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MAN, MYTH, LEGEND: THE MANY FACES OF THOMAS MORE

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Man, Myth, Legend: The Many Faces of Thomas More

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Abstract

In the centuries after his death, the perceptions of Sir Thomas More have changed over 500 years. In works spanning from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century, the perception of More have shifted from ones of overwhelming praise to increasingly critical of his actions. This thesis seeks to explore how the perceptions of More have changed over time, especially within the 1980s due to new scholarship and new ways of interpreting More's character. Events within the twentieth century, which include the canonization of Thomas More as a saint in 1935, the creation of the peer-reviewed journal *Moreana* in 1963, and the creation of the St. Thomas More Project at Yale in 1958, caused an explosion of works about More as well as new views on him. This thesis will then explore views on Thomas More that took place before the events mentioned previously, with biographies and fictional works about the man. Then the work will explore the lasting effects his canonization, the project at Yale, and the creation of the *Moreana* had on scholarship about Thomas More. Lastly, works published in the 1980s will be examined that shed a critical light and new point of view on More's character. I believe the study of Thomas More has changed over time due to scholars taking a closer look at his life and works and realizing the works about him by close friends and family provided a biased point of view, making it difficult to discern who the "real" Thomas More really was.

Introduction

Saint. Traitor. Humanist. Martyr. These words have been used to describe Sir Thomas More in both life, death, and thereafter. After his beheading in 1535, More was held up to English society as a martyr in Henry VIII's crusade for complete obedience to his supremacy over the Church of England and reform of the Church. He was an important figure who stood up in the face of religious and political tyranny for his beliefs, despite how dangerous it was for

Catholics like him during this time period. More and others like Bishop John Fisher died as martyrs for their faith, and this is what made him such an interesting character to a lot of scholars, and why people are still interested in him centuries after his death. He dared to stand up to Henry VIII- who was not only the King, but also his friend- and deny his demand to recognize the invalidity of his marriage to Katherine of Aragon, the validity of his marriage to Anne Boleyn and any children born from this marriage, and his demand to be recognized as the Supreme Head of the Church of England. To refuse to swear to the Act of Supremacy was cause for treason, and being found guilty of treason meant a death sentence. Other men would have had their resolve broken and given in to the Act, but not Thomas More. He never lost his resolve, nor ever compromised in his spiritual beliefs even though it would have been easier for him to do so. Despite the risks, Thomas More remained steadfast in his beliefs and paid for them with his life.

In the decades after his death, friends and More's family members worked hard to preserve his legacy and cultivate a certain image of him, as his reputation was buried underneath the threat of persecution in speaking out in defense of the martyrs. The portrait painted was of a calm, temperate man who died a martyr for his beliefs in the age of Reformation. This image endured for centuries, and it was because of this image that Thomas More was canonized as a saint in 1935. However, it wasn't until the early to mid 1980s that this image of Thomas More began to crumble and a new image began to take shape. A renewal of interest in the life and writings of Thomas More began to emerge, causing scholars to re-examine his writings and discover the complexities of his character. More wasn't just the one-dimensional, temperate and wise figure that he was portrayed as in the earlier biographies about his life. Through analysis, scholars of the 1980s found that he was a complicated figure whose writings, feelings, and

actions throughout his life were complex and often contradicted one another. A new image of Thomas More emerged, one who seemed more like a human being than an idol put on a pedestal. The renewal of interest coincides with events within the twentieth century, which include the canonization of Thomas More as a saint in 1935, the creation of the peer-reviewed journal *Moreana* in 1963, and the creation of the St. Thomas More Project at Yale in 1958. The use of sources from different points of view will perhaps show Thomas More in a newer, nuanced perspective and answer the question of why people are still interested in him 500 years after his martyrdom on Tower Hill. Thomas More's life continues to attract scholars and academics after all this time because of the controversial actions he made during his lifetime. He stood in the way of a monarch trying to gain power and stuck to his ideals even when it became dangerous to do so. But his life and writings about him raise questions of the limits of biography, as most of the biographies written about Thomas More were primarily written by those who knew him and may have potentially been biased towards him. A large majority of the works about More portray him in a certain way, dismissing his flaws or any wrongdoings he may have committed in life. It then becomes difficult to know who the "true," authentic Thomas More really was.

Life of Thomas More

Sir Thomas More (later St. Thomas More according to the Catholic Church), was born on February 6, 1478 in London, England. His father Sir John More was a barrister and later became a judge. The father, like the son, was charismatic and intelligent as well as virtuous. Though not much is known about the mother, Agnes, her father Thomas Graunger was a later sheriff of London. He was the second child of seven children and one of four living children. Not much is known about the other More siblings, but Thomas kept in contact with them before their deaths. His mother Agnes most likely died around 1499, and Thomas never mentioned her in any of his

writings. His father on the other hand was very involved with young Thomas' life and wanted his son to succeed as a lawyer as he had. The More family had a history of service to the monarchy and to the law, so Sir John ensured his son would follow the same path to greatness.

As a young boy, Thomas was sent to St. Anthony School, a grammar school in London, where he learned Latin and the oratory skills he was well-known for later in his life. After he left the school in 1489, young Thomas followed English tradition and was placed in a sort of "apprenticeship" at a high-ranking person's home at the behest of Sir John his father. He was placed in the home of John Morton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, where he trained for his future profession. In Morton's home, young More participated in the rituals of the household, like performing in plays for Morton's guests. According to William Roper (More's son-in-law), during Christmas time performances, More would jump into the performance and deliver his lines without a mistake, charming the audience with his manner of speech and wit. This wit Morton praised More for, saying to his dinner guests, "This child here, waiting at the table, whosoever shall live to see it, will prove a marvelous man."¹ Already at a young age, Thomas More had potential. His father had planned on him following the family profession of becoming a lawyer and living comfortably, and Morton's comment continues the assumption that More will grow up to become a great man. Thomas, who loved his father and Morton dearly, went along with it. Later in his life, More would remember Morton with great fondness and admiration.

¹ William Roper, "The Life of Sir Thomas More c. 1556" in *A Thomas More Source Book*, ed by Gerard B. Wegemer and Stephen W. Smith (Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 19.

But not only did Thomas learn about politics and other formal lessons, he also experienced (most likely) for the first time religious practices up close. The time he spent with Morton, in the words of biographer Richard Marius, "...are the most likely origin of the profound devotion to God and the church that was to mark the rest of his life..."² This makes sense, as Morton was the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1486 until his death in 1500. More may have witnessed Morton go about his duties as an archbishop; watching the traditions of the church unfold in front of his eyes, like the sacrament of communion and the prayers and sermons being delivered. Combined with the spiritual exploration in his adult years while living in a cloister and the inner battle between marriage and priesthood, More had a healthy respect and devotion to the Church. Later in life, More would viciously defend the traditions of the Catholic Church during Luther's accusations of the Church of being corrupt and the practices not part of the Bible. More held onto his spiritual beliefs and convictions, despite how dangerous they were, until he died on the scaffold at Tower Hill in 1535.

