The Reception of Erasmus' Moria in England Through 1640

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ERASMUS' Encomium Moriae, first published in 1511, was revised several times. Altogether thirty-seven editions appeared in Erasmus' lifetime, and it was translated into English by Sir Thomas Chaloner in 1549, by John Wilson in 1668, and White Kennett in 1683. That Erasmus' little jest was popular with his contemporaries and with succeeding generations goes without saying. To discover what literate Englishmen thought of it, I have read 7,010 books published in Great Britain from the first printing of Moria through 1640. In this group of books I found 577 items with references to Erasmus and his works; of these, 39 were to The Praise of Folly. Because of the dearth of other information, scanty publication and sales records, the best measurement we have of the reception of Moria in the English Renaissance is the number of times it is cited by other writers. What follows is an annotated check list of those works which mention or allude broadly to Moria. In the quotations I have silently regularized i/j, u/v, and vv according to modern usage, supplied those vowels which were omitted after nasalized consonants, and sometimes expanded abbreviations; otherwise, I have rendered spelling and punctuation as they are in the text. I have, however, suppressed ubiquitous italics.

The first printed English reference to Erasmus' Moria is found in Leonard Cox's The Arte or Crafte of Rhetoryke (1524). A friend of Erasmus and Melanchthon, Cox was eminent as a grammarian, poet, preacher, and

rhetorician. In anatomizing the parts of an oration, he explains the function of the preamble:

Nowe if one wolde take upon hym to make an oracion to the prayse of his losel/ whiche mater is of litle honesty in it selfe/ he must use in stede of a preface an insinuacion. That what thynge poetes or commune fame doth eyther prayse or dispraise ought nat to be gyven credence to/ but rather to be suspecte. For ones it is the nature of poetes to fayne and lye/ as bothe Homere and Virgile. . . . An example [of such a preface] may be set out of the declamacion that Erasmus made to the prayse of folysshenes. An other example hath the same Erasmus in his seconde boke of Copia. . . . [sig. B4v-B5]

In An Answer to Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue (1531), William Tyndale, a leader of the English Reformation, defended his use of the word congregation rather than church in his translation of the New Testament. More had attacked Tyndale’s usage in A Dyaloge of syr Thomas More. Wherein be treated divers maters, as of the veneration & worship of ymages (1529). In his Answer Tyndale pointedly asks:

But how happeth it that .M. More hathe not contended inlykewise agaynst hys derelynge Erasmus all this longe while? Doeth not he chaunge this worde ecclesia into congregacyon, and y' not seldom in y' new testament? peradventure he owithe him favoure because he made Moria in his house. which boke if it were in englishe/ then shulde every man se/ how y' he then was ferre other wise minded than he nowe writeth. [sig. A7v]

The following year, 1532, Sir Thomas More responded to Tyndale’s Answer with The Confitacyon of Tyndales Answer. In Book II, More defends himself against Tyndale:

Then he [Tyndale] asketh me why I have not contended with Erasmus whom he calleth my derlynge, of all thys longe whyle for translatynge of thys worde ecclesia in to thys worde congregatio. And then he cometh forth wyth his fete proper taunte, that I faouyr hym of lykelyhed for makynge of hys boke of Moria in my howse. There had he hyt me lo saue for lakke of a lytell salte. I haue not contended wyth Erasmus my derlynge, bycause I found no suche malycyouse entent wyth Erasmus my derlynge, as I fynde wyth Tyndale.... As touchyng Moria in which Erasmus under the name and person of Moria, which worde in greke sygyfyeth foly / doth merely towche and reprove suche fawtes and folyes as he founde in any kynde of people / perusynge every state and condycyon spyrytuall and temporall, leyyne all moste none untowched/ by whych boke Tyndale sayth that yf it were in englysshe, every man sholde then well se that I was then ferre otherwyse mynded than I now wryte: yf thys be trew, then the