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Heroes, Victims and Villains: How film and television affect our view  
of history. Focussing on the Tudor period.

Lydia Hargreaves

Master of Arts in History

Degree awarded by the University of Huddersfield

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## Introduction

'You think you know a story...' this is the opening line of *The Tudors* and seems like an appropriate place to start when looking at the Tudors in film and television.<sup>1</sup> The Tudor period is an era of history that has captured the imagination of people for centuries and in turn is a period of history that people tend to think they know about. Therefore, it is no surprise that film and television producers have capitalised on this popularity and produced many films and television series about them. This dissertation will focus on three film and television series in particular, *The Tudors*, *Wolf Hall* and *A Man for All Seasons*. Each of the television series and films are explained in more detail later in the dissertation. It will use these film and television series to see how Thomas More, Thomas Cromwell and King Henry VIII are portrayed in film and television and how this affects our view of history. It is important to note that in this instance the word 'our' means the general public with little or no advanced knowledge of the Tudors. Some viewers may have some knowledge of the Tudors but their previous knowledge could be from general stereotypes. For example, from what they learned at school or even other film and television series. The reason this dissertation is focussing on what the general viewer can learn from film and television is because it is becoming a very popular way for people to learn about the past. Moreover, this dissertation will simplify the analysis of three popular films and television series in order for the general public to understand how film and television affects our view of the past. In 2019 it was estimated that, 26.8 million households have a television in the UK. Therefore, if historians and producers alike can find a way to use film and television to educate people about the past it could be the perfect way to keep the past alive.<sup>2</sup> This dissertation will analyse the film and television series from the perspective of a historian whilst also acknowledging the audiences point of view. It is, at points, going to recognise the flaws in the way history is presented in film and television. It is important to acknowledge that the main aims of film and television are not to be factual documentaries as they are, primarily, made to be entertaining. Therefore, naturally, from a historian's perspective, there will always be flaws in presenting history in film and television. However, this dissertation will look to find the positives and how that affects the public's view of history. This dissertation may not definitively put More, Cromwell and Henry under the bracket of a 'hero,' 'victim' or a 'villain' but will use these terms as a basis to analyse how they are portrayed. This dissertation will also consider the historiography to see whether the portrayals differ from the historiography and it will use contemporary sources to see whether the

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<sup>1</sup> McDougall, Charles and Shill, Steve, (Directors), Hirst, Michael, (Writer). (2007). *In Cold Blood*. (Series 1, Episode 1). Hirst, Michael, (Producer). The Tudors. [Television Broadcast]. BBC. Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> Stoll, J. (2021). *Total number of TV households in the United Kingdom from 2004 to 2019(in millions)*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/269969/number-of-tv-households-in-the-uk/#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20the%20were%20nearly,to%20grow%20annually%20since%202014.>

film and television series reflect the historical evidence. Overall, the main aim of this dissertation will be to see what the public can take away and learn from film and television and whether it can add to their previous knowledge of the period. It will also analyse why *A Man for All Seasons*, *Wolf Hall* and *The Tudors* portray More, Cromwell and Henry in certain ways and why this might be. It will argue that one of the reasons people can learn about the past from film and television is because more often than not film and television can reflect the present. Therefore, the past can resonate with the present which helps the general public understand the past and the people of the past better. It will conclude by arguing that the general public can learn from film and television to an extent because it creates an awareness of the past and can, in some instances, open discussion and feed in to discourse. However, it will also highlight how film and television can often misrepresent people of the past and why this is an issue.

The Tudor period is arguably the most famous period in English history. It lasted one hundred and eighteen years and is attributed as transitioning England from the medieval period into the early modern world. Henry VII was the first Tudor monarch and he was the last English monarch to win his crown on the battlefield. Henry VIII's reign is one of the most memorable reigns ever. It saw six different queens, a break away from the Roman Catholic Church and multiple high-profile beheadings. The Tudor period also saw massive social, political and religious changes which arguably shaped England into the country it is today. Therefore, it is no wonder that film and television makers choose to focus on the Tudor period for inspiration. This dissertation will be focussing on a number of key events that took place during Henry VIII's reign between 1509 and 1547. Although the title suggests this dissertation will be focussing on the Tudors, it will only be focussing on Henry VIII's reign. This is partly due to film and television series using the 'Tudor' name to just describe Henry's reign. Both Mary I and Elizabeth I usually come under the 'Marian' and 'Elizabethan' titles in film and television. Furthermore, *A Man for All Purposes* will focus particularly on Henry's break with Rome, his divorce from Catherine of Aragon, his marriage to Anne Boleyn, the Oath of Succession and most importantly the downfall and execution of Thomas More. It will use these events to see how More is portrayed in film and television and argue that the portrayals of More reflect the time in which they were made, rather than the time in which they were set. *The Man Who Conquered the System From Within* will focus on the Reformation and the Pilgrimage of Grace and whether the portrayals of these events in film and television have had a negative effect on how we view Thomas Cromwell. *You Think You Know A Story...* will focus on Henry's reign as a whole as well as some of the key events mentioned to argue that film and television makers only focus on a small section of Henry's reign which effects our view of Henry.

The Tudor period has always been a favourite with film and television producers due to the significant and dramatic events of the era. Therefore, in response to this the Tudor representation in film and television has always been a topic of debate for historians. Many film historians, such as Andrew Elliot and Robert Rosenstone, believe that one cannot judge a historical film on the grounds of accuracy because that was never its intention.<sup>3</sup> They believe that historical films should be judged based on the perspective of the viewer, not by the historian.<sup>4</sup> Overall, this dissertation will look at film and television from the perspective of the public, however it will also look at them from a historian's point of view. Elliot goes on to say that historians have to differentiate between a good or bad film in terms of entertainment and a good or bad film in terms of inaccuracies.<sup>5</sup> This is something that Marnie Warrington-Hughes has also written about. She suggests that historical film and television series can be used simply for viewing pleasure.<sup>6</sup> The film and television series used in this dissertation were, and still are, very popular, thus suggesting that they were highly entertaining for the viewer. Paul Sturtevant suggests that it is natural for historians to worry about the representation of history in film and television.<sup>7</sup> He suggests that historians are concerned that people will watch film and television and take it as irrefutable.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, he has used Stuart Hall's concept of an 'active audience' to justify his belief that the public actively engage and critically analyse the media they see.<sup>9</sup> This implies that historians need to give the public more trust to analyse and criticise historical film and television series. It also suggests that historical film and television series do not need to be completely accurate because the audience will not take everything that happens as factual. Thomas Freeman is more critical when it comes to historical films and accuracy. He suggests that producers are often lazy when it comes to accuracy and often

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<sup>3</sup> Elliot, Andrew. (2010). *Remaking the Middle Ages: Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World*. McFarland & Company. London. Page 207.

Rosenstone, Robert. (2012). *History on Film/Film on History*. Pearson Education. Page 6.

<sup>4</sup> Elliot, Andrew. (2010). *Remaking the Middle Ages: Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World*. McFarland & Company. London. Page 207.

Rosenstone, Robert. (2012). *History on Film/Film on History*. Pearson Education. Page 6.

<sup>5</sup> Elliot, Andrew. (2010). *Remaking the Middle Ages: Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World*. McFarland & Company. London. Page 207.

<sup>6</sup> Warrington-Hughes, Marnie. (2007). *History Goes to The Movies: Studying History on Film*. Routledge. Oxon. Page 6.

<sup>7</sup> Sturtevant, Paul. (2018). *The Middle Ages in Popular Imagination: Memory, Film and Medievalism*. I.B. Tauris & Co. London. Pages 71-72.

<sup>8</sup> Sturtevant, Paul. (2018). *The Middle Ages in Popular Imagination: Memory, Film and Medievalism*. I.B. Tauris & Co. London. Page 16 and 71-72.

<sup>9</sup> Sturtevant, Paul. (2018). *The Middle Ages in Popular Imagination: Memory, Film and Medievalism*. I.B. Tauris & Co. London. Pages 71-72.

Stuart Hall (ed.), *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79* (London: Hutchinson in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1980), pp. 128 – 38.

sacrifice it for the sake of a 'dramatic gesture' or 'feeble witticism.'<sup>10</sup> However, he does concede that historical films should be shown and taught in schools.<sup>11</sup> He suggests that they are useful for students when looking at historical myths and traditions as well as how different time periods are viewed in different eras.<sup>12</sup> Overall, this thesis will take a positive view of historical film and television. It will analyse, and criticize when needed, but seeks to look at the overall affect of film and television on our view of history.

This dissertation will focus on one film and two television series. The reason for this is because each adaptation focusses on one of the people that will be analysed in this dissertation. Each adaptation offers a different interpretation for each person. *A Man for All Seasons* is based on Robert Bolt's 1960s play of the same name. The name derived from Robert Whittington, who in 1520 wrote "More is a man of an angel's wit and singular learning. I know not his fellow. For where is the man of that gentleness, lowliness and affability? And, as time requireth, a man of marvelous mirth and pastimes, and sometime of as sad gravity. A man for all seasons."<sup>13</sup> This suggests that Bolt drew on contemporary sources to write his play about More. It was turned in to a film by Fred Zinnemann and was released in 1966. By 1966 Zinnemann was an established director who had won multiple awards and had become known for his films that often depicted lone and principled individuals that were tested by tragic events. This made him the ideal candidate to direct a film about Thomas More. Arthur Nolletti has commented on Zinnemann's directing style suggesting 'his films are characterized by an unshakable belief in human dignity; a realist aesthetic; a preoccupation with moral and social issues; a warm and sympathetic treatment of character.'<sup>14</sup> *A Man for All Seasons* is a story about the moral dilemma of one man and the tragic consequences that followed. Therefore, Zinnemann's directorial style was the perfect match. The film starred Paul Scofield, as Thomas More, Leo McKern, as Thomas Cromwell and Robert Shaw, as Henry VIII. The film proved to be a great hit and won six Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director and Best Actor for Scofield. The film starts in 1529 when Henry is beginning to question his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and finishes in 1535 with the execution of Thomas More. The film follows Thomas More's story throughout these years and the moral and spiritual decisions he had to make in this period. The film is a crucial part of this

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<sup>10</sup> Doran, S., & Freeman, T. (2009). Introduction: It's Only a Movie. In T. Freeman (Ed.), *Tudors and Stuarts of Film* (pp. 1-30). Palgrave, Macmillan. Basingstoke. Page 16-17.

<sup>11</sup> Doran, S., & Freeman, T. (2009). Introduction: It's Only a Movie. In T. Freeman (Ed.), *Tudors and Stuarts of Film* (pp. 1-30). Palgrave, Macmillan. Basingstoke. Page 27.

<sup>12</sup> Doran, S., & Freeman, T. (2009). Introduction: It's Only a Movie. In T. Freeman (Ed.), *Tudors and Stuarts of Film* (pp. 1-30). Palgrave, Macmillan. Basingstoke. Page 27.

<sup>13</sup> Stanbridge, J. (1932). *The Vulgaria of John Stonbridge and the Vulgaria of Robert Whittinton*. Early English Text Society. London. Page 187.

<sup>14</sup> Nolletti, Arthur, ed. (1999). *The Films of Fred Zinnemann: Critical Perspectives*. State University of New York Press. New York. Page 20.

dissertation as it offers a completely unique perspective of Thomas More and gives an invaluable insight in to how More was used by Robert Bolt and how audiences of the 1960s perceived him.

*Wolf Hall* is based on Hilary Mantel's novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* and was released as a six-part adaptation of the novels in 2015. *Wolf Hall* has been praised by historians, notably Diarmaid MacCulloch, who has stated publicly that the books have a deep knowledge and understanding of the sixteenth century and the events that took place.<sup>15</sup> MacCulloch was so impressed by *Wolf Hall* and its portrayal of Thomas Cromwell that he wrote his 2018 biography of Thomas Cromwell in response to the series. Mantel used Catherine Fletcher as an historical advisor for *Wolf Hall* which may have contributed to the accolades it received over its historical accuracy. It was turned in to a television series by producer Mark Pybus, director Peter Kominsky and screenwriter Peter Straughan. The series stars Mark Rylance as Thomas Cromwell, Anton Lesser as Thomas More and Damian Lewis as Henry VIII. *Wolf Hall* has been a huge success and received eight Emmy Award nominations in 2015 and three Golden Globe nominations in 2016, winning Best Miniseries. The series begins in 1530 during Cardinal Wolsey's downfall and finishes in 1536 with the execution of Anne Boleyn. It follows Thomas Cromwell, from his own perspective, throughout these years and shows just how important he was in the political, social and religious events that happened during this period. Cromwell is the main character in the series with Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII playing very important supporting roles. *Wolf Hall* is a key source in this dissertation because it offers an alternative perspective on More and Cromwell to that portrayed in *A Man for All Seasons*. It also shows how the perceptions of these men have changed in the fifty years since the release of *A Man for All Seasons*.

*The Tudors* is a long running television drama created by Michael Hirst for the American cable television channel Showtime. Hirst is known as Hollywood's 'go-to guy for historical fiction.'<sup>16</sup> He has written and produced some of Hollywood's most popular and well known historical films such as, *Elizabeth* and *Elizabeth: Golden Age*. Hirst has stated that he 'loves' the research and 'getting to know' these historical characters that he writes about.<sup>17</sup> This suggests that despite *The Tudors* being made for the popular audience there has been some thought and research gone in to writing the script. Hirst also suggested that the purpose of *The Tudors* was to try and show people that the

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<sup>15</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page1.

<sup>16</sup>Hogan, R. *So What Do You Do, Michael Hirst, Creator of The Tudors and Vikings?*. MediaBistro. <https://www.mediabistro.com/be-inspired/advice-from-the-pros/so-what-do-you-do-michael-hirst-creator-of-the-tudors-and-vikings/>.

<sup>17</sup> Halterman, J. (2009). *"The Tudors" Creator Michael Hirst*. The Futon Critic. [http://www.thefutoncritic.com/interviews/2009/04/03/interview-the-tudors-creator-michael-hirst-30921/20090403\\_tudors/](http://www.thefutoncritic.com/interviews/2009/04/03/interview-the-tudors-creator-michael-hirst-30921/20090403_tudors/).

characters in the series were 'living, real people' and that the 'range of their feelings were just like ours so not treating history like a museum but treating it as a quite extraordinary human story.'<sup>18</sup> *The Tudors* starred Jonathan Rhys Meyers as Henry VIII, James Frain as Thomas Cromwell and Jeremy Northam as Thomas More. It followed Henry's reign from 1527 until his death in 1547, covering everything, from his marriages to political and social events that happened in this period. *The Tudors* was made for prime time television and was, therefore aimed at a large ranging audience and thus this is reflected in the way it presents Henry and his reign. The opening line to the series is 'You think you know a story...' which suggests that the series is going to challenge the collective memory about Henry's reign.<sup>19</sup> However, the series tends to stick to the traditional assumptions of his reign and enforces the popular narrative that exists. It proved to be a very popular series in 2007 and was nominated for Best Drama Series at the Golden Globes and was Showtime's highest rated programme for three years running.<sup>20</sup>

Thomas More is the first person this dissertation will analyse. It will analyse More because of the way he was perceived both in his lifetime and after his execution in 1535. It will also analyse how the film and television series representations of Thomas More often reflect the time in which they were made more than the time in which they were set. He was the main character in *A Man for All Seasons* and also played an important side character in *The Tudors* and *Wolf Hall*. More was a lawyer, scholar and politician during his lifetime and served as Lord High Chancellor of England between October 1529 and May 1532. He was also a staunch Catholic during the start of Henry VIII's break from Rome. More refused to recognise Henry as Supreme Head of the Church of England and refused to sign the Oath of Succession which recognised Anne Boleyn as Queen of England and her children's rights to the succession. This led to him being executed on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1535. Despite More's execution being more than four-hundred years ago the dilemma to do what he thought was the right thing, acting according to his conscience, is a concept that people in the twentieth and twenty-first century can relate to. They also show how More and his decisions may resonate in the modern world.

Thomas Cromwell is the second person this dissertation will focus on. Cromwell played such a vital role in both politics and religion between 1533 and 1540 that it is impossible to ignore him when looking at this period of history. He started life as the son of a blacksmith and rose through the

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<sup>18</sup> Halterman, J. (2009). "The Tudors" Creator Michael Hirst. The Futon Critic. [http://www.thefutoncritic.com/interviews/2009/04/03/interview-the-tudors-creator-michael-hirst-30921/20090403\\_tudors/](http://www.thefutoncritic.com/interviews/2009/04/03/interview-the-tudors-creator-michael-hirst-30921/20090403_tudors/).

<sup>19</sup> McDougall, Charles and Shill, Steve, (Directors), Hirst, Michael, (Writer). (2007). *In Cold Blood*. (Series 1, Episode 1). Hirst, Michael, (Producer). The Tudors. [Television Broadcast]. BBC. Ireland.

<sup>20</sup> Adalain, J. (2007). *Showtime's 'Tudors' continues reign*. Variety. <https://variety.com/2007/scene/markets-festivals/showtime-s-tudors-continues-reign-1117963026/>.

Tudor ranks to become the King's Chief Minister and the Earl of Essex.<sup>21</sup> This was an incredible feat in Tudor England and it is one of the reasons why Thomas Cromwell continues to draw the interests of both historians and film and television producers to this day. *Wolf Hall* was filmed from the perspective of Cromwell and therefore will be used as the main portrayal in this chapter. This chapter will focus on how Cromwell is portrayed in film and television and whether the portrayals reflect both contemporary and modern opinions. It will also look to see whether Cromwell has been fairly portrayed in film and television. The chapter will conclude that Thomas Cromwell may be one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented people of the Tudor world and will use *A Man for All Seasons*, *Wolf Hall* and *The Tudors* to show this.

Finally, this dissertation will focus on Henry VIII. Henry's reign, or at least part of it, is possibly one of the most popular periods in history for film and television makers. Henry's reign changed the future of England forever and therefore it will always be one of the most memorable periods in English history. However, Henry ruled for thirty-eight years but the majority of the events that film and television makers focus on happen in the nine years between 1527 and 1536. This dissertation will look to see why that is the case. It will also analyse how Henry is portrayed in film and television and whether this is justifiable. Overall, it will argue that modern portrayals of Henry have had a negative affect on our view of Henry and his reign because they feed in to the idea that he was a tyrannical, out of control king.

Overall, this dissertation will use film and television to see why and how people can learn about history from film and television. It will use one of the most popular and turbulent periods in English history to show both the positives and negatives to using film and television to learn about history. It will argue that people can learn from film and television to an extent. It will use More, Cromwell and Henry to show how film and television producers have used people of the past to create modern film and television shows. However, it will also highlight how film and television producers need to be wary of how they represent people of the past as they risk misrepresenting them.

## Methodology

In the twenty-first century film and television is a keyway for people of all ages to learn about history. In the US based 'Presence of the Past' project 81% of the 1500 people interviewed said they

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<sup>21</sup> Leithead, H. (2009, May 21). Cromwell, Thomas, earl of Essex (b. in or before 1485, d. 1540), royal minister. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Retrieved 31 Jan. 2021, from <https://www-oxforddnb-com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-6769>.

had watched a historical film or television show in the past twelve months.<sup>22</sup> Although, this is a relatively small sample size it shows just how many people are engaging with historical film and television shows. Therefore, due to the popularity of historical film and television there is some debate among historians about whether film and television are the best way for the general public to learn about history. Film and television producers often have their own agenda when creating their adaptations of the past. The film and television industries are all about making money therefore they need to pick a topic or event that will draw the public in. This often means they focus on the 'big' events in history such as, wars, violent or bloody events, such as executions, and certain monarchs who had key events take place in their reigns. This poses a problem for historians as it often means a large majority of history is neglected. There is also the problem that even the 'big' events in history that film and television makers choose to focus on, like the reign of Henry VIII, are often picked apart. For example, the vast majority of film and television series about Henry focus on 1527 onwards. This is eighteen years after Henry ascends the throne. This is a major problem as it does not give the audience a full view of his reign. Film and television makers usually focus on the turbulent years between 1527 and 1536. These years provide film and television makers an abundance of drama but Henry ruled England for thirty-eight years, not nine. This could lead to the audience forming unbalanced opinions on Henry. There is also the problem of anachronism. Twentieth and twenty-first century audiences may not understand the customs and practices of the sixteenth century. This becomes a problem especially when looking at the period of Henry's reign 1527 -1536. There were a lot of events that happened in this period that without understanding the context of the time and the events that happened before may lead to an audience forming unbalanced opinions. For example, the Pilgrimage of Grace and the executions of heretics and rebels.