At Morton's urging, Thomas More entered study at Oxford's Canterbury College in 1492. There he learned the four liberal arts, arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy, as well as expanding on the grammar, logic and rhetoric he learned at St. Anthony's. His rhetoric skills would become an important asset to his later career. After about two years at Oxford, he left the university to pursue legal studies at the behest of John More.

"He spent only two years at Oxford, forced to leave (so Erasmus tells us) by his father, who feared that he might enter liberal studies rather than the law. A life of liberal studies

² Richard Marius, *Thomas More: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 23.

would have meant a university career, and since all dons were clerics, such a career would have meant priesthood.”³

Like any caring father with their child, John More wanted his son to live comfortably and be able to provide for himself, as well as be successful in life. In the Middle Ages, success meant climbing up the social ladder. If a person was born in a lower social class, their mission would be to climb the social ladder for a position that was higher/better than their own. If they achieved that, then they would have achieved success. Take Cardinal Wolsey for example. The son of a butcher, Wolsey steadily climbed the social ranks until he became Lord Chancellor of England under Henry VIII, and thus improved his social status. Sir John More himself had climbed the social ladder until he became a lawyer and eventually a judge. He wanted the same for his son Thomas. Being a lawyer was a profitable and respectable career, and being a clergy member wasn't as profitable as a career like being a lawyer. Sir John wanted better for his son, and that is why he pushed him towards a career in law. Law would push his son into a high social position where he could achieve success. John More was ambitious enough for the both of them. Thomas did go along with his father's plan because he loved and respected him, but his religious inklings would put his father's plans into jeopardy. Thomas first began his law education in New Inn in London. The Inns of the Court were where young men went to learn about law. They would learn the history of England and the laws of the land. After a period of two years at New Inn, Thomas then moved on to Lincoln's Inn in 1496 until he was called to the bar and became an 'utter barrister' (a full-fledged lawyer) in 1501.

³ Richard Marius, *Thomas More: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 28.

In the years between arriving at Lincoln's Inn in 1496 and his marriage in 1505, Thomas More went through a period of intense religious and personal exploration. It was during this time he went to stay and study with the Carthusians where, according to Roper, "He gave himself wholly to devotion and prayer in the Charter-house at London. Living there religiously four years without vow."⁴ Thomas was struggling to decide whether he wanted to live a secular life as a lawyer with a wife, or to take holy orders and live as a cleric. During this time period in Christianity, virginity was prized above all else. The teachings of St. Augustine said that sex and sexuality were the worst of all sins, and those that indulged in sexuality were destined to end up in Hell. Marriage was also condemned by Augustine, because it led one astray from celibacy and God. After finishing his legal studies, More gave a series of lectures on St. Augustine's *City of God*, so he must have been fully aware of Augustine's views and may have shared those views himself. The goal of Medieval Christians was to live a virtuous life so that they may achieve salvation/heaven in the afterlife. Thomas, the good religious man that he was, deeply feared Hell and wanted to achieve this salvation in the afterlife, so he considered a life in the clergy. However, he never did end up becoming a cleric as he married in 1505. According to Thomas Stapleton, Thomas was afraid "That he would not be able to conquer the temptations of the flesh

⁴ William Roper, "The Life of Sir Thomas More c. 1556," in *A Thomas More Source Book*, ed. by Gerard B. Wegemer and Stephen W. Smith, (Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 19.

that come to a man in the vigor and ardor of his youth, he made up his mind to marry.”⁵ He would rather marry than to potentially fail at giving up sexuality. Throughout the rest of his life, More would make penance for his inability to fully give up the flesh; he would wear a hair shirt underneath his clothing, practice self-flagellation, fast, and deny himself any sort of material goods like a soft bed.

In 1505 he married Jane Colt, the daughter of John Colt, who was a friend of the More family. From this union resulted three daughters and one son, the eldest being Margaret, who was his favorite child. The More family lived in London, in Bucklersbury, and More continued his study in law and began to educate his children. Unfortunately, the marriage didn't last very long, as Jane Colt died suddenly in 1511. A month later More married his second wife, the Dame Alice, who was the widow of a man named John Middleton. To this second marriage she brought along her daughter who was also named Alice. Dame Alice and More were married until his death in 1535.

In his public career, More enjoyed success and some recognition by the public for his work. In 1504 he was elected to Parliament under King Henry VII. In 1510, he was elected to the Parliament under King Henry VIII (who was crowned in 1509). That same year he was appointed Under-Sheriff of London, a position he held until 1518 when he went into service for the King. In 1515, More was sent on a mission by the King to be an ambassador overseas to

⁵ Thomas Stapleton, *The Life and Illustrious Martyrdom of Sir Thomas More, Formerly Lord Chancellor of England*, trans. by Philip E. Hallett, (London, Bruns Oates and Washbourne LTD., 1928), 10.

renegotiate commercial treaties England had made. First More was sent to Antwerp, then later to Bruges.

Not only did his public career as a lawyer and ambassador to the King bring him into the public eye, but his writings did as well. More wrote epigrams and various letters and defenses of things he was passionate about, like the later *Confutation of Tyndale*. But most of these were private writings or were published well after his death. One such was his only historical work, *History of King Richard III*. Initially written in 1513, the work wasn't published until after his death. More wrote it as a sort of moral lesson. Kings shouldn't be tyrants, and if they were, they might end up like Richard III. Though never finished and not published during his lifetime, it did show that More had the inklings of becoming a scholar. But one of his works published during his lifetime did manage to bring him into the literary sphere. In 1516 while being an ambassador in Antwerp, More wrote his most well-known work, *Utopia*. This work was what really brought More into public eye and brought him into the public as a writer. *Utopia* was a sort of satirical and critical look on England and European society as a whole through the lens of a fictional land called Utopia. Here things were orderly, no one was allowed to be lazy as everyone had to work to improve the commonwealth, their politics were different from Europe, as they elected their rulers/politicians rather than through inheritance, and their religion, in which a number of religions exist, and all believe in the same God. The tone suggests that More may or may not have believed everything he wrote in *Utopia*, but a number of beliefs and practices translate over from More's personal life. He liked to keep busy and didn't like seeing others not working as well as not at all interested in tolerating other religions, since he was staunchly Catholic and believed in the one "True" religion. Nevertheless, *Utopia* shows the image of More the scholar and humanist alongside the image of More the lawyer. The book earned him renown, and was re-

published many times throughout his life. Though he did not have an extensive literary career, More's works still demonstrate the workings of his mind and his passion for subjects he cared deeply about.

