

JOHN GUY'S THOMAS MORE: ON THE DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY

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John Guy's full-length biography of Thomas More proves both intellectually stimulating and historically clarifying. Committed at the outset to a broad skepticism, denying the possibility of a truly historical biography of More on account of the plethora of myths and icons created both during the subject's own life and by posterity, he proceeds to demolish these obstacles, much to the interest of any reader. Yet while most can draw satisfaction from the work of this highly competent legal/political historian, one cannot help but feel that he discloses the emerging flaw in his own enterprise, when very early he hazards the suggestion that More probably wanted most to be remembered for his stand against Henry VIII. In an imperialist mobilization and ruthless reduction of all the evidence to the political activities and import of More's life, he produces a political biography, which for all its clarifications fails to do justice to the religious dimension of More's being.

Key words: action, otherworldliness, conscience, consensus.

Le Thomas More de Guy paru dans la collection "Reputations" est stimulant intellectuellement, et clarifie des points d'histoire. L'auteur, pourtant, nie d'emblée la possibilité d'une biographie vraiment historique de More, étant donnée la pléthore de mythes et d'icônes créée déjà durant sa vie, puis par la postérité : le voir démolir ces obstacles est un plaisir pour tout lecteur. Mais, si la plupart des gens seront satisfaits par l'ouvrage de cet historien si compétent en droit et en politique, on ne peut s'empêcher de sentir que lui-même révèle une faille dans son entreprise lorsqu'il se risque à suggérer, dès les premières pages, que More souhaitait probablement laisser à la mémoire collective l'image surtout de sa résistance à Henry VIII. En braquant drastiquement tous les documents sur les activités politiques de More au détriment des autres aspects, il a produit une biographie politique, qui, malgré tous les points qu'elle tire au clair, ne rend pas justice à la dimension religieuse de la personnalité de More.

Mots clés : action, contemplation de l'au-delà, conscience, consensus.

El *Tomás Moro* de Guy publicado en la colección "Reputations" es estimulante intelectualmente, y aclara puntos de historia. El autor, sin embargo, niega de entrada la posibilidad de una biografía verdaderamente histórica de Moro, dado la plétora de mitos y de iconos creada ya durante su vida, luego por la posteridad: verle echar abajo estos obstáculos es un placer para todo lector. Pero, si la mayor parte de la gente estuviera satisfecha por la obra de este historiador tan competente en derecho y en política, uno no puede impedirse de sentir que él mismo revela un fallo en su empresa cuando se arriesga a sugerir, desde las primeras páginas, que Moro deseaba probablemente dejar a la memoria colectiva sobre todo la imagen de su resistencia a Henry VIII. Disponiendo drásticamente todos los documentos sobre las actividades políticas de Moro en detrimento de los otros aspectos, ha producido una biografía política, que, a pesar de todos los puntos que pone en claro, no hace justicia a la dimensión religiosa de la personalidad de Moro.

Palabras claves: acción, contemplación del más allá, conciencia, consenso.

Published in a new series, "Reputations," committed to allowing no firm ground to history and to promoting the interests of "argument without end", yet authored by one of the shrewdest and most responsible of Tudor legal historians, the latest biography of Thomas More promises an intellectual experience of both profit and pleasure: John Guy, *Thomas More*, London: Arnold, and New York: Oxford UP, xvix + 251 pp., ISBN 0-340-73138-9 (hb), £ 40, 0-340-73139-7 (paperback), £12.99. In pursuit of a clarifying iconoclasm, amidst the clatter of shattered images and myths, John Guy, despite his disclaimers to the contrary, conjures a very special representation of Thomas More that should decisively advance the study of its subject and leave its readers long indebted. Yet its peculiar allure invites caution.

At the very outset, the Table of Contents announces to the reader the challenging, problematic character of the work. It deserves attention here: 1) An historical Thomas More? 2) Action or contemplation? 3) Reluctant courtier? 4) Happy families? 5) Social reformer? 6) Heresy hunter? 7) Law reformer? 8) Politician? 9) Acquiescence or resistance? 10) Whose conscience? 11) Conclusion. The interrogative cast of the book's chapters announces and invokes an analytical, aggressive approach.

