



The Life of Thomas More

Peter Ackroyd

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Peter Ackroyd's **The Life of Thomas More** is a masterful reconstruction of the life and imagination of one of the most remarkable figures of history. Thomas More (1478-1535) was a renowned statesman; the author of a political fantasy that gave a name to a literary genre and a worldview (**Utopia**); and, most famously, a Catholic martyr and saint.

Born into the professional classes, Thomas More applied his formidable intellect and well-placed connections to become the most powerful man in England, second only to the king. As much a work of history as a biography, **The Life of Thomas More** gives an unmatched portrait of the everyday, religious, and intellectual life of the early sixteenth century. In Ackroyd's hands, this renowned "man for all seasons" emerges in the fullness of his complex humanity; we see the unexpected side of his character--such as his preference for bawdy humor--as well as his indisputable moral courage.

The Life of Thomas More Details

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Author : Peter Ackroyd

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From Reader Review The Life of Thomas More for online ebook

Lauren Albert says

It is still difficult to place oneself in the frame of mind that would lead a man like More to condemn himself to death--figuratively, that is. Ackroyd does an excellent job of trying to help you see the man and the times but perhaps, in this age of Jihadists, it is still difficult for most people to understand what would lead someone to die for their religion.

Vincent says

Excellent, three dimensional profile of the Saint and explanation of the political, religious, and cultural elements of the time. The authors misconceptions that the Sacramental System was exclusively a Medieval viewpoint does not take away from the quality of the work.

Angus McKeogh says

Really interesting biography of an historic figure. I knew he had been beheaded for refusing to take the oath of the Act of Succession by Henry VIII and was thereafter canonized by the Catholic Church. I didn't know that prior to these events he'd been the King's Chancellor and had had numerous burned at the stake for being "heretics" or not Catholic, and he had reveled in those very facts. I suppose you live as a religious murderer and you die as a religious murderer. Very prescient with the state of our current world. This behavior has always been going on. Imagine a world with no religion

Julie says

This is one of the best biographies I have come across full of detail, it sheds a great deal of light on this man who was known best of all as Chancellor of England to Henry VIII. suitable for students and general readers alike.

Idyll says

Ackroyd writes with an irresistible scholarly starchiness. It's hard for me to like More, though I love reading about his times. He was a medieval, hierarchically inclined stick-in-the-mud at the time that this world view was about to be shattered. It's hard for us in modern times to even imagine a world that had the kind of (oppressive) cohesion of his youthful years. He stuck with the mothership of the 1000-year-old franchise. Unfortunately, his boss had left the building. He was obviously killer-intelligent, but smug. Though nobody should die as he did, he was blind to the end to his own hypocrisy. He apparently enjoyed whipping heretics.

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Chris says

I've never really like Thomas More. He always seemed a bit hard headed, stubborn, bordering on cruel. At least, in what I've read about him and seen in the movies. It is to Ackroyd's credit that he makes More human. I don't like him, but I respect him.

Ackroyd goes a long way into taking a closer look at More's marriage. He makes Alice More into more than a shrew. Ackroyd also place More in time and place. He looks at the influence of society and religion. He is careful too keep away from the idea of a saint's life, and his More is very human.

Ackroyd shows us More's humor (more sexual and dirty than you would think) as well as his love for his family. I wish I had read this before reading Utopia. Ackroyd's reading of that More tract is in depth and gives the book a new dimension.

This isn't a quick read, but it is an easy read. However, if you are unfamiliar with Henry VIII and his great matter, you might want to read a little about that first. Ackroyd presumes that his reader knows about that.

Rebecca says

Ackroyd writes in such an enchanting style, and boy did he choose a fascinating topic! Since reading 'Wolf Hall', I have been intrigued by the polarised figure of More (a recent article of 'History Today' was entitled 'Thomas More: Saint or Sinner'. Ackroyd wisely avoids this dichotomy of interpretation, and instead recounts More's life from start to finish- a life which traverses European cities and the courts of Kings, but one which ultimately remains entrenched in the city of London. I particularly enjoyed reading about More's childhood and the anecdotes included by Ackroyd to recreate the world which formed More's character: his childhood and naming after Saint Thomas Beckett, his schooling at St Anthony's (with the symbol of a pig!), his debates at St Bartholomew's Churchyard- and it is truly fascinating to be able to piece together these crucial experiences and to trace the impact they had on his character- his preferred style of dialogue; his aptitude for law; his love for London and its people, as evidenced in his time as under-sheriff. Ackroyd creates a really enjoyable account of More's journey through the life, and the permanent, indelible aspects of his personality: his respect for inherited tradition, the spoken word, communal truth, drama and display- all of which would ultimately play a crucial role in the turning point of his life: the King's 'Great Matter'. Ackroyd tactfully deals with More's stance in this matter, demonstrating how More's attitude towards heretics and his writings at the time simply demonstrate the danger with which he viewed the threat to his beloved religion. Interestingly, Ackroyd touches on how this threat altered More's character and left him perhaps more cynical and harsh as his hope in the Christian world and his own King was weakened. I felt that Ackroyd's account and analysis of More's death was particularly touching, not only in the small anecdotes included (such as More's interaction with Fisher whilst in the Tower, and their sending of fruit to one another), but also in his focus on More's death as his final act of obedience - "He remained a model of

obedience; both in his life and at this death".