1518 was the year More's life changed forever, as this was the year he entered into service to King Henry VIII. Henry VIII had tried to get More into his service for a while, and him being ambassador to Bruges and Antwerp (as well as to Calais in 1517) was the beginning of Henry trying to get More into his service. More was offered a pension after being ambassador, but he refused. As stated in Stapleton's *Life*, More said "The King appointed me a pension and one, indeed, not to be despised in point of honor and value. But so far I refused to accept it and I think I shall persist in my refusal; because if I take it, either I must give up my present office in the city (which I like better than many another office of higher rank) or keep it only with the risk of offending the citizens, which is the last thing I would wish."⁶ While More was offered a generous pension by the King for his work as an ambassador, he didn't take it as he believed it would compromise his position as Under-Sheriff of London. More didn't want the people of London to think that he would let the pension affect his decision making or anything of that nature. Henry eventually got More to agree to go into his service in 1518. More resigned from his position as Under-Sheriff. Shortly after, Henry knighted More, making him Sir Thomas More, and also gave him numerous important jobs like Master of Requests and Under-Treasurer of the Exchequer. In 1529, More was granted the highest office a man could hope to achieve:

⁶Thomas Stapleton, *The Life and Illustrious Martyrdom of Sir Thomas More, Formerly Lord Chancellor of England*. Translated by Philip E. Hallett, (London, Brunns Oates and Washbourne LTD., 1928),18

Lord Chancellor of England. He was given the office after the fall of Cardinal Wolsey, who failed to secure Henry's divorce.

From 1518 until about 1526, More acted as a sort of private secretary to the King, helping him write professional (and private) letters. In a personal capacity, Sir Thomas and Henry VIII were close companions. Henry would talk with Sir Thomas about subjects like literature and astrology. Henry considered him a friend. He liked More's wit and they often debated on topics such as public affairs. Stapleton said "But the King loved him so much, and took such great delight in his companionship, that without warning he would visit him at his home, sit down unceremoniously to table with his family, and spend a day or two in the country with his dear friend More."⁷ The King must have enjoyed More's company to pay visits to the More home in Chelsea and spend time with him and his family. It may have angered him when More refused to speak in favor of the divorce from Katherine of Aragon, and later when More refused the Act of Supremacy.

Moving forward to the 1530s, More's public career began a downward spiral. In 1527, King Henry began to seek a dispensation from Rome to divorce his wife of 24 years, Katherine of Aragon. Henry had begun to think that the marriage to Katherine was "unlawful" and God was punishing them by not giving them any sons. Katherine had been previously married to Prince Arthur (older brother of Henry VIII), but he died in 1502 due to an illness. Years later she married Henry and they had only one living child, Mary. The rest of Katherine's pregnancies

⁷ Thomas Stapleton, *The Life and Illustrious Martyrdom of Sir Thomas More, Formerly Lord Chancellor of England*. Translated by Philip E. Hallett, (London, Brunns Oates and Washbourne LTD., 1928), 20.

ended in miscarriages or the baby died months after birth. Henry believed these incidents were God's punishment for marrying his brother's widow and prevent him from having an heir. For these reasons Henry decided to divorce (though it was also around this time period Henry met Anne Boleyn). Henry collaborated with Wolsey and other clergymen to get a dispensation from the Pope to divorce Katherine and re-marry someone else, namely Anne Boleyn. Henry also asked More for help in his "Great Matter," and More was elusive in giving advice on this issue. He didn't give the King the answer he wanted and generally avoided giving the King his opinion on the matter. He even tried to point the King to other advisors to assist him with his issue instead of him,

"To be plain with your grace, neither my Lord of Durham, nor my Lord of Bath, though I know them both to be wise, virtuous, learned and honorable prelates, nor myself, with the rest of your Council, being all your Grace's own servants, for your manifold benefits daily bestowed on us so most bounden to you, be, in my judgment, meet counselors for your Grace herein. But if your Grace mind to understand the truth, such counselors may you have devised, as neither for respect of their own worldly commodity, nor for fear of your princely authority, will be inclined to deceive you."⁸

Thomas didn't want to get involved with the "Great Matter" because he didn't approve of the divorce from Katherine of Aragon and he didn't like the fact that the King would potentially break off from Rome to get what he wanted. He tried to persuade Henry to choose other individuals to help him because he didn't think he or the counselors would be good counsel in the divorce. Despite being learned and honorable men, they wouldn't be able to do it justice since they would be afraid of angering the King. If he wanted to know the truth, he should find

⁸ William Roper, "The Life of Sir Thomas More c. 1556" in *A Thomas More Source Book*, ed by Gerard B. Wegemer and Stephen W. Smith (Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 32.

other counselors who don't have this fear to assist him. But the King kept coming to More to ask his opinion on the divorce, and More tried to remain tight-lipped. Henry VIII eventually did divorce Katherine to marry Anne Boleyn, but broke off from the Catholic Church and became the Supreme Head of the Church of England in 1531. As a result, More resigned from the Chancellorship in May of 1532.

But the King wasn't done with More yet. If he couldn't get More on his side, then he'd do everything to tear him down. The King tried to indict More on false charges that he was conspiring with Sister Elizabeth Barton (the Nun of Kent) against Henry's marriage to Anne. These charges fell through, but still the King looked for ways to bring More down. He got his opportunity in 1534 when More refused to swear an oath to the Act of Supremacy, in which recognized Henry as the Supreme Head of the Church of England and recognizing his marriage to Anne Boleyn. More was then put in the Tower of London in April of 1534. July 1, 1535, More was put on trial for treason for refusing the Act. His charges were laid out in eight treasonable acts in J. Duncan M. Derrett's article on his trial:

“1. Refusal on 7 May 1535 to accept the royal supremacy of the Church of England. 2. Letters written and delivered to a known traitor, sc. Fisher. 3. More upheld Fisher in his treasonable attitude, and communicated his own refusal to discuss the issue. 4. He described the Act of Supremacy in hostile terms. 5. He counselled Fisher to answer spontaneously and to avoid expressions which would incriminate More. 6. On 3 of June More refused to break his silence. 7. but, intending to stir up sedition against the king, described the Act of Supremacy as a two-edged sword. 8. On 12 June More in a long conversation with Rich admitted the king might be accepted Head of the Church in England, but denied Parliament's capacity so to declare him and thereby to bind the subject.”⁹

⁹ J. Duncan M. Derrett, “The Trial of Sir Thomas More” *The English Historical Review*, vol. 79 1964, 454.

Though there wasn't solid evidence to prove More did these things (Richard Rich did testify against him), More was found guilty of treason and sentenced to die a traitor's death, though it was changed to beheading due to his station. He was executed on Tower Hill on July 6, 1535. But his legacy and story don't end in death.

