allegory. *The Flight of Icarus* opens with a striking inaugural passage in Parets' text which hopes that his own efforts will avoid the doomed model of the flight of Icarus. As it turns out, however, the passage was not written by Parets himself, but inserted by the anonymous translator of the manuscript into Castilian, creating, as Amelang later remarks, the paradoxical situation of a "self-image imposed from without" (p. 164). In Amelang's analysis, this textual episode marks the social contestation embedded in the form of artisan autobiography. Even if Parets himself did not invoke Icarus, other popular autobiographies of the time did utilize variations of the topos of authorial humility, which Amelang astutely interprets in terms not only of their awareness of the disapproval of learned and elite readers but also at times as "a vehicle of forward movement and self-promotion" (p. 161). Icarus served as an emblem of this ambiguous form of textual production, even to the extent that the use of classical myth itself served to "ennoble" the text (in much the same fashion that the translation of the Catalan text into Castilian was understood to do).

One drawback of Amelang's interest in the civic ramifications of artisan autobiography is that, while not ignoring the family, it does tend to consign the family to the domain of privacy. The work of Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas, on the other hand, argues for the growing *public* relevance of private life in the early modern period, and the recent adventures of the American presidency only confirm the thorough interpenetration of private and public in our postmodern culture. Amelang's book also contains a running argument against the literary-historical tendency to enshrine Rousseau as the origin of modern autobiography. Amelang rightly argues that artisan autobiography should be understood as informing some of the aspects of Rousseau, but this insight can, and should, be used to call into question Amelang's own assertion that Rousseau conceived "autobiography as *non-citizenship*, as making a forceful statement from within a private space radically separated from the public" (p. 236). Amelang's own argument elsewhere suggests a stronger articulation of the apparently paradoxical relationship between a "private" form simultaneously "highly public in terms of its aspirations, contents, and fields of circulation" (p. 228). This insight, central to Amelang's study, should guide further enquiry in the field of early modern autobiography, both elite and popular.

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Peter Ackroyd. *The Life of Thomas More*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1998. Pp. ix, 435.

Reading Peter Ackroyd's biography of Thomas More is an experience akin to playing a game of "six degrees of separation." The author shows how More knew and was known by most of those who played significant roles in Tudor England and on the wider European stage, and Ackroyd sets this "complicated network of

affiliations" against the background of a vibrant Catholic culture that definitively shaped his subject's life and loyalties. As a result, More's death makes a new kind of sense. He is a martyr for something more splendid than personal conviction. He lays down his life for an entire way of inhabiting the world. Taking into account the work of historians such as Eamon Duffy and Christopher Haigh, Ackroyd makes More stand for the medieval coherence that was especially stable on the eve of the English reformations. His Thomas More opposes Henry VIII's innovations not simply because they trouble his conscience. In fact, Ackroyd urges readers to reconsider what conscience would have meant for More and his contemporaries. During an interrogation prior to More's ultimate trial and execution, the Abbot of Westminster asks More to estimate the weight of his conscience. More's answer makes for one of the most revelatory moments in Ackroyd's book. He responds that he has the support of "the generall counsail of Christendome." This, Ackroyd explains, is More's central argument. Conscience is "knowledge-with-others" (p. 354). More never imagines that he stands alone against his king. His company includes all of the faithful, living and dead, who make meaning together on the basis of a common Catholic experience.

Ackroyd's account of More's incorporation into the community for which he is willing to sacrifice his life provides the book's most original and striking insights. He begins and ends his biography with elegant descriptions of the rituals by which medieval people marked the significant events in their lives. For example, the chapter on More's baptism, ironically entitled "This Dark World," catalogues practices which lit the lives of More's contemporaries with color and sense. Rituals consecrated time, space and tangible objects so that order and stability were palpable. Ackroyd shows how More's education, both formal and informal, reinforced such rituals by underscoring the notion that all of creation constituted a "harmonious organization of parts." More cherished his role in this divinely-ordered scheme and refused to relinquish it, especially when the organization was under attack. More could not conceive of an alternative. As Ackroyd argues, "it is impossible to over-emphasize the authority which custom and tradition exercised upon More; he was, in that sense (as in others), one of the last great exemplars of the medieval imagination."

More's imagination, as rendered here, works by principle of integrity. For More, all is of a piece, and "it is misleading to separate "social" from "political," "legal" or "religious" matters in this period; they represent the same central concern of fallen man, which lay in understanding and organizing his temporary sojourn upon this earth." Ackroyd encourages his readers to travel along with More, and there is an appropriate integrity about his account of More's personal pilgrimage from parish grade school pupil to pious Lord Chancellor. The use of Middle English, for instance, stands out among Ackroyd's efforts to give us More on More's own terms. Off-putting at first in a book aimed at a general audience, this device encourages readers to work through the alterity of another culture. Ackroyd empha-

sizes such differences so that we avoid the temptation of making More into one of our own. By implication other biographies fail because they do so. Ackroyd consistently refuses to elide the differences between More's experiences and ours. He makes readers work hard to appreciate the otherness of the medieval world through which More moved so easily.

More's social ease and his many successes rest on a surprising self-confidence, according to Ackroyd. Medieval piety might seem to undermine identity; so much emphasis on sin and death are likely to result in anxiety. But Ackroyd smartly shows how this was not the case. Likewise, he explains how More's otherworldly focus facilitates his sense of humor and his "humanism." In embodying this paradox, "so open to misunderstanding and to misinterpretation," More epitomizes his culture. "Yet within the overwhelming context of divine truth and eternity," Ackroyd writes, "there is also a delight to be found in the transient and an energy to be derived from the passing spectacle."

The Thomas More we meet here takes special delight and derives incredible energy from the passing spectacle that is late medieval London. Ackroyd, himself a devoted Londoner who celebrates his city in novels such as *Hawksmoor* and *English Music* and in his biography of Dickens, relates details that explain More's affection for London. While always aware of developments in the Christendom to which he dedicated his life, More paid close attention to the particularities of England's capital. More's energies match those of his stimulating city. Ackroyd describes, for example, how More writes "The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer" late into the night after dedicating his day to the administration of London's laws. And London provides a prime example of the medieval synthesis which More dies defending. Religious processions, in which More loved to participate, regularly wound through this hub of commerce and politics. London was thick with parish churches. As Ackroyd notes, "no other Western European city could boast so many sacred spaces."

Ackroyd ends his book noting how More contributed to the hallowing of London by giving it a saint. But his account of More's trial and death is particularly poignant since readers know that it is not only one man being cut down in his prime. Within a generation's turning all of More's coherence will be gone. One need not be a religious sympathizer nor a specialist to find this book satisfying because Ackroyd achieves in it the very "harmonious organization" that More himself so cherished.

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