Indeed everything is thrown into question including the biographical urge and product themselves. Does not the very Conclusion merit a question mark?

Guy begins by denying the possibility of a truly historical biography of More because the sources are so problematic, so tainted, and the impulse to the ironic so great. Among the image makers and spin doctors during More's own life time—Erasmus, Holbein, Roper—is the man himself, not to mention posterity's admirers of More. Reputations, representations, images, myths and icons: if the dancer cannot be known from the dance, what hope within a welter of opinions, not facts? Unquestionably, the problematic character of biography and most especially More's own defies any absolute historical rendering of its subject. Our historical "More" becomes the one we seek to imagine. But, of course, if some measure of clarification or small truth were not possible, we could all close up the shop now. And if a number of small established clarifications amount to a considerable beam, it becomes all the more important to attempt to adjust that beam of greater illumination upon our subject.

Very early, at the beginning of the second chapter, we obtain a clue as to the direction of the present work. It is introduced as a suspicion: "that More himself wanted to be remembered not for *Utopia* or his achievements as Lord Chancellor, but for his stand against Henry VIII" (21). Such a suggestion is hardly surprising from the pen of a most eminent legal/political historian, the veritable heir to the mantle of Sir Geoffrey Elton: namely, *A Political Biography!* But if so, why not announce it in the title to the volume? Almost insidiously it becomes quite unnecessary because the author's sure-footed, in fact, unsurpassed command of the sources and their *fortunae*, the comprehensive knowledge of the period's historical events, the sustained logic of his argument have the subtle effect of allowing the persuaded, even convinced reader to take this new, highly politicized More as the total, the complete More. Despite the force, sophistication, and complexity of Guy's accomplishment, it becomes too simplistic for the understanding of this particular man.

In order to be able to attend effectively to the culminating, decisive chapters at the end (8-10), we need to be somewhat cursory in our consideration of the earlier chapters. Expectably, Guy builds upon the fruits of Elton's research culminating in the later political involvement of More with the opposition to Henry VIII, of capital importance for More scholarship and first advanced in a paper given at St. John's University in 1970. Likewise he will draw sustenance appropriately from the tough, unhagiographical approach of Richard Marius, most evident in his massive biography of More. But along with the fruits several spooks have developed in the interchange between Elton and Marius, spooks that need to be conjured, resolved and dissolved. They derive from the interpretation of More's early years and his living now in, or here more probably, near the Charterhouse in London: namely, the spooks of More being a failed monk in his aspiration, his guilt, and being a "sex maniac". In watching their own handy disposal one cannot help marveling how even the best historians in their considerable contributions, especially in the field of demythologizing, will create new myths of which in this instance the application of Freudian psychology affords a rich cache. Of greater import for the development of the biography is the precise significance of the Charterhouse experience for More. In the author's construct of "Action or contemplation" the rejection of the monastery for marriage at this time signifies the irrevocable abandonment of contemplation for the active life. To this matter we need to return later.

Proceeding fastidiously, yet effectively through his self selected iconic minefield, making clear the way, Guy disposes of his mentor's blow to More's integrity and humanism, while demonstrating that More was a less than reluctant courtier. In addressing the heaviest single investment of More scholarship, the *Utopia*, under the rubric of "Social reformer", Guy presents the alternatives of Idyll or ideal—the first best represented by R. W. Chambers's interpretation not as practical social program but as an exhortation to Christians with divine revelation not to be surpassed in moral living by Utopians merely equipped with reason. Maneuvering deftly, however, the author draws nearer to the

practical, radical view of J. H. Hexter that *Utopia* presents a social idea to be realized. Brendan Bradshaw and Quentin Skinner are seen as lending less vehement but more nuanced support, in their reading of the enigmatic masterpiece as an ideal "to nudge society as close to Plato's 'ideal' as could be managed..." (100). Here rather cautiously pronounced, but most clearly expressed at the work's end, emerges his adherence to the interpretation of the *Utopia* as an ideal to be sought. Guy assesses the Charterhouse years as More's determined effort "to understand the proper relationship between philosophy and public life" (38). The articulation of this issue, although not the monastic context, derives from Skinner in his rendition of the *Utopia*. Hence the *Utopia* affords a tentative resolution in its moving to reconcile civic Cicero with Plato.

