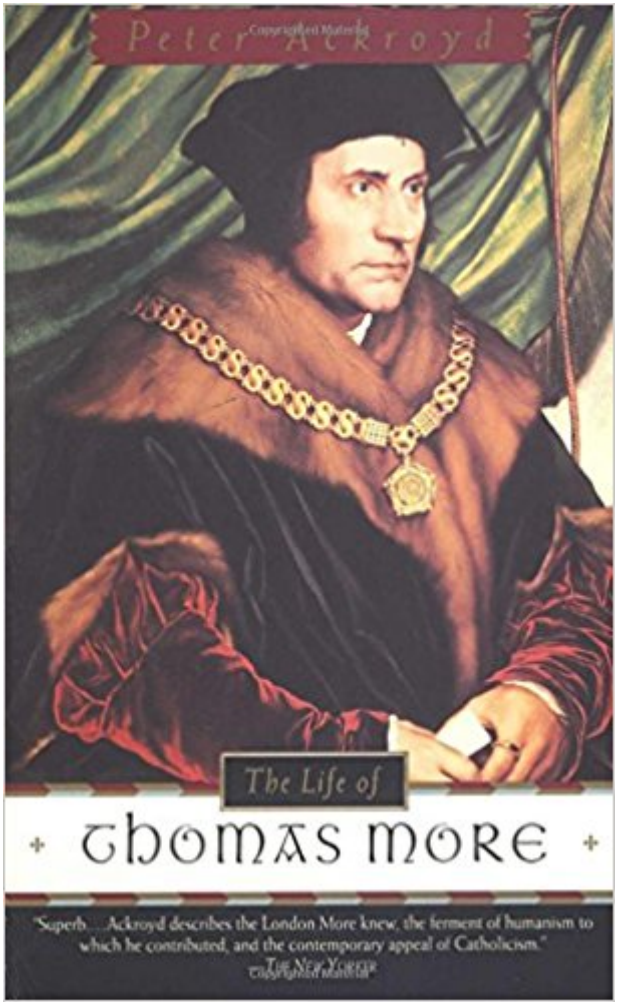
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The Life Of Thomas More



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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 thatÃ Â Ã Â 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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Life of Thomas More is Peter Ackroyd’s biography--from baptism to beheading--of the lawyer who became a saint. More, a noted humanist whose friendship with Erasmus and authorship of Utopia earned him great fame in Europe, succeeded Cardinal Wolsey as Lord Chancellor of London at the time of the English Reformation. In 1535, More was martyred for his refusal to support Henry VIII’s divorce and break with Rome. Ackroyd’s biography is a masterpiece in several senses. Perhaps most importantly, he corrects the mistaken impression that Robert Bolt’s A Man for All Seasons has given two generations of theater and film audiences: More was not, as Bolt’s drama

would have us believe, a civil disobedient who put his conscience above the law. Ackroyd explains that "conscience was not for More an individual matter." Instead, it was derived from "the laws of God and of reason." If the greatest justice in this book is analytic, however, its greatest joys are descriptive. Ackroyd brings 16th-century London to life for his readers--an exotic world where all of life is enveloped by the church: "As the young More made his way along the lanes and thoroughfares, there was the continual sound of bells." --Michael Joseph Gross --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

According to Ackroyd (Blake; Hawksmoor), More "embodied the old order of hierarchy and authority at the very moment when it began to collapse all around him." Symbolizing that collapse was Henry VIII's defiance of the pope in the "great matter" of his much-desired divorce of Catherine of Aragon. Refusing to compromise with the break from Rome, More willed his own death. He dies well in Ackroyd's narrative, but he does not live a life as saintly as he leaves it, piously amassing wealth and power, piously writing philosophical works as ambiguous as Utopia and as scatological as Responsio, piously harassing religious reformers and smugly condemning them to the stake. As a biographer of More (the first since 1984), Ackroyd is also an effective novelist. He evokes late-medieval London in sight and in smell; sends More on his workaholic schedule of legal, political, diplomatic and courtly activities; exploits familial and hagiographic anecdotes for their story values; and repeats unscholarly untruths (as Luther's cloacal epiphanies) because fiction can be more colorful than fact. Only Henry VIII in Ackroyd's large cast fails to be realized in the round, but the king, recognizing More's loyal services, does "graciously" reduce his sentence from disemboweling to beheading. After an awkward, conditional start ("But it might be more fruitful to recognise... "/ "...but it might be worth rehearsing certain of its aspects... "/ "It has in the past been noticed... "), Ackroyd's clotted language metamorphoses into elegant English, and the nobility of More's demise will move readers who persist to the end. 27 b&w illustrations not seen by PW. BOMC, History Book Club and QPB selections. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