Thomas More According to 16th Century Writers

Although he has been dead for more than 500 years, countless writers and biographers have sung the praises of Thomas More in numerous books, letters, and creative works. A large majority of the early writings about him were by the people who knew him personally. Such writers include friends such as Erasmus, Nicholas Harpsfield, Thomas Stapleton, and William Roper. All of these individuals praise and exult the man for his character and achievements.

However, they had to wait quite a bit of time before writings about More and other Catholic martyrs could be published in England. It was because of the hostility and anger towards Catholics and Catholic martyrs during the Reformation. Thomas More and people like Bishop John Fisher died because they refused to recognize the King as the Head of the Church of England. This made the King angry and so he had them found guilty of treason and killed. England broke off from Rome and the Catholic Church and became the Church of England. Protestantism rose and the "old ways" of the church were banned. After the deaths of the two men, various people in the Catholic church proclaimed them as martyrs because they died for the Catholic faith. But Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell didn't like this, and actively tried to stop their subjects from talking about the reasons why they were killed. They ordered the magistrates:

"To declare to the people the treasons committed by the late Bishop of Rochester and Sir Thomas More; who thereby, and by divers secret practices, of their malicious minds intended to seminate, engender, and breed a most mischievous and seditious opinion, not

only to their own confusion, but also of divers others, who lately suffered execution according to their demerits.”¹⁰

This portrayed Fisher and More as troublemakers who intended to spread opinions and ideas that would inspire the people to rebel against the King. Cromwell and the King intended for this to end any opposition against their decision to have the two men executed, and to prevent anyone from being sympathetic towards the men unless they wanted to break the law. While the Catholics in England couldn't speak in support of More and Fisher out of fear of persecution, Catholics in other countries spoke in support of the men's actions and proclaimed them as martyrs. But when Queen Mary I came into power, the Catholics in England were free to praise More and Fisher, and biographies like Roper's *Life of Sir Thomas More* and Harpsfield's *Life and Death of Sir Thomas More* were written. Mary herself was a Catholic, and was raised Catholic by her mother, the late Katherine of Aragon. This period did not last long, as Mary died in 1558 and Queen Elizabeth I (a Protestant) was crowned.

William Roper's *Life of Sir Thomas More* was the earliest of the biographies about Thomas More. He was More's son-in-law, as he married More's oldest daughter Margaret. He had lived with the More family for a period of 16 years, and was in the household for a majority of the important events in More's life (including his imprisonment, trial and beheading). Roper was a lawyer as well as a biographer, his writing on More being his main work. He was a Catholic like his family, but did dabble with Protestantism for a short period of time.

¹⁰ E.E. Reynolds, "From Martyrdom to Canonization" in *Saint Thomas More*. (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1954), 363.

Many details in his biography he witnessed first-hand More's character and interacted with him on a daily basis. One of the main reasons Roper wrote this biography was in remembrance of More's goodness and character. Although Roper was present in the household, some of his memories may have not been completely accurate. Roper himself says that though he witnessed many things in the household, but "Among which things, very many notable things (not meet to have been forgotten) through negligence and long continuance of time are slipped out of my mind."¹¹ But despite this, Roper wrote a somewhat good sketch of Thomas More's life. It was written/published in 1556 during the reign of Queen Mary I, about twenty years after the death of More. Since More had tried to defend Queen Mary's mother Katherine of Aragon in the battle of the legitimacy of her marriage to Henry VIII (and the legitimacy of Mary's birth and accession to the throne), a biography about his life was welcomed and celebrated

But if Roper's work was just a sketch, then Nicholas Harpsfield's *Life and Death of Sir Thomas More, Knight* was one of the first complete works about More. Written a year after Roper's sketch, Harpsfield's biography expanded upon the facts of More's life by portraying his secular and spiritual sides. Not only did he write about More's life, but he also wrote about his writings, achievements, and his legacy after death. Nicholas Harpsfield was a historian and later archdeacon of Canterbury. He was a Catholic and, under the reign of Mary I, prosecuted heretics with the dioceses of Canterbury. However, after the end of Mary's reign, he was imprisoned in Fleet Prison for a period of 12 years for speaking out against Protestantism in England.

¹¹ William Roper, "The Life of Sir Thomas More c. 1556" in *A Thomas More Source Book*, ed by Gerard B. Wegemer and Stephen W. Smith (Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 18.

Harpsfield was a friend of the More family, and friends with William Roper in particular. He got to know them when he went to school at Oxford. Roper was actually Harpsfield's benefactor, as he did give Harpsfield support during the time he spent in prison. His biography was intended to be a New Year's present to Roper, as a sort of thank-you gift for Roper's patronage. In his dedication to Roper at the beginning of the biography, Harpsfield thanks him and says,

“...if I be able in this or any other matter, with any manner of commendation, to enterprise anything, or to gratify any man with my doings, you are the only man living in all the earth that by your long and great benefits and charges employed and heaped upon me, toward the supporting of my living and learning, have most deeply bound me, or rather bought me, to be at your commandment during my life.”¹²

Roper helped out Harpsfield in his time of need, so Harpsfield returned the favor by writing a biography about his beloved father-in-law.

Although his motivations for writing about Thomas More were more out of personal interest than of gratitude, Thomas Stapleton wrote his biography about More in reverence of the man's martyrdom and religious piety. The year of 1535 was significant to both Thomases in two ways: This was the year that Thomas Stapleton was born and the year Thomas More died. It's ironic that Stapleton was born a few days after More's execution. Like his namesake, Stapleton was a Catholic and left England after the Protestant Elizabeth I came into power. He was also a theologian as well as a professor for Douai University. His biography of More was written in 1558 as a part of his *Tres Thomae*, biographical sketches of 3 Thomases: Thomas More, Thomas Becket, and Thomas the Apostle. These men were important to him because he shared the same

¹² Nicholas Harpsfield, “The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More, Knight: Sometime Lord High Chancellor of England” in *Early English Text Society* ed. E.V. Hitchcock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 3.

name of ‘Thomas.’ The three had also stood up to people in positions of power and lost their lives as a result. Stapleton wrote his biography to show that More was a saint, not only because of his martyrdom but because of his achievements as well. Stapleton wrote in the biography, “For I have written his Life not to draw his portrait as a man of rank, learning, wit, or high position, not as a good father, a wise ruler of a household, a just judge, or a man of letters, but above all as a saint and a glorious martyr for truth and right.”¹³ The main purpose of the work was to portray More as a martyr, a good and holy man who died for his beliefs.

But arguably, the one person who was closest to More, who knew him intimately as a friend was Erasmus of Rotterdam. Erasmus was a scholar, a reformer, and a good friend to Thomas More. They met in 1499 when Erasmus first came to England to tutor William Blount, Lord Mountjoy. They communicated semi-frequently through letters and whenever Erasmus came to England. They were both humanists and clearly passionate about the church. They loved each other like family, and Erasmus was devastated to hear of More’s execution in 1535. The letter to Ulrich von Hutten, which was written in 1519, gives a sketch of More in all ways: as a learned man, physical appearance, a just and pious man. The purpose of the letter was to tell von Hutten about More and what type of person he was. The Thomas More of this letter is a respectable man with no care for finery and disinterested on court life, who was intelligent and pious.

