

## The Editorial Design of the 1557 *English Works* <sup>1</sup>

In the preface to the Scolar Press facsimile of *The Workes of Sir Thomas More* (1978), K.J. Wilson notes how the 1557 folio gives evidence of William Rastell's painstaking treatment of his uncle's English works. Despite some peculiarities, the text is remarkably dependable, as the Yale editors have repeatedly shown (p. vii). The many Yale volumes, however, have obscured the particular Morean icon created by the folio itself : as Wilson observes (p. viii), where the 1563 Basle *Lucubrationes* and the 1565 Louvain *Opera* outline the Erasmusian humanist, the folio depicts More as *miles christianus*, the 'knight of Christ.' <sup>2</sup>

By arranging and framing these works, Rastell -- like editors generally -- creates both an icon and a reliquary, but the problems set by More's life, works and death together make Rastell's achievement particularly notable. Beyond the literary-historical problem common to all such collections, Rastell faced an « iconic » problem, the framing of dual images of the same figure : as *miles*, More is both a confessor and a martyr whose life and death testify to this sanctity. As manifested in the folio, the editorial methods to solve these problems are apparently contradictory, and the icon created by the folio is paradoxically complicated by More's public career, and especially by his dramatic fall and execution. A review of the folio suggests an editorial design that changes, particularly in the last three hundred pages, so as to accent More's spiritual development and to minimize the immediate political circumstances of his death.

To regard the book as a reliquary is no mere fancy, of course, because its format and literal weight contribute to our initial impression of the texts it contains. The very format, usually reserved for theology, philosophy or law (as Rastell, printer and lawyer, would have been well aware), advertises the seriousness of the contents. Although several of

More's works -- *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529), *Supplication of Souls* (1529, perhaps the first book printed by Rastell himself), and *Confutation* (1532-33, also by Rastell) -- had already been published in this format, the greater bulk of the 1557 book would mark it as literally and figuratively weightier. Likewise, in an era during which « books » were commonly sold in sheets to be bound at the buyer's direction, continuous pagination represents the editor's most insistent demand for a particular order of presentation.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the prefatory apparatus of dedication and of a double table frames the reliquary, preserving and giving access to these written relics of the saint.

That More's standing as an English saint is at issue can be seen by the self-advertised « Englishness » of the book, the keynote of Rastell's dedication, with which the full cosmopolitan range of Queen Mary's imperial titles, listed at the beginning of the letter, seems oddly out of harmony. Rastell claims a triple preeminence for More's works : their « great eloquence, » « excellent learning, » and « moral virtues » -- characteristics varying the Horatian prescription *movere, docere, delectare* -- can teach every Englishman not only the « eloquence and property of the English tongue, » but also « the true doctrine of Christ's catholic faith ». Thanks to their literary value, More's writings can « forward your Majesty's most godly purpose, in purging this your realm of all wicked heresies » of the protestant reformers. Rastell is thus continuing his uncle's enterprise under the terms that More himself set out originally. Rastell's parenthetical note that More, « being with almighty God, and living with him in heaven » can intercede for the queen and her realm proclaims his sainthood : his « worthy works and godly end » qualify him for a place in heaven and his written works for publication in folio. Rastell's conclusion, an oblique glance at the imperial titles with which he began, rounds out the prefatory letter with a recognition of More's « catholicity, » an important addition to the defense of the Catholic faith.

Rastell's editorial method in the first thousand pages results in the image of More as confessor of the faith. In the chronological order fixed by his biographical headnotes, the earlier and longer part of the folio necessarily follows More's career as an English writer, beginning with the youthful « pastimes », the biography-anthology of Pico, and the history of Richard III, then concentrating upon polemical or apologetic religious works. The image of More as confessor, built up in these lengthy and complex works through the *Answer to a Poisoned Book* (pp. 1035-1138),<sup>4</sup> is nevertheless incomplete because the Latin *Respon-*

*sio* and controversial letters do not figure in it. If the Latin works are vital for a comprehensive understanding of More's polemical career, they are less vital to his countrymen than the works written in the language he, an English confessor, shares with them, as Rastell's dedication indicates, of course.<sup>5</sup> A therefore deliberately incomplete icon of the confessor, this longer part of the folio is unconcerned with More's public life except as it frames these writings, as one may see in the headnotes which acknowledge important events in More's political career.