In examining More as an avid heresy hunter, Guy rises above the censorious, often rabid criticism and accusation running from John Foxe to Jasper Ridley. He takes seriously and judges accurately the import of the Yale edition regarding More's polemical writings and, following the perspective although not the acerbity of Marius, places More's engagement with this issue in a spectrum that moves from theological councillor at the beginning of the twenties to that of public defender of the faith in 1529 with the publication of *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*. Likewise as Lord Chancellor, beginning the same year, More, as highest civil official in the realm, appropriately assisted the Church in the prosecution of heretics. Yet perhaps beyond everything else it is More's total commitment to this task, his very avidity as evinced by the words trumpeted in his epitaph that continue to embarrass those interpreters of his character who seek to endow him with an Erasmian temperament: *furibus autem, homicidis haereticisque molestus* (Allen, X, 261). In fact it remains so embarrassing that Guy begins his chapter by recounting that when in 1833 repairs on the monument were effected, what had been intended to be etched in marble for all time came to be effaced so that More is now only "grievous to thieves and murderers." At times Guy seems to glory in the uncertainty or paucity of the evidence, and here he sees no resolution to the schizophrenia

produced by the issue, no reconciliation of More as author of *Utopia* and as inquisitor in heresy cases.

With "Law reformer?" the author of *The Public Career of Thomas More* comes into his very own. Guy understands More as Lord Chancellor to have refined the system of his predecessor, Cardinal Wolsey. But in the process Wolsey's reputation, insofar as he had a real concern for the poor and for effecting justice, is rehabilitated. He dissolves another myth regarding More as a stout advocate of the common-law jury system in criminal trials. In fact More, when out of office and apparently retired, entered into controversy with Christopher St. German against whom he defended the *ex officio* proceedings of the Church courts both in the *Apology* and in *The Debellation of Salem and Bizance*. As the principal editor of the Yale edition of the latter, Guy can readily quote More to the effect that he would "trust the truth of one judge, as well as the truth of two juries" (139). It will not be the last time that the *Debellation* decisively advances the argument of this biography.



The argument of this splendid study culminates with the last three chapters. Much earlier Guy had articulated the insight that "[t]he greatest paradox about the political Thomas More will become his ability to dissimulate and speak the truth simultaneously" (58). Twice in his dealings with Cromwell he manages subtly to slam the king: first in reminding Cromwell that it was the king back in 1521 who had insisted to the distressed and resisting More regarding the papal supremacy upon which all depends—a position which More could not accept, warned against and disallowed. Then with greater ironic intent he will impart to Cromwell that in coming into the king's service, he had been advised by Henry "first look unto God and after God unto him." It is this statement by the king himself which Guy, in taking issue later with the Paris News Letter's report on More's last words, will persuasively urge as constituting something nearer to More's final words on the scaffold. The author here discloses a vein in More's

practice whereby "he threw back the King's words in his face almost as a habit" (213), thus carrying the political struggle up to the block.

While Alice slept, More pondered his diminishing options. The fact that More remained in the political arena at least a year following his resignation is persuasively elaborated in evidence that goes beyond the findings of Elton. Rather than retiring into silence and an apparent acquiescence he continues his resistance not only by giving support and comfort to the queen's party, the Aragonese, but by returning to controversy, this time against the distinguished common lawyer Christopher St. German. From his earlier editorial work on More's *Debellation* Guy had come to the important recognition that in both the *Apology* and its subsequent response to his opponent, More was deliberately setting himself in opposition to express royal policy; indeed More chooses to dissemble his knowledge that St. German is his opponent and constructs a fictive uncertainty in referring to him as the Pacifier, thereby claiming innocence of express royal policy. Although not introduced here, this last point would seem to strengthen the already formidable argument that More was pursuing politics by other means. Henry did not fail to react promptly to such opposition from his former councillor: the printer's shop was raided and More's name was now introduced into the February 1534 Bill of Attainder, originally against Elizabeth Barton—a measure taken less for More having absented himself from Anne's coronation, the usual reason given, but rather for what was perceived as an affirmation of canon law and the apparatus of the Church, a year following the king's consumption of the entirety.