¹³ Thomas Stapleton, *The Life and Illustrious Martyrdom of Sir Thomas More, Formerly Lord Chancellor of England*. Translated by Philip E. Hallett, (London, Bruns Oates and Washbourne LTD., 1928), 144.

Despite the different motivations for their writing, all these men respected Thomas More and wanted to preserve his character and legacy as a whole in writing. One of the characteristics they noticed was that Thomas More didn't get angry. "Whom, in sixteen years and more being in a house conversant with him, I could never perceive as much as once in a fume"¹⁴, remarked More's son-in-law William Roper. In all the time Roper had lived with the family, he had never seen More angry or become angry. He must have had incredible restraint to not get heated about political or religious issues. An example of this restraint is when he didn't get angry with Roper when Roper began to favor the teachings of Luther. Early in his marriage to More's eldest daughter Margaret, Roper was, according to Harpsfield, "a marvelous zealous Protestant, and so fervent, and withal so well and properly liked of himself and his divine learning, that he took the bridle into the teeth, and ran forth like a headstrong horse, hard to be plucked back again."¹⁵ Roper was, in other words, obsessed with Luther and Protestantism, and he wanted to indulge in it by reading Luther's works. Sir Thomas More tried to talk him out of pursuing Protestantism and returning to the Catholic faith, but Roper ignored him. Stapleton said that More did this instead, "But when he saw that his words were fruitless, 'Henceforth,' he said, 'I will not argue

¹⁴ William Roper, "The Life of Sir Thomas More c. 1556" in *A Thomas More Source Book*, ed by Gerard B. Wegemer and Stephen W. Smith (Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2004),34.

¹⁵ Nicholas Harpsfield, "The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More, Knight: Sometime Lord High Chancellor of England" in *Early English Text Society* ed. E.V. Hitchcock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932),

with you, but will pray to God for you.’ ”¹⁶ Roper eventually returned back to the Catholic faith, and remained a Catholic until his death.

More could have gotten very angry with Roper for following the words of Luther, since he himself disliked the Protestants and what they were doing to the Catholic Church. He possibly could have renounced Roper or kicked him out of his house. But he didn't; instead, he remained calm and spoke to Roper about his obsession with Protestantism. When Roper refused to listen to his advice, instead of getting angry More left him alone to figure things out on his own. This is an example of the restraint More had to not get angry about his son-in-law acting in a manner which he disapproved.

Another positive trait More had which was identified by his friends and family was of being a fair and honest judge. For a time, More did serve as the Undersheriff of London, and as a lawyer before being Undersheriff, so he dealt with clients and their legal quarrels on a daily basis. According to his friends, More was a fair judge and sought justice and fairness whenever he could. His friend Erasmus wrote this about his fairness when telling von Ulrich about him, “He gave every client true and friendly counsel to their advantage rather than his own, generally advising them that the cheapest thing they could do was to come to terms with their opponents. If he could not persuade them to do this, he pointed out how they might go to law at least expense;

¹⁶ Thomas Stapleton, *The Life and Illustrious Martyrdom of Sir Thomas More, Formerly Lord Chancellor of England*. Translated by Philip E. Hallett, (London, Brunns Oates and Washbourne LTD., 1928),70.

for there are some people whose character leads them to delight in litigation.”¹⁷ More, in this example given by Erasmus, helped his clients to figure out the solutions to their problems without spending too much money and to avoid those who tried to take advantage of them, because he wanted them to get the justice they deserved. He didn’t try to take advantage of his clients but instead tried to help them find the best solution that would help *them* the most, not him. He gave his clients advice about their cases but never pushed them to take it. As an impartial judge, he gave everyone who came into his court room the same treatment, regardless if they knew him. An example of this is his son-in-law Giles Heron, who was married to another one of More’s daughters. “When he brought an action before his father-in-law, the latter warned him to cease litigation as his case was not just. When he refused to do so, More forthwith gave sentence against him.”¹⁸ Not even his family could escape his sense of justice. Even though Heron was a son-in-law, More’s sense of justice and did not let him show favoritism to family, even in a time where patronage was important. His wisdom, ability to be impartial, and sense of judgement helped him be a fair judge and lawyer.

Another trait that a majority of his biographers admired was Thomas More’s intense devotion to religion. More was a Catholic, and was very passionate about his beliefs. He believed in the practices of the Church and participated in Mass. He also prayed every morning and every

¹⁷ Erasmus, “Erasmus on Thomas More 999 to Ulrich von Hutten, Antwerp July 1519,” in *The Epistles of Erasmus*, vol. 3, e.d. by Francis M. Nichols (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1918), line 190.

¹⁸ Thomas Stapleton, *The Life and Illustrious Martyrdom of Sir Thomas More, Formerly Lord Chancellor of England*, 26.

night, and implored his family to do the same. His prayers were what supposedly brought William Roper out of his obsession with Protestantism and helped him come up with a solution when Margaret was sick with the Sweating sickness. He defended the faith against heretics and spoke out against prominent heretics like Luther. He observed feast days and held onto God's teaching to love one another. More also gave alms to the poor and helped them out financially whenever he could. An example of his Catholic generosity is when his barns and some of his neighbors' barns burned down when they were filled with the corn harvest. In a letter he wrote to his wife Dame Alice, he said, "I pray you make some good ensearch what my poor neighbors have lost, and bid them take no thought therefor; for, and I should not leave myself a spoon, there shall no poor neighbor of mine bear no loss happened by any chance in my house."¹⁹ More cared more about his neighbor's suffering than his own and wanted to help them out in any way he could, fulfilling God's commandment to love thy neighbors. More's care for his neighbors and devotion to his faith made him memorable to those who read the biographies by his loved ones. His piety, good judgement, and temperament made him stand out above the rest and solidified his legacy as a pillar of morality.

Renewed Interest: Canonization to New Scholarship

Though Thomas More had not faded into obscurity, his legacy was mainly left alone aside from the works of his early biographers. However, as the 20th century came about, a sort of renewal of interest in Thomas More's life and legacy took hold. A series of events signaled this renewal of interest: these events included the Canonization of Thomas More and Bishop Fisher

¹⁹ ¹⁹ Thomas Stapleton, *The Life and Illustrious Martyrdom of Sir Thomas More, Formerly Lord Chancellor of England*, 92.

in 1935, the play *A Man for All Seasons* by playwright Robert Bolt, the foundation of the *Amici Thomae Mori*, and the creation of the St. Thomas More Project at Yale.