Another issue with film and television is that major periods in history seem to be neglected. The Tudors, the Victorians, the Vikings and the First and Second World War seem to be some of the more popular periods that film and television makers use. However, this leaves large gaps of history that are neglected by film and television producers. The Tudor period is a perfect example of a period that is often used and re-used by film and television makers. However, it is also an example of how some periods are neglected and others over used. Henry VIII and Elizabeth are two of the most popular monarchs with film and television makers. However, Edward VI and Mary I are very rarely used in film and television. The reason for this could be because of what is going on in society at the time these films were made, after all film and television is made for an audience and the larger the

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<sup>22</sup> Warrington-Hughes, Marnie. (2007). *History Goes to The Movies: Studying History on Film*. Routledge. Oxon. Page 1.

audience the more money is made. James Chapman suggests that historical films are more of a reflection on the present than they are of the past.<sup>23</sup> For example, *A Man for All Seasons* was released in the 1960s. The 1960s in Britain are 'characterised by enormous social, economic, cultural and political change.'<sup>24</sup> Many people, particularly the older generations and thought that some of the social and cultural changes had gone too far in this period and that people were losing their morals and values. Therefore, *A Man for All Seasons*, specifically Thomas More, could have offered these people the hero of conscience and the defender of principles they were looking for.

Another problem for historians is whether films and television shows can be historically accurate and whether they should be historically accurate. Thomas Freeman, suggests that filmmakers' approach towards historical inaccuracy is frustrating for historians.<sup>25</sup> He suggests that filmmakers try to make their films historically accurate to an extent, but easily sacrifice this for 'dramatic gesture' or a 'feeble witticism'.<sup>26</sup> He also suggests that the power of film in the modern day poses a serious problem for historians because people can quite often assume everything they see in a film is real and soon becomes common knowledge.<sup>27</sup> This is one of the major arguments historians use to stop film and television being used to teach people about history. Freeman goes as far to use an example of an American congress man misquoting Thomas More in congress, 'if people with the power to wage war and negotiate peace are drawing their knowledge of history from films, can we afford to neglect the content of these films?'<sup>28</sup> However, Hughes- Warrington argues that historical films and television do not always have to be used for education they can simply be used for viewing pleasure.<sup>29</sup> Is it possible to use historical people and events purely for entertainment? Possibly, however, the messages and portrayals in these films and television shows need to have some basis in reality and therefore accuracy is important. Elliot has also commented on the concept that historical film and television can be used as entertainment<sup>30</sup> He suggests that when looking at film and television historians need to differentiate between a 'bad' film in terms of entertainment and a 'bad' film in terms of accuracy.<sup>31</sup> The aim of film and television series are not to be factual

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<sup>23</sup> Chapman, James. (2005). *National Identity and the British Historical Film*. I.B. Tauris & Co. London. Page 1.

<sup>24</sup> Cohen, Susan. (2014). *1960s Britain*. Osprey Publishing. Oxford. Page 9.

<sup>25</sup> S. Doran & T. Freeman. (2008). *The Tudors and Stuarts on Film*. Red Globe Press. London. Page 15.

<sup>26</sup> S. Doran & T. Freeman. (2008). *The Tudors and Stuarts on Film*. Red Globe Press. London. Page 16.

<sup>27</sup> S. Doran & T. Freeman. (2008). *The Tudors and Stuarts on Film*. Red Globe Press. London. Page 12.

<sup>28</sup> S. Doran & T. Freeman. (2008). *The Tudors and Stuarts on Film*. Red Globe Press. London. Page 14.

<sup>29</sup> Warrington-Hughes, Marnie. (2007). *History Goes to The Movies: Studying History on Film*. Routledge. Oxon. Page 6.

<sup>30</sup> Elliot, Andrew. (2010). *Remaking the Middle Ages: Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World*. McFarland & Company. London. Page 207.

<sup>31</sup> Elliot, Andrew. (2010). *Remaking the Middle Ages: Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World*. McFarland & Company. London. Page 207.

documentaries, they are made to entertain people. Therefore, as Elliot suggests it would be hard to judge them purely on accuracy.<sup>32</sup>

The historical adviser for *Wolf Hall* Catherine Fletcher acknowledges that accurate history rarely makes for exciting television.<sup>33</sup> She also suggests the complexity of the Tudor mind would be too complicated for the everyday viewer to understand.<sup>34</sup> However, *Wolf Hall* is used by some historians to show just how history can be used in film and television. In response to Diarmaid MacCulloch's 2018 biography on Thomas Cromwell, Peter Marshall highlights just how much *Wolf Hall* changed the way historians are beginning to think about Cromwell.<sup>35</sup> Marshall suggests *Wolf Hall* is 'a rare and interesting example of how an historical imagination can spur serious scholarly investigation.'<sup>36</sup> Therefore, this is just one example of how film and television may help history as an academic field and how history can be used to educate people about the past. It also supports Oscar Wilde's theory of anti-mimesis, 'Life imitates art far more than art imitates life.'<sup>37</sup> In this instance *Wolf Hall* inspired a revival of ideas and discussion surrounding Thomas Cromwell and thus 'life imitates art.' After the release of the 2015 television adaptation of *Wolf Hall*, Thomas Cromwell enjoyed somewhat of a renaissance. According to Marshall, people are more likely to know about Thomas Cromwell than Oliver Cromwell, which is remarkable given the historical importance of the latter in English history.<sup>38</sup> This shows how films and television series can help educate people about the lesser known, but important, people in history. Thomas Cromwell played a major part in the shaping of Tudor England and, arguably modern England, and without *Wolf Hall* he may have stayed a forgotten man by many. Despite being quite critical about historical film makers and their attitudes towards historical accuracy in films, Thomas Freeman also recognises the importance of film and how we can use film and television to educate people both inside and outside of the classroom.<sup>39</sup> He suggests that historical films can be used to teach history students how different historical people and events are reinterpreted in different periods.<sup>40</sup> This is important as it teaches students to recognise the historical trends and context when studying history and why certain trends occur

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<sup>32</sup> Elliot, Andrew. (2010). *Remaking the Middle Ages: Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World*. McFarland & Company. London. Page 207.

<sup>33</sup> Fletcher, C. (2015). *On Wolf Hall: Musings of a 'Historical Accuracy Expert*. History Matters. <http://www.historymatters.group.shef.ac.uk/wolf-hall-historical-accuracy-expert/>.

<sup>34</sup> Fletcher, C. (2015). *On Wolf Hall: Musings of a 'Historical Accuracy Expert*. History Matters. <http://www.historymatters.group.shef.ac.uk/wolf-hall-historical-accuracy-expert/>.

<sup>35</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London.

<sup>36</sup> Marshall, P. King Henry's Henchman [Review of the book *Thomas Cromwell: A Life* by D, MacCulloch]. *Literary Review*, (468), 737.

<sup>37</sup> Wilde, O. (1889 January). The Decay of Lying – An Observation. *The Nineteenth Century*.

<sup>38</sup> Marshall, P. King Henry's Henchman [Review of the book *Thomas Cromwell: A Life* by D, MacCulloch]. *Literary Review*, (468), 737.

<sup>39</sup> S. Doran & T. Freeman. (2008). *The Tudors and Stuarts on Film*. Red Globe Press. London. Page 27.

<sup>40</sup> S. Doran & T. Freeman. (2008). *The Tudors and Stuarts on Film*. Red Globe Press. London. Page 27.

when they do. This also teaches the student about wider society trends and how this may affect how historical people and events are interpreted. Freeman also hopes that this book reaches the wider public, not just those studying history. He sums up the introduction by saying 'historical films have the power to kindle interest in and empathy for past people and epochs.'<sup>41</sup> This is very important for any film and television producer and historian when looking at historical film and television shows. Over the past decade the funding and engagement in the humanities has fallen dramatically. Therefore, historical film and television shows could inspire the next generation of historians especially with the power and outreach of online streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime. For example, over the last twelve months some of Netflix's most popular shows were historical dramas. *Bridgerton*, which premiered on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 2020 is a period drama set in London during the Regency Era. As of January 4<sup>th</sup> 2021 *Bridgerton* had reached sixty-three million streams on Netflix.<sup>42</sup> *Bridgerton* caused a huge interest on social media and has trended multiple times on various social media platforms since its release. *The Crown* is another series that has captured the attention of people worldwide. According to Netflix seventy-three million households have watched *The Crown* since it began in 2016.<sup>43</sup> *The Crown* focusses on the reign of Elizabeth II and like *Bridgerton* caused quite a stir on social media. These are two recent examples of how film and television can start a conversation about history and historical events. Although it may not be possible to make film and television completely accurate the conversations they create could be very important in the preservation and popularity of the humanities as an educational subject. Film and television have the power to inspire not only the next generation of historians but also, they could also be key in keeping both young and old people engaged in history.

The contemporary sources this dissertation will use will be written sources from the Tudor period. Luckily, for historians many written primary sources from this period have survived and are easily accessible today. Some of the sources that will be used in this dissertation will be, the *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, the letters of Eustace Chapuys, the *Collected Works of Erasmus* and Edward Hall's *The Union of The Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York (Chronicle)*. The *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic* are a collection of thousands of letters and papers from the sixteenth century. These letters and papers cover everything from the day-to-day life of the Tudor court, to debt repayments, gifts to and from the King to other major events such as royal weddings and executions. These letters and papers a key to historians understanding of the

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<sup>41</sup> S. Doran & T. Freeman. (2008). *The Tudors and Stuarts on Film*. Red Globe Press. London. Page 28.

<sup>42</sup> Gonzales, E. (2021 January 28). 82 Million of Us Burn for Bridgerton. *Harper's Bazaar*.  
<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/film-tv/a35122184/bridgerton-viewers-netflix/>.

<sup>43</sup> BBC News. (2020). *Netflix reveals The Crown viewing figures for the first time*. BBC News.  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-51198033>.

Tudor court and provide some remarkable insights into the lives of the Tudor people. It is also important to note that although Henry VIII does have some authored letters in this collection the majority of the letters and papers are the in-coming correspondence to his ministers. The sheer amount of correspondence going in to Wolsey's and then Cromwell's office every day is remarkable. However, as they are official documents passing through the official offices of Henry's Chief Ministers, they may not give us the most balanced assessment of the Tudor court. Many of the letters are men writing to Cromwell asking him to write off debts or asking him to address the King about an issue.<sup>44</sup> This means that people know whatever they write in these letters will be monitored and therefore, people may not present their real problems and frustrations in the letters. However, it would be impossible to write about the Tudor court without these letters and papers and they are an invaluable source for historians. They also provide us with an insight into the letters and papers of Eustace Chapuys. He served as the Imperial Ambassador to England for the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V from 1529 until 1545 and provided extensive and detailed correspondence about what was happening at the Tudor court. Chapuys' letters and papers are a very valuable source for historians looking at the Tudor court in this period because not only does he comment on the political goings on of the court but he also comments on the people, their personalities and in some cases their motives. The level of detail he provided about the people and events of the court and the picture he builds for the reader is quite remarkable. Historians such as Lauren MacKay and David Starkey agree that the letters of Chapuys are an invaluable source when studying the Tudor court.<sup>45</sup> Starkey suggests that Chapuys was very careful about his sources and the people he retrieved information from were public people who could be held to account.<sup>46</sup> However, Chapuys was an employee of Charles V and had obvious loyalties to the Emperor and the Roman Catholic Church. Historians such as Retha Warnicke and Eric Ives suggest that Chapuys' clear loyalties mean that he is an unreliable source because much of his information was based on rumour or his own 'biased' speculation.<sup>47</sup> However, despite some historians being cautious about using Chapuys, it is impossible to write about the Tudor court between 1529 until 1545 without using him as a historical source. The detailed insights he has provided into the Tudor court and its people have

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<sup>44</sup> Antony Knyvet to Thomas Cromwell. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1536. Retrieved from <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol11/pp157-175>. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2020.

<sup>45</sup> MacKay, Lauren. (2014). *Inside the Tudor Court: Henry VIII and his Six Wives through the eyes of the Spanish Ambassador*. Amberley. Stroud. Pages 10-12.

Starkey, David. (2004). *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII*. Random House. London. Page 360.

<sup>46</sup> Starkey, David. (2004). *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII*. Random House. London. Page 360.

<sup>47</sup> Warnicke, Retha. (1989). *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family politics at the court of Henry VIII*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 2.

Ives, Eric. (2004). *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: The Most Happy*. Blackwell Publishing. Oxford. Pages 73-75.

been an invaluable source for many historians and therefore this dissertation will be using Chapuys as a source.

*The Collected Works of Erasmus* are another set of extraordinary documents from the sixteenth century. Erasmus was one of the great scholars of the sixteenth century and is still held in very high regard in the twenty-first century.<sup>48</sup> This dissertation will look at these letters in relation to Erasmus' friendship with Thomas More and the insight it may give to who Thomas More was as a person. These letters give historians a useful insight in to how More was viewed across Europe and how he interacted with a person who he considered his friend. However, because Erasmus was More's friend it does not give historians the most balanced view of More. It will also look at how Erasmus describes a young Henry VIII to see how people across Europe viewed Henry before the break with Rome. Erasmus' letters provide a different perspective to the Letters and Papers of Henry VIII as they are not official court documents but personal letters. However, Erasmus knew his letters were of political significance and therefore he was very self-aware of what he should and should not write in them. Overall, Erasmus' letters are a valuable source for historians when looking at this period of history. Another contemporary document this dissertation will be using is Edward Hall's *Chronicle*. Edward Hall was a lawyer and historian who lived from 1496 until 1547. The *Chronicle* follows the conflict between the houses of Lancaster and York and starts in 1399 with the accession of Henry IV to the throne until 1532 and then continued by Richard Grafton, with Hall's notes, until the end of Henry VIII's reign in 1547. According to Scott Lucas, 'no sixteenth-century chronicler's portrait of King Henry VIII had a wider acceptance or more enduring influence that Edward Hall's *The Union of The Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York*.'<sup>49</sup> Lucas goes on to say 'Hall's presentation of his own monarch's reign provides the most detailed survey of Henry VIII and his rule by any Henrician author.'<sup>50</sup> Hall was also key in starting the debate that Henry's personality changed during his reign.<sup>51</sup> The idea that Henry's personality changed is still a debate that occupies historians today. Hall's *Chronicle* is an important source for historians as Hall is a contemporary observer yet he

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<sup>48</sup> Vredeveld, Harry. (1993). The Ages of Erasmus and the Year of his Birth. *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 46, Pages 754–809.

Desiderius Erasmus. (1532). Erasmus and His Age: Selected Letters of Desiderius Erasmus. Retrieved From <https://www.euppublishing.com/doi/pdfplus/10.3366/more.2018.0032>. Page 97.

<sup>49</sup> Freeman, Thomas and Betteridge, Thomas. (2012). From Perfect Prince to 'Wise and Politike' King: Henry VIII in Edward Hall's Chronicle. In Lucas, Scott (Ed). *Henry VIII and History*. (pp. 51-64). Routledge. London. Page 51.

<sup>50</sup> Freeman, Thomas and Betteridge, Thomas. (2012). From Perfect Prince to 'Wise and Politike' King: Henry VIII in Edward Hall's Chronicle. In Lucas, Scott (Ed). *Henry VIII and History*. (pp. 51-64). Routledge. London. Page 51.

<sup>51</sup> Freeman, Thomas and Betteridge, Thomas. (2012). From Perfect Prince to 'Wise and Politike' King: Henry VIII in Edward Hall's Chronicle. In Lucas, Scott (Ed). *Henry VIII and History*. (pp. 51-64). Routledge. London. Page 51.

needed to be cautious about the things he was writing as any form of negativity or outspokenness regarding Henry could be classed as treason. Despite this, Hall's *Chronicle* is a very important source for any historian who studies Henry VIII and Scott suggests that even historians such as Elton and Scarisbrick who reject Hall's conclusions are influenced by his work and the detailed accounts of Henry's reign.<sup>52</sup>

## A Man for All Purposes

Thomas More was a man who divided opinions during his lifetime and divided them even more after his execution in 1535. Saint or sinner? Hero, victim or villain? This chapter will use More's commitment to the Catholic Church, his downfall and his execution to try and break down the enigma that was Thomas More. It will examine *A Man for All Seasons*, *The Tudors* and *Wolf Hall* to see how he is portrayed in modern film and television. *A Man for All Seasons* and *Wolf Hall* will be the benchmark for the comparisons in this chapter supported by *The Tudors*. Each of these portrayals depict More differently and this chapter will look to see why this is the case. *A Man for All Seasons* portrays More as a man of conscience; *Wolf Hall* portrays him as a religious heretic and *The Tudors* portrays him as a man who was conflicted over his loyalty to the Catholic Church and his King. It will also use several written primary sources and a number of historians to see how the film and television portrayals compare to the contemporary primary source material and the more recent historiography. This chapter will examine how differently the film and television series present Thomas More. It will argue that the portrayals of More tell us more about the time in which they were made than the time they were set in.

Thomas More was born on the 7 February 1478 to Sir John More who was a successful lawyer. From a young age More was introduced to humanist teachings by John Morton, who More served as a household page between 1490 until 1492. Morton served as Archbishop of Canterbury from 1487-1500 and he saw great potential in More and nominated him for a place at Oxford University. These humanist beliefs introduced to him by Morton played a great part in More's life and led to him writing his 1516 work *Utopia*. Following the downfall of Cardinal Wolsey, Thomas More took up the position of Lord High Chancellor of England from October 1529 to May 1532. Thomas Stapleton, a staunch Catholic who chose to leave England on Elizabeth I's accession to the throne rather than conform to the new religion, claimed in 1588 that Thomas More knew more about the King and was

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<sup>52</sup> Freeman, Thomas and Betteridge, Thomas. (2012). From Perfect Prince to 'Wise and Politike' King: Henry VIII in Edward Hall's *Chronicle*. In Lucas, Scott (Ed). *Henry VIII and History*. (pp. 51-64). Routledge. London. Pages 63-64.

trusted more by the King than anyone else.<sup>53</sup> Henry confided in More about his divorce as early as 1527 and More was able to speak 'openly, candidly and sincerely' without the King getting offended.<sup>54</sup> So what leads a man who the King trusted more than else to be executed? Thomas More was a staunch supporter of the Catholic Church and refused to recognise Henry as Supreme Head of the Church of England. On the 13th of April 1534 More was asked to swear his allegiance to the Act of Succession. More refused to sign the Oath of Supremacy, recognising Henry as the Supreme Head of the Church in England and the Oath of Succession, recognising Anne Boleyn as Queen of England and her children's rights to succession. According to Eric Ives, More did in fact acknowledge Anne Boleyn's queenship in letters to Henry before Anne's coronation.<sup>55</sup> However his refusal to take this further and swear to Henry's new position as head of the Church sealed More's fate and he was arrested for treason.<sup>56</sup>

Early twentieth century historians such as P. S. Allen claimed that England should have done more to remember Thomas More.<sup>57</sup> R. W. Chambers suggests that one of the reasons Thomas More has been neglected is because history 'does not remember the losers.'<sup>58</sup> However, the 1960s saw a revival in Thomas More's memory, largely due to the release of *A Man For all Seasons*. It was made because it fitted the debates of the time which in turn would ensure a large audience. The film portrayed the final few years of More's life and sparked a renewal of interest surrounding Thomas More. This could have been because during the 1960s Britain was undergoing massive social and cultural changes and many of the older generations thought that society was losing the morals and values of pre-war Britain. Therefore, More could have been seen as the hero of conscience many thought Britain needed at the time. John Guy starts his biography of Thomas More, written in 2000, by describing him as a 'man for all purposes,' and he is exactly that.<sup>59</sup> Throughout history and popular culture Thomas More is known as a man of great principle and strong moral conscience. He was made a saint by the Catholic Church in 1935 epitomising just how much he is valued by the Catholic Church. In contrast he was a hero of the Soviet Union for his apparent communist beliefs and was even listed on a statue dedicated to influential thinkers in Moscow in 1918. This highlights his humanistic and political beliefs adopted by the Soviet Union. He also played the role of a moral

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<sup>53</sup> Guy, John. (2000). *Thomas More*. Hodder Headline Group. London. Page 3-4.

