

Uwe Baumann, *Die Antike in den Epigrammen und Briefen Sir Thomas Mores*, Beiträge zur englischen und amerikanischen Literatur, vol. 1. Paderborn, Munich, Vienna and Zurich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1984, 207 pp.

This revision of a 1983 Düsseldorf dissertation sets out to examine the relation of the epigrams and letters to classical texts. The poems and letters do not form one unified corpus, nor are they bound to each other by falling within one thematic division of More's works — devotional, humanistic, polemical, etc. But the very disparity of these works, with little in common except their authorship, furnishes us with a sort of portfolio of More in his various guises, so that Baumann's account of the role of the classics in these texts shows us something of how More regarded the classics throughout his career.

In discussing the epigrams Baumann states that all of More's *Greek Anthology* translations are from the Planudean collection, adding the interesting observation that the epigrams More chooses to translate are at the late end of the time span represented by the collection, and that More prefers to translate epigrams showing Roman influence. Baumann suggests that More had a particular liking for the epigrams of Lucilius and Palladas; but without a more detailed account of what makes them distinctive it is hard to determine what this more or less marginal preference has to tell us about More's own poetry. That More's translations are accurate does not reflect "literary quality" (p. 26) but simply tells us that More does in fact translate these Greek epigrams literally. A firm standard of "literary quality" would probably have to be based on a careful comparative study of the classical models themselves, something outside the scope of this survey; and in this context, simply establishing that More translates some Greek epigrams and adapts certain others might have been quite sufficient.

In discussing the classical elements in the epigrams B. handily sets up three classifications of influence: each epigram contains an ancient source, an ancient motif, or an ancient influence. The list that follows (pp. 29–48) is one of the most useful parts of the book, though in such a pursuit there is obviously some danger of mistaking a casual parallel for a definite token of influence. In general however this list is responsibly executed and meticulously documented, though again simply listing a number of isolated parallels cannot make More's poems any richer in resonant allusions than they were already.

Baumann divides the epigrams into five classes: those on politics,

those related to human life, those directed at individuals, those about beasts and objects, and miscellaneous poems. These categories are further divided into groups such as "actual political epigrams" and "on tyrants and kings" for the first category; "life and death," "practical wisdom and advice," "husband and wife," "professions and types" (itself divided into nine classes), "intellect, character, bodies" (three sub-types), and so on through the list. The assumption at work in these subdivisions seems to be that the subject-matter of an epigram without reference to treatment or tone dictates what sort of poem it is. This assumption may be valid for some epigrams, but what of those instances where the treatments of different themes seem to converge, or two treatments of one theme dramatically vary? Consider for instance More's five poems on sleep (*CW* 3/2 107–08, 110, 114, 139), which are equally concerned with tyrannical pomp, and which waver between two perceptions of sleep as a source and negater of happiness; to classify these as exclusively "tyrant" or "sleep" poems is to misrepresent them quite radically. This is simply to say that there is a risk of category-error in setting up classifications of poems based on subject. A book of poems is not merely an assortment of independent poems; as a rule, even in miscellaneous collections every poem is connected to various others in various ways, and the segregation of poems based on subject (or any other single basis) precludes a comprehensive view of the whole. Counting the specimens of each species of tree is not a better way to study the forest. Even so, Baumann's method is useful for seeing the similarities between More's various poems on the same subjects; and the description of each class of poems permits him to expand upon the pure documentation of the preceding section. One can scarcely explore all the meaningful links between all of More's 250-plus poems in one 50-page chapter; although Baumann provides very few critical readings of any great depth, he does map the surface-terrain of More's classical landscape quite efficiently and thus provides valuable guidelines for future explorers.

The next section discusses classical elements in More's letters, which really are independent texts. Unlike Erasmus, Budé, and Melanchthon, More himself never published a letter-collection, and the disparate subjects and recipients of his letters really do demand separate responses to the letters as units. Here examining the letters *en masse* can disguise their essential discreteness, just as parcelling up More's poems according to just one criterion can disguise their essential affinities. Though there are indeed classical elements which must be examined in these

texts, and though this is perhaps the best way to examine them, there is some risk of slighting whatever these letters contain *besides* classical resonances.

Baumann's first group of letters comprises all those More addressed to his family, letters pleasantly expounding his own pedagogical theories including his sense of the importance of classical studies. The second group brings together More's humanistic letters, both the largest group and the one in which classical influences on More's thought can be most clearly seen. The first sub-group of these consists of dedicatory letters, the prefaces to the *Life of Pico*, to Lucian, and to the coronation poems for Henry VIII. The second sub-group comprises polemical letters, and here the going is thorny, for the letters to Dorp, the monk, Brixius, Bugenhagen and Frith have more dissimilarities than features in common. Specifically, the letters to Dorp and the monk are defenses of Erasmian biblical humanism and must be understood in that context, one in which the letters to Lee and Oxford, discussed in later sections because they are "friendly" letters, should also be considered; while More's letter to Brixius is a cantankerous outburst forming part of a literary quarrel, and really should be read in connection with the Brixius-epigrams discussed in pp. 86-89. The letter to Bugenhagen falls into the category of religious polemic and is a younger sibling of the *Responsio ad Lutherum*, while the letter against Frith (it is not a letter to Frith — we do not know the recipient — but *about* him) is a part of the last stage of More's work, his vernacular defense of the catholic faith in England, and may be considered the younger sibling of the *Answer to a Poisoned Book*. The next group comprises letters to friendly humanists, and here we see More's correspondence with Erasmus, Holt, Colet, and others. The last sections of this chapter discuss the quarrel of ancient and modern in More's letters and the relation of More's letters and the classical epistolographic tradition. That the quarrel between ancients and moderns ends in a draw may well be; but I am not convinced by the evidence, and wonder whether a study of this sort can yield an answer to that question. More convincing is the notion that More's letters represent a blending of classical and medieval traditions; if Baumann had used this hypothesis to help orient this part of his study from the start, he might well have arrived at more generally valid conclusions.

The final chapter makes some concluding and general statements about More and classical antiquity, and there is little new in the conclusion that classics presented the humanist More with a rule for action

and guiding principle for judgments in his own time; in fact this chapter is anticlimactic. The appendix of addenda to Rogers and Allen is very useful; and the bibliography is as packed as the documentation in the text, though one cannot help feeling that listing modern editions of classical texts is padding the list a bit.

These criticisms are meant to describe certain limitations imposed by Baumann's method and not to detract from the very real virtues of the book. The minute examination of all of More's poems and letters has revealed just about every classical element that may have influenced More in the course of writing these works. The documentation is similarly exhaustive and extremely useful. Because of the amount of detail packed into a relatively short space, and the problems entailed by classifying such diverse texts according to a single rule, this book must be considered more as a reference work than as an attempt at literary criticism. But it is one that all future scholars of these texts will rely on and benefit from in many ways.

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