In 1886 Thomas More, along with several others, was beatified by Pope Leo XIII. Now he was to be known as ‘Blessed Thomas More.’ However, it was not until 1935 that Thomas More and Bishop Fisher were canonized as saints. The delay was mostly because the canonization process in itself was long, but also because of the political climate in Europe during this time period. In the early 1930s, Hitler was coming into power with his Nazi party, and was elected as Chancellor of Germany in 1933. The Catholic church during this time was trying to prevent the Nazi party and Hitler from infringing on their rights. They hoped to make a deal with Hitler so that the Party wouldn’t interfere with the church. German historian Fritz Stern wrote in his book *Dreams and Delusions: The Drama of German History* that an agreement between the Catholic Church and Hitler was made. “The church agreed to withdraw from the political field and in that realm in effect surrendered to *Gleichschaltung*.”²⁰ Later on, the Catholic Church and Hitler signed a concordat, an agreement between the Vatican and a secular government. “By the terms of the concordat the church renounced all political activities in turn the state guaranteed the right to free worship, to circulate pastoral epistles, to maintain Catholic schools and property.”²¹ The Church and Hitler agreed to this concordat so that both parties would stay out of the others’ way. The Church would not say anything against Hitler or get involved with politics, and Hitler would not interfere with the Church or its practices. Hitler broke his promises, as

²⁰ Fritz Stern, “The Lure of Power,” in *Dreams and Delusions: The Drama of German History*, (New York: Knopf, 1987), 188.

²¹ Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions: The Drama of German History*, 189.

members of the clergy were arrested and condemned by his regime. Some members of the Church attempted to speak out and act against the brutality of the Nazi regime, but a majority of the Church stayed silent.

It was in this intense political climate that Thomas More (and Bishop Fisher) were canonized. Their canonization ceremony took place in May of 1935 at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, led by Pope Pius XI. The Homily spoken by the Pope at the ceremony spoke of heresies that have come and gone in history, but the Catholic faith always endured and those they kill would become martyrs. Pope Pius then goes on to introduce the two new saints as people who were not afraid of the heretics or the threats of powerful people, and their deaths were testaments to their loyalty to the Faith. The Pop exulted Bishop Fisher first, about his good qualities and piety, then about how he went to his death without fear. Then, he moves on to exult Sir Thomas More, his piety, and his speaking out against wrongdoing that eventually lead to his death.

“A strong and courageous spirit, like John Fisher, when he saw that the doctrines of the Church were gravely endangered, he knew how to despise resolutely the flattery of human respect, how to resist, in accordance with his duty, the supreme head of the State when there was question of things commanded by God and the Church, and how to renounce with dignity the high office with which he was invested.”²²

At the end of the homily, Pius XI asks members of the Church to emulate the virtues of St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More, and to pray to the saints that those who have been separated from the Catholic Church to come back to their home.

In light of the political climate of Europe during the 1930s, the canonizations of Fisher and More were a way for the Catholic Church to remind itself and their people to stand up for

²² “Two New Saints,” *The Tablet*, 165, no. 4960 (June 1935).

their beliefs, despite the fact that doing so could get them killed. With Hitler's Nazi regime bearing down on Europe and breaking their concordat with the Church, the Church had to make a choice whether to stand up to the Nazis or to stay quiet. Some Catholics spoke out against the Nazis and paid for it with their lives while a vast majority stayed silent. It was parallel to what More and Fisher went through in the 16th century. In their time period, Fisher and More (as well as other English Catholic martyrs) stood up against Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy and the break from Rome and paid for it with their lives. The majority of Catholics in England stayed silent and went along with the Reformation. St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More were examples of what Catholics should have done when faced with danger for standing up for themselves.

Although separated from More's lifetime by about 400 years, playwright Robert Bolt still found inspiration in More's convictions and strong belief in himself. Bolt was a screenwriter and playwright known for his historical plays, which included *A Man for All Seasons*, a play about Thomas More and the battle of wills he had with King Henry VIII, which eventually ended in his imprisonment and death. Bolt was inspired by More's insistence on sticking to his convictions in the face of danger and his confidence in his own sense of self. Bolt wrote in the preface to the play "what first attracted me was a person who could not be accused of any incapacity for life, who indeed seized life in great variety and almost greedy quantities, who nevertheless found something in himself without which life was valueless and when that was denied him was able to grasp his death."²³ Bolt admired the strength of the convictions More held throughout his life and his willingness to die for those beliefs. Throughout the play, many people were trying to get

²³ Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons: A Play of Sir Thomas More* (London: Bloomsbury, 1960), Preface.

More to change his mind about Henry's divorce (including the King himself), some were plotting his downfall (Cromwell), and others still trying to forge an alliance with him (Chapuis). But even with all these pressures, still Thomas More would not yield and recant his beliefs. More also didn't shy away from his religious beliefs when it became dangerous to remain a Catholic in England. When Henry demanded More to take the oath for the Act of Supremacy, he refused. His belief was that the Pope was the Head of the Church, not the King. He also didn't want to comment on the royal divorce because he didn't approve of it but didn't want the King to know. In *A Man for All Seasons*, the fictional Duke of Norfolk in the play tries to dissuade More from refusing to take the oath and does not understand why More would throw away the respect people have for him over his theory that The Pope was the head of the Church and the link to God. More said to him, "But what matters to me is not whether it's true or not but that I believe it to be true, or rather not that I believe it, but that I believe it ..."²⁴ More did not care that he would be losing the King's love and respect for refusing the oath. He did not even care that the refusal may put his life at risk. All he cared about was his belief in the Catholic Church, and remained steadfast until his death in 1535. Audiences in the 1960s when the play was written could identify with More, especially in the sense of patience and conscience. Barry Ulanov from *Catholic World* writes in a review of the play and said "The More we have here is a great man of principle, devoted servant of the King, dedicated lawyer, who could not separate law from his consciousness or conscience from the law. Those who believe in and practice passive resistance may take comfort from this play of Sir Thomas More. So may militarists whose bellicose ardors

²⁴ Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons*, Act Two.

are rooted in conscience, social conscience.”²⁵ More provided an example of resistance that didn’t depend on violence, but rather on words, wit, and conscience. He never uttered a single word against the King or his policies, but rather relied on his wit and wisely kept silent. He rebelled against the King and government while also keeping his conscience. The Thomas More in *A Man for All Seasons* was a person people could look to for guidance in their battles which challenge their own consciences.