<sup>54</sup> Stapleton, T. (1928). *The Life and Illustrious Martyrdom of Sir Thomas More*. (P. E. Hallet, Trans.) Burns&Oates. London. (Original work published 1588). Page 226-227.

<sup>55</sup> Ives, Eric. (2004). *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: The Most Happy*. Blackwell Publishing. Oxford. Page 47.

<sup>56</sup> Lawrence Wilde (2016). [\*Thomas More's Utopia: Arguing for Social Justice\*](#). Routledge. London. Page. 112-113

<sup>57</sup> Allen, P. S. (1918, December 26). The Times Literary Supplement, p. 654. Cited In Smith, Preserved. (1923). *Erasmus: A Study of His Life, Ideals and Place in History*. Harper and Brothers. London. Page 83.

<sup>58</sup> Chambers, R. W. (1937). *The Place of Thomas More in English Literature and History*. Longmans Green and Co. London. Pages 21-25.

<sup>59</sup> Guy, John. (2000). *Thomas More*. Hodder Headline Group. London. Page xi

paragon in President Clinton's impeachment trial in 1999, because he is often associated with the idea that he had a strong moral conscience.<sup>60</sup>

In the second part of the twentieth century Tudor historians such as Elton and Guy set out to question the portrayal of Thomas More in *A Man for All Seasons*, with Guy famously writing 'everyone who has seen *A Man for All Seasons* wants to know about More, but not to know too much, their illusions might be shattered, their ideals infringed, their delight in a moral tale defaced.'<sup>61</sup> John Guy suggests that More may not have been the great man of principle that has often been depicted throughout history. This is because many of the earliest sources surrounding the life of Thomas More were contrived and manipulated by himself and his supporters to shape his posthumous reputation.<sup>62</sup> For example, his epitaph which he wrote himself, his letters written to Cromwell in 1534 and his letters written to his daughter Margaret More while he was in the Tower of London.<sup>63</sup> Guy uses these examples, especially his letters to Margaret, to show how Thomas More was purposely producing his own propaganda.<sup>64</sup> Guy suggests that More was more concerned with his own reputation than the actual fate of the Catholic Church in England. He claims that More's point scoring on his religious morals and principles must have irritated his friends and colleagues.<sup>65</sup> This could suggest that More used his religion and the Protestant Reformation in England to further his own interests in improving his reputation. However although Geoffrey Elton believes it is rash to believe that the whole of More's life was in preparation for his death he does believe that Thomas More was not the principled man that was portrayed in *A Man for All Seasons*.<sup>66</sup> Elton, compares More's political ambitions to those of Thomas Cromwell. Elton believes that being made chancellor in 1529 allowed More to influence policy regarding religion and to start policing heretics.<sup>67</sup> Elton's argument about the real Thomas More is largely reflected in the Thomas More portrayed in *Wolf Hall*. Both Jasper Ridley and David Daniell agree with Elton that More abandoned his humanistic principles because destroying heresy was more important to More than his own principles.<sup>68</sup> This is another example of historians who believe More abandoned his principles.

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<sup>60</sup> Guy, John. (2000). *Thomas More*. Hodder Headline Group. London. Page xi

<sup>61</sup> Guy, John. (2000). *Thomas More*. Hodder Headline Group. London. Page 223.

<sup>62</sup> Guy, John. (2000). *Thomas More*. Hodder Headline Group. London. Page x-xi.

<sup>63</sup> Guy, John. (2000). *Thomas More*. Hodder Headline Group. London. Page xi

<sup>64</sup> Guy, John. (2000). *Thomas More*. Hodder Headline Group. London. Page xi

<sup>65</sup> Guy, John. (2000). *Thomas More*. Hodder Headline Group. London. Page 214.

<sup>66</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1992). *Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell in Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 149.

<sup>67</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1992). *Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell in Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 149.

<sup>68</sup> Ridley, Jasper. (1982). *Statesman and the Saint*. Viking Press. New York. Page i.

Daniell, David. (2001). *William Tyndale: A Biography*. Yale University Press. New Haven. Page 276.

However, historians such as Travis Curtright and Eamon Duffy have since responded to Guy and Elton's claims with their own defence of More. Curtright and Duffy claim that the man portrayed in *A Man for All Seasons* is the man history should remember. Duffy suggests that Thomas More deserves to be known as a saint for trying to defend the Catholic faith from the Protestant Reformation.<sup>69</sup> In response to Guy and Elton's claims that More only cared about his own reputation and his political ambitions, Duffy argues that More had been 'England's most determined and highest profile public champion of orthodoxy' until his execution in 1535.<sup>70</sup> Duffy also claims that More would have felt responsible to police heresy as it undermined the ancient law and custom of the Catholic Church.<sup>71</sup> Duffy criticises Mantel and her portrayal of More. He suggests that More is subject to anachronism, especially in *Wolf Hall*, and he justifies More's burning of heretics by suggesting that More had to change with the state of the world.<sup>72</sup> Duffy acknowledges More's burning of heretics but suggests that it was the norm for Tudor heretics to be burned. Duffy is right to acknowledge that sixteenth century customs may come across as extreme to a twentieth and twenty-first century audience. This is something that film and television makers need to be wary of when portraying More as a religious fanatic who burned heretics. Curtright uses More's own writings to defend More's actions. Curtright uses Elton and Guy's arguments, amongst others, and breaks them down one by one using More's own writings to justify More's actions, particularly, against heretics. Curtright suggests that More's humanist principles actually go hand in hand with his actions.<sup>73</sup> He suggests that More believes that the Church and the State should be separate.<sup>74</sup> In More's view the Church would control heresy, approve scriptures and teach doctrine.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, for Curtright this justifies More's actions in regards to heretics and counters Elton's argument that More abandoned his humanist principles. The complex historiographical arguments surrounding Thomas More means that he remains an enigma. This is reflected in the film and television portrayals of More. Each of the film and television series analysed in this chapter portray More in a different way.

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<sup>69</sup> Duffy, Eamon. (2017). *Reformation Divided: Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England*. Bloomsbury Publishing. London. Page 27.

<sup>70</sup> Duffy, Eamon. (2017). *Reformation Divided: Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England*. Bloomsbury Publishing. London. Page 27.

<sup>71</sup> Duffy, Eamon. (2017). *Reformation Divided: Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England*. Bloomsbury Publishing. London. Page 28.

<sup>72</sup> Duffy, Eamon. (2017). *Reformation Divided: Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England*. Bloomsbury Publishing. London. Page 31.

<sup>73</sup> Curtright, Travis. (2012). *The One Thomas More*. Catholic University of America Press. Washington DC. Page 13.

<sup>74</sup> Curtright, Travis. (2012). *The One Thomas More*. Catholic University of America Press. Washington DC. Page 108.

<sup>75</sup> Curtright, Travis. (2012). *The One Thomas More*. Catholic University of America Press. Washington DC. Page 13.

According to P. S. Allen, England should have done more to remember Thomas More.<sup>76</sup> Robert Bolt's stage play *A Man for All Seasons* definitely played its part in getting people to remember Thomas More. It was first performed at the Globe Theatre (now the Gielgud Theatre) on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1960 and proved to be a huge success. In 1961 it premiered on Broadway and it was made into a film in 1966 by Fred Zinnemann and focussed on the final seven years of Thomas More's life. More was played by Paul Scofield who won numerous accolades for his performance including an Academy award, a Golden Globe and a BAFTA. The term Bolt used to name his play, and subsequent film, was first coined by Robert Whittington in 1520 when he described More as 'a man of an angel's wit and singular learning. He is a man of many excellent virtues; I know not his fellow. For where is the man (in whom is so many goodly virtues) of that gentleness, lowliness, and affability, and as time requires, a man of marvellous mirth and pastimes and sometime of steadfast gravity — a man for all seasons.'<sup>77</sup> It was used again in 1521 by Erasmus who stated 'it would be hard to find anyone who was more truly a man for all seasons and all men.'<sup>78</sup> In *A Man for All Seasons* More is presented as a man, not of religion but of conscience. More does not claim to understand or be responsible for the word of God and therefore does not look for any external ideals to guide him through life, he looks to his conscience. More is a man who is open to new and different ideals if his conscience agrees. There is a certain irony to Thomas More being called 'a man for all seasons' because in the end he is only a man for the things his conscience deems correct. When *A Man for All Seasons* was released in 1966 England had gone through a period of social change, many people believed that society was losing its morals and values. One of the reasons why *A Man for All Seasons* could have been so popular is because people, particularly the older generations, were looking for a hero of conscience and a defender of principles. The 1960s was also a significant time in Bolt's life. In 1962 he was arrested and imprisoned for protesting against nuclear proliferation. At the time of his imprisonment he refused to sign a declaration stating he would not participate in such activities again. This very much sounds like a man refusing to sign a document that goes against his morals and his conscience. In this instance, despite the four hundred years that separated them, Thomas More and Robert Bolt had the same dilemma. This supports Chapman's view that film and television often reflect the time in which they are made more than the time in which they are set.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Allen, P. S. (1918, December 26). The Times Literary Supplement, p. 654. Cited In Smith, Preserved. (1923). *Erasmus: A Study of His Life, Ideals and Place in History*. Harper and Brothers. London. Page 83.

<sup>77</sup> Stanbridge, J. (1932). *The Vulgaria of John Stanbridge and the Vulgaria of Robert Whittington*. Early English Text Society. London. Page 187.

<sup>78</sup> Erasmus, D. (1988). *Collected Works of Erasmus*. (Vol 8, Letter 1233). (R. A. B. Mynors, Trans.) University of Toronto Press. Toronto. (Original work published 1444-1536). Page 297.

<sup>79</sup> Chapman, James. (2005). *National Identity and the British Historical Film*. I.B. Tauris & Co. London. Page 1.

*A Man for All Seasons* begins in 1529 when Henry is trying to get a divorce from Catherine of Aragon. For a King to get divorced in the Catholic Church it needed to be authorised by the Pope, and the Pope did not authorise Henry's divorce. In 1530 Cardinal Wolsey, the Lord Chancellor, died and More took over as Chancellor. Despite being made Chancellor and Henry's pleas and promises of a lifetime of royal favour, More's stance on Henry's divorce did not change. These pleas and promises showed just how much Henry regarded More as an advisor and as a friend. It also showed just how much Henry relied on More for moral guidance and acceptance. However, More looked to his conscience and could not accept Henry's divorce. It was More's conscience which meant he developed enemies at court and ultimately led to him being executed.

In *Wolf Hall* More is portrayed as a narcissistic villain, a religious fanatic who burns and tortures heretics. Hilary Mantel, the author whose books the *Wolf Hall* television series were based on, was brought up a practising Catholic. She attended a convent school and received a Catholic education. She has since spoke about how much she disliked her Catholic upbringing and the school she attended left her with less than fond memories.<sup>80</sup> Mantel sees Cromwell as a progressive leader who was taking England into the modern world whereas More was a conservative bigot who does not want to see progress and change in society. In comparison to the hero of conscience and a defender of principles that is portrayed in *A Man for All Seasons*, *Wolf Hall* presents a Thomas More who is unwilling to see society progress. To a twenty-first century audience, particularly young adults, who are more accustomed to an open and ever changing world, Thomas More in *Wolf Hall* could be seen as a man in power who is unable to change and accept the new ideas of the early modern world. *Wolf Hall* challenged the already established saintly view of More that existed after the release of *A Man for All Seasons* in the 1960s. Therefore, Mantel has flipped how More was portrayed during the 1960s in *A Man for All Seasons* and portrayed him as a regressive conservative.

*The Tudors* is the third television series this chapter will be analysing. It is important to remember that *The Tudors* target audience is teenagers and young adults therefore, the complex religious and moral arguments presented in *A Man for All Seasons* and *Wolf Hall* would not resonate with the viewer or fit in to the shows overall image. Therefore, *The Tudors* offers a more middling ground. *The Tudors* shows More as a man who is deeply divided by his loyalty to his religion and his loyalty to his King. More, played by Jeremy Northam in series one, is loyal to Henry and refuses to believe the rumours that Henry is distancing himself from the Catholic faith. He also refused to help Wolsey with the King's 'great matter' on the principle of international peace than religion. However, towards the

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<sup>80</sup> Kent, Nicolas. (Producer), Denyer, Ian. (Director). (2020). *Hilary Mantel: Return to Wolf Hall*. [Television Broadcast. BBC.

end of series one More starts to become radical in his views towards Protestantism and heretics. Once it becomes evident that Henry was changing his attitudes towards Catholicism, More retires hoping to live out a private life. However, once Henry, under the influence of Cromwell, begins to believe that More is conspiring with Catholic nobles and bishops to publicly support Catherine of Aragon his opinions on More change. This leads to More being brought in for questioning about his obvious avoidance of signing the Oath of Succession. This is a perfect example of how More tried to play the political game he kept quiet until he hoped the situation would pass. This reflects many of the twenty-first politicians we see today. Eventually, More concedes that he will recognize Henry and Anne Boleyn's children as heirs to the throne however, he refuses to recognise Henry as Supreme Head of the Church of England. Therefore, he is imprisoned and executed. In *The Tudors* More is a humanist who does not agree with violence or international war. He is a well-educated, respected man and is highly valued by Henry. He does recognise that there is corruption within the Catholic Church. But his staunch Catholic views border on fanatical and More forgets his hate of violence when it comes to heretics and those questioning the Pope's authority. Therefore, *The Tudors* presents a different Thomas More. More is not the hero of conscience that he is in *A Man for All Seasons* nor is he the regressive bigot that is portrayed in *Wolf Hall*. He comes across as a man who is torn between his loyalties to God and to the King.

When it comes to Thomas More there is no escaping religion. Thomas More was made a saint by the Catholic Church in 1935 and he was made patron saint of statesmen and politicians in 2000. He is quite often portrayed as the man who died for his religion and his principles. However, this portrayal is not always justified by historians. John Guy argues in his biography of More that he valued his own reputation more than his religion.<sup>81</sup> He suggests that More wanted to make the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom for his own posthumous reputation rather than for the sake of the Catholic Church. In November 1534 parliament passed the Act of Succession which required all subjects to take the oath to recognise Anne Boleyn as Henry's lawful wife and their children as legitimate heirs to the throne. The Oath of Succession went further than the Act and asked people to renounce the power of any foreign authority. In this case, this was a law that made people renounce the Pope's authority in England and cemented Henry's position as Supreme Head of the Church in England. Guy, argues that More did not simply stay silent in protest to the Act of Succession, like is portrayed in *A Man For All Seasons*, but he was consistently talking to Thomas Cromwell about his disagreement with the law knowing full well this would get back to Henry.<sup>82</sup> Forced martyrdom is forbidden by the Catholic Church as it is seen as suicide, therefore Guy uses this as a base for his argument that More cared

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<sup>81</sup> Guy, John. (2000). *Thomas More*. Hodder Headline Group. London. Page xi.

<sup>82</sup> Guy, John. (2000). *Thomas More*. Hodder Headline Group. London. Page 215.

more about his own reputation than of the rules and principles of the Catholic Church.<sup>83</sup> More would have known that there would have been consequences to not signing the Oath of Succession and by talking to Cromwell he did not help his cause. Another key piece of evidence Guy uses to show that More cared more about his own reputation than the principles of the Catholic Church was a letter that Erasmus wrote after More's execution.<sup>84</sup> Erasmus is known as the 'Prince of Humanists' and was influential in the Catholic Counter Reformation.<sup>85</sup> He was also one of More's close friends and someone he looked up to. Therefore, he was someone More wanted to impress. After More's execution Erasmus wrote about how impressed he was with More and how he had handled the Protestant Reformation in England.<sup>86</sup> He goes on to say how well More had done by resisting to burn heretics unlike Germany and France where many had been put to death.<sup>87</sup> This could be interpreted in multiple ways for example, Erasmus who was helping with the Catholic Counter Reformation could have been trying to enhance the Catholic cause by portraying them as the good and true faith. Or it could be just one of the many things More has lied to Erasmus about. From the records there were six heretics burned during More's two and a half years as Chancellor.<sup>88</sup> This was six more heretics burned than in Cardinal Wolsey's fourteen years as Chancellor.<sup>89</sup> Despite this in the 1960s film *A Man for All Seasons* More is portrayed as a man of conscience. However, since then new historical perspectives and approaches to film and television portray a more diverse Thomas More, which includes a broader narrative of his activities.

For example, the reappraisal of More presented in *Wolf Hall* addresses the following points, how More switched from a religious man to a cold, calculated political player as soon as the opportunity arose, how he burned heretics and how he liked to show off his wealth. This is something that Geoffrey Elton also picked up on. It is impossible to ignore More's obvious hatred for heretics and his strong loyalties to his religion. Despite lying to Erasmus on multiple occasions More did make his feelings about heretics clear, he suggested in one letter that he found 'that breed of men absolutely loathsome' and he wanted to be 'as hateful to them as anyone can possibly be.'<sup>90</sup> This could suggest why Elton believed it was 'rash' to suggest that More cared about his reputation rather than his faith

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<sup>83</sup> Guy, John. (2000). *Thomas More*. Hodder Headline Group. London. Page 214.

<sup>84</sup> Desiderius Erasmus. (1532). Erasmus and His Age: Selected Letters of Desiderius Erasmus. Retrieved From <https://www.eupublishing.com/doi/pdfplus/10.3366/more.2018.0032>. Page 97.

<sup>85</sup> Latourette, Kenneth Scott. (1953). *A History of Christianity*. Harper & Brothers. New York. Page 661.

<sup>86</sup> Desiderius Erasmus. (1532). Erasmus and His Age: Selected Letters of Desiderius Erasmus. Retrieved From <https://www.eupublishing.com/doi/pdfplus/10.3366/more.2018.0032>. Page 97.

<sup>87</sup> Desiderius Erasmus. (1532). Erasmus and His Age: Selected Letters of Desiderius Erasmus. Retrieved From <https://www.eupublishing.com/doi/pdfplus/10.3366/more.2018.0032>. Page 97.

<sup>88</sup> Kenny, Anthony. (1983). *Thomas More*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. Page 61.

<sup>89</sup> Kenny, Anthony. (1983). *Thomas More*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. Page 61.