Concomitantly and as the political biography's argument mounts toward its persuasive conclusion, there is something more covert and implicit, yet highly revealing for the nature and purpose of this study. Guy proceeds with breathtaking legerdemain to sweep the apparently devotional writings of More's last year onto the political side of the ledger. We learn that More's Alington letter constructs "the icon of saintliness and 'otherworldly' detachment" (175). Certainly there is a measure of construction and self-fashioning undeniably present in the artfulness of this extraordinary composition, which is here taken as More's alone. Among the

several audiences can clearly be included that of posterity. Likewise his letters to Margaret from the Tower worked "to shape an interpretation of Catholic 'conscience' which would be preserved as a perpetual memorial" (177). And Guy is on firmer ground in referring to the epitaph as part of the program in which More creates his own myth. Yet when he comes to allude to the 'otherworldliness' (Guy's single quotation marks) of More's main Tower Works—*A Dialogue of Comfort* and *De tristitia Christi*—in simply providing the material, which at the hands of More's earliest biographers would become the story of the legend, one obtains the sense that both More's otherworldliness—no quotation marks—and these two masterpieces are curiously being discounted in the ultimate judgment of the man. It is possible that the author is so much the legal/political historian as to be impatient with the evidence of such material and that he does not understand or wish to understand what he refers to as More's 'otherworldliness' always in these curious, inverted quotations marks (167, 175 [otherworldly], 181) or later to an "authoritarian" element in his outlook (222). In pursuit of icons, myths and their dissolution, the author quite justifiably can call us to a different reading of these texts whose narrative, he urges, is not the whole story. The question remains as to what extent it must displace a traditional, less iconoclastic and less politically enthralled understanding of its subject.



The work culminates with a most incisive chapter on conscience—Whose conscience? For conscience had been looming ever larger in More's thoughts, self-defense and Tower letters, the word appearing over forty times in the Alington letter. A modern source, Bolt's play, offers, in its very being so wide of the mark, the Archimedean point of gaining the ultimate and necessary leverage and insight upon the problem. In a most brilliant and convincing analysis Guy demonstrates what Bolt has represented to modern audiences as More's conscience, his supreme intent—"A man's soul is his self!" and that "what matters to me is...that I believe it" can only be the position arrived at by Henry VIII. Rather More's

conscience is one that has been carefully, consciously and yet in accordance with the age, necessarily framed in the general and traditional consensus or common belief of the Church—a view that allowed More to assume a minimalist position regarding papal supremacy and to vest effective authority, probably with deliberate murkiness, in the undetermined interconnection between papacy and general council. In short, More did not die, as later tradition would have it, for the papacy, nor for the right of individual conscience against the State but rather for an individual right to frame his own conscience where the operative framework was not that of individual opinion. So far, excellent. But a point seems to be missed in claiming that "the view that individuals could read the Bible and make judgements about religious doctrine and the Church was a Protestant position" (199-200). Better to say that it became a Protestant position. For although in fact it appeared both to More at the time and to later ages that Luther's stand was an assertion of private judgment, Luther himself sincerely and profoundly believed and claimed that his conscience, rather than being free floating, was bound, not indeed to More's *consensus*, but rather captive to the Word of God. While differing in operative frameworks, More and Luther, similar in so many ways, belonged to the same world, now for us so difficult to apprehend on the other side of the great watershed. Likewise on that same distant shore Luther's immediate followers can talk the same language as More: if, as argued here, Cromwell charged the former heresy hunter with discounting the consciences of suspected heretics, similarly, as the Protestant reformer of Württemberg John Brenz had explained it four years earlier, heretics had only fictive consciences (Joseph Lecler, *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la Réforme*, Paris: Aubier, Éditions Montaigne, 1955, I, 251).