Thirty years after his canonization with Fisher, St. Thomas More came into the academic spotlight with the creation of the *Moreana* and the St. Thomas More Project at Yale. Both academic endeavors emerged around the early 1960s, with the St. Thomas More Project being the first one to come into existence. The project was announced in October of 1958 and was ended by Yale in 1985. The project was the creation of Rev. Edward J. Klein, whose interest in Thomas More arose when he was doing a dissertation on the works of Richard Whitford. Rev. Klein spent some time teaching at the College of St. Thomas and came back to Yale with a copy of a 1557 folio of St. Thomas’ English works, which was printed by his nephew William Rastell. Rev. Klein’s idea was “intent upon rendering it into contemporary English.”²⁶ He was supported financially by the Michael P. Grace II Trust and worked on the translation from the Sterling Library at Yale. In 1957 when Rev. Klein fell ill (he died in 1969), the Trust and others at Yale had to figure out what to do with the project. The author of the article “THE ORIGIN OF THE

²⁵ Barry Ulanov, “A Man for All Seasons,” *The Catholic World* 194, no. 1162 (January 1962), 255.

²⁶ David R. Watkins, “THE ORIGIN OF THE ST THOMAS MORE PROJECT,” *Moreana* 16, no. 62 (July 1979), 7.

ST THOMAS MORE PROJECT” David Watkins, who was during this time period the Head of the Reference Department at the Yale Library, wrote that he suggested to the attorney of the Michael Grace II Trust “an appropriate approach might be the organization of a project along the lines of groups working on the edition of the works of Benjamin Franklin, the Horace Walpole project, the Boswell edition, and the several other complete editions then being prepared in the Yale library.”²⁷ Soon, the project was re-organized and there was the St. Thomas More Project. Several volumes of More’s works have been in two editions have been published. “The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More” was to be about fourteen volumes and each of them were “including a comprehensive introduction dealing with the text, circumstances of composition, historical background, and other related matters. Each Latin text will be accompanied by a facing English translation, and all significant variant readings will be included.”²⁸ The second edition, “Selected Works of St. Thomas More” included fewer texts. Unfortunately, about 20 years after its creation, Yale decided to stop the project in 1985. It was mainly due to financial issues, as the money from the trust was running out. However, the project did have an impact on those who worked on it. Many of the editors who were part of the project had their views on More changed. In an article for *The New York Times*, professor emeritus Louis Martz was quoted, saying “All of us who have worked on the edition have come to see More as an extraordinarily complex human being.”²⁹ Those who worked closely with materials

²⁷ Watkins, “THE ORIGIN OF THE ST THOMAS MORE PROJECT,” 8.

²⁸ David R. Watkins, “The Saint Thomas More Project,” *The Yale University Library Gazette* 36, no. 4 (April 1962), 165.

²⁹ Colin Campbell, “Yale Ends Project on Thomas More,” *New York Times*, June 16, 1985, 48.

on St. Thomas More realized that More wasn't just a saintly figure; he was a complex human being whose actions and feelings often contradicted one another.

Though the St. Thomas More Project was ended by Yale, the *Moreana* flourished and still publishes journals to this day. The *Moreana* was an academic journal pertaining to all things Thomas More. According to the journal, "Since its inception, *Moreana* has provided leading research on the life of More and humanist forms of thought through interdisciplinary studies."³⁰ The journal was founded in 1963 by Abbé Germain Marc'hadour, who was also a member of the *Amici Thomae Mori* (Society of Friends of Thomas More). The *Amici* consists "of all those throughout the world with an interest in or a devotion to Thomas More."³¹ Anyone who liked Thomas More joined the society. It makes sense why the *Moreana* is the official journal of the *Amici Thomae Mori*. The *Moreana* and the St. Thomas More Project had a lot in common. Some of its editors of the Project wrote articles of their findings for the *Moreana*. Marc'hadour, who served as the *Moreana*'s editor, also served as an editor for the St. Thomas More Project. Both served as ways for Thomas More scholars to share their work and debate Thomas More's work.

All these events; the canonization of Fisher and More, the creation of *A Man for All Seasons* by Robert Bolt, the formation of the St. Thomas More Project, and the creation of the *Moreana*, served as ways to renew interest in Thomas More. The canonization brought More back into the public spotlight after almost 400 years of waiting for sainthood in a time of political turmoil. The St. Thomas More Project and *Moreana* introduced new ways of thinking

³⁰ "About This Journal," *Moreana*, accessed October 27, 2020.

³¹ J.B. Trapp, "The Founding of the Amici Thomae Mori," *Moreana* 26, no.1 (January 1989):18.

about More's work and brought new scholarship into the academic world. As mentioned in the *New York Times* article, some editors had changed how they viewed and thought about Thomas More. One of the editors was named Richard Marius, and in 1984 he wrote a biography on Thomas More's life that portrayed him in a different light than previous works had before.

Thomas More According to 1980s Scholarship

After the creation of two new avenues of Thomas More scholarship, historians and writers began to view Thomas More in a completely different way. While the portrait of an honest and "saintly" man still remained, the view of a complex and complicated person began to show on the surface. This took place mainly within the 1980s, with works like *Thomas More: A Biography* by Richard Marius and articles about the complexity of More's character by G.R. Elton. Both men were very critical of More's character and how he was portrayed after his death by his friends and family, especially G.R. Elton. Elton believed that the portrayals of More in those early biographies were manufactured by those who knew him. In their works, the men explore the complexities of Thomas More and try to discover the man behind the painted portrait.

Richard Marius was an American scholar and writer. He was a professor at Harvard University and taught English and Writing. Marius was part of Yale's St. Thomas More Project as an editor of *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*. He read a lot of More's works while working on the Project, and both of these things helped him formulate a new (and somewhat controversial) view on More that is in his book *Thomas More: A Biography*. This view of a More that was authoritarian, who hated heretics to the point of hysteria, who wasn't always fair and just, and was deeply religious on the cusp of fanaticism, was controversial because it went against everything the early biographers portrayed him as. This work was critical on More, and

while it still praised the man for his actions, it also takes a deeper look at said actions and examines them critically.

Another author who examined Thomas More critically was Geoffrey (G.R.) Elton. He was a British historian who specialized in the Tudor period. He wrote a number of books on Tudor politics and wrote extensively about the impact of Thomas Cromwell in Tudor politics. An article he wrote for *Psychological Medicine* called “The real Thomas More,” ponders the question “who was the real Thomas More?” The article examines More’s behavior and how at times it contradicted itself. For example, More could be witty, but his wit could be sharp and wound others. Elton examined some of his writings, like *Utopia* and the *Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer* and finds that the Thomas More in those writings fears hell and damnation, is violently against heretics and is pessimistic about human nature.

