

HILARY MANTEL

The Mirror & the Light

1.

Cromwell is a divisive figure, and in Mantel's hands he is a complex character. What are some of the key contradictions that define Cromwell's character? Did the novel make you think differently about him and his role in history?

2.

What is the meaning of family in this story? What does it mean to be somebody's son, daughter - or illegitimate daughter/son? To be disinherited, adopted, married or disowned? What are some of the striking or surprising family relationships that emerge and evolve in the story?

3.

The novel is filled with images or mirrors and lights. What are some of the things these rich images symbolise?

4.

The story follows a twisting path, and encompasses an enormous cast of characters. Cromwell's mind is always turning back to the past - to Anne Boleyn's execution, to his own recent past and his childhood. Why does Mantel choose to shape the story this way? How does one orient oneself in this maze of a story?

5.

Cromwell is the ultimate schemer. Yet towards the end of the story he loses control and allows his enemies to get the better of him. What goes wrong? Who is to blame?