, 2003)

Hilary Mantel, *Learning to Talk: Stories* (Henry Holt, 2003)

Hilary Mantel, *Mantel Pieces: Royal Bodies and Other Writings from the London Review of Books* (4th Estate, 2020)

Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cromwell: A Revolutionary Life* (Viking, 2018)