<sup>90</sup> Guy, John. (2000). *Thomas More*. Hodder Headline Group. London. Page 107 and 120.

but this does not mean that Elton supported the view that Thomas More was a 'saint' who died for his religion and his principles.<sup>91</sup> In fact, Elton suggested that More abandoned his principles as a humanist in 1521 to pursue a career in politics.<sup>92</sup> Elton believed that More became disillusioned with the lack of influence he hoped his works, such as *Utopia*, would bring and therefore turned to politics.<sup>93</sup> He had hoped that politics would help in influence the policy on heretics and support his religious intolerance.<sup>94</sup> Although, Elton believed it was 'rash' to suggest that More cared about his reputation more than his faith, he also claimed that More lied to Erasmus.<sup>95</sup> Erasmus did not believe that scholars should be involved in politics, however there is evidence to suggest that More lied about when he has entered in to Henry's service.<sup>96</sup> This again was to protect his reputation to a man he looked up to and to a leading scholar known all around Europe. *In Wolf Hall* there is a scene where Cromwell calls out More on his switch from a religious man to Lord Chancellor. Cromwell, More, Chapuys and other notable noblemen are at a dinner at when More suggests that Cardinal Wolsey deserved his downfall for being the most 'corrupt man in Christendom.'<sup>97</sup> As the conversation progresses things get heated and Cromwell argues that More should be careful about what he is saying about other people. Cromwell states 'Thomas here says I'd spend my life in the church if I have a choice, I am devoted to things of the spirit, I care nothing for wealth, the worlds esteem is nothing to me. So how is it I come back to London to find you've become Lord Chancellor?'<sup>98</sup> As well as being portrayed as a religious fanatic who tortured and burned heretics, Mantel presents a Thomas More who is the complete opposite of the hero of conscience in *A Man for All Seasons*. He was someone who to the audience was a cold and calculated individual who was willing to do whatever it takes to protect himself. Anton Lesser, who played More did so with a certain type of arrogance that almost made him seem untouchable and there was a level of evilness about him that made the audience aware that he was the villain. During the dinner scene in the first

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<sup>91</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1992). *Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell in Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 149.

<sup>92</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1992). *Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell in Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 149.

<sup>93</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1992). *Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell in Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 149.

<sup>94</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1992). *Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell in Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 149.

<sup>95</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1992). *Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell in Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 149.

Elton, Geoffrey. In "Thomas More, Councillor". Written in: Sylvester, Richard. (1972). *St. Thomas More: Action and Contemplation*. Yale University Press. New Haven. Page 92.

<sup>96</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1992). *Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell in Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 149.

<sup>97</sup> Kosminsky, Peter (Director), Straughan, Peter (Writer). (2015). *Three Card Trick*. [Episode 1]. Pybus, Mark (Producer). Wolf Hall. BBC. London.

<sup>98</sup> Kosminsky, Peter (Director), Straughan, Peter (Writer). (2015). *Three Card Trick*. [Episode 1]. Pybus, Mark (Producer). Wolf Hall. BBC. London.

episode, the *Three Card Trick*, More's arrogance really shines through. He openly speaks out about Cardinal Wolsey and then he speaks down to Cromwell and rolls his eyes at what he is saying.<sup>99</sup> He then storms out of the room when Cromwell refuses to back down.<sup>100</sup> In the second episode we again see More speaking down to Cromwell and trying to catch him out by asking if he had read Tyndale or Luther.<sup>101</sup> The second episode also sees More in the confines of his own home where he has a fool, a medieval and early modern entertainer, locked up above the dining table and a monkey running around.<sup>102</sup> This does not portray the typical image of a man that was dedicated to his faith and to God but more of a rich nobleman who wanted to show off his wealth. Therefore, *Wolf Hall* affects our view of history because this portrayal of Thomas More counters that of the Thomas More seen in *A Man for All Seasons* and the portrayal that is often taught in schools. Arguably, the most significant affect on our understanding of history is that *Wolf Hall*, which was broadcast on the BBC, nominated for multiple awards and won the Best Miniseries Award at the Golden Globes was able to portray a Catholic Saint who is revered in the Catholic faith as a narcissistic villain. This portrayal of More split the audience, many of whom are Catholic and believe that Thomas More is 'the most significant defender of the true Catholic Faith,' or so it is taught in Catholic schools.<sup>103</sup> The Catholic reaction to *Wolf Hall* was not a happy one. An article in *The Tablet*, a Catholic weekly news magazine, suggested that *Wolf Hall* was a 'serious distortion of history' and that Mantel is a 'bitter ex-Catholic.'<sup>104</sup> However, *Wolf Hall* is not the only modern television series that has portrayed More in a less than positive light. *The Tudors* is not as damning as *Wolf Hall* but towards the end of the first and in to the second series the audience begins to see a darker side of More. His staunch religious views being to surface, and he despises anyone who considers questioning the Popal authority. *The Tudors* shows how More abandons his humanist principles as soon as it becomes clear that Henry is questioning the Popes authority. Although, the timeline is not the same as Elton's claim that More abandoned his humanist principles in 1521 it does support his argument. However, *The Tudors* does show that More struggled with his divided loyalties between Henry and his faith and therefore it is not fair to say that *The Tudors* portrays More as an out and out villain. He is a man who was caught

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<sup>99</sup> Kosminsky, Peter (Director), Straughan, Peter (Writer). (2015). *Three Card Trick*. [Episode 1]. Pybus, Mark (Producer). Wolf Hall. BBC. London.

<sup>100</sup> Kosminsky, Peter (Director), Straughan, Peter (Writer). (2015). *Three Card Trick*. [Episode 1]. Pybus, Mark (Producer). Wolf Hall. BBC. London.

<sup>101</sup> Kosminsky, Peter (Director), Straughan, Peter (Writer). (2015). *Entirely Beloved*. [Episode 2]. Pybus, Mark (Producer). Wolf Hall. BBC. London.

<sup>102</sup> Kosminsky, Peter (Director), Straughan, Peter (Writer). (2015). *Entirely Beloved*. [Episode 2]. Pybus, Mark (Producer). Wolf Hall. BBC. London.

<sup>103</sup> Thorpe, Vanessa. (2015, January 18). Thomas More is the villain of Wolf Hall. But is he getting a raw deal? *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/jan/18/wolf-hall-thomas-more-man-honour-fanatic-hilary-mantel>.

<sup>104</sup> Weigel, George. (2015, April 22). 'Wolf Hall' and Anti-Catholicism. *The Tablet*, <https://doi.org/https://thetablet.org/wolf-hall-and-anti-catholicism/>.

in the middle of something much bigger than himself and was forced to choose between his King and his faith.

Thomas More's canonisation in 1935 suggests that the Roman Catholic Church believe that Thomas More died and sacrificed himself for his religion. *A Man for All Seasons* also portrays this version of Thomas More. In *A Man for All Seasons* More is a principled humanist whose religion meant more to him than life itself. He was a defender of the Catholic faith in its time of crisis. He was not the religious fanatic who burned heretics that was portrayed in *Wolf Hall* but a man simply trying to do the right thing for the sake of himself, his country and his faith. Eamon Duffy and Travis Curtright, have defended More against the version portrayed of him in *Wolf Hall*. Duffy argues the modern day criticisms of More are subject to anachronism and the failure to recognise the norms of the times, especially when it comes to More's burning of heretics during his time as Lord Chancellor.<sup>105</sup> Some film historians have also commented on film and television producers' acceptance to let anachronisms slip for the sake of the storyline.<sup>106</sup> Duffy, makes a valid argument that it is important to remember the subject of anachronism especially in modern film and television because it is very easy for a producer to turn a historical figure in to a villain by forgetting the norms of the times. This is particularly important for film and television series' that are aimed at children who may not be aware of the norms of a specific period. Duffy suggests More would have felt responsible as Lord Chancellor to defend the ancient law, custom and morality of the Catholic faith.<sup>107</sup> In June 1535 More wrote to his daughter explaining that Cromwell had brought up More's burning of heretics during his time as Chancellor.<sup>108</sup> Cromwell questions that More had burned the heretics because they questioned the Pope's authority and whether he should be Head of the Church or not, Cromwell then asks why More has a different opinion to the fact that Henry is now questioning the Popes authority.<sup>109</sup> Although, this is an obvious attempt by Cromwell to incriminate More by getting him to commit treason by talking about the King's death, it is More's response that gives us a better idea about why he will not sign the Oath of Succession. More claims 'a man is not so bound in

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<sup>105</sup> Duffy, Eamon. (2017). *Reformation Divided: Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England*. Bloomsbury Publishing. London. Page 30.

<sup>106</sup> Doran, S., & Freeman, T. (2009). Introduction: It's Only a Movie. In T. Freeman (Ed.), *Tudors and Stuarts of Film* (pp. 1-30). Palgrave, Macmillan. Basingstoke. Page 16-17.

<sup>107</sup> Duffy, Eamon. (2004). *The Faith of Our Fathers: Reflections on Catholic Traditions*. Continuum. London. Page 11.

Duffy, Eamon. (2017). *Reformation Divided: Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England*. Bloomsbury Publishing. London. Page 28.

<sup>108</sup> Sir Thomas More to Margaret Roper. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1535. Taken From <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol8/pp305-325>. On The 09/06/2020.

<sup>109</sup> Sir Thomas More to Margaret Roper. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1535. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol8/pp305-325>. On The 09/06/2020.

conscience by a law of one realm as by a law of Christendom.<sup>110</sup> This suggests that More believed his conscience was to God and the law of Christendom than to one King and one realm. This is very much the More we see in *A Man for All Seasons*. In *A Man for All Seasons* it is clear that for More the priority was his soul and of the promise of an eternity in heaven rather his life on Earth. Therefore, More chose the Pope and his faith, over his King and the law of the realm. Moreover, *A Man for All Seasons* affects our view of history because it shows that More realised that his time on Earth was temporary, but the actions and choices he made were permanent. He valued his eternity in heaven over his loyalty to his King on earth. He suggested at his trial that 'the faithful subject is more bound to his conscience and his soul than to anything else in the world.'<sup>111</sup> This again confirms his loyalties to his soul, conscience and God before his King. *A Man for All Seasons* therefore explains why he is so highly revered by Catholics around the world. It is also another example of how *A Man for All Seasons* reflects the time in which it was made. More is prioritising his loyalties to his conscience over his King and the State. In the 1960s the British government introduced a number of acts, such as the 1967 Abortion Act and the 1967 Sexual Offences Act which decriminalised homosexual activity between two men over the age of twenty-one, that would have forced not only Catholics but everyday people to question their conscience and moral judgments. People in the 1960s saw a lot of social change in a seemingly short period of time and the Thomas More portrayed in *A Man for All Seasons* is a man who may not have foreseen such big changes happening in such a short period of time and his inability to adapt to these changes ultimately led to him losing his life.

Travis Curtright uses More's own writings to counter the argument put forward by Elton that More had abandoned his humanist principles by 1521. More uses *Utopia* to show how the state should be run. However, according to More the Church and State should be separate.<sup>112</sup> Hence More's opinion that religion was the province of Popal authority in Rome whilst the State was a matter for the King. More believed that the church should police heresy, approve scriptures and teach doctrine.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, Curtright is not denying More's burning of heretics, but he is justifying his actions. For Curtright, More is not the torturous religious fanatic as portrayed in *Wolf Hall* or someone who abandons his humanist principles as shown in *The Tudors*. He is simply a man using his position as Lord Chancellor to implement the policies and practices of the sixteenth century Catholic Church.

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<sup>110</sup> Sir Thomas More to Margaret Roper. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1535. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol8/pp305-325>. On The 09/06/2020.

<sup>111</sup> Thomas More at his trial. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1535. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol8/pp379-402sy>. On The 09/06/2020.

<sup>112</sup> Curtright, Travis. (2012). *The One Thomas More*. Catholic University of America Press. Washington DC. Page 108.

<sup>113</sup> Curtright, Travis. (2012). *The One Thomas More*. Catholic University of America Press. Washington DC. Page 13.

Thomas More could quite easily have slipped into obscurity after his execution in 1535, but four hundred and eighty five years after his death he is still a figure that is seen worthy of discussion and debate. This is largely due to the enigma of dying for one's faith and the idea of opposing Henry VIII. He was also made a Saint by the Roman Catholic Church. "They were martyrs because they were saints, not saints because they were martyrs."<sup>114</sup> This is how one Catholic, in 2015, describes Thomas More and John Fisher in an article written in the Catholic Herald. Considering this is a Catholic newspaper written for Catholic readers the author of the article is trying to explain that More was not made a saint because he died for the religion, but because his faith and conscience was so strong Henry had to execute him. The article is a very good example of how highly thought of More is in the Catholic Church even in the twenty-first century. It is this narrative that has enabled More to become the apparent hero of conscience that is often portrayed in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Watching the trial and execution scenes in *Wolf Hall*, *A Man for All Seasons* and *The Tudors* gives a good indication of how the producer wants More to be portrayed and how his death should be viewed in the twentieth and twenty-first century. In *A Man for all Seasons* More's trial seems like more of a show trial than a court of law. Cromwell and his allies make sure the verdict is given there and then rather than letting the jury go off to deliberate. After the guilty verdict is delivered More makes a speech suggesting that he has broken no laws but if the King says he should be executed then he is confident he will go to heaven. At which point most of the public gallery are cheering and supporting in favour of More. This could reflect how the wider Tudor majority thought of More and how Zinnemann wanted to portray More. The execution scene is a poignant one where More forgives the executioner and accepts his fate. He famously quotes 'I die the King's good servant but God's first.'<sup>115</sup> In *Wolf Hall* the trial scene is portrayed differently. Like in *A Man for All Seasons* More suggests that he has broken no laws however, unlike *A Man for All Seasons*, he also suggests that it is Henry who has broken the law.<sup>116</sup> The crowd then reply with jeers, shouts of 'traitor' and the Duke of Norfolk suggests More has chosen 'Rome over England'.<sup>117</sup> The execution scene is again poignant, the crowd and More have very little reaction to the event. Overall, *Wolf Hall's* portrayal of More's trial and execution is one that is not filled with much emotion. He is a traitor who is being executed, maybe this is the message that Mantel is trying to convey. In *The Tudors* More makes it clear at his

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<sup>114</sup> Lucie-Smith, Alexander. (2015, June 22). *Thomas More and John Fisher: two saints who died for the integrity of the Catholic Church*. Catholic Herald. Retrieved from <https://catholicherald.co.uk/thomas-more-and-john-fisher-two-saints-who-died-for-the-integrity-of-the-catholic-church/>.

<sup>115</sup> Zinnemann, F. (Director), & Zinnemann, F. (Producer). (1966). *A Man for All Seasons*. [Film]. Columbia Pictures; Highland Films.

<sup>116</sup> Kosminsky, Peter (Director), Straughan, Peter (Writer). (2015). *The Devil's Spit*. [Episode 4]. Pybus, Mark (Producer). *Wolf Hall*. [Television Broadcast]. BBC. London.

<sup>117</sup> Kosminsky, Peter (Director), Straughan, Peter (Writer). (2015). *The Devil's Spit*. [Episode 4]. Pybus, Mark (Producer). *Wolf Hall*. [Television Broadcast]. BBC. London.

execution that he 'shall now suffer death in, and for, the faith of the holy Catholic Church.'<sup>118</sup> This is supporting the narrative that More died for his faith, it is also making it very clear to the audience why More is being executed. The execution has more emotion than on *Wolf Hall*, some of the audience are crying and more significantly Henry VIII seems to be regretting executing More. Just as the axe falls on to More's neck Henry screams to the heavens. This could suggest that even Henry thinks he has made a mistake by having More executed. These scenes are significant to the way the audience remembers More because despite what he may or may not have done in the film or television series, to get to this point the amount of emotion, empathy or apathy felt in these scenes is more likely to leave a lasting impression on the audience.

In conclusion, the portrayals of Thomas More could not have been any more different. The Thomas More portrayed in *A Man for All Seasons* tells us much more about Robert Bolt than it does about More. Society was going through great social and cultural change and Bolt used More as a 'hero of conscience' to try and create a figurehead to limit these changes. Bolt also saw More as a man he could relate to. In the 1960s Bolt was forced to sign a declaration stating he would not protest against nuclear proliferation again. Bolt did not want to sign this document but he was forced to by a film producer whom he was working for at the time. Although, this is a different cause to what More was protesting for it was a very similar situation. Both men, over four hundred years apart, were being forced to sign something that went against their conscience. Bolt eventually gave in and signed, More, however, did not. *Wolf Hall* presented another side to More that many people may not have recognised. It presented him as a man who claimed to be a man of religion but was drawn into Tudor politics and as a religious fanatic who could not accept the changing world of Tudor England. This is another example of how a television series reflects the time it was made more than the time in which it was set. The twenty-first century is a time in which society is constantly moving and progressing. People, in particularly men, who cannot accept change and accept the ever changing society are often criticized. The target audience for *Wolf Hall* would have been those who were growing up in the progressive 1960s society. Therefore, More would have been seen as a man who was trying to stop society from progressing. Overall, the portrayals of Thomas More are all very different in the way they presented him, but they were all similar in that they reflected the time in which they were made. *A Man for All Seasons* and *Wolf Hall*, in particular, reflect the ever changing worlds of the twentieth and twenty first centuries and how More would have been seen in the modern world by the audiences.

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<sup>118</sup> Donnelly, Ciaran, (Director), Hirst, Michael, (Writer). (2008). *His Majesty's Pleasure*. (Series 2, Episode 5). Hirst, Michael, (Producer). The Tudors. [Television Broadcast]. BBC. Ireland.

## The Man Who Conquered the System From Within

'The man who conquers the system from within,' this quote from Hilary Mantel seems like a very appropriate place to start this chapter about Thomas Cromwell.<sup>121</sup> Born in Putney, c1485, Cromwell had a remarkable journey from the son of a blacksmith to becoming the King's Chief Minister.<sup>122</sup> His time spent at the summit of Tudor politics were arguably the most turbulent years of Henry's reign. Geoffrey Elton, a leading Tudor historian, once described Thomas Cromwell as 'unbiographical.'<sup>123</sup> This is unsurprising considering the sheer number of letters and papers passing through Cromwell's office every day from around 1533 until his execution in 1540. However, there are also large gaps in the historical record when it comes to Cromwell's life hence why Elton may have suggested he was 'unbiographical.' However, this job becomes even more difficult as the majority of Cromwell's outgoing correspondence were destroyed by his household shortly after his arrest in 1540. His time as Chief Minister saw huge religious and administrative changes in England and this chapter will look to see just how many of these changes were down to Thomas Cromwell. Film and television have played a very important role in keeping Cromwell a topic of conversation nearly 500 years after his death. Peter Marshall suggests that due to *Wolf Hall* people are more likely to know about Thomas Cromwell than Oliver Cromwell, which is remarkable given the historical importance of the latter in English history.<sup>124</sup> However, this chapter will argue that Cromwell has been a victim of misrepresentation in film and television due to the producers and writers not recognising the crucial role he played in the Reformation or the administrative changes that happened during this period. It will use a number of modern film and television series, the *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of Henry VIII* as well as historiography from the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries to see how these changes have, or have not, been portrayed and interpreted. This chapter will also analyse how the reputation of Cromwell has changed amongst historians over the twentieth and twenty-first century and whether these changes have been reflected in film and television.

The Tudor dynasty saw an expansion of opportunities to move up the social ladder and a chance unlike ever before for those of the middling ground to rise and compete with the highest in society. Cromwell came from a humble background of a blacksmith's son to become one of the most powerful men at court. The Henrician court was a brutal place for even the most intelligent and

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<sup>121</sup> Armitstead, C. (2019, September 21). Hilary Mantel: 'History is a process, not a locked box'. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/21/hilary-mantel-history-wolf-hall-thomas-cromwell>.

<sup>122</sup> Leithead, H. (2009, May 21). Cromwell, Thomas, Earl of Essex (b. in or before 1485, d. 1540), royal minister. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Retrieved 31 Jan. 2021, from <https://www-oxforddnb-com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-6769>.

<sup>123</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1992). *Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics: Volume 4, papers and Reviews 1983-1990*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 146-147.