To conclude our survey up to this point, as political biography John Guy's *Thomas More* is a most distinctive intellectual achievement in its command of the sources and their reading. It becomes equally an extraordinary intellectual experience for any reader, that should attract not simply scholars and specialists on Thomas More, or historians and biographers in the field of European

history, but also the ordinary, inquiring reader interested in historical reputations and the problematic character of anything like an accurate recovery. Yet for all its skepticism regarding the possibility of a historical biography, the momentum of his accomplishment would lead many a reader to believe that the result is the whole More or the best possible More that we can ever expect. It is the contention of the present review that we have in Guy's *Thomas More* the best possible biography except for the fact that the most decisive element in his life has been sheared away, leaving that life without its ultimate reference and framework—namely, the devotional, spiritual, religious dimension.



One does not need to be a hagiographer or even a committed Christian to recognize the importance of this dimension for More. Yet, if I may be personal at this point, I must confess my own slowness to recognize the ultimate centrality of the devotional. For as a former editor of the St. Thomas More Project at Yale I have from the beginning long felt and continue to believe that the most significant result of this definitive edition was the recovery of the polemical works, howsoever unpleasant, because they quickly laid bare a tougher, harsher More. As a means of making clear my own Eltonian/Marian predisposition, permit me to refer to an episode in the long ongoing saga of the troublesome phrase *haereticisque molestus*, appearing on More's epitaph and twice treated by Guy. More scholarship readily draws upon an unnoticed 1967 second printing of the 1961 *Selected Letters* (ed. Elizabeth Frances Rogers, Yale UP). What was so offensive about the first printing, copies of which were issued freely to each of the members of the Yale project? There may have been many other reasons for a reprinting in 1967 and I can only offer here my own limited, personal experience, as one who registered alarm, even outrage, at the rendering of the Latin *hoc ambitiose feci* (Allen, X, 260-61) where More explains his intention to Erasmus. The first rendering of More's explanation—"I wrote that just to be smart" (SL, 180) rather

than the more contextually appropriate translation of the second printing, "I wrote that with deep feeling"—seemed to betray a clumsy effort to save the icon of sweet reasonableness for More and fend off any possibility of a darker, harsher More according to twentieth-century lights.

Conceiving ourselves as young Turks, crusading for a tougher, less pleasing More in a hotbed of potential hagiography, the St. Thomas More Project, Dick Marius and I together with possibly others belabored Dick Sylvester who, to his credit, had it silently corrected. Apart from providing further evidence regarding the persistence of the iconic in More studies and in what seemed to be the veritable font of modern More scholarship, I offer it here for the self-serving purpose of establishing my own credentials as one nearer the Eltonian camp than the hagiographical. Yet I wish to argue that anyone in quest of the "real More," must address the deeply religious/spiritual undercurrent in More's being and take seriously the measure and direction of his devotional writings. Such an exhortation, it can well be imagined, would produce in our author a bemused disdain. Nevertheless something like the whole if not the real More is not to be ultimately found in the Public Record Office but rather in or at least near the monastery, the London Charterhouse.



But before we go there, let us pause to consider the dimensions of More's devotional writings and how they may figure in his entire *oeuvre*. While More's humanist and polemical works can be nicely confined to distinct periods in his career, 1510 to 1520 and 1523 to 1533 respectively, his devotional writings are everywhere present throughout his life and mark both his very first and very last works. True, humanistic and polemical qualities remain characteristic to all his immense productivity. But the study of the devotional works affords the opportunity to draw nearer to the man in all his complexity, as one who constructed and lived his own life, despite all its intense engagement with the world, so that at the end