Though in Roper’s work he claims that he had never seen More “in a fume,” his writings tell a different story. His dislike of heretics becomes full on hatred in his writing, and examples of this are in his *Response Against Luther* and *Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*. The image of the cool, unflappable Thomas More who does not get angry that his son-in-law became a Protestant is not present. Instead, in his place is a man whose anger almost explodes off the page. The *Response* was dripping with hatred against Luther, heretics, and anger that anyone would dare question the Catholic Church. A passage of the *Response* in Richard Marius’ book is particularly inflammatory:

“ Since he has written that he already has a prior right to bespatter and besmirch the royal crown with shit, will we not have the posterior right to proclaim the beshitted tongue of this practitioner

of posterioristics most fit to lick with his anterior the very posterior of a pissing she-mule until he shall have learned more correctly to inferior posterior conclusions from prior premises.”³²

Basically, More is telling Luther to kiss an ass until he learns to keep his mouth shut. Another example of this anger, especially when it comes to Protestants, is the *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*. G.R. Elton wrote in his article “The *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* is really a distressing book to read- an interminable, high-pitched scream of rage and disgust which at times borders on hysteria.”³³ In both examples, there is no hint of the calm Thomas More who “was never in a fume.” Why was More so angry against Luther and Protestants when his own son-in-law dabbled with it? Perhaps it was because Roper was family to him, and he felt it was his duty to save him from being a heretic. But it may also be because Luther and the Protestants were insulting everything More held dear. Luther and the others were attacking the Catholic Church and its practices, calling it corrupt. These practices were sacred to More, who participated in them and held them close to his heart. To see them being attacked by (in his mind) heretics must have made his blood boil. These people were against Catholicism, so More must have felt it was his duty to defend the Church from attacks from heretics. And he defended the Church with everything he had, giving up his life for the Church.

Thomas More was also known for being a fair and honest judge by those who knew him. But even though he had this reputation, More was still capable of mis constructing the truth. He

³² Richard Marius, *Thomas More: A Biography*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 281.

³³ G.R. Elton, “The real Thomas More?” *Psychological Medicine* 10, no. 4. (November 1980): 613.

committed a miscarriage of justice in the Richard Hunne affair. Richard Hunne was a tailor in London and reportedly had a good reputation. His young son had died and so the body was taken for burial at St. Mary's Church in Whitechapel. In this time period, priests would receive something called a mortuary fee, where a piece of the dead's property was given to the priest as payment. The priest in this case, Thomas Dryfield, wanted a piece of the dead child's christening sheet. But Hunne refused to let the priest have it because the child did not own it. English law said that dead people did not own any property. When he refused the priest's request, he was basically saying that the sovereign's law was above the Church's canon law, which made a lot of people angry. Hunne got sued by the priest and he sued the priest back. Eventually he was locked up in Lollard's Tower, a prison, and was found dead on December 4, 1514. The cause of death was confusing, because some people said he killed himself and others said he was murdered. But Thomas More believed that Hunne had killed himself, and that the man was a heretic. However, Richard Marius claimed that "More distorted the facts to uphold the official view of the church that Hunne was a heretic and a suicide."³⁴ The evidence collected by the coroner said differently. Hunne was found hanging by his neck, but when someone pushed the body, it fell out of the noose. There was blood on the floor and on his jacket, and he had marks on his wrists and neck, as if he was restrained and choked with something. It seemed very likely that Hunne was murdered, maybe by someone from the Church. They would have reason to, as Hunne insulted them with his actions. There wasn't much evidence to prove Hunne was a heretic. There was an English Bible found at his home with notes in it, but it supposedly was not his and was planted.

³⁴ Richard Marius, *Thomas More: A Biography*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 123.

However, despite the evidence, More still maintained that Hunne was a heretic and that he killed himself because people found out he was a heretic. If the evidence pointed to foul play, why did More choose to ignore it? He was supposedly a fair and honest judge who looked at all the facts before making a judgement, so why did he ignore it in this case? Perhaps it's because More wanted to defend the Church and its practices. Hunne's actions must have been an insult to him as it insulted the clergy. But it won't ever really be known why More distorted the truth, as this distortion of the true story prevails into More's *Dialogue Concerning Heretics*.

Though his early biographers claimed that More was an honest and fair judge and he never got angry, the evidence in the writings of Elton and Marius show that a new image on Thomas More was emerging. They did not skip over the unpleasant parts of More's life, but instead examined them critically to discover the hidden parts of More's identity. In these works, More is seen more as a human being that made mistakes and not solely as a saintly, wise man that writers tend to portray him as.

Conclusion

The carefully crafted persona of Thomas More as a calm, temperate man began to crumble during the 1980s due to the renewal of interest in Thomas More's life and new scholarship surrounding his works and him as a person. This renewal of interest coincides with events within the twentieth century, which include the canonization of Thomas More as a saint in 1935, the creation of the peer-reviewed journal *Moreana* in 1963, and the creation of the St. Thomas More Project at Yale in 1958. Using a series of biographies and letters by those who knew him best, plays, speeches, and academic writings, the uncomplicated, unbiased character of the famous martyr may become clearer. The early biographers of More had all claimed that More was a fair and honest judge, a person who never got angry. However, new scholarship soon came

along to change this perception and portray him as a complex human being. This was in part due to a revitalization of interest in More that started with his canonization as a saint by Pope Pius XI in 1935, a year of political turmoil for the whole world. A play on More, *A Man for All Seasons*, showed a man who was not afraid to die for what he believed and could provide an example to audiences. This revitalization of interest spurred academic endeavors such as Yale's St. Thomas More Project and the *Moreana* journal. These two endeavors then lead to a flurry of new scholarship on Thomas More, which helped formulate this new perception of More.

Despite the wealth of information about Thomas More's life, political career, and writings, the "true" Thomas More may never be truly revealed. The limits of history prevent scholars from unearthing the full picture. A number of More's letters to Erasmus have not survived, and whatever replies More wrote to Erasmus have been lost to time. The same goes for other letters he had written during his lifetime. Some of More's works are unfinished, like his *Richard III* biography, which prevents historians from reading More's take on Richard's character and motivations for his actions. However, the number of writings from More himself and those saved by Margaret Roper and family give a clear picture of a man of many faces, a complex character. More was at one time a living, breathing human being whose actions weren't always cut and dry. He could be witty, but he could also be cruel. He had a calm demeanor, but when it came to the Reformation his anger could be explosive. Thomas More was a complex human being whose actions inspired many to stand up for their beliefs, even if those beliefs had dire consequences. This is what attracts scholars to More, his willing martyrdom for the cause he believed in so much. To me, Thomas More was a dynamic character who had his faults and at times made dubious choices. He was a human being who made mistakes and was a multi-faceted and complex individual. The biographies written about him by his close friends and family forget

about this and instead portrayed him as this infallible individual who could never do any wrong. The friends/family's portrayal puts a limit on how people view Thomas More now and in the future. This flawed, multi-faced individual will now be seen as an untouchable figure whose legacy was determined solely by the family's recollection of the man. Like the portrayals of the late Lady Diana Spencer ("The People's Princess"), and John F. Kennedy's "Camelot" administration, Thomas More's memory and legacy is determined by the memories and biographies of his friends and family, which makes it almost impossible to see the "real" Thomas More.

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