<sup>124</sup> Marshall, P. King Henry's Henchman [Review of the book *Thomas Cromwell: A Life* by D, MacCulloch]. *Literary Review*, (468), 737.

experienced men, take Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas More, for example. Therefore, for Thomas Cromwell to overcome all the obstacles of the court to hold so much power and have the trust of the king makes him a remarkable man. Many nineteenth century historians agree that Cromwell ruled England brutally but when you look his achievements it could be argued that such brutality was necessary.<sup>125</sup> Arthur Galton, a nineteenth century historian who wrote *The Character and times of Thomas Cromwell: A Sixteenth Century Criticism* in 1887, started as a priest in the Catholic Church before later converting to become a Church of England vicar. Galton described Cromwell as ‘a minister of destruction, Cromwell is almost without an equal in history.’<sup>126</sup> J. A. Froude described Cromwell as being ‘the most despotic minister who ever governed England.’<sup>127</sup> However, despite his methods being brutal and tyrannical Galton and Froude admire the religious and political changes Cromwell made during his time at the height of Tudor politics.<sup>128</sup> By the early twentieth century there had been a shift in the historiography. Historians no longer saw religion as Cromwell’s main motivation.<sup>129</sup> R. B Merriman described him as having a ‘lack of emotion in everything he did’ and a having a ‘total disregard of the justness or morality of any action.’<sup>130</sup> He also suggested that Cromwell had ‘no concern for religion.’<sup>131</sup> A. D Innes and Peter Wilding are two more early twentieth century historians who agree that Cromwell was not motivated by religion but that he was motivated by power and influence.<sup>132</sup>

The second half of the twentieth century saw a change of opinion in regard to Thomas Cromwell, largely due to Geoffrey Elton. He suggested Cromwell was ‘England’s first parliamentary statesman’ and claims that Cromwell was not the sinister politician that people often associate him as being.<sup>133</sup> Elton, also claimed that it was Cromwell, not Henry, who ‘instigated and in part accomplished a

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<sup>125</sup> Everett, Michael. (2015). *The Rise of Thomas Cromwell: Power and Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII, 1485-1534*. Yale University Press. Yale. Page 3.

Froude, J. A. (1856). *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Death of Elizabeth*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Pages 521-525.

Galton, A. (1887). *The Character and Times of Thomas Cromwell: A Sixteenth Century Criticism*. Cornish Brothers. Birmingham. Pages 208-209.

<sup>126</sup> Galton, A. (1887). *The Character and Times of Thomas Cromwell: A Sixteenth Century Criticism*. Cornish Brothers. Birmingham. Pages 208-209.

<sup>127</sup> Froude, J. A. (1870). *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Death of Elizabeth*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Pages 521-525.

<sup>128</sup> Everett, Michael. (2015). *The Rise of Thomas Cromwell: Power and Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII, 1485-1534*. Yale University Press. Yale. Page 3.

<sup>129</sup> Everett, Michael. (2015). *The Rise of Thomas Cromwell: Power and Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII, 1485-1534*. Yale University Press. Yale. Page 4.

<sup>130</sup> Merriman, R. B. (1902). *Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. Page 87.

<sup>131</sup> Merriman, R. B. (1902). *Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. Page 88.

<sup>132</sup> Innes, A. (1906). *Ten Tudor Statesmen*. Eveleigh Nash. London. Pages 115 and 149.

Wilding, Peter. (1935). *Thomas Cromwell*. W Heinemann. London. Page 66.

<sup>133</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1974). *Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government. The Political Creed of Thomas Cromwell*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Pages 225- 234

major and enduring transformation in virtually every aspect of the nation's public life.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, Elton suggested that Thomas Cromwell did have a major part to play in the events that happened not only during his time in power but that he also laid the foundations for the modern parliamentary state that we live in today.<sup>135</sup> Elton grew up in Germany during the 1930s during which time Europe saw the rise of many dictators, he then moved to Britain and wrote his PhD thesis in 1949. After the Second World War, Europe saw the rise of the Soviet Union and Communism. Such circumstances could have influenced Elton to dedicate his life to Cromwell who, according to Elton, helped create a modern bureaucratic state in England and lay the foundations for England's future success and stability.<sup>136</sup> Elton became a Professor at Cambridge and went on to teach some of the most well-known Tudor historians of the twentieth and twenty-first century. J. J. Scarisbrick, one of Elton's former pupils, suggests that Thomas Cromwell transformed the English administrative system and made it into a machine that ran more efficiently than ever before.<sup>137</sup> Scarisbrick suggests that Cromwell was Henry's 'ways and means' man as after Wolsey's downfall there was a period where Henry struggled to implement policies.<sup>138</sup> David Starkey, another of Elton's pupils, describes Cromwell as 'a supreme master of the bloody game of faction politics.'<sup>139</sup> However, Starkey believes that Cromwell had no motivation other than personal gain.<sup>140</sup> David Loades suggests that Cromwell transformed the administrative system of England and did not care for the trappings of power.<sup>141</sup> He also concedes that Cromwell was a dangerous man however, he was living in a dangerous world where no one was safe.<sup>142</sup> Later in the twentieth century and in the twenty-first century the way some historians look at history changed. Elton preferred an empirical approach to the study of history.<sup>143</sup> Twenty-first century historians focus on Cromwell's background and the reasons why Cromwell had certain motivations to explain how and why he achieved what he did. Elton was a leading critic of philosophical historians and saw that the duty of historians was to objectively

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<sup>134</sup>Elton, Geoffrey. (1974). *Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government. Thomas Cromwell Redivivus*. Cambridge University Press. Page 192.

<sup>135</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1953). *The Tudor Revolution in Government: Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page Passim.

<sup>136</sup> Slavin, Arthur. (1983). *G. R. Elton and His Era: Thirty Years On*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Pages 217-218.

<sup>137</sup> Scarisbrick, J. J. (1997). *Henry VIII*. Yale University Press. Yale. Pages 489-499.

<sup>138</sup> Scarisbrick, J. J. (1997). *Henry VIII*. Yale University Press. Yale. Pages 241-304.

<sup>139</sup>Starkey, David. (2002). *The Reign of Henry VIII: Personalities and Politics*. Vintage. London. Page 105.

<sup>140</sup> Starkey, David. (1987). *The English Court: From the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War*. Longman. Harlow. Pages Passim.

<sup>141</sup> Loades, David. (1997). *Power in Tudor England*. Macmillan. London. Page 54.

<sup>142</sup> Loades, David. (1997). *Power in Tudor England*. Macmillan. London. Page 54.

<sup>143</sup> Slavin, Arthur. (1983). *G. R. Elton and His Era: Thirty Years On*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 210.

analyse the evidence available.<sup>144</sup> Inspired by the *Wolf Hall* book series by Hilary Mantel, MacCulloch embarked on something that Geoffrey Elton thought was impossible, a biography of the life of Thomas Cromwell. MacCulloch was another one of Elton's impressive list of students, however MacCulloch's argument and motivations could not be more different. MacCulloch goes into detail about Cromwell's background and the forty years before he entered Cardinal Wolsey's service. Historians have often struggled to write about the full life of Thomas Cromwell as there are a major lack of primary sources up until Cromwell was about forty. However, MacCulloch thinks Cromwell's background is key to understanding his religious motivations later in his career.<sup>145</sup> He believes Cromwell's travels throughout Europe, before he entered Wolsey's service, influenced Cromwell's evangelical religious beliefs.<sup>146</sup> Another obstacle for historians is that when it became clear that Cromwell would be convicted of treason his household destroyed many of his out-going correspondence. Therefore, historians have little primary material to help them figure out the mystery that was Thomas Cromwell. MacCulloch, concluded that the revolution Thomas Cromwell created in the 1500s helped shape the modern Protestant world as it is known today.<sup>147</sup> He also suggests that everything Cromwell did was for religion, rather than politics.<sup>148</sup> MacCulloch believes that Cromwell's religion helped him rise to the heights he did and was also the reason for his downfall.<sup>149</sup> It is important to remember when reading MacCulloch that he is ordained as a deacon in the Church of England and is a well-known supporter of Cromwell. Although, Alec Ryrie suggests that Cromwell's execution in 1540 proved that the Reformation was Henry's Reformation and Henry's alone.<sup>150</sup> He does agree with MacCulloch that it is clear that Cromwell was an evangelical and therefore, was motivated by religion and was a true reformer.<sup>151</sup>

Hilary Mantel, the author of *Wolf Hall*, *Bring up the Bodies* and *The Mirror and the Light*, set out to do in her novels what many historians have been unable to do, try to explain the complicated and turbulent life of Thomas Cromwell. It is important to note that as a novelist and not a historian Mantel has made it clear that she never intended, nor claimed that her books are academic.<sup>152</sup> However, historians such as MacCulloch have stated that Mantel's books have a deep knowledge of

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<sup>144</sup> Slavin, Arthur. (1983). *G. R. Elton and His Era: Thirty Years On*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 209.

Little, D. (2020). Philosophy of History. In *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/history/>.

<sup>145</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page 5.

<sup>146</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page 5.

<sup>147</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page 551.

<sup>148</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page 4.

<sup>149</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page 4.

<sup>150</sup> Ryrie, Alec. (2013). *The Age of Reformation*. Routledge. Oxon. Page 138.

<sup>151</sup> Ryrie, Alec. (2013). *The Age of Reformation*. Routledge. Oxon. Page 126.

<sup>152</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page 1.

the sixteenth century and the events that took place.<sup>153</sup> Although this piece of work will focus on the *Wolf Hall* television series, the argument still remains that many historians give due credit to Mantel for her knowledge of the sixteenth century. Hilary Mantel's Cromwell, in *Wolf Hall*, is played by Mark Rylance. Filmed from the perspective of Cromwell *Wolf Hall*, follows his time at court from the downfall of Wolsey to the execution of Anne Boleyn. Rylance plays the role of a very quiet, astute Cromwell who was never the loudest at court but certainly knew when the right time to talk was. He always seemed to be in the background and knew everything that was happening at court. Rylance executes Mantel's version of Cromwell brilliantly, using minimal facial expressions and very little dialogue to the extent that the audience is questioning Cromwell's thoughts and motives. Despite this it is quite obvious to the viewer that Cromwell's main aim in *Wolf Hall* is to avenge those involved in the downfall of Cardinal Wolsey. The way *Wolf Hall* manages to do this is through a series of flashbacks to an earlier scene where certain members of the nobility put on a show for Henry depicting the downfall of Cardinal Wolsey. *Wolf Hall* also offers a different side to Cromwell compared to *A Man for All Seasons* and *The Tudors*. It shows a human side of him, not just a politician or a religious reformer. In the series Cromwell's wife and two daughters die from the sweating sickness. It gives the viewer a reminder that Cromwell was a person, it also is one of the few times Cromwell shows the audience any real emotion in the series. *Wolf Hall* presents a Cromwell that could resonate with twenty-first century viewers. Mantel has suggested that Cromwell's low birth and his rise to the top of the Tudor court was one of the reasons she chose to write about him.<sup>154</sup> He is presented as a man who is doing what he can to better his life and his career. He is often looked down upon from other nobles at court for coming from a lower background. However, this is also something that Henry recognises and likes the fact Cromwell is not afraid to say what he thinks even if it might not be the response Henry was expecting. Mantel suggests that in the sixteenth century 'ambition was a dirty word,' however in the twenty-first century it is quite the opposite.<sup>155</sup> In the twenty-first century it does not matter where you come from or what your background is, you can rise through the social classes. Rather than the religious fanatic or the ruthless politician often portrayed Mantel could be trying to show the audience a version of Cromwell they can relate to, a man who is simply trying to better himself for the sake of his family. Cromwell is also a character who could recognise change and accept that England was changing and that the King and the court

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<sup>153</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page1.

<sup>154</sup> Clark, Alex. (2020, February 22). Hilary Mantel: 'I've got quite amused at people saying I have writer's block. I've been like a factory!'. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/feb/22/hilary-mantel-ive-got-quite-amused-at-people-saying-i-have-writers-block-ive-been-like-a-factory>.

<sup>155</sup> Clark, Alex. (2020, February 22). Hilary Mantel: 'I've got quite amused at people saying I have writer's block. I've been like a factory!'. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/feb/22/hilary-mantel-ive-got-quite-amused-at-people-saying-i-have-writers-block-ive-been-like-a-factory>.

had to change with it. In the twenty-first century England is almost always changing and therefore this is another way audience can relate to Cromwell.

This chapter will also use *The Tudors* to analyse Cromwell's rise, nadir and rapid fall from power. *The Tudors* was a long running television series created by Michael Hirst for the American television channel Showtime. Made for teens and young adults it portrayed Henry VIII's reign from around 1527 until his death in 1547. *The Tudors* offers a different perspective to *Wolf Hall* as it shows the majority of Cromwell's political life. Played by James Frain in *The Tudors* Cromwell was portrayed as ruthlessly ambitious; a man who was determined to get to the top and stay there for as long as possible. Yet he is also shown as an outwardly emotional man in comparison to the Cromwell portrayed in *Wolf Hall*. It is easy for the audience to know when he is angry or annoyed. *The Tudors* also makes it clear that Cromwell's main aim was to influence religious policy, which is different to *Wolf Hall*. In *The Tudors* many of the key figures at court were annoyed that a person of such low-ranking birth could wield so much power. In *The Tudors*, it is portrayed that the people hated Cromwell because of his religious policies and his brutality towards the Catholics. They firmly believed that the religious upheaval in the country was Cromwell's doing and not Henry's. The people blame Cromwell for the Protestant Reformation and they suggest the Pilgrimage of Grace was aimed at him and not Henry.

This chapter will also use *A Man for All Seasons* for a third detailed look at Cromwell and compare it to how differently he is portrayed, especially compared to *Wolf Hall*. In *A Man for All Seasons* Cromwell is seen as the scheming, manipulative villain who is trying to bring down Thomas More in order to become Henry's right hand man. Cromwell hired More's servant, Richard Rich, to spy on More and ultimately it is the testimony that Rich gave that led to the downfall of More. Therefore, it is very clear that Cromwell, played by Reginald "Leo" McKern, was the villain. During the 1960s when *A Man for All Seasons* came out the Cold War was very much under way. The Cold War is synonymous with countries using spies in order to gain information from the other side. This means the 1960s audience watching *A Man for All Seasons* could clearly see that Cromwell was the villain by the way he used Richard Rich to spy on Thomas More. *A Man for All Seasons* presents Cromwell's main motivation as power, rather than religion.

Little is known about Cromwell's early life other than he is the son of a blacksmith and at a young age he left home to become a mercenary in the French army.<sup>156</sup> Once he left the French army he was

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<sup>156</sup> Leithead, H. (2009, May 21). Cromwell, Thomas, Earl of Essex (b. in or before 1485, d. 1540), royal minister. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Retrieved 31 Jan. 2021, from <https://www-oxforddnb-com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-6769>.

taken in by an Italian banker and began building his network among English merchants working in the Low Countries.<sup>157</sup> By 1524 Cromwell had begun working for the Lord Chancellor, Cardinal Wolsey. It was this appointment that started his journey to becoming the king's most trusted advisor.<sup>158</sup> Cromwell worked for Wolsey until Wolsey's death in 1530. Cromwell became Henry's chief minister in 1532 and this is where we start to see the massive administrative transformations take place. *Wolf Hall* uses a series of flashbacks from Cromwell's childhood to show the audience just how far Cromwell had come from the son of a blacksmith to the Tudor court. It also portrays Cromwell's father as being abusive towards Cromwell which the show portrays as a reason to why Cromwell left home to become a mercenary. Although, *Wolf Hall* does not necessarily present a Cromwell that is motivated by religion or politics, it does present a man from a humble background trying to make his way in the bloody world of Tudor England.

David Loades suggests that Cromwell did not care for the trappings of power and he was motivated purely by serving Henry.<sup>159</sup> He did this by, according to some historians, transforming the English administrative system. Elton and Loades suggest that Cromwell was an administrative genius who changed the way England was governed.<sup>160</sup> Scarisbrick goes further and describes Cromwell as 'a genius, perhaps the most accomplished servant any English monarch had enjoyed, a royal minister who cut a deeper mark on the history of England than have many of her monarchs'.<sup>161</sup> According to Elton, Cromwell replaced the medieval household structure of government and replaced it with a series of bureaucratic departments and in doing so started the beginnings of the modern nation state we recognise today.<sup>162</sup> As Principal Secretary, Cromwell transformed the office into a large scale clearing house for political and administrative business.<sup>163</sup> Elton suggests that it was obvious that Cromwell was managing the day to day running of the country and suggests 'Cromwell not Henry was really the government.'<sup>164</sup> This is also something that the Imperial Ambassador Eustace

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<sup>157</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Pages 22-23.

<sup>158</sup> Leithead, H. (2009, May 21). Cromwell, Thomas, Earl of Essex (b. in or before 1485, d. 1540), royal minister. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Retrieved 31 Jan. 2021, from <https://www-oxforddnb-com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-6769>.

MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Pages 71, 79 and 81.

<sup>159</sup> Loades, David. (1997). *Power in Tudor England*. Macmillan. London, Page 54.

<sup>160</sup> Loades, David. (1997). *Power in Tudor England*. Macmillan. London. Page 54 and 94-95.

Elton, Geoffrey. (1953). *The Tudor Revolution in Government: A Study of Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 6 and 416.

<sup>161</sup> Scarisbrick, J.J. (1968). *Henry VIII*. Yale University Press. Yale. Page 303-304 and 383.

<sup>162</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1948). *Thomas Cromwell: Aspects of His Administrative Work* [PhD Thesis, Cambridge University].

<sup>163</sup> Loades, David. (1997). *Power in Tudor England*. Macmillan. London. Page 54.

<sup>164</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1953). Elton, Geoffrey. (1953). *The Tudor Revolution in Government: A Study of Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 175.

Chapuys recognised.<sup>165</sup> Despite Cromwell and Chapuys clear religious differences they developed somewhat of a friendship during Cromwell's early years as Chancellor and when he became Chief Minister.<sup>166</sup> On a diplomatic front a friendship between Cromwell and Chapuys was mutually beneficial.<sup>167</sup> Cromwell, despite supporting the Break from Rome, did not want to alienate the Holy Roman Empire and Chapuys recognised Cromwell's power and wanted to try and influence Cromwell to help restore the Princess Mary's right to succession and stop the Break with Rome. On a personal level away from court, Mackay suggests Cromwell and Chapuys genuinely were friends, albeit in a discrete manor but their allegiances to their rulers and their countries came first.<sup>168</sup> However, historians such as Scarisbrick, Loades, Guy and Starkey all agree that Cromwell was running the country on Henry's orders rather than on his own accord.<sup>169</sup> Therefore, it is possible that Cromwell managed to rise to the heights he did simply because Henry thought that he was the best man for the job. Although *Wolf Hall* only shows a small part of Cromwell's time at the Tudor court it does present a relationship between him and Henry which depicts Henry as being the one with the power. As *Wolf Hall* is filmed from Cromwell's perspective it could suggest that Cromwell himself knew Henry was in charge and everything he did was on behalf of the King. *Wolf Hall* and Mantel presented Cromwell like this because they did not portray him as a power hungry politician or a religious fanatic but because they wanted to portray him as a person doing his service for his King. *The Tudors* also presents a Cromwell who for the most part recognises that Henry holds the power. He understands there are certain things that he can do without permission of the King but that ultimately the key decisions had to be supported by Henry. This could be because Henry is the main character in *The Tudors* therefore Cromwell had to include Henry in his decision making otherwise Henry would not have been the main character. However, film and television does not depict the 'genius' that Elton, Loades and Scarisbrick describe.<sup>170</sup> They show a man who is essentially doing his job by carrying out the orders of the King. They fail to show the audience any of the major

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<sup>165</sup> MacKay, Lauren. (2015). *Inside The Tudor Court: Henry VIII and his Six Wives through the eyes of the Spanish Ambassador*. Amberley. Stroud. Page 279.