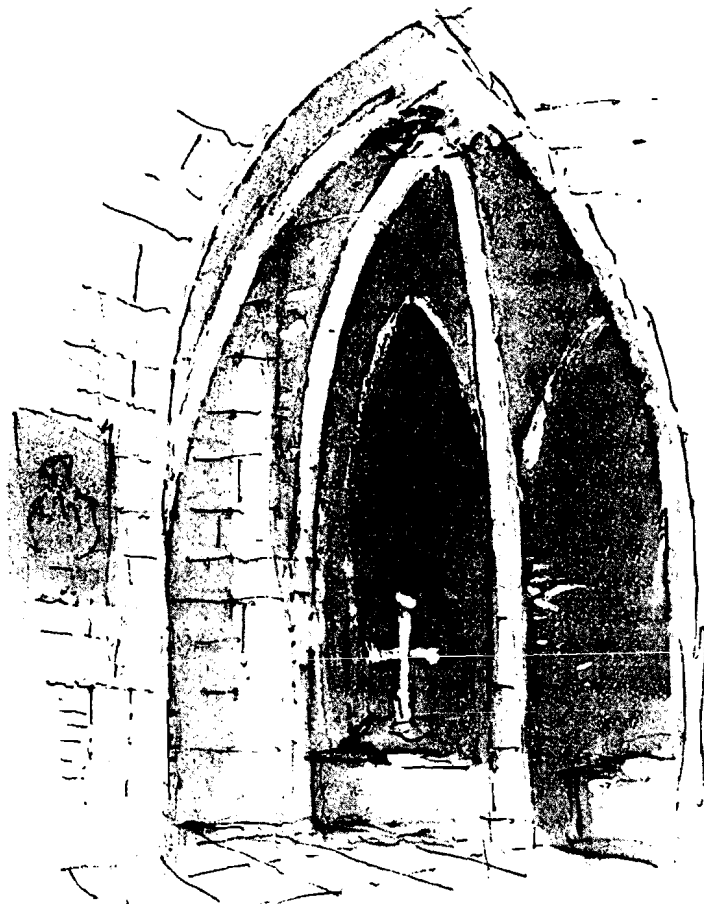
the world could successfully be set at naught. The strong undercurrent of More's devotional preoccupation escapes Guy or simply could never interest him. True he does not ignore the Tower Works and alludes to them occasionally, but for their political resonances. Yet he totally ignores More's *The Last Things*, absent from both text and chronology, deriving from 1522, which argues best for the explicit continuity of this preoccupation between the early and the late More. In this work More will identify God for the first time as the jailer of this world, a theme which will be further richly developed at the end in *A Dialogue of Comfort* (CW1: 156-7; cf. CW12:272-3), serving to remind us of the relative and inferior nature of this world and its doings. The real difficulty arises with his handling of More's first devotional work, the *Life of Pico*, and its immediate context. Guy correctly situates it at that liminal moment as having been written for one who had just entered the cloister by one who was now leaving the precincts of the monastery. But in misreading the significance of the Charterhouse years he stumbles badly over the threshold of this decisive transition. For we are told that the "significance of the Charterhouse years is likely to be that More spent his time trying to understand the proper relationship between philosophy and public life" (38). Such an unfortunate notion seems to derive from Quentin Skinner in the quite different context of interpreting *Utopia*, to appear again later (102) and thus to have obvious importance. It is unfortunate because it is too impersonal, abstract and academic for More at the beginning of the sixteenth century and belongs to the cold inquiry of political philosophy or worse, political science at the end of the twentieth century.

What is then the meaning of the Charterhouse years and More's selective reworking of the nephew's *Life of Pico*? In or around the monastery the emerging humanist/lawyer/politician had engaged the crucial question of his generation and probably of the entire century itself. Given the apparent decay of the contemplative ideal exercised in the monastery, now challenged by a new civic ideal of life deriving from the penetrating impulses of Italian Renaissance culture, the question and issues become more

immediately compelling—What does it mean to be a Christian in this changed context? How do I lead the Christian life? It is a question raised and a similar answer to that of More given in the very same decade by the Venetian aristocrat, Gasparo Contarini, who, in forsaking the monastery for the world, nevertheless takes with him a discipline and commitment, if not a hairshirt, to control the new engagement. Martin Luther will struggle to reintegrate the *vita contemplativa* with the *vita activa*—but in the world. That ever perceptive radical, Sebastian Franck, will soon look around and, in judging the significance of the great groundswell of reform, will claim that each person must now be a monk one's whole life long in the world. Nor is this *disciplina Christi* limited to lay piety and the context of emergent Protestantism. It will be perhaps best exemplified by the Jesuits, borne during this century to the remote corners of the globe. Thus it would seem to be dangerously wide of the mark in constructing the problem "Action or contemplation?" as inevitably opposed, rather than 'both and,' and then to interpret More's removal from the monastic to the married state in 1505 as indicating that for him the lure in the end was always "action" (38). In fact the opposite prevails throughout in the effective combining of what had heretofore been conceived as different and distinct registers of the Christian life, now somehow to be exercised together.



