

At many points in the
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The paper “Anchored to Our Principles - More’s Immobility in A Man for All Seasons by Robert Bolt” is a spectacular example of a book review on literature. Sir Thomas More, in Robert Bolt’s A Man for All Seasons, finds himself at the center of a terrible debate. King Henry wants a divorce, but the pope refuses to annul his first marriage. Henry decides that the pope has no authority over him and appoints his own head bishop, creating the Church of England. But More doesn’t believe the king has this power, and he cannot give his approval of the divorce. Although many characters appeal to his sense of love, pity, friendship, morality, logic, and fear, More stands by an unchanging moral ideal.

Early in the play, Cardinal Wolsey laments More’s “horrible moral squint” (11) and tries to use reason to persuade him that the king’s needs outweigh the church’s law or More’s morality. He plays on More’s love of stability with the question, “Do you favor a change of dynasty?” (12), implying that the social consequences of not granting the king’s divorce will lead to an eventual war over the succession. He recognizes that More would gladly “govern the country by prayers” (13), suggesting that More’s idealism is stupid and flies in the face of logic.

The king approaches More with flattery, treating him with honor and calling him his friend. Then, having buttered More up, Henry tries to persuade him through religious argument, quoting, “Leviticus: ‘Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of their brother’s wife.’ Leviticus, Chapter eighteen, Verse sixteen” (31), and saying of his first marriage, “it was a sin, Thomas, I admit

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it; I repent. And God has punished me; I have no son” (31). After appealing to More’s piety, the king switches tactics, stroking his ego with more complements: More is “ known to be honest” (31) and the king respects his sincerity. At last, he woos More with the offer of a king’s regard, saying, “ If you could come with me, you are the man I would soonest raise—yes, with my own hand” (33).

When Richard Rich visits More, he has come to move More with paranoia, warning him, “ Cromwell is asking questions. About you. About you particularly. He is continually collecting information about you!” (36). A pragmatist whose reading of Machiavelli has made him dangerous and successful, Rich has a guilty conscience. His last appeal is almost a cry for More to save him from his own practicality. When he begs, “ Employ me” (37) he is asking More relieve him of the burden of all the terrible things he knows he will otherwise take part in.

In the middle of the play, Norfolk tries to tempt More with his own honor. He claims, “ from where I stand, this looks like cowardice” (52) and “ you’ll forfeit all you’ve got—which includes the respect of your country (53). Later, knowing that More is to soon be incarcerated, he appeals to his friendship. “ What about your friends?” (70) Norfolk asks, and explains, “ Goddammit, you’re dangerous to know” (70) and “ You’ll break my heart” (70). At the trial, he begs More to appease the king, dangling before him the promise of “ his gracious pardon” (86).

Margaret supports More up to the point that she fears he will be permanently taken from her. When she visits him in prison, Margaret uses the logic “ God more regards the thoughts of the heart than the words of the mouth” (81) to persuade him to save his own life. When this does not work, she resorts to pity, revealing, “ We sit in the dark because we’ve no candles. And we’ve no talk because we’re wondering what they’re doing to you here” (82). She offers him a picture of their broken family and suggests how easily he could restore it to a state of wholeness.

Alice worries about More’s principles when they result in his fall from grace. When he resigns his post, she asks, “ Is this wisdom—to betray your ability, abandon the practice, forget your station and your duty to kin and behave like a printed book?” (52) She wants to show him that he will be forsaking everything else he believes in for a single principle. She understands that More cannot walk away and tells him, “ Poor silly man, d’you think they’ll leave you here to learn to fish?” (55), trying to warn him of the inevitable outcome of defying the king. Finally, when he has gone to jail, she plays on his love for her, chiding him, “ You’re content, then, to be shut up here with mice and rats when you might be home with us!” (81) and “ Your death’s no ‘ good’ to me!” (83).

Cromwell tries to scare More into compliance. He threatens him with the king’s displeasure, reading, “ I charge you with great ingratitude.... no king of England ever had nor could have so villainous a servant nor so traitorous a subject as yourself” (68). When he first calls More to him, he toys with the

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word “ charges” and all the implications of that word. At the trial, More is called “ on a charge of High Treason” (87) “ For which the punishment is no imprisonment” (87), but death.

Throughout the play, most of the characters have personal reasons for trying to change More’s mind and appeal to different facets of More’s personality and belief system in their attempts. However, More is a man of principle, who cannot betray himself even when his entire world is at stake. He did not want to die or to hurt anyone around him. He was simply a man who would not be swayed from the truth, no matter what temptations were dangled before him.