<sup>166</sup> MacKay, Lauren. (2015). *Inside The Tudor Court: Henry VIII and his Six Wives through the eyes of the Spanish Ambassador*. Amberley. Stroud. Pages 276-279.

<sup>167</sup> MacKay, Lauren. (2015). *Inside The Tudor Court: Henry VIII and his Six Wives through the eyes of the Spanish Ambassador*. Amberley. Stroud. Pages 276-279.

<sup>168</sup> MacKay, Lauren. (2015). *Inside The Tudor Court: Henry VIII and his Six Wives through the eyes of the Spanish Ambassador*. Amberley. Stroud. Page 279.

<sup>169</sup> Betteridge, Thomas; Freeman, Thomas S. (2012). *Henry VIII in History*. Ashgate. Oxon. Pages 17.

Starkey, David. (2004). *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII*. Random House. London. Page 555.

Loades, David. (1997). *Power in Tudor England*. Macmillan. London. Page 54.

Guy, John. (1988). *Tudor England*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. Page 82.

<sup>170</sup> Loades, David. (1997). *Power in Tudor England*. Macmillan. London. Page 54 and 94-95.

Elton, Geoffrey. (1953). *The Tudor Revolution in Government: A Study of Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 6 and 416.

Scarisbrick, J.J. (1968). *Henry VIII*. Yale University Press. Yale. Page 303-304 and 383.

administrative changes Cromwell made during his time as Henry's minister. Although it is the film and television writers' job to create drama by focussing on the more bloody and brutal aspects of Tudor life there has to be some compromise between drama and reality.<sup>171</sup> Thomas Cromwell made changes to the English administrative system on a scale that had never been seen before and there has to be some acknowledgment of that in film and television in order for the audience to know the 'real' Thomas Cromwell.. There are no, or very little, indications that Cromwell made any administrative changes or how successful they were. Therefore, not only has film and television ignored just how remarkable it was for a blacksmith's son to become the King's Chief Minister but they have also ignored just how much he changed the English administrative system.

There is also the argument that everything Cromwell did was not for Henry or religion but for himself. *A Man for All Seasons* presents a power hungry tyrant who did not care who he had to betray to reach the top. Many historians also see Cromwell as a power hungry tyrant who was able to manipulate the king and gain vast amounts of money and power. Even Elton who championed Cromwell's administrative genius suggested he was an 'autocrat as well as a bureaucrat.'<sup>172</sup> *A Man for All Seasons* also presents this Cromwell. It portrays a man that is willing to do whatever it takes to gain power at the Tudor court, this includes bringing down Thomas More. *The Tudors* presents a man with more enemies than friends and also a man who is able more often than not get his own way. One primary source goes in to detail about how one Irish man described Cromwell in 1538, 'Cromwell was the greatest briber that ever was in England...he is so great taker of money and will do for no man but for money.'<sup>173</sup> The letter also goes on to describe Cromwell as a 'villain' and suggests all the revenue meant for the king was going directly to Cromwell.<sup>174</sup> The man who was accused of saying these things was brought to trial and Cromwell was notified. This could suggest that the man had some status as it is unlikely Cromwell would have been notified otherwise. Although this is just one letter it does give us a sense of how people were feeling about Cromwell in 1538. Lauren MacKay suggests that Chapuys thought that Cromwell was 'the true power behind the throne' which could suggest why some people disliked Cromwell so much.<sup>175</sup> It also suggests that

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<sup>171</sup> Elliot, Andrew. (2010). *Remaking the Middle Ages: Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World*. McFarland & Company. London Page 209.

<sup>172</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1953). *The Tudor Revolution in Government: A Study of Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 416.

<sup>173</sup> Robert Cowley to Thomas Cromwell. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 1538. Taken from <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol13/no1/pp157-176>.

<sup>174</sup> Robert Cowley to Thomas Cromwell. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 1538. Taken from <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol13/no1/pp157-176>.

<sup>175</sup> MacKay, Lauren. (2015). *Inside The Tudor Court: Henry VIII and his Six Wives through the eyes of the Spanish Ambassador*. Amberley. Stroud. Page 279.

some people thought Cromwell's motivations were personal rather than for the sake of the king or religion.

It is impossible to write about Thomas Cromwell without writing about the Reformation because of the crucial role he played in the Break from Rome and the start of the Reformation in England in the 1530s. In January 1535 Henry appointed Cromwell the Royal Vicegerent and Vicar-General. This gave Cromwell the power to organise all the country's churches, monasteries and clergy. It also enabled him to conduct a census to enable the government to overhaul how the church was taxed. It is obvious by the sheer number of letters and papers coming in and leaving Cromwell's office each day that he kept very close attention to the ecclesiastical affairs happening in the country.<sup>176</sup> For example, on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1538 Cromwell wrote a very threatening letter to a Bishop reminding him of his duties and warning him about the content of his sermons.<sup>177</sup> This shows that Cromwell was not afraid to personally get involved in the teachings of the church and remind the clergy of their duties. However, it was the Dissolution of the Monasteries, starting in 1536, which caused the most disruption in Tudor England. George Bernard called it 'one of the most revolutionary events in English history.'<sup>178</sup> *The Tudors* presents a Cromwell that is motivated by religion, not politics. Throughout the programme until his death it is obvious to the viewer that Cromwell is obsessed with, as he calls it, the destruction of the Catholic Church.<sup>179</sup> It is also obvious that his religious reforms are not popular with the people. The show makes this clear by showing how unhappy the Northerners in particular are with the Reformation and just how far they were willing to go to make their voices heard.<sup>180</sup> The series makes it clear that the Pilgrimage of Grace was aimed at Cromwell and his reforms. The Pilgrimage of Grace was the largest peacetime rebellion England has ever seen.<sup>181</sup> Shortly before the Pilgrimage of Grace there was the Lincolnshire Rising. This was much smaller than the Pilgrimage of Grace, however, The Lincoln Articles released on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October 1536 suggest that the Lincolnshire Rising and Pilgrimage of Grace was largely aimed at bringing

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<sup>176</sup> Robert Cowley to Thomas Cromwell. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 1538. Taken from <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol13/no1/pp157-176>.

<sup>177</sup> Thomas Cromwell to the Bishop of ?. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1538. Taken from <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol13/no1/pp1-20>.

<sup>178</sup> Bernard, G. (2011). The Dissolution of the Monasteries. *History*, 96, 390-409.

<sup>179</sup> Donnelly, Ciaran, (Director), Hirst, Michael, (Writer). (2008). The Definition of Love. (Series 2, Episode 6). Hirst, Michael, (Producer). *The Tudors*. BBC. Ireland.

Walsh, Dearbhla, (Director), Hirst, Michael, (Writer). (2008). Matters of State. (Series 2, Episode 7). Hirst, Michael, (Producer). *The Tudors*. BBC. Ireland.

<sup>180</sup> Donnelly, Ciaran, (Director), Hirst, Michael, (Writer). (2009). Civil Unrest. (Series 3, Episode 1). Hirst, Michael, (Producer). *The Tudors*. BBC. Ireland.

Donnelly, Ciaran, (Director), Hirst, Michael, (Writer). (2009). The Northern Rising. (Series 3, Episode 2). Hirst, Michael, (Producer). *The Tudors*. BBC. Ireland.

<sup>181</sup> Lipscomb, Suzannah. (2009). *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII*. Lion Hudson. Oxford. Pages 43-47.

down Cromwell and saving the monasteries.<sup>182</sup> The first article states that they are unhappy with the suppression of so many religious houses.<sup>183</sup> The fourth article directly names Cromwell, suggesting that the king has taken too many council members of 'low birth and small reputation' of whom have directly profited and taken advantage of the Dissolution of the Monasteries.<sup>184</sup> This suggests that Cromwell was disliked by many people during his time as Chief Minister both because of his role in the Dissolution of the Monasteries and because of his low ranking birth. By directly naming Cromwell in the article it shows just how influential he was during the mid-1530s. It also supports how *The Tudors* portrayed the Pilgrimage of Grace and how the rebels were rebelling against Cromwell and his allies and not the King. However, some historians argue that Cromwell was a genuine reformer.

Diarmaid MacCulloch argues that the revolution Thomas Cromwell created in the 1500s helped shape the modern Protestant world as we know it today.<sup>185</sup> He played a pivotal role in shaping a religious Reformation and society that would change England forever. For example, he played a crucial role in producing and distributing the Bible in English. Before his death in 1540 he commissioned Myles Coverdale to print and distribute the English Bible to every parish in England.<sup>186</sup> This was crucial as it gave the people a way to read, understand and interpret the Bible for themselves without relying on the church or a priest. He also played an important role in England's Break from Rome, and the Pope, and making the monarch of England the Supreme Head of the Church in England. This was significant because it meant that for the first time the state and the church could work as one. This meant that the Pope no longer had control over the people of England and that the state could dictate and control religion. In this sense, Cromwell was helping to create a modern secularised state in which the power lies solely with the state and not with the Pope in Rome. Although Ryrie suggests it was Henry leading the Reformation, not Cromwell, he does concede that Cromwell was a committed and true reformer who wholeheartedly believed in Evangelicalism.<sup>187</sup> Another way Cromwell managed to secure the future of Protestantism was by introducing William Cecil and Nicholas Bacon to Evangelical circles early in their careers.<sup>188</sup> Cecil and

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<sup>182</sup> Fletcher, Anthony and MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2008). *Tudor Rebellions*. Person Education, Harlow. Page 141-142.

Halpenny, B. BBC. (2013). *Lincolnshire Uprising – A Very Religious Affair*. bbc.co.uk.

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/lincolnshire/content/articles/2009/07/03/lincolnshire\\_uprising\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/lincolnshire/content/articles/2009/07/03/lincolnshire_uprising_feature.shtml)

<sup>183</sup> Fletcher, Anthony and MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2008). *Tudor Rebellions*. Person Education, Harlow. Page 141-142.

<sup>184</sup> Fletcher, Anthony and MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2008). *Tudor Rebellions*. Person Education, Harlow. Page 141-142.

<sup>185</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page 551.

<sup>186</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page 535.

<sup>187</sup> Ryrie, Alec. (2013). *The Age of Reformation*. Routledge. Oxon. Page 126 and 138.

<sup>188</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page 543.

Bacon would go on to become favourites of Elizabeth I who would rule a Protestant England for forty-five years. Bacon, and in particular Cecil, went on to hold great power and influence in Elizabethan England. Although he could not have predicted the power and influence they would hold Cromwell was clever enough to put people in place to continue his legacy and the Protestant Reformation for long after his death. Cromwell did not live to see the effects of the Reformation he helped to create but he played a vital role in laying the foundations that would eventually shape the England we live in today.<sup>189</sup> Guy suggests that in the end Cromwell had allowed his commitment to reform to cloud his political judgement which eventually led to his downfall, 'in this sense, he was much a martyr to his faith as More and Fisher were to theirs.'<sup>190</sup> In many aspects modern film and television does not reflect this Thomas Cromwell. Modern film and television does Cromwell a disservice by not recognising the role he played in creating a society that we can still recognise today. As with his administrative changes, modern film and television writers and producers tend to pick and choose a small part of Cromwell's life to portray and shape it to fit in to the bigger story. For example, they show the opposition to Cromwell's religious reforms with the Pilgrimage of Grace but they do not show the support he had by many in the country at the time. *The Tudors* does present religion as Cromwell's motivation but does so in a way that makes him an enemy of the people, rather than a reformer. It also shows Cromwell, with Henry's permission, keeping a percentage of the profits from the Dissolution of the Monasteries. However, there is one scene in *The Tudors* that could suggest to the viewer that Cromwell was a genuine reformer. Cromwell is caught praying in his office rather than in church. This is significant because Catholics believed that you have to be in church in order to communicate with God. The pageboy looked shocked and uncomfortable to which Cromwell replied 'do all of our reforms mean nothing to you? God is not just in church. He is everywhere. We do not need priests to speak for us. We can speak to Him ourselves, and - He will listen. There is no need for bells, and books, and candles. All you need... is your soul.'<sup>191</sup> This shows the viewer that Cromwell could have been a genuine reformer because he was not praying for show or to make a point to anyone, this was in the confines of his private office. The pageboy was not an important noble or the King this could prove to the audience that Cromwell wanted to help reform the masses for genuine religious reasons. However, this idea is not one that is presented in *The Tudors* because it is easier for film and television writers to create drama out of opposition and anger than it is to create drama out of acceptance and conformity.

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<sup>189</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page 371.

<sup>190</sup> Guy, John. (1988). *Tudor England*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. Page 188.

<sup>191</sup> Podeswa, Jeremy, (Director), Hirst, Michael, (Writer). (2009). Protestant Anne of Cleves. (Series 3, Episode 7). Hirst, Michael, (Producer). *The Tudors*. BBC. Ireland

Thomas Cromwell may be one of the most misunderstood people in history. He rose through the ranks of the Tudor world to reach the very top and in the process he helped transform the administrative system of England and helped set in motion a Reformation that would change England forever. Geoffrey Elton and Diarmaid MacCulloch may disagree about what Cromwell's motivations really were, but it is clear that they agree just how extraordinary Cromwell and the things he achieved were. Modern film and television do Cromwell a disservice by not recognising just how much he changed England in the few years he was at the top of the Tudor court. They often show a one-sided representation in order to fit Cromwell and his story around the overall plot of the film or television series. It is much easier for film and television writers to create drama out of opposition and discontent. Therefore, more often than not Cromwell is the guy to create this opposition and discontent. There is no doubt that film and television producers must do more to show the long term effects of the changes that Cromwell made during his time at the top of the Tudor court. Cromwell is a victim to the way modern film and television producers have chosen to portray him. More and more modern historians are disagreeing with the notion that Cromwell was an out and out villain. Elton, Loades and Scarisbrick describe him as a genius.<sup>192</sup> MacCulloch and Ryrie describe him as a true reformer who helped shape the modern Protestant world.<sup>193</sup> However, without film and television, especially *Wolf Hall*, Thomas Cromwell may well have slipped into obscurity. The way Cromwell is portrayed in the film and television series could spark debate and interest from the people watching them. Film and television has made Cromwell a man that people cannot ignore, especially when watching and learning about the Tudors. Therefore, despite the way in which he has been portrayed, film and television has impacted the way in which we learn about Cromwell and has even had an impact on academic history.

## You Think You Know A Story...

Henry VIII is quite possibly the most famous and well-remembered English monarch. He ruled England for thirty-eight years from 1509 until 1547. Writers, poets, film and television writers throughout the centuries since his death have taken a key interest in his reign. This chapter will use *The Tudors*, *Wolf Hall*, *A Man for All Seasons* and *Horrible Histories* to see how Henry is portrayed in film and television. Henry VIII is popular with film and television makers due to his drama filled reign.

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<sup>192</sup> Loades, David. (1997). *Power in Tudor England*. Macmillan. London. Page 54 and 94-95.

Elton, Geoffrey. (1953). *The Tudor Revolution in Government: A Study of Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 6 and 416.

Scarisbrick, J.J. (1968). *Henry VIII*. Yale University Press. Yale. Pages 303-304 and 383.

<sup>193</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page 551.

Ryrie, Alec. (2013). *The Age of Reformation*. Routledge. Oxon. Page 126 and 138.

Although, the full thirty-eight years of his reign is not what captures the attention of film and television makers, rather it is the years 1527 until 1536 that film and television makers tend to focus on. Some of the key events in his reign, such as Henry's divorce from Catherine of Aragon, his Break with Rome, his marriage to Anne Boleyn, the executions of Thomas More and Anne Boleyn, the Pilgrimage of Grace and his marriage to Jane Seymour, all happened during this period, 1527 until 1536. This means that film and television writers do not have to look far for something that will capture an audience. Despite the well-known events of his reign Henry himself remains an enigma, with a variety of portrayals of the man coming from historians, film and television makers alike. This chapter will look at Henry's reign from the beginning and discuss why film and television makers do not produce films and television series about the first eighteen years of his reign. It will then discuss the apparent change in Henry's personality and the events that may have led to the change. Primarily, it will focus on why the period between 1527 and 1536 attracts film and television makers. Finally, it will use some of the events in this period to see how Henry is portrayed in film and television. This chapter will argue that film and television makers have a negative impact on how we view Henry VIII because they only focus on a small period of Henry's reign.

A.F. Pollard, a great twentieth century historian and biographer of Henry VIII, was the first historian to use the *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII* when writing his work. He concluded that although Henry was a ruthless ruler, he was not a tyrant.<sup>194</sup> He suggested that Henry always acted with rational calculation and responded to the events that happened. This suggests that Pollard believed that Henry's personality did not change throughout his reign but that Henry simply responded, as any sixteenth century King would, to the events that took place when they happened. Although, Pollard was writing earlier than most of the historians discussed in this chapter, he was key in stimulating debates amongst historians in the later twentieth century. However, the historiography regarding Henry has changed in more recent years. It changed from Pollard's statesman like interpretation of Henry as a monarch who reacted with caution and calculation to events into a King who was driven by passion, instincts and insecurity.

Many historians agree that Henry's personality changed throughout his reign, however they disagree on why and when it changed. Chronicler Edward Hall, a sixteenth-century historian, was the first to write about Henry's apparent change in his personality.<sup>195</sup> He wrote that for the first fifteen years or so of his reign Henry was a good King then at some point in the 1530s he became 'increasingly brutal

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<sup>194</sup> Pollard, A. F. (1902). *Henry VIII*. Goupil. London. Page 246-247

Freeman, Thomas and Betteridge, Thomas. (2012). *Henry VIII and History*. Routledge. London. Page 11.

<sup>195</sup> Freeman, Thomas and Betteridge, Thomas. (2012). *From Perfect Prince to 'Wise and Politike' King: Henry VIII in Edward Hall's Chronicle*. In Lucas, Scott (Ed). *Henry VIII and History*. (pp. 51-64). Routledge. London. Page 51.

and authoritarian.’<sup>196</sup> Hall set the precedent for future historians, many of whom still agree with his interpretation today. Lucy Wooding suggests that there was a shift in Henry’s behaviour during his reign.<sup>197</sup> Wooding suggests the shift happened during the late 1520s when Henry was becoming more and more obsessed with having a male heir. However, Wooding is keen to point out that Henry did not turn in to the tyrannical King that some historians have written about but he was a King with genuine principles.<sup>198</sup> Suzannah Lipscomb suggests 1536 was a key year in Henry’s reign. She suggests the year 1536 was the key turning point in Henry’s reign.<sup>199</sup> Arguably there were more developments in 1536 than happened in the whole of Henry’s reign all together. A number of key domestic, religious and political events took place which changed Henry. These include Henry’s increasing desperation for a male heir, the death of Catherine of Aragon, the execution of Anne Boleyn, his marriage to Jane Seymour, Thomas Cromwell accelerating the Protestant Reformation and the largest peace time rebellion ever raised against an English monarch, the Pilgrimage of Grace.<sup>200</sup> Lipscomb shows the change in Henry’s personality but also tries to justify this change, using the events of 1536. This is something *The Tudors* also tries to incorporate into the television series. The programme clearly shows a change in Henry’s personality especially after the downfall of Anne Boleyn and during and after the Pilgrimage of Grace. David Starkey is another historian who notes the change in Henry’s personality. Starkey claims ‘there are two Henry’s, the young one and the old one.’<sup>201</sup> Starkey suggests that Henry was prone to ‘lightening enthusiasms about people and things.’<sup>202</sup> He also implies it was Henry’s constantly changing personality that shaped the intrigue and manipulation that surrounded Tudor politics.<sup>203</sup> This period is famous for political intrigue and ministers swapping and changing factions in order to gain power at Henry’s court. However, due to Henry’s unpredictable personality it was hard for any minister to fully grasp power. Furthermore, those that did manage to gain power at Henry’s court often ended up in the Tower. Although these historians disagree about when Henry’s personality started to change, they all agree that it did change. This is important when looking at film and television because *The Tudors* shows the change in Henry’s personality. In the series he goes from being a young, sport loving monarch to a paranoid short-tempered King. However, not all historians agree that Henry’s change in personality was just a

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<sup>196</sup>Freeman, Thomas and Betteridge, Thomas. (2012). *From Perfect Prince to ‘Wise and Politike’ King: Henry VIII in Edward Hall’s Chronicle*. In Lucas, Scott (Ed). *Henry VIII and History*. (pp. 51-64). Routledge. London. Page 51.

