
REVIEW Katherine Rodgers
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Clarence Miller’s achievement as a scholar, translator, and consummate reader of humanist literature is well represented by this compact volume of essays, most of which have appeared in slightly different form in previously published works written over a period of three decades. As Jerry Harp reminds us in an appreciative introductory essay, Miller’s scholarly publications have explored subjects as diverse as Dante and Hopkins, but all ten of the essays included here are devoted to the 16th century giants made accessible through Miller’s own masterful translations: the book includes four chapters on Erasmus, four on More, and two, “The Epigrams of Erasmus and More” and “Extraordinary Friends” (Chapters Five and Ten), on both. Many readers of *Moreana* will likely have encountered these essays elsewhere. But a few of the papers published here are unobtainable even through the most well-endowed research libraries and databases. Thus, the collection and publication of these introductions, articles, and talks in a single volume make a welcome contribution to the scholarly literature on More and Erasmus.

That seminal work of 16th century humanism, *The Praise of Folly* (a work Miller has both edited and translated), is the focus of three
of the four essays on Erasmus. Chapter One, “Styles and Mixed Genres in Erasmus’s *The Praise of Folly*” (originally published in 1988 as part of the *Papers from the Sixth International Congress of NeoLatin Studies*), Chapter Two, “Some Medieval Elements and Structural Unity in Erasmus’s *The Praise of Folly*” (which appeared in an issue of *Renaissance Quarterly* in 1974), and Chapter Four, “The Logic and Rhetoric of Proverbs in Erasmus *Praise of Folly*,” consider the complexities of form and style which made *Folly* so central to the humanist ethos. Chapter Three, “The Liturgical and Historical Context of Erasmus’s Hymns” (adapted from a talk originally published in 1991 in *Papers from the Seventh International Congress of NeoLatin Studies*) reminds us that Erasmus’s Latin style is more wide-ranging than even *Folly*’s performance suggests.

Three of the four chapters on More likewise demonstrate the range of humanist Latin style and the variety of genres in which these writers, arguably the most iconic 16th century humanists, composed their work. But while most of the chapters on Erasmus deal with the well-known *Folly*, More’s much-analyzed *Utopia* is the subject of only one of the chapters on his work included in this volume. Though brief, this essay, “Style and Meaning in More’s *Utopia*: Hythloday’s Sentences and Diction” (published in 2001 as the introduction to the Yale Nota Bene edition of *Utopia*), is a virtuoso performance on Miller’s part. Along with Elizabeth McCutcheon’s 1971 article “Denying the Contrary: More’s Use of Litotes in *Utopia*,” Miller’s discussion of syntax and diction in *Utopia* is surely one of the most significant stylistic analyses of More’s masterpiece ever written, a reminder that rhetorical close reading offers the basis of some of the richest literary interpretation.

Chapters Seven and Eight (“More’s Use of Patristic Evidence in the Eucharistic Controversy” and “The Heart of the Final Struggle: More’s Commentary on *The Agony in the Garden*”) treat the lesser known *Answer to a Poisoned Book* and the great (though unfinished) *De
Both of these chapters originally appeared as introductions to volumes edited by Miller as part the Yale edition (of which he served as Executive Editor from 1979-1997) and are thus more readily accessible than other essays collected here under one roof, but their inclusion in this new context allows us to consider them in relation to one another – and to the complementary but distinct vision and style of Erasmus. Indeed, this volume serves to remind us that while More and Erasmus shared literary enthusiasms and delighted in one another’s company, they are to be distinguished from one another as Latin stylists. The differences, Miller makes clear, are most apparent in the poetry: while both men’s prose masterpieces endure as twin expressions of 16th century humanist thought, More alone, in Miller’s judgment, would be remembered if he had written nothing more than his poetry.

Given the trajectory of More’s political career, of course, his place in history was secured by more than his poetry – or his prose. The last two essays in the volume (one of which appeared in this journal in 1990 while the other originated as a talk given in 2005 at The University of Dallas’ Center for Thomas More Studies) are only loosely concerned with style. Both might rather be seen as meditations on the afterlife of early 16th century humanism in the later 16th century, in the 20th century, and in Miller’s own scholarly career. Both of these essays, “Thomas More, a Man for All Seasons: Robert Bolt’s Play and the Elizabethan Play of Sir Thomas More” and “Extraordinary Friends” make the case that the best and surest way to gain access to the habits of these humanist minds is through close and careful reading of their works.

Certainly, as this volume testifies, such a reading has been Miller’s own life’s work, a work that has ensured that many generations of readers (whether they are Latinists or not) will gain an appreciation of the humanist marriage of style and meaning. Perhaps fewer and fewer readers are capable of the kind of reading
Miller here elucidates, but thanks to his own labors, access to the complexities of humanist ideas is by no means closed. In this regard, a bibliography of Miller’s published works on More and Erasmus would have been a valuable appendix to the book. But even in the absence of such a bibliography, this volume offers a splendid reminder that in Clarence Miller, More and Erasmus themselves have had an extraordinary friend.

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