THE MAN IN FULL

Travis Curtright: *The One Thomas More*. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012. Pp. ix, 231.)

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Whereas scholars like R. W. Chambers once viewed Thomas More's life as a portrait of "heroic unity" (2), modern accounts posit a fractured More—a divided mind who wrestles unsuccessfully with contradictory, incompatible ideologies. The historical More, much like Humpty Dumpty, appears to have fallen from a great height and shattered into pieces. Yet Travis Curtright is determined to put More back together again. He argues for "one" Thomas More who maintains ideological consistency as humanist, statesman, and religious controversialist. Curtright provides a well-written and persuasive argument, grounded in an impressive command of humanist and theological tracts and propelled by a nuanced, methodical rhetorical structure. Taking its lead from Eamon Duffy's approach to Reformation studies, *The One Thomas More* is a formidable defender of both More's unity and the complementary nature of his humanism and Catholicism. Even if all readers are not persuaded by this new rendering of More, the book offers many compelling observations for the historian, literary scholar, and political theorist alike.

Curtright argues that revisionist accounts of More tend to place his humanist philosophy at odds with his Catholic orthodoxy. G. R. Elton in particular posits "two Mores": the rational humanist on one hand and the nigh fanatical theologian on the other (138). Elton's theories have influenced scholars like Alistair Fox, Richard Marius, and Stephen Greenblatt, and this bifurcated More has trickled into the popular imagination. Hilary Mantel's recent, critically acclaimed novel *Wolf Hall* (Picador, 2009) "presents More as a self-absorbed villain who plays opposite to Cromwell's heroism" (9), and HBO's popular series *The Tudors* (2007–2010) "depicts More with a wild look in his eye as he gazes into a fire that consumes a man" (106). Both characterizations emerge in stark contrast to Robert Bolt's iconic "man for all seasons," the witty, healthy, and well-rounded More depicted only a half-century ago (8). What perhaps most disturbs Curtright—and what is evident in these modern, derisive characterizations—is that revisionist scholarship pitting More's humanism against his religious convictions likewise suggests that More's belief in church authority undermines his intellectual accomplishments. In these accounts, the "real" Thomas More emerges as "an admixture of early ambition and later intolerance, a description that, eventually, causes revisionists to eliminate the appellation of 'humanist' altogether" (5).

Yet Curtright challenges those who "define humanism in ways that undervalue or misrepresent its religious character" (107). The first three chapters of the book redefine More's Christian humanism in relation to his political philosophy, arguing for a consistent ideological perspective that the final chapters

bring to bear on More's later controversial writings. The first chapter analyzes More's translation of *The Life of Pico della Mirandola* (ca. 1504–10) and proposes More's ideal state for the Christian humanist: a balance between the contemplative life and the active one. More's literary approach to the translation introduces changes and interpolations that point toward a consistent theme —namely, a humanist emphasis on learning and knowledge in pursuit of piety. Curtright's second chapter explores More's political philosophy, acknowledging the extent to which More recognizes practical obstacles to this humanist ideal; the chapter juxtaposes More's *The History of Richard III* (ca. 1514–18) with his own epigrammatic poetry. For Curtright, the epigrams serve as political touchstones against which to evaluate More's characterizations in the *History*. Through this comparative analysis, Curtright distills what he sees as More's distinction between mere sophistry in service of tyranny (Buckingham's character) and shrewd, socially beneficial dissimulation (Cardinal Morton's character). In his third chapter, Curtright turns his attention to the first book of *Utopia* (ca. 1516), a text in which "More's Christian humanism emphasizes engagement in temporal affairs as an attempt to accommodate the social ideals of Christian faith to political limitations" (13). In this reading, Hythloday's reluctance to serve falls short of the Christian humanist ideal whereas the character of "More" emerges as consistent with More's own position in the *Life* and the *History*. Taken together, these first three chapters provide a framework for considering More's antiheretical tracts in the subsequent chapters, demonstrating the complex ways in which More's early writings remain in dialogue with his later work.

The fourth chapter considers More's *Letter to Oxford* (1518) in relation to *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529). While revisionists expect *Oxford* to "reveal evidence of More's humanist credo in contradistinction to his later polemical theology," Curtright again sees continuity between More's "faith and liberal learning" (107). In the same way, the fifth chapter strives to correct what Curtright sees as modern misreadings of More's religious polemic by applying the previously established approach to politically engaged Christian humanism. Curtright analyzes the *Apology of Sir Thomas More, Knight* (1533), More's response to Christopher St. German's *A Treatise Concernynge the Diuision betwene the Spirytualitie and Temporaltie* (ca. 1532). Revisionist historians have understood More and St. German's debate as chiefly temporal—a legal debate between lawyers. Read in this light, More's tone emerges as sputtering and combative, as if a desperate More has let his religious zeal get the better of his legal savvy. Yet in Curtright's view, St. German's *Treatise* fails to sustain itself as a legal argument. Here, he builds on Henry Ansgar Kelly's recent claim that St. German's text seriously misrepresents ecclesiastical court procedures and canon law. Curtright argues that More responds not to St. German's legal positions, which emerge as "largely unoriginal, even contradictory," but instead to St. German's "politically dangerous anticlericalism" (143). This being so, More's tone is calculated to address what an early modern

humanist would perceive as perilous theology rather than merely legal provocation.

The impact of Curtright's study extends beyond the history of an individual man. Particularly striking, for example, is his observation that the classical rhetoric books used to train poets were the same books used to train lawyers— demonstrating the union of legal and liberal study in early modern education. For Curtright, revisionist scholarship that distinguishes between More's roles as humanist and lawyer imposes anachronistic divisions between the disciplines (95). In the same way, Curtright argues for a humanist marriage between faith and the liberal arts. He notes that the revisionists with whom he spars often have political stakes in arguing that the "urbane, witty advocate of social justice" is not compatible with the "hardened hammer of heretics" (3). Unlike Curtright, their approaches seem unable or unwilling to see how the secular and the religious could complement each other in a historical context.

Yet *The One Thomas More* is neither reactionary nor hagiographic. If Curtright does, as it were, put the historical More "back together again," More's character is not the same as before. As Curtright reiterates in his concluding analysis of More's prison letters, More remains a complex mind whose moral conscience synthesizes his training as scholar and lawyer. More's final refusal to take the Oath of Supremacy is rooted in an understanding of both "the legality of the oath and an individual obligation to seek and find right judgment through study" (200). In the end, Curtright's new More embodies an interdependent philosophical network of Christianity, humanism, and statecraft.

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HUMANITÄT

Vicki A. Spencer: *Herder's Political Thought: A Study of Language, Culture, and Community*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. Pp. xi, 354.)

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Vicki A. Spencer's *Herder's Political Thought: A Study on Language, Culture, and Community* is an excellent survey of the political ideas of Johann Gottfried Herder, a late-eighteenth-century historian, translator, educator, and clergyman, whose background influence on long-standing philosophical debates over pluralism, community, nationalism, language, and identity has only lately come to be widely accepted. To have Spencer's readings of Herder collected together into one sustained interpretive argument should come as a