Conor says

One of the best biographies and simply put best books I have ever read. Ackroyd makes More's England come to life. One smells the smells, hears the sounds, and tastes the tastes of More's London. Ackroyd has an incredible sympathy for his subject and writes a gripping book. It reads like a novel. My one complaint, and it is minor, is that Ackroyd does not translate the Olde English into the contemporary English and this can make some of the quotations quite difficult to understand. On my second read through, which was a quicker read, I found this more difficult to deal with. It really is great however.

Gregg says

Informative and easy to read. Ackroyd keeps the original spelling of Renaissance times, which is a little irritating, but that aside, I totally got wrapped up in his recounting of More's rise in the court of the English government, and subsequent fall from grace through King Henry's split with the church. Plenty of nuggets of which I was unaware (among the many words More introduced into the vernacular: paradox, and fact), and plenty of lines culled from More's correspondence used in various dramatizations ("A Man for All Seasons," and "The Tudors" use them plenty). More was indeed remarkable. A man who died out of adherence to his faith, true, but also, in Ackroyd's approach, a man who died for the sake of the law as well. Fascinating.

Helen Felgate says

Like his biography of Charles Dickens, Peter Ackroyd brings the flawed but complex personality of Sir Thomas More to life. An impeccably researched book, just to read the extensive bibliography Ackroyd lists at the back of the book inspires a sense of awe ! A fascinating story which fleshes out the character of More and gave me some understanding of the theology and traditions of the Catholic Church during the reformation which led More to act the way he did (he was guilty of bringing many so called "heretics" to a cruel end) and led ultimately to his downfall. I struggled initially with some of the medieval language quoted verbatim but towards the end I found the flow to it (a bit like when initially accustoming oneself to the language of Shakespeare) and felt it gave a much greater understanding of More and all his complexities. Of his brilliant use of language and metaphor in his considerable writings. Who knew for eg that he was responsible for inventing and recording so many words and sayings that are still in common use today. Or knew of his struggle with his early sexual feelings, and his sense of the absurd. His humour often bawdy or what we would call today toilet humour. It is also a picture of a family man with a strong sense of familial duty. Ultimately his story is a tragedy of a man who wore a hair shirt under his clothes and who despite his attempts to avoid controversy and the wrath of the king is observed moving ever closer to his inevitable death. A fascinating study which alongside Holbein's famous portrait of him lingers in the mind.

Czarny Pies says

I am appalled that this book won the James Tait prize. In my opinion the reading public could well have done

without this inconsequential effort. There are a number of other better biographies available at the time this one was published and fail to see what Ackroyd's effort adds to our knowledge of either the man or the era.

The reality is that in the last 400 years virtually new sources on the life of Thomas More have come to light. During that period, biographers have been going through the same archival material and deciding what can be believed from the first biography of More written by his son in law William Roper.

What the biographers have been able to is to explain the intellectual and political context in which More lived given the knowledge and perspective of the readers of their generation. Unfortunately, Ackroyd demonstrates scant understanding and little interest in the intellectual debates of the era. What Ackroyd does give us is no more than the tale of a talented parliamentarian who got involved on the wrong side of a London court intrigue.

As a study of one of the greatest writers of the Renaissance and one of the last major political theoreticians to write in Latin rather than his own vernacular, this book comes up grievously short.

Richard Marius' 1984 biography of More is superior in every way.

Patrick says

I thought on first reading this biography some years ago that it was less gripping than it could have been, given the stature of the man that it is about, but I find on re-reading the book that my first assessment was wrong. What I had called tedious then is what I would now call atmospheric and impressively detailed. Peter Ackroyd knows sixteenth-century London inside and out. One of the virtues of this biography is that it places Thomas More in his proper context, as a man who all his adult life upheld the prerogatives of the law and the Church as he understood them.

That Thomas More's life intersects those of such larger-than-life figures as Martin Luther, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, and (of course) King Henry VIII is a boon to skillful biographers, and Ackroyd also has insights to share about More's peers, not to mention the impetus for and course of the Protestant Reformation in England.

While some of the excerpts from More's writing slowed down my own reading because spelling at the time had not been standardized, it was great fun to learn how much More actually bequeathed even to language, by crafting or documenting expressions like "dead as a doornail." More even followed the medieval practice of employing a household Fool who was himself clever enough to use lines like "Chancellor More is chancellor no more."

It is no easy thing to make virtue accessible without belittling it, which is why saints are tricky to write about. Fortunately, Ackroyd has a firm grasp of what it means to be "in the world but not of it," and his work here does justice to England's most famous lawyer.

Helene Harrison says

Review - I was quite looking forward to reading this book, as all I really know of Thomas More is what I've

read from reading about Henry VIII, and watching shows like The Tudors and Wolf Hall. Perceptions for example in The Tudors and Wolf Hall are completely different so I was really intrigued to see how this book treated him. He comes across quite human, but flawed and obsessive at times, but loving towards his family. It was well-written and engaging.

General Subject/s? - Biography / History / Tudors

Recommend? – Yes

Rating - 16/20

Andrea says

Long and tedious in some ways but very interesting. Adult reading. I liked how he was so opposed to materialism that he gave his daughter a necklace of peas rather than pearls to teach her a lesson. Watch the movie "A Man for All Seasons."
