λαοὶ δὲ δὴ ἄλλοι: Theognis in Reformation Germany

An important area in Classical Reception studies is the relationship between the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation and Greek and Latin literature as mediated through Renaissance humanism. This relationship is often assessed in wildly divergent terms, ranging from such claims as "*ohne Humanismus keine Reformation"* (Moeller 1959: 59) on the one hand to a blanket denial of any Protestant interest in the classics for personal piety on the other (Rummel 2000: 6). One possible reason for such a stark discrepancy in scholarly opinion is the fact that a noticeable lack of close analysis of single texts that could offer more specific conclusions has compelled scholars to fall back on rather subjective assessments. There is simply a lack of detailed study of individual texts.

In my paper I have tried to contribute to the filling in of this gap. I concentrated on Joachim Camerarius (1500-1574) who, being both reformer (along with Philip Melanchthon he composed the official statement of Protestant belief for the Hapsburg authorities, the *Augsburg Confession*) as well as scholar, educator, poet, and philhellene, practically embodies the elements of classicism and religion. In 1551 he published a commentary on the Greek Archaic poet Theognis for use in the public school at Zwickau in Saxony. This commentary offers a great many insights into the reasons why the early Protestants were devouring Greek literature not only because of what Camerarius draws the students' attention to as he comments, but also for the fact that he composed the commentary itself in Attic Greek.

Concentrating my analysis on the question of what Camerarius wanted to get out of a reading of Theognidean poetry, I have isolated three areas of interest: the philological, the experiential, and the theological. The commentary is particularly concerned with the correct reading. While in several places Camerarius despairs of finding the correct reading because of a

problematic manuscript tradition, he still constantly brings up variant readings and explores the meaning this or that variant would yield. At the same time he betrays the fact that he has done a thorough study of the scholiastic tradition in order to appropriate the language and phraseology of those ancient commentators for his own purposes. These two points are enough to show that the mastery of Greek that Camerarius intended for himself and his students was to be uncompromisingly absolute.

Also evident in his commentary is a desire to turn back the clock, as it were, and engage with his subject on one-to-one terms by establishing a commonality of experience between sixteenth-century Germany and Archaic Greece. One way he attempts to establish this commonality is, again, by using his subject's language and not forcing Theognis to speak through an interpreter. Yet another way I discuss is the special attention he pays to adages and proverbs. The popularity of adages in the early modern period needs only mention of Erasmus' magisterial *Adagia* to make its point. While the major use adages were put to was rhetorical, here I make the point that Camerarius treated them as ways to demonstrate common experiences between different cultures and eras. I also explore the way Camerarius' desire to approach ancient Greece on its own terms fleshes out the idea of immediacy McGrath sees as an important common denominator between Renaissance humanism and Reformation (McGrath 2012: 40-41).

Lastly, Camerarius makes it clear in his Greek preface that he regards Theognidean poetry as primarily gnomological, and so valuable as offering standards of ethical behavior, and throughout his commentary he develops that idea, using Theognis to corroborate Christian expectations such as honoring one's parents, especially in their old age, but also using him to weigh in on theological questions, such as the extent of man's free will. This hearing what Theognis has to say on topics that were live wires in Camerarius' day shows, contrary to not a

little scholarly opinion, that he was quite open to gleaning moral insights from pagan sources, an attitude that reduces the distance between Reformation and humanism. But that distance is not reduced without cost. For example, I end by discussing how Camerarius embroils himself in the problem of reconciling the motivation the humanist found in *laus* and *gloria* with the Christian ideal of humility (Kerrigan & Braden 1989: 19-22), a discussion that sums up my overall point: the *Nachleben* of Theognidean poetry, being so specific in intent, yet so general in expression, establishes much needed controls to a very vexed question in early modern studies.

Bibliography

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