If the religious energies formerly associated with the monastery are now for the individual Christian to operate in the world, it is going to take more than a hairshirt by its practitioner. It is a matter of acquiring an intellectual/spiritual armor for a detached, yet intense engagement with this world. The controlled, critical engagement with, yet distance from, this world will first and foremost be effected by satire—Lucian's satire. In the same year that sees the transition to the married life, More undertakes with Erasmus his translations from Lucian of which the most important for him and



Lower Bell Tower.
Sir Thomas More's Cell.

Hugh Casson, *The Tower of London: An artist's portrait*.
London: The Herbert Press, 1993.

one to which he will return is the *Menippus* where human existence is seen as a stage play with meaninglessly exchangeable and shifting parts in which each has for a time a part to play (CW 3/1:176-7). It is best for underlings not to intrude upon such stage plays in which great matters be "Kynges games, as it were stage playes, and for the most part plaied upon scaffoldes" (CW2:81:5-6). Along with the satire that holds the world at a controlled distance, the play of irony and More's love of the merry tale, his wit, *festivitas*, work in the interests of acquiring a special armor, a harness, whereby he can deal with the world, without ever being overwhelmed by it.

Platonism provided More with that degree of transcendence together with a capacity to assemble those humanist techniques into functions that achieved both engagement and detachment from the world. For while conspicuously Christomorphic in character this special armor had been from the beginning of peculiarly Platonic alloy. In a notable article on More, Hugh R. Trevor-Roper drew attention over twenty years ago to a consistent, inhering Platonism, early evident in More's exposure to Pseudo-Dionysius and Augustine's *City of God*, carried further with Pico, and apparently culminating with Plato's *Republic* in the creation of Utopia as an effort to escape history or end it and transcend this world. But this intensely held, deeply appropriated inner vision, this Platonism needs further consideration and to be extended beyond 1520, for it would pervade More's being even to prison and to the scaffold. In seeking the precise quality of More's Platonism, we can dispense with Ficinian magic, astrology, and the Iamblican crinkle-crinkle to which they are related. Nor is it a simple Plotinian flight of the alone to the Alone, or Socratic irony and the relentless drive toward truth. Rather, it seems ultimately to be the firmly held confidence in a higher order of absolutes, an universe of supreme ideals, providing detachment and leverage upon what he had first recognized as the brittleness of the world (CW1:10:30) and now at the end with his daughter he refers to as "the friendship of this wretched worlde so ficke" (Elizabeth Frances Rogers, ed. *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, Princeton UP, 1947, 524/363-64). Part of the complexity and wonder of this late medieval

Catholic, this Renaissance man, so evident in his writing, is that he can long perform as civic humanist in a meaningful, intense engagement with that world by having forged for himself the transperspectival, uncoupling devices of irony and wit, satire and merriment. For the gaze remains beyond. To ignore this essential strand in More's make-up is to reduce him to the level of just another political operative and, in his failure, ultimately inexplicable.

It remains so difficult for us moderns to begin to apprehend Thomas More because he belongs to a different world, a different ordering of perceived realities that believed in the universe of Truth, the totality of a single Truth, any threat to whose resonances or implications being a threat to the whole. Here we can do no better in concluding this long review of a most valuable book by hearkening to our heresy hunter as reported by "Son Roper" in a passage that bears a note of authenticity in its very reassertion of the religious priority. Momentarily More looks to the future in disgust, and then reels back in horror:

And yet, son Roper, I pray God, that some of us, as high as we seem to sit upon the mountains treading heretics under our feet like ants, live not in the day that we gladly would wish to be at a league and composition with them to let them have their churches quietly to themselves, so that they would be content to let us have ours quietly to ourselves. (*Roper's Life of Sir Thomas More*, in *Two Early Tudor Lives*, ed. R.S. Sylvester & D.P. Harding, Yale UP, 1962, 216).

What produces this alarm on the part of More is the vision of a Catholic minority willingly accommodating themselves to a transformed context of religious pluralism, doctrinal indifference, disestablishment, tolerance—these last together constituting the veritable crown jewel of liberal democracy and the modern sovereign state.