<sup>197</sup> Wooding, Lucy. (2009). *Henry VIII*. Routledge. Oxon. Page 4.

<sup>198</sup> Wooding, Lucy. (2009). *Henry VIII*. Routledge. Oxon. Page 3.

<sup>199</sup> Lipscomb, Suzannah. (2009). *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII*. Lion Hudson. Oxford. Page 13.

<sup>200</sup> Lipscomb, Suzannah. (2009). *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII*. Lion Hudson. Oxford. Pages 43-47.

<sup>201</sup> Starkey, David. (2008). *Henry: Virtuous Prince*. Harper Press. Oxfordshire. Page 3.

<sup>202</sup> Starkey, David. (1985). *The Reign of Henry VIII: Personalities and Politics*. Vintage. London. Page 3.

<sup>203</sup> Starkey, David. (1985). *The Reign of Henry VIII: Personalities and Politics*. Vintage. London. Page 6.

reaction to the events. This also shows an uncertainty among historians about who Henry was at arguably the most turbulent point in his reign.

Thomas Freeman and Thomas Betteridge suggest that the idea that Henry turned into a tyrant in the 1530s was created by Catholic historians who have linked the change in his personality with his abandonment of the Catholic Church.<sup>204</sup> This could suggest that Henry's personality did not change during his reign and it was a narrative created by historians who wished to push forward a particular interpretation.

Reginald Pole's *De Unitate* written in 1535-1536 is the first known work by a Catholic writer to suggest that Henry was a tyrant.<sup>205</sup> Pole was just one of many Catholics who wrote out about Henry in the sixteenth century. Catholics continued to write out about Henry in Marian and Elizabethan England. This set the precedent for all future Catholic historians.<sup>206</sup> J.J. Scarisbrick, writing in the twentieth-century, is a staunch Catholic and it is clear from his work that he emphatically dislikes Henry. He describes him as a bully who acted ruthlessly and ruled ineptly.<sup>207</sup> Henry was the King at the time of the Reformation and was the man to begin England's break from Rome. Scarisbrick, as a Catholic, has a clear motive to describe Henry the way he does. Although Scarisbrick does concede that although Henry did have many faults, how he changed England during his reign was remarkable.<sup>208</sup> It could be possible that Scarisbrick has let his own religious stance get in the way of the overall popular opinion of Henry and his reign. Lacey Baldwin Smith wrote *Henry VIII: The Mask of Royalty* in 1971 which looked at Henry from a psychiatric perspective. He described Henry as 'egotistical borderline neurotic' who had a very suspicious personality and frequently had great fits of temper.<sup>209</sup> Jasper Ridley in his 1984 biography of Henry described him as a 'lion who, knowing his strength, could not be ruled.'<sup>210</sup> Ridley describes Henry as a monarch who could manipulate, took advantage of others weaknesses and ruled England as a tyrant who could not have ruled the way he did at any other time in history.<sup>211</sup> All of these historians are Catholics and as the break with Rome started during Henry's reign it could explain their arguments about Henry and his personality.

This chapter will use *The Tudors*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *Wolf Hall* and *Horrible Histories* to analyse how Henry VIII is portrayed in film and television series. It will analyse this selection of film and

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<sup>204</sup> Freeman, Thomas and Betteridge, Thomas. (2012). *Henry VIII and History*. Routledge. London. Pages 13- 15.

<sup>205</sup> Freeman, Thomas and Betteridge, Thomas. (2012). *Henry VIII and History*. Routledge. London. Page 65.

<sup>206</sup> Freeman, Thomas and Betteridge, Thomas. (2012). *Henry VIII and History*. Routledge. London. Page 13.

<sup>207</sup> Scarisbrick, J. J. (1997). *Henry VIII*. Yale University Press. Yale. Pages 498-526.

<sup>208</sup> Scarisbrick, J. J. (1997). *Henry VIII*. Yale University Press. Yale. Page 506.

<sup>209</sup> Smith, Lacey Baldwin. (1971). *Henry VIII: The Mask of Royalty*. Academy Chicago Publishes. Chicago. Page Passim.

<sup>210</sup> Ridley, Jasper. (1984). *Henry VIII*. Constable. London. Page 416.

<sup>211</sup> Ridley, Jasper. (1984). *Henry VIII*. Constable. London. Page 416.

television shows because they all offer different perspectives of Henry. *The Tudors* is centred on Henry and his life, *A Man for All Seasons* shows Henry as a side character to Thomas More, *Wolf Hall* is filmed from the perspective of Thomas Cromwell and therefore the Henry we see is based on the man Cromwell knew. The *Horrible Histories* series offers a view of Henry made for a young audience. There are other film and television series that feature Henry such as, *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, *The Other Boleyn Girl* and the television film *Henry VIII*. However, as this dissertation focusses on Thomas Cromwell, Thomas More and Henry VIII it has used the three film and television series focussing on these people for a different perspective in each chapter.

*The Tudors* was created by Michael Hirst and follows Henry's reign from the late 1520's until his death in 1547. Hirst, Hollywood's 'go-to man for historical fiction,' has spoken about the process that he goes through in order to write historical fiction.<sup>212</sup> Hirst has stated that he 'loves' the research and 'getting to know' these historical characters that he writes about.<sup>213</sup> This suggests that despite *The Tudors* being made for the popular audience there has been some thought and research gone in to writing the script. Hirst also suggested that the purpose of *The Tudors* was to try and show people that the characters in the series were 'living, real people' and that the 'range of their feelings were just like ours so not treating history like a museum but treating it as a quite extraordinary human story.'<sup>214</sup> The ability to portray these historical characters as actual people is one of the major powers film and television has. It has allowed people of the twentieth and twenty-first century to understand and relate to people of the past. There is a much larger possibility of an emotional connection to a person of the past through film and television than through a museum. This is because film and television allows a person to see emotions through the highs and lows of one's story. *The Tudors* starts around the time when Henry was starting to question his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. It then follows Henry through the most turbulent years of his reign. *The Tudors* not only shows the change in Henry and his personality throughout this period but also shows the viewer why his personality changed. This is important because it very much supports Lipscomb, Wooding and Starkey's opinion that Henry's personality changed during his reign. Henry, played by Jonathan Rhys Meyers, begins a fun, outgoing and sporty King who enjoyed putting on lavish events

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<sup>212</sup>Hogan, R. *So What Do You Do, Michael Hirst, Creator of The Tudors and Vikings?* MediaBistro. <https://www.mediabistro.com/be-inspired/advice-from-the-pros/so-what-do-you-do-michael-hirst-creator-of-the-tudors-and-vikings/>.

<sup>213</sup> Halterman, J. (2009). "*The Tudors*" Creator Michael Hirst. The Futon Critic. [http://www.thefutoncritic.com/interviews/2009/04/03/interview-the-tudors-creator-michael-hirst-30921/20090403\\_tudors/](http://www.thefutoncritic.com/interviews/2009/04/03/interview-the-tudors-creator-michael-hirst-30921/20090403_tudors/).

<sup>214</sup> Halterman, J. (2009). "*The Tudors*" Creator Michael Hirst. The Futon Critic. [http://www.thefutoncritic.com/interviews/2009/04/03/interview-the-tudors-creator-michael-hirst-30921/20090403\\_tudors/](http://www.thefutoncritic.com/interviews/2009/04/03/interview-the-tudors-creator-michael-hirst-30921/20090403_tudors/).

such as jousting contests. As *The Tudors* progresses, he becomes ever more frustrated at his lack of male heir and begins to become insecure and paranoid, his fits of rage and anger become more frequent and his trust in his closest advisors starts to slip away. His time becomes less about enjoyment and more about having a male heir. However, *The Tudors* uses multiple events to justify Henry's insecurity and his paranoia. For example, they often use Henry having nightmares or flashbacks to spur on his paranoia. They use his struggle to have a male heir, his 'unfaithful' wives and advisors and the Pilgrimage of Grace as justifications for his insecurities and ruthlessness. As *The Tudors* was a long running television drama made for the popular audience it is expected that many of the events in Henry's reign may have been dramatized. *The Tudors* fits into the historiography written by many twenty-first century historians because it shows the change in Henry's personality throughout his reign. It is also a perfect example of how the first eighteen years of Henry's reign have been forgotten about. Henry is meant to be the main character of *The Tudors* but the storylines start half-way through his reign. It is also important to note that although Henry is the main character in *The Tudors*, there are many times in the series where Henry feels like a side character to other figures such as Anne Boleyn, Thomas Cromwell and the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk. So, you think you know a story? The chances are you already do, *The Tudors* very much sticks to the more popular narratives that exist when it comes to Henry and the events that happen in his reign.

This chapter will also look at the portrayals of Henry in *Wolf Hall* and *A Man for All Seasons*. Although Henry is not the main character in either *Wolf Hall* or *A Man for All Seasons* it is important to analyse him from a different perspective. *Wolf Hall* is filmed from the perspective of Thomas Cromwell and therefore gives us a portrayal of Henry through Cromwell's eyes. This means that the audience sees Henry how Cromwell saw and viewed Henry. *Wolf Hall* shows a very short period of Henry's reign starting just before the downfall of Wolsey in 1530 until the death of Anne Boleyn in 1536. It presents him as quite a vulnerable man who is reliant on his advisors, mainly Cromwell, for help and advice. As in *The Tudors* Henry's main aim is to have a male heir and secure the line of succession.

*A Man for All Seasons* is based on Henry's reign between 1529 until 1535. The main character in the film is Thomas More however, Henry still plays an important part. In the film Henry is very conflicted about how he should handle the news that Thomas More is refusing to sign the Oath of Supremacy which acknowledged and accepted Anne Boleyn as Queen of England. In one scene Henry visits More at his house and pleads with him to sign the Oath and claims 'he will have no opposition' to

the Oath.<sup>215</sup> However, Henry promises More that if he cannot accept his divorce he will 'leave him out of it.'<sup>216</sup> This is far from the tyrant that many Catholic historians portray Henry as. Although Thomas More was executed in 1535, *A Man for All Seasons* does not blame Henry for More's execution. In fact, the film shows Henry trying to convince his ministers, mainly Cromwell, that More does not need to sign the Oath as Henry knows More is loyal to him. Again, this does not show the audience a tyrant but a King who realises he has put one of his most loyal advisors and friends in an impossible position. This could be perceived by the audience that Henry, as a person, was loyal to his friends but as a King it showed him as being weak. This is because he claimed he would have 'no opposition' to the Oath but as soon as More opposes it he makes an exception.<sup>217</sup> By allowing More to be 'left out of it' he gave others a platform to oppose it.<sup>218</sup> Both *Wolf Hall* and *A Man for All Seasons* do show Henry as having an unpredictable personality. Also, because they are both only filmed over six years of Henry's reign, they do not show the progression in his personality like *The Tudors* does. There are other examples of film and television makers picking and choosing certain parts of not only Henry's life but Thomas Cromwell and Thomas More's lives to portray, for example *The Other Boleyn Girl*, *The Private Life of Henry VIII* and *Horrible Histories*.<sup>219</sup>

However, there are television shows that do present Henry as a tyrant. *Horrible Histories* is a very popular children's television series which presents Henry VIII as a murderous and violent King. As the title of the show suggests it largely focusses on the 'horrible' parts of history. The title of the sketch featuring Henry and the Tudors is called the *Terrible Tudors* which suggests to the viewer that the Tudors were not nice people. It is important to understand that as a children's television series the programme does not go into great depth about Henry and his reign and aims to keep the information given to the viewer as simple as possible. However, it is also important to note that as a children's television show it is often the first time many of the audience will learn about Henry and the Tudors. Therefore the Henry presented in *Horrible Histories* may be the Henry VIII many children from the early twenty-first century will remember. David Glassberg in his journal entitled *Public*

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<sup>215</sup> Zinnemann, F. (Director), & Zinnemann, F. (Producer). (1966). *A Man for All Seasons* [Film]. Columbia Pictures; Highland Films.

<sup>216</sup> Zinnemann, F. (Director), & Zinnemann, F. (Producer). (1966). *A Man for All Seasons* [Film]. Columbia Pictures; Highland Films.

<sup>217</sup> Zinnemann, F. (Director), & Zinnemann, F. (Producer). (1966). *A Man for All Seasons* [Film]. Columbia Pictures; Highland Films.

<sup>218</sup> Zinnemann, F. (Director), & Zinnemann, F. (Producer). (1966). *A Man for All Seasons* [Film]. Columbia Pictures; Highland Films.

<sup>219</sup> Chadwick, J. (Director), & Owen, A. (Producer). (2008). *The Other Boleyn Girl* [DVD]. Universal Pictures; Columbia Pictures.

Korda, A.(Director), & Korda, A. & Toeplitz, L. (Producers). (1933). *The Private Life of Henry VIII* [Film]. United Artist; London Film Productions.

Connelly, S. Brigstocke, D. Thomas C. (Directors), Norris, C. Pilbrow, G. Brigstocke, D. Cooper, I. (Producers). (2009-2020). *Horrible Histories*. [Television Broadcast]. CBBC.

*History and the Study of Memory* has explored the idea that children are more likely to emotionally bond with and, therefore, remember things they learned between the ages of 6-12 than at any other age.<sup>220</sup> *Horrible Histories* is recommended for children age seven years and older. This means it is a key television series to introduce and engage children with history. It may also explain why there is a widely accepted belief that Henry VIII was a tyrant. Furthermore, there are other more recent examples of Henry being called a tyrant in the popular media. For example, on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2020 *The Guardian* published an article stating that 'Henry VIII planned every detail of Boleyn beheading' and more importantly claimed that this discovery 'reinforces the image of the King as a pathological monster.'<sup>221</sup> On the 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020 Channel 5 aired a programme entitled *Henry VIII: Rise of a Tyrant*.<sup>222</sup> This suggests that even in 2020 people are still fascinated by the idea that Henry was a tyrant. However, the running theme with all the portrayals of Henry as a 'tyrant' is that they are set after 1530. By 1530 Henry had been on the throne for twenty-one years, so who was the pre 1530 Henry and why is he never portrayed in film and television?

Starkey, Lipscomb and Wooding all agree that there were two Henry's during his rule, the young one and the old one.<sup>223</sup> Although, they disagree about the exact dates of the 'old' and the 'young' Henry they agree that it was the 1530s that saw the best examples of the changing Henry.<sup>224</sup> So who was the 'young' Henry and why did he change? When Henry was born in 1491, he was the second son of King Henry VII and Elizabeth of York. He was educated by the best tutors and as a second son he grew up without the pressure that he would one day inherit the throne of England.<sup>225</sup> In 1502 Arthur, Henry's older brother, died which meant that Henry was now the heir-apparent. This changed Henry's life immediately, as he was now the sole heir to the English throne. Henry was quickly locked away for his own protection. Not only was this a huge change for Henry who had previously enjoyed a relatively carefree life as the second son but it also meant that when the time came to be King, he was unrehearsed in the art of ruling.<sup>226</sup> Due to the Wars of the Roses and the nature of how Henry VII won the throne he was very protective of Henry which meant that until he

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<sup>220</sup> Glassberg, D. (1996). Public History and the Study of Memory. *The Public Historian*, 18(2), 7-23. <https://doi-org.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/10.2307/3377910>.

<sup>221</sup> Alberge, Dalya. (2020, October 25). Chilling find shows how Henry VIII planned every detail of Boleyn beheading. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/oct/25/chilling-find-shows-how-henry-viii-planned-every-detail-of-boleyn-beheading>.

<sup>222</sup> Martin Korzun, Luke (Director), Martin Korzun, Luke (Writer). (2020). *Henry VIII: Rise of a Tyrant*. [Episode 1]. Hindley, Emma (Producer). *Henry VIII: Rise of a Tyrant*. [Television Broadcast]. Channel 5.

<sup>223</sup> Starkey, David. (2008). *Henry: Virtuous Prince*. Harper Press. London. Page 5.

Lipscomb, Suzannah. (2009). *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII*. Lion Hudson. Oxford. Pages 43-47.

Wooding, Lucy. (2009). *Henry VIII*. Routledge. Oxon. Page 4.

<sup>224</sup> Lipscomb, Suzannah. (2009). *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII*. Lion Hudson. Oxford. Page 13.

<sup>225</sup> Lipscomb, Suzannah. (2009). *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII*. Lion Hudson. Oxford. Pages 27 & 30.

<sup>226</sup> Lipscomb, Suzannah. (2009). *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII*. Lion Hudson. Oxford. Page 27.

became King he led a very secluded and private life. When Henry became King in 1509 it seemed that the young King was very popular. William Blount, a English courtier and humanist scholar, wrote to Erasmus in 1509 stating 'when you know what a hero (the King) now shows himself, how wisely he behaves, was a lover he is of justice and goodness, what affection he bares to the learned, I will venture that you will need no wings to fly to behold the new auspicious star...our King does not desire gold or gems or precious metals, but virtue, glory and immortality.'<sup>227</sup> In 1509, undoubtedly, this quote was Blount's way of glorifying the young King to Erasmus. Although, the last sentence does spark some interest. Was it clear as early as 1509 that Henry would go on to be obsessed with glory and immortality? Early sources from Henry's reign describe the young King as the 'most invincible King whose acquirements and qualities are so many and excellent that I consider him to excel all who ever wore a crown.'<sup>228</sup> They also describe him as a 'talented linguist, a skilled musician and composer, a capital horseman and a fine joustler.'<sup>229</sup> Throughout his early reign he enjoyed banquets, hunting, dancing and 'riding out all day tiring eight or ten horses.'<sup>230</sup> So why is it that this young and exciting King who was revered around the world is not portrayed in film and television? The simple answer is because there is little drama for the film and television writers to use. By most accounts for the first twenty or so years of his reign Henry was a largely popular King. He married Catherine of Aragon and enjoyed an 'unusually good' marriage and was named Defender of the Faith by Pope Leo X in 1521.<sup>231</sup> Therefore, film and television affects our view of history because it portrays and builds on the narrative that Henry's reign only started when he became unhappy in his marriage. Henry ruled for eighteen years before he decided he wanted a divorce and there are very few film and television series that show this part of his reign. This has helped build the narrative of Henry the 'tyrant' because it does not portray a whole view of his reign. In this instance, film and television have had a negative impact on how it affects our view of history. So, how did Henry change and why does the 'old' Henry appeal to film and television makers?

Towards the end of the 1520s Henry had become extremely impatient with Catherine of Aragon and the lack of a male heir. This began the transition from 'young' Henry to 'old' Henry according to

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<sup>227</sup> Lord Mountjoy to Erasmus on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 1509. Cited in, Lipscomb, Suzannah. (2009). *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII*. Lion Hudson. Oxford. Page 28-29.

<sup>228</sup> Francesco Chiericato in 1511. Cited in, Lipscomb, Suzannah. (2009). *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII*. Lion Hudson. Oxford. Page 30.

<sup>229</sup> Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to English Affairs existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice (1867-1873). Cited in, Lipscomb, Suzannah. (2009). *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII*. Lion Hudson. Oxford. Page 30.

<sup>230</sup> Lipscomb, Suzannah. (2009). *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII*. Lion Hudson. Oxford. Page 30. Fraser, Antonia. (1996). *The Wives of Henry VIII*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. London. Page 95.

<sup>231</sup> Elton, Geoffrey. (1977). *Reform and Reformation: England 1509-1558*. Edward Arnold. London. Page 103.