With the *Diálogue of Comfort* (p. 1139), a new phrase in Rastell's headnotes -- « while he was prisoner in the Tower of London » -- marks a change in More's life and in the kind of works so introduced. As regards the folio's structure, the disappearance of the phrase after the headnote to the « Godly Meditation » (p. 1416) marks equivalent changes in editorial method. Together these changes indicate the emergence of the martyr-icon.

Simply on the basis of genre, one would guess that some significant event marked More's life between the writing of the *Answer to a Poisoned Book* and the *Dialogue of Comfort*, the last of the folio texts that had previously appeared in print (1553). Of the works in the folio's preceding pages, everything from *A Dialogue concerning Heresies* (p. 103) onward, more than a thousand folio pages, has been religious polemic. Here, however, although the *Dialogue of Comfort* may use the figure of the Turk as a metaphor for heresy (or, if intended to represent Henry, for a particular heretic), Antony's long exposition of the theological doctrine of comfort turns the book away from polemic. If a reader wonders about (or perhaps even hopes for !) the re-emergence of polemic in the occasionally dry stretches of Antony's discourse, his self-deprecating reference to the poets who « paint ... all the lust of an old fool's life » as « drink and drivel and talk » (p. 1169) and the « merry tales » that follow in book 2 put the matter of polemic well away.<sup>6</sup> The dialogue thus marks More's own return to catechetical, exegetical and devotional tracts, represented much earlier in the folio by the *Life of John Picus* (pp. 1-34) and the treatise on the *Four Last Things* (pp. 72-col. 102).<sup>7</sup>

The Tower section (pp. 1139-1458) documents More's transformation from confessor to martyr. Up to this point, the folio adds details to the familiar public image of Thomas More ; beyond it, the folio creates an independent image of his inner development during his imprisonment, to complement the public image created by his statements to the judges or from the scaffold, both absent from the folio. As a record of

this transformation, the folio creates a new icon in which psychological or spiritual credibility must be of premier, if not exclusive, concern. These contrasted images together are a complex equation of spiritual status and literary kind : polemical works, public and antagonistic, come from the confessor ; devotional works, private and reconciling, from the martyr. To accommodate these different icons, Rastell departs from the selective editorial approach he used in the first part of the folio.

Briefly stated, the editorial principle of the Tower section is inclusivity : More the martyr is to be represented as completely as his extant writings -- whatever their form or tongue -- will allow. To achieve such iconic clarity and detail, Rastell allows this new criterion not only to displace the two earlier principles, chronological ordering and vernacular writings, but also -- at one critical point -- to prompt the inclusion of at least one other writer's works. Such deviations from the folio's nominal axiom -- the title-page announces works « in the English tongue » -- suggests the importance of the texts that are included in the Tower section, particularly that apparently miscellaneous collection with which the folio concludes.

The order of the Tower section reveals the diversity of the prisoner's writing and suggests how their presentation affects the impression made by the folio as a whole. After the *Dialogue of Comfort* comes the remainder of the « Tower Works » as ordinarily so called : the first group consists of the treatises on the Blessed Body (pp. 1264-69) and on the Passion (pp. 1270-1349), and Mary Basset's English translation of *De Tristitia* (pp. 1350-1404) ; the second is a series of shorter « instructions and prayers » in English or in Latin with English translations (pp. 1405-1418), ending with More's 1529 letter to his wife (p. 1418) and the epitaph he wrote after he resigned the chancellorship (p. 1419), with verses « which himself had made .xx. years before » (p. 1420) -- two inclusions that depart most radically from chronology. In the last two groups -- for brevity's sake, the « Tower Letters » -- chronology is re-established around the fact of More's imprisonment : in the first group are four letters -- three to Cromwell, one to Henry -- from the period between his resignation and his imprisonment (pp. 1422-28) ; in the second, from the period of imprisonment, seventeen letters -- all but three to Margaret Roper -- and two sets of verses (pp. 1428-58), including the well-known exchange Alice Alington and Margaret Roper, the latter (as Rastell notes) « whether written by Sir Thomas More in his daughter Roper's name, or by herself ... is not certainly known » (p. 1434).

