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Artur Závodský

Dr. Otto Hietsch, Die Petrarcaübersetzungen Sir Thomas Wyatts. Wiener Beiträge zur englischen Philologie, LXVII. Bd. Wien 1960. 220 pages.

Dr. Hietsch's comparative philological study of Wyatt's Petrarchan translations and imitations is so far the most exhaustive investigation of the subject which, in the author's opinion, had been rather neglected by previous research. Since it also contains a number of new observations or noteworthy suggestions concerning Wyatt's original creative method, it is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the English Petrarchan's own poetic achievement. Some of Dr. Hietsch's general conclusions confirm and substantiate the critical opinions of earlier students of Sir Thomas Wyatt and the English Petrarchans of the sixteenth century. But even when the author disagrees with any of them, he generally does so on the grounds of meticulously painstaking and objective research work. His arguments, moreover, may be closely followed and easily verified thanks to the methodical presentation of the textual material — Petrarch's Italian originals and Wyatt's English version — and thanks to the