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The Life Of Thomas More



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

This is a first-rate biography of the sainted Thomas More. Ackroyd's goals in this biography are to present a non-anachronistic depiction of More, and through his portrait of More, to give readers a sense of the late Medieval world destroyed by the Reformation and the emergence of nation-states.

Ackroyd presents More as a man exemplifying the late Medieval ethos. Deeply religious, highly intelligent, and well educated, More existed with a profound sense of human fallibility and saw all aspects of his world as manifestations of a divine order. The world as the body of Christ, a metaphor to which Ackroyd returns repeatedly, is a recurring theme. The temporal world is transient and a necessary preparation for the eternal and in a crucial sense, less real than the eternal world of Christian teachings. This world is bound by custom and inherited legal and religious traditions, hierarchial and paternalistic in its structure of authority, and deeply enmeshed in rituals that mirror the structure of divine authority. More was not, however, a reactionary except when the radicalism of the Lutherans pushed him to stringent and violent acts needed to defend the integrity of his perception of the Christian world. A prominent member of the Northern European Humanist movement, More was dedicated to the recovery of a renovated faith based on a new reading of the Patristic fathers, attention to classical, particularly Greek neoplatonic authors, and disdain for complex scholastic theology. He and his fellow Humanists hoped for reformation of the Church without abandoning the unity of Christendom, the apparatus of ritual and hierarchy that defined so much of their lives, and the primacy of papal authority. Ackroyd's efforts to present More and the late medieval ethos are very successful.

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