The Tower section is certainly the most dramatic and personally revealing part of the folio. Perhaps as a result, the *Dialogue of Comfort* and a few of the letters are the most familiar of all More's writings after the *Utopia*. The Yale editors have afforded us succinct and broadly-based views of More's achievement here. Haupt's persuasive reading of the Tower Works outlines More both as the man struggling with his own imminent death and as the far more objective religious thinker whose personal situation -- like that of Antony or Vincent -- he himself perceives as but a version of the general condition of the faithful in a time of tribulation.<sup>8</sup> As Haupt demonstrates, these works are all based upon familiar exegetical models ; all have a « predominantly public orientation ... richly symbolic of More's tenacious commitment to an objective, impersonal, universal order of Christendom » (p. clxxx) ; and all are advertised in the headnotes as having been written in the Tower.<sup>9</sup> Martz's reading of the Tower Letters, a far more various collection in kind, concentrates upon the « art of improvisation » More uses to shape his original audience's responses.<sup>10</sup>

As these commentaries remind us, Rastell's presentation of the Works and the Letters heightens an already existing dramatic force. We may, nevertheless, see something of Rastell's own editorial art -- and something, perhaps, of pious cunning -- in his arrangement and commentary upon these texts. For the reader, the sequence of Works and Letters makes possible a sense of moving inward through the mind of More, although this movement is neither linear nor without its own tidal rhythm. That sense of motion, of psychological development, is reinforced by the brief notes which, in their intimation of passing time, augment our sense of the Tower's effect on More's spiritual development. The Tower section seems designed to lead us to an understanding of More the martyr as we follow him on his way to the scaffold, not through the political processes that led to his death but through the course of reflection that led to these written works.

We perhaps may guess that what is true for us was also true for the readers -- « every Englishman » -- whom Rastell envisioned as he wrote the dedication : the *Dialogue of Comfort* is undoubtedly the most accessible of the texts in the section, as its continued popularity demonstrates. Thus, as considered in itself, it merits first place. As an introduction to the Tower Works, the dialogue offers a straightforward education in the nature of and the skills necessary for the other, more rigorous devotional works. In addition, Antony's concentration on the focal

importance of Christ's Passion anticipates the central theme of two longer works that follow. As a commentary upon More's own immediate situation, Antony's development of the Boethian figure of the world-as-prison is both apposite and poignant. No other text stirs in us so warm a feeling for the author, even though he does not appear in his own person: Antony is More as he would have been (or as, perhaps, he wanted to be).<sup>11</sup> Finally, as regards More's meditations on his own future, the speculations upon the nature and pain of martyrdom represent the Christian *memento mori* enjoined upon all who consider the Four Last Things, as the author had done more theoretically years before. Thus prepared, the reader comes to the treatise on the Blessed Body, less involved with the familiar world than the dialogue, but by that detachment an apt introduction to and preparation for the double-book on the Passion, the incomplete English treatise and the Basset translation of the *De Tristitia*, which Rastell regards as virtually a single work.<sup>12</sup>

The lengthy headnote to the translation (p. 1350), which should remind the reader of the other « translation » in this section, the *Dialogue of Comfort*, is built largely upon procatalepsis, the figure that notoriously anticipates and answers the objections of the audience. Rastell's insistence upon the propriety of the translation, his reference to the consent of « great clerks, » and his notice of the reticence of the modest translator (whose notion of a « pastime » may strike a modern reader oddly) seem to excuse the addition of this Latin work in an otherwise « English » text. At the same time, however, the telling anecdote of the work's *terminus ad quem*, its interruption at the biblical phrase « and they laid hands upon Jesus, » shows why the inclusion is not anomalous if the reader understands this section of the text to be the fruit of a particularly demanding imitation of Christ. A tailnote, unusual in itself, dates the Latin text at the very end of More's career: « Sir Thomas More wrote no more of this work, for when he had written this far, he was in prison kept so strait that all his books and pen and ink and paper was taken from him, and soon after was he put to death » (p. 1404).

The tailnote thus sets off this section with the first explicit mention of More's death, and the instructions and prayers that follow are clearly marked as a new section by the larger typeface reserved for the titles of major works. Certain other characteristics -- the length of the works (as projected if not completed), their familiar devotional forms, their appropriateness for publication -- suggest that these works are so placed not because of their order of composition, but because, being nearly related but progressively more difficult, the anticipated reader

may more easily comprehend them. Even if a catechetical or didactic (as opposed to a chronological, and therefore biographical) ordering shapes this introductory section, however, regular progress through the paginated text recreates for the reader the experience of spiritual development. Finally, the breaking off of the *De Tristitia*, which the tailnote accents, gives both a sense of the abruptness of martyrdom and a dramatic « sense of an ending » to the whole series of works so far presented.