Wooding.<sup>232</sup> This sparked the ‘King’s Great Matter,’ or his pursuit of a divorce from Catherine of Aragon who by 1527 was past a child bearing age. By 1527 the King had set his sights on Anne Boleyn, a young, intelligent, quick-witted woman who Henry seemed captivated by.<sup>233</sup> In the long term the King’s divorce would go on to light the spark for a chain of events that would change England forever. However, in the short term the change from the ‘young’ to the ‘old’ Henry seemingly happened in the nine years between 1527 and 1536.<sup>234</sup> In 1531 Catherine was banished from court and in 1532 Thomas Cromwell saw a number of acts passed through parliament, such as the Supplication against the Ordinaries and the Submission of the Clergy which started the Break from Rome.<sup>235</sup> In 1534 the Act of Supremacy was passed to declare that Henry VIII and all subsequent monarchs would be the Supreme Head of the Church of England.<sup>236</sup> The Break from Rome became known as the Reformation. Freeman and Betteridge suggest the narrative, started by Catholic historians, that Henry VIII was a tyrant started around 1527 to 1536.<sup>237</sup> There were also many other events that happened between these years which for some historians saw the transition from ‘young’ Henry to ‘old’ Henry. In 1533 Henry married Anne Boleyn, in 1535 Henry executed Thomas More, 1536 saw the trial and execution of Anne Boleyn and the five men she was excused of committing adultery with and it saw the start of the Pilgrimage of Grace. It was these nine years that went on to define Henry’s reign and in turn helped him become one of the most famous monarchs in English history. These nine years are often the ones film and television makers focus on, quite simply because it was such a turbulent period. The events that occurred in these years give film and television makers an abundance of drama which could suggest why they focus on these years. In the film and television series there is not one version of Henry portrayed but many different versions of Henry. This is because historians often do not understand who Henry was or understand his personality changes therefore film and television makers do not either. However, film and television makers have a responsibility to give the audience a balanced story and more often than not they do not with Henry VIII. *A Man for All Seasons* is set from 1529 to 1535 following the events that led to the execution of Thomas More, *Wolf Hall* is set from 1530 to 1536 and follows Thomas Cromwell from the death of Wolsey to the execution of Anne Boleyn. Although, it is important to remember

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<sup>232</sup> Wooding, Lucy. (2009). *Henry VIII*. Routledge. London. Page 4.

<sup>233</sup> Warnicke, Retha. (1989). *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family Politics at the Court of Henry VIII*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Page 59.

<sup>234</sup> Lipscomb, Suzannah. (2009). *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII*. Lion Hudson. Oxford. Page 13.

Starkey, David. (2008). *Henry: Virtuous Prince*. Harper Press. Oxfordshire. Page 3.

Wooding, Lucy. (2009). *Henry VIII*. Routledge. London. Page 4.

<sup>235</sup> Williams, Neville. (1971). *Henry VIII and His Court*. Macmillan. London. Page 136.

<sup>236</sup> Bernard, George. (2005). *The King’s Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church*. Yale University Press. Yale. Pages 69-71.

<sup>237</sup> Freeman, Thomas and Betteridge, Thomas. (2012). *Henry VIII and History*. Routledge. London. Pages 13- 15.

Henry is not the main character in *A Man for All Seasons* or *Wolf Hall*. *The Tudors*, however, focusses on Henry. It starts after 1527 and goes on until Henry's death in 1547. The opening line of *The Tudors*, 'You think you know a story, but you only know how it ends. To get to the heart of the story, you have to go back to the beginning,' suggests that the series will focus on the entirety of Henry's reign from start to finish.<sup>238</sup> However, *The Tudors* does not portray the first eighteen years of his rule. They start the series when he begins to question his divorce to Catherine. Therefore, this is a prime example of how film and television producers pick and choose the history they want to portray. It is also a very good example of how film and television can mislead the public about the past. If someone who knew nothing about the Tudors watched *The Tudors*, they may be inclined to think that 1527 was the start of Henry's reign. Although, this chapter has only analysed a small sample size of film and television series it shows that producers are only interested in the years from 1527 onwards. Some other examples that are only interested in this time period are *The Other Boleyn Girl*, which is set from the late 1520s until 1536 and *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, which begins in 1536 and follows Henry until his death.<sup>239</sup> The next part of the chapter will discuss some of the events that occurred during these nine years and how they may have been perceived on film and television.

Scarbrick argues that Henry was a bully who acted ruthlessly and ruled ineptly and Ridley describes Henry as a 'tyrant.'<sup>240</sup> Throughout the film and television series there are a number of occasions where Henry acted in such a way that in the twenty-first century we would consider him a tyrant. In *The Tudors* there are occasions where Henry is portrayed to be a cruel ruler. For example, in *The Tudors* the first time Henry is presented as cruel is in the aftermath of the Pilgrimage of Grace. Up until this point he had been ruthless and unpredictable but not so much cruel. Henry orders Charles Brandon, the Duke of Suffolk, to slaughter thousands of innocent civilians across the North of England in an attempt to give warning to any would be rebels. The series also shows the psychological effects this has on the Duke of Suffolk, who pleaded with Henry to change his mind, and how it changed his view of Henry. This supports Scarbrick's view that Henry was a 'bully' as not only has he ordered the killing of thousands of innocent civilians but he has also chosen one of his

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<sup>238</sup> McDougall, Charles and Shill, Steve, (Directors), Hirst, Michael, (Writer). (2007). *In Cold Blood*. (Series 1, Episode 1). Hirst, Michael, (Producer). *The Tudors*. [Television Broadcast]. BBC. Ireland.

<sup>239</sup> Chadwick, J. (Director), & Owen, A. (Producer). (2008). *The Other Boleyn Girl* [DVD]. Universal Pictures; Columbia Pictures.

Korda, A. (Director), & Korda, A. & Toeplitz, L. (Producers). (1933). *The Private Life of Henry VIII* [Film]. United Artist; London Film Productions.

<sup>240</sup> Scarbrick, J. J. (1997). *Henry VIII*. Yale University Press. Yale. Pages 498-526.

Ridley, Jasper. (1984). *Henry VIII*. Constable. London. Page 416.

closest friends, and someone who did not agree with this course of action, to carry out the orders.<sup>241</sup>

In October 1536 Henry himself wrote that he intended to 'make an example of' the rebels on the borders of Yorkshire.<sup>242</sup> Again on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October Henry states that he is 'intending to punish insurrection to the example and terror of all others hereafter.'<sup>243</sup> However, it is important to note that Henry is not ordering the execution of innocent civilians but only those who have actively taken part in the rebellion. This does not seem like a King who wanted to rule with blood and terror but a King who was rightfully punishing a rebellion against him and his kingdom. Therefore, *The Tudors* could be using the Pilgrimage of Grace to unfairly portray Henry as a tyrant in this instance. A rebellion would be a very easy event for a film or television writer to dramatize because the event in itself provides the storyline and all the writer needs to do is create tension and anguish on both sides. The way Henry reacted to the rebellion would have been very standard in the sixteenth century however, to a twenty-first century audience it may come across as brutal and unjust.

Baldwin-Smith suggests that Henry had a very suspicious personality.<sup>244</sup> This is something that is portrayed in all of the film and television series in this chapter and could be a reason why Henry reacted the way he did when handling the Pilgrimage of Grace and could have played a part in the many executions that took place during his reign. Baldwin-Smith uses Henry's suspicious personality to support his claim that Henry was a tyrant.<sup>245</sup> However, it could also be used to justify Henry's actions. Henry was King at a very unstable time in history. His father, Henry VII, had secured the crown at the Battle of Bosworth after thirty-two years of fighting between the House of York and the House of Lancaster. This time saw a constant change in loyalty of the nobles and could suggest why Henry was suspicious of those around him at court and sentenced those who he deemed had committed treason to death. Also, although he was only a young boy Henry may have remembered the Cornish Rebellion of 1497. The Cornish Rebellion saw 15,000 men rebel against Henry VII and the harsh taxes he had imposed on his people in this period.<sup>246</sup> Henry VII reacted by sending 25,000 men to confront the rebels and punished the leaders and participants to death.<sup>247</sup> This shows that the

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<sup>241</sup> Scarisbrick, J. J. (1997). *Henry VIII*. Yale University Press. Yale. Pages 498-526.

<sup>242</sup> Henry VIII to Unknown. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 1536. Taken from <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol11/pp284-314>. On the 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

<sup>243</sup> Henry VIII to the Earl of Shrewsbury. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 1536. Taken from <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol11/pp284-314>. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2020.

<sup>244</sup> Smith, Lacey Baldwin. (1971). *Henry VIII: The Mask of Royalty*. Academy Chicago Publishes. Chicago. Page Passim.

<sup>245</sup> Smith, Lacey Baldwin. (1971). *Henry VIII: The Mask of Royalty*. Academy Chicago Publishes. Chicago. Page Passim.

<sup>246</sup> Arthurson, I. (1987). The Rising of 1497: A Revolt of the Peasantry? In J. Rosenthal (Ed.), *People, Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages*. (pp. 1-18). Alan Sutton Publishing. Stroud.

<sup>247</sup> Rowse, A.L. (1969). *Tudor Cornwall: Portrait of a Society*. Macmillan. London. Pages 122-126.

way Henry VIII dealt with the rebels of the Pilgrimage of Grace was normal for the time. It also shows that from a young age Henry was aware that as King there would always be some opposition to the way he was ruling. He needed to suppress the opposition ruthlessly not only to ward off other opposition but also to regain the confidence of his people in him and his rule. Therefore, it is very understandable that Henry had a suspicious personality and dealt with the Pilgrimage of Grace and his treasonous subjects the way he did. He acted like any other sixteenth century King would have done and in doing so managed to rule England for thirty-eight years. This is a prime example of how a film or a television series could affect our view of history. The audience does not know this background knowledge and therefore just sees what is happening on the film or series. However, as historians we are more likely to know the background of the Wars of the Roses and the Cornish Rebellion. By only showing the audience a snapshot of an event in history it is hard to give the audience a balanced outlook of history and the context surrounding it. Therefore, in this aspect film and television have had a negative impact of our view of history because by picking and choosing certain events to show it can create a narrative about a person or period without any context. If the audience could see why Henry acts the way he does in certain situations they may not see him as tyrannical. The Pilgrimage of Grace being portrayed in *The Tudors* is also another example of how a television series reflects the time in which it was made. The years between 2008 and 2020 have been called the 'Decade of Dissent' by one journalist due a large rise in protests in England after the global economic crisis of 2008.<sup>248</sup> This proves that protesting or rebelling is an age old process that people have and will continue to do to voice their grievances.

In conclusion, film and television has had a negative impact on our view of Henry VIII because they fail to give a balanced view of history. By ignoring Henry's background and the first eighteen years of his reign, film and television makers fail to give the audience a full view of Henry's reign. By focussing on the drama filled years of 1527 to 1536 they have contributed towards the narrative that Henry VIII was a tyrant. When learning about history context is crucial in order to build an opinion, film and television makers have failed in their responsibility to give their audience crucial context. However, the nine years between 1527 until 1536 should not define a reign that lasted thirty-eight years. Secondly, if historians do not agree on who Henry VIII was, whether his personality did change and when it changed, then how can film and television makers? There is also the problem of anachronism. Some twenty-first century audiences may not be able to understand that in many situations Henry acted like any other Early Modern King. It is clear from the historiography that there

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<sup>248</sup> Bailey, D.J. (2020). *Decade of dissent: How protest is shaking the UK and why it's likely to continue*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/decade-of-dissent-how-protest-is-shaking-the-uk-and-why-its-likely-to-continue-125843>

is a split between Catholic and non-Catholic historians. Catholic historians believe that Henry was an uncontrollable tyrant who caused the Break with Rome. Others believe that Henry's reign was split between the 'young' Henry and the 'old' Henry. *A Man for All Seasons*, *Wolf Hall* and *The Tudors* do not portray Henry as an out and out tyrant. However, there are some scenes that to a twentieth and twenty-first century audience Henry could be considered tyrannical. Overall, Henry was not a tyrant, nor was he a hero or a victim. In fact, it is very difficult to know who exactly Henry VIII actually was. 'The easiest judgments of Henry VIII are the ones that straightforwardly condemn. The amount of debate this one man has generated, however suggests that the truth is likely to be more complex than these judgments allow.'<sup>249</sup> However, there is no doubt, his reign changed England forever and we are still feeling the effects nearly five-hundred years after his death.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, film and television affects our view of history because they create an awareness of the past which may not have otherwise been there. The popularity of film and television in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has meant that historical film and television adaptations have created hype, and a discussion which may have not been there otherwise. If someone has watched a historical film or television show and learned something about the past that they otherwise did not know then the film or programme has provided an education, no matter how big or small, about the past. Film and television are a vital way of learning about the past especially in the twenty-first century, whereas since 2010 the humanities subjects have seen huge budget cuts in both schools and universities.<sup>250</sup> This means that film and television offer a different way to teach people about the past that is outside the traditional academic routes. Another reason people can learn about the past from watching film and television is because they often reflect the present time rather than the time they are portraying. *A Man for All Seasons* teaches us just as much about the 1960s as it does about the Tudor times. In a time of immense social change Thomas More was used as a man of principles who championed old school beliefs and values. Many middle aged, middle class people in the 1960s thought that the social changes were going too far and championed the old school beliefs of pre-war Britain. Therefore, *A Man for All Seasons* teaches us much more about the 1960s need for a hero of principles than it does about the Tudor period. However, this does not mean it does not teach us about history, indeed it teaches us that we are much more similar to the people of the past than we are led to believe.

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<sup>249</sup> Wooding, Lucy. (2009). *Henry VIII*. Routledge. London. Page 288.

<sup>250</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-11583990>

Although this dissertation has spoken about the misrepresentation of both Thomas Cromwell and Henry VIII in film and television it is important to remember that film and television are not one hundred percent accurate and do not claim to be.<sup>251</sup> Film and television are offering a platform for people to get to know these characters and like everything, people are free to make up their own assumptions and have their own opinions about people of the past. Historians have different opinions about people of the past and so do film and television writers and producers. However, that being said, film and television makers have a responsibility to the people of the past and to those who are watching their content to fairly represent their characters and give the public a full view of events so that people can come to their own conclusions. Overall, the benefits of film and television representing the past are much greater than the downfalls. In a time where the humanities has seen a ten percent drop in the number of people studying them at university, the power film and television has to capture people's imaginations and engage them with the past means that we have to embrace a new way of learning about past.<sup>252</sup> The acquisition of the History Channel by Sky TV in May 2020 proves that there is a big enough audience willing to watch a dedicated history channel and that it is profitable for the largest television corporation in the United Kingdom to buy the rights to the channel. Therefore, both historians and film and television producers need to embrace this popularity and work together to ensure that people can learn about the past from film and television.

Thomas More is an example of just how differently one man can be portrayed in film and television. In all three adaptations he is presented in a completely different way. However, the adaptations do reflect the different historiography that has been written about More throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century. This dissertation has discussed how in *A Man for All Seasons* he is the hero of conscience and principles that a 1960s audience needed. In *Wolf Hall* he is the narcissistic villain who could not accept the ever changing world of early modern England. Thomas More sparked debate amongst people both before and after his death and he will continue to do so for however long people are interested in his story. However, like academia these different portrayals of Thomas More mean that an audience can watch and make their own mind up about the enigma that was Thomas More.

*Wolf Hall* offered an alternative way of looking at Thomas Cromwell that even historians had not thought of. It used source material that had been largely ignored until now to create a new way of looking at Cromwell. The idea that Cromwell spent his career trying to avenge the downfall of

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<sup>251</sup> Aberth, John. (2003). *A Knight at the Movies: Medieval History on Film*. Routledge. New York. Page Viii.

<sup>252</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/05/18/new-report-investigates-changes-humanities>

Thomas Wolsey was an idea that historians have overlooked until Hilary Mantel wrote *Wolf Hall*. This in turn caused somewhat of a renaissance for Thomas Cromwell with both the public and with historians. Diarmaid MacCulloch has praised Mantel for her deep knowledge of the sixteenth century and wrote his biography on Thomas Cromwell in response to the release of the *Wolf Hall* book series.<sup>253</sup> This is another way of how film and television has affected our view of history. Although this dissertation has largely focussed on how it affects the general public's view of history this is an example of how it has affected academia. Mantel used source material that has always been there but has been ignored. Although Mantel is an author who writes fiction she went through the same process a historian would. By researching the source material she found a Thomas Cromwell that had not yet been discovered. However, Cromwell is also a perfect example of how film and television can misrepresent someone from the past but also how it can help keep someone's story alive nearly five hundred years after their death. Peter Marshall suggests that due to *Wolf Hall* Thomas Cromwell may well be more known to the general public than his namesake Oliver Cromwell.<sup>254</sup> However, this is also an example of how film and television producers have to take responsibility for how they are portraying individuals. Cromwell achieved things in his lifetime that were unimaginable to think of for the son of a blacksmith in Tudor England and film and television writers and producers must do more to portray this. For example, they could focus on Cromwell's ambition, ability and achievement which would highlight just how much of an impact he had on England and how we are still living in the England Cromwell helped create almost five-hundred years earlier. Henry VIII may have also been misrepresented in film and television.

'You think you know a story?'<sup>255</sup> The key word in this quote from *The Tudors* is 'think'. There is no doubt that the majority of people in England will have heard of Henry VIII and his six wives. However, like Cromwell Henry often gets misrepresented in film and television, although not necessarily in the same way as Cromwell. The majority of Henry's reign is often forgotten by film and television producers as they choose to focus on the drama filled years between 1527 and 1536. This has had a negative impact on how film and television has affected our view of Henry VIII because it has contributed towards the narrative that Henry was a tyrannical king, who was a slave to his passions. However, like Cromwell, film and television have kept these stories alive and have inspired people to research further about Henry and the Tudors. It is also important to note that film and television makers have to appeal to the masses in order to make money, which after all is a necessity

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<sup>253</sup> MacCulloch, Diarmaid. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*. Random House. London. Page1.

<sup>254</sup> Marshall, P. King Henry's Henchman [Review of the book *Thomas Cromwell: A Life* by D. MacCulloch]. *Literary Review*, (468), 737.

<sup>255</sup> McDougall, Charles and Shill, Steve, (Directors), Hirst, Michael, (Writer). (2007). *In Cold Blood*. (Series 1, Episode 1). Hirst, Michael, (Producer). *The Tudors*. [Television Broadcast]. BBC. Ireland.

if film and television are to keep producing content. Although film and television producers pick and choose the parts of history they want to focus on they have to pick the parts that are going to create discussion and capture the imaginations of the public. As John Aberth suggests, 'the main goal of cinema is to entertain, it cannot hope and does not aspire to achieve the accuracy of historical works.'<sup>256</sup>

Overall, there are some problems with how historical events and people are portrayed in film and television. However, it is also clear that the positives of history in film and television massively outweigh the negatives. It is important to remember that historians do not own history. History is a subject open to opinions, arguments and debates. Whether you are an academic, a film or television writer or a member of the public you have every right to interpret history the way you see it. Film and television has the power to inspire people who may not be normally interested in history to watch and learn about the past. Film and television is not made to be historically accurate it is made to entertain the masses. Therefore, if film and television writers and producers can find the right balance between entertainment and accuracy it has the power to take the general public's engagement with the past to the next level. If someone has watched a film or television series and learned something about the past then that has to be something that is celebrated. 'Cinema may never stand in for history but it can spark audience's interest and enthusiasm for it.'<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Aberth, John. (2003). *A Knight at the Movies: Medieval History on Film*. Routledge. New York. Page Viii.

<sup>257</sup> Aberth, John. (2003). *A Knight at the Movies: Medieval History on Film*. Routledge. New York. Page IX.

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