I enjoy listening to classics, and this is a very good book. The narration is somewhat dry. Although I realize this is a difficult piece of literature to read, the narrator could have done a bit more to add animation and emotion to his performance. The narrator does a very good job of pronunciation, pacing, and dealing with words that aren't used much anymore.My review is not a synopsis of the book, but rather my opinion of it. I received a free copy of this audiobook at my request and have

voluntarily left this review.

I very much enjoyed this classic piece of literature. Unlike some other reviewers, I don’t think it is meant to be a model for a real society. It is in fact a quixotic idea of what a perfect society might look like, but I am not going to criticize a work of fiction just because it is not necessarily a realistic plan for a real state/country/world.That being said, I do believe the purpose of More’s work is to make people seriously consider some of the things that are wrong with our culture and how to improve upon it. I found myself highlighting scores of passages, particularly those about education. (Full disclosure: I am a teacher, so naturally I have idealistic views about education.) More writes in very long, drawn-out sentences, but the basic idea of one of my favorite passages is, "If we do not properly educate people so they cannot be financially independent and so resort to stealing, what else are we doing but making thieves and then punishing them?" As a teacher for at-risk students, I see this behavior all too often, and I do believe that many of society’s ills can be corrected in youth if only schools have the resources.My main issue with this book was More’s writing style. As I mentioned before, he writes in extremely long sentences, mostly separated by semi-colons, which can make for tedious reading. Sometimes one sentence takes up a whole page. Other than that, I enjoyed the work.

As usual, Oxford does a good job with translations, introductions and notes.More’s "Utopia" is the longest and best of the three works presented in this book, at least as far as fleshing out the details of how a utopian civilization would really look, particularly when situated among other civilizations. But, since most people are familiar with it to some degree, I’ll discuss the other two writings in more detail.Bacon’s "New Atlantis" is the least satisfying of the three utopian civilizations. First, it isn’t complete, barely beginning before it ends. Second, it seems to be more about scientific specialization (i.e. how the New Atlantic culture has made great strides in various fields of science [e.g. agriculture, astronomy]) than about utopian society per se. It is interesting how Bacon relates these islanders, far from Europe, to the famed ancient Atlantean society.Neville’s "Isle of Pines" is an interesting tale of shipwreck and discovery. A ship sinks near the coast of a faraway island, killing everyone except a man with the last name "Pine" and a few women, one of whom is black. What follows is a fascinating story of old/new-world racism and debauchery. Basically, the Pine fellow starts bedding ALL the women (two of whom, if I recall, are sisters) because, you know, they’re not getting rescued any time soon and they’ve got to keep civilization going. Eventually, they all dispense with the wearing of clothes. Then ALL the women get pregnant and turn into baby

factories and everyone breeds like rabbits until there are hundreds of people within one or two generations. The interesting tack that Neville takes is that Pine only sleeps with the black woman at night, she "craftily" sneaking into his bed. In addition, her progeny happen to be the bad apples of the island, which is discussed from the perspective of some visiting sailors many years after the shipwreck. Fascinating view into the European mind from several centuries back.

I would not want to live in this Utopia. Although the laws are stated to be few and easily understood, the culture is packed full of restrictions and expectations for its members. I would suffocate in that culture. However, it is a very interesting reporting of a different culture, akin to socialism and communism, that gets one thinking.

This historic text may be of great interest to historians, who research what life and attitudes were like in former times. Reading it on my early day kindle, with its limitations on movement through the text became almost as much a chore as the ancient language style. On most books with my Kindle, I experience the lack of freedom in tuning back a few pages to check a fact, but this was the worst. Also, More indulged in many attempts at humor, both sharp and broad, which would confuse a reader at any age of reading. This book is best reserved for the researchers.

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