Up to the end of the Basset translation (and excepting the juvenilia in the second signature of the folio), the volume contains works for which publication was either intended or achieved: so far, then, the folio presents its own public image of More. The succeeding pages refine this public icon of the martyr already available. As Haupt and Martz have pointed out, it would be a mistake to consider the remaining works « private » in the sense that they reveal the « real » More in a privileged way, yet on the other hand, the works do present a stage upon which More might make « a part of his own » different from those he had played before. The range of disparate materials for these roles compounds the basic editorial problem, which is to develop the clearest image of the imprisoned More.

The image thus created owes its clarity in large part to the context established by the preceding Tower Works, which may be taken as a course in the theory of spiritual development for a reluctant martyr. From this perspective, the remaining works -- in two groups, the first closing with the epitaph, the second subdivided into pre- and post-imprisonment letters -- may be seen as refinements in More's roles on two distinct stages of his life's play. In the first group, the instructions and prayers, although certainly profitable for others, seem primarily addressed to the writer as his own audience; renunciation, freeing oneself from the world, is the keynote of their various themes. This idea, presented as it were theoretically in these writings, is practically manifested in the last two pieces of the group: the letter to Dame Alice after the burning of their barns is a parable of renunciation to goods unwillingly lost, while the epitaph memorializes not only More's achievements but also his willed renunciation of worldly power and position. Placed thus (and thus literally anachronistic), the letter and epitaph gain credibility as records of More's work toward that renunciation and « comfort » that the earlier part of the Tower section describes, work that began (if the reader will attend to the dating) *before* the preceding texts were written. Nevertheless, in the linear presentation of the paginated text, these earlier writings may also stand to represent the fruits of

that discipline of renunciation previously examined.

The third vision of More's preparation for death and martyrdom comes through the collection of letters with which the folio closes. As Martz observes, More is clearly conscious of the various audiences that he addresses in the letters. Over the whole course of the series, however, the pattern of renunciation, intimated in the earlier parts of the section, seems to be applied to More's particular situation. It is this process of application that makes the Alington-Roper exchange so provocative. « Margaret's » response gives the last fully developed representation of More as the *paterfamilias*, as in presence of his « own good daughter » he twice at leisure reads the letter in which his stepdaughter conveys the mind of his successor.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, More is also represented as a sort of spiritual plumbline still holding true and upright, despite the understandable variations of everyone around him, including his favorite daughter. Focussed in this letter are both the central question that still vexes the study of More's political life -- namely, why was he silent? -- and a dramatically rendered manifestation of that silence in what must have been its most painful form.

Thomas More's unfinished last letter, with which the folio closes, would in any case prompt deep feelings, and its privileged place gives it an additional freight of significance. In its printed form, it is preceded by the customary note -- the editor's allowing his author the grace of the last word -- and distinguished by marginal identifications of the various family members to whom More refers; this extra care seems almost in the hope that the embellishment would add to the lustre of what is, considered apart from its highly charged context, an otherwise undistinguished piece of writing. But it may be that that lack of distinction is its principal grace, for -- as articulated and represented in the folio texts, both More's words and his editor's -- this letter represents the last stage of renunciation that More could reach *on paper*. From the *Dialogue of Comfort* to the last letter, the folio moves the reader through a journey to martyrdom that ends in the stripping away of all roles but this last. And perhaps in this last letter, More plays no role. Afterwards, « thus endeth this book » (p. 1458).

No review of the 1557 folio will reveal absolutely whether its icon is the result of structural intention -- that is, of editorial design - or merely of accident. The arrangement and commentary that Rastell provides, however, particularly in the altered editorial method of the Tower section, suggest a conscious principle that requires the inclusion of works in translation or by other writers. That inferred intention may be

classed with the biographical impulse that has a more certain manifestation in Rastell's fragmentary life of More.<sup>14</sup> Conceived as a project in biography, the folio intimates the magnitude of the editor's veneration for More, both as confessor and as martyr, and also -- if I am not merely deceived by the projection of my own attitudes -- a degree of frustration and impatience. Whether as regards the folio, its author or its editor, one comes finally to appreciate Margaret's situation as it is reflected in the letter to Alice Alington: to have so much, and still not to have the answers one most wants, is uncommonly vexing.

*Department of English  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky 40292.*

**Dale B. BILLINGSLEY**

## NOTES

1. In its original form, this paper was presented as part of the 1985 Msgr H.F. Hillenmeyer Distinguished Lecture Series at Thomas More College, Crestview Hills, Kentucky.

2. All citations to pages in the folio are taken from the Scholar Press facsimile. No reference is given for the two page preface. Spelling is modernized throughout. On the collation and binding of surviving copies of the folio, see Germain Marc'hadour, « More's English Works: Toward a Census and an Anatomy, » *Moreana*, no. 13 (1967), pp. 69-78. On editions of the Latin works, see James K. McConica, « The Recusant Traditions of Thomas More, » Appendix II of *English Humanists and Reformation Politics under Henry VIII and Edward VI* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 285-94. The important analysis of Rastell's textual editing in the last chapter of this book, pp. 272-280, puts the project into the larger context of pre-Tridentine Catholic humanism.

3. By contrast, collected « works » published well into the seventeenth century sometimes showed continuous pagination only within individual works, which the buyer could then arrange to suit his own taste. A folio of Cowley's works (1668), now in the Rare Book Room of Ekstrom Library, University of Louisville, presents separately paginated texts of the secular poems first, relegating the *Davideis* and the author's biography (in 8s, on signatures, A-D) to the end of the bound volume -- a typical case that has cognates in any collection of older texts.

4. Every complete copy of the folio, like the one in the University Library, Cambridge used for the Scholar facsimile, shows an unpaginated leaf containing More's addition to the errata page of the *Answer* between p. 1138 and p. 1139, the latter being the first page

of the *Dialogue of Comfort*. This inclusion, the verso of which is the only blank page in the book, thus distinctively separates the Tower works from the rest of the text. The distinction, however, is fortuitous : the leaf is tipped into the middle of signature CC, apparently because the scrupulous Rastell was behindhand in discovering this bit of More's prose tucked away at the end of the *Answer*. See Clarence H. Miller's comments in the critical edition of this book, *CW11*.

5. This concentration upon the English works, coupled with the focus on More's doctrinal writings, explains the absence of the *Utopia* which seems so conspicuous to us. This is not to say, however, that Rastell would not use the Latin works to supplement defects in the English (see Wilson, p. vii, and Sylvester, *CW2*, xxx, on Rastell's « augmentation » of the English *Richard III*), nor that certain Latin works would not appear in the 1557 folio.

6. Rastell's use of manuscript sources, rather than mere slavish dependence upon published versions, can be seen by his reproduction of various marginalia not included in the 1553 Tottel edition of the *Dialogue of Comfort*. Thus the annotation against the passage cited here, « As true as the gospel, the lust of old folks' life, » may be either Rastell's own comment or that of an annotator in the text he was following. See also Louis L. Martz, « The Text, » Part I of the Introduction to *CW12* (1976), pp. xix-lvii.

7. See Marc'hadour, « Census, » pp. 72, 75.

8. Garry E. Haupt, Introduction to *CW13* (1976), esp. Part IV, « The Late Devotional and Exegetical Works and More the Man, » pp. clxvii-clxxx.

9. For discussion of the dating of the two treatises, see Haupt's summary and the other works there cited, *CW13*, xxxvii-xlii.

10. Louis L. Martz, « The Tower Works : 1. The Art of Improvisation, » Part II of the Introduction to *CW12* (1976), lvii-lxv.

11. Richard S. Sylvester, « Three Dialogues, » *Moreana*, no. 674 (1980), 65-78.

12. « Sir Thomas More wrote no more in English of this treatise of the Passion of Christ. But he (still prisoner in the Tower of London) wrote more thereof in Latin (after the same order as he wrote thereof in English), the translation whereof here followeth » (p. 1349).

13. « And with this word I [Margaret] took him your letter, that he might see my words were not feigned, but spoken of his mouth, whom he much loveth and esteemeth highly. Thereupon he read over your letter. And when he came to the end, he began it afresh and read it over again. And in the reading he made no manner haste, but advised it leisurely, and pointed every word » (p. 1345).

14. MS. Arundel 152, reprinted as Appendix I of Nicholas Harpsfield, *The Life and Death of Sr. Thomas Moore*, ed. Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock, EETS Orig. Series 186 (Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, 1932, rpt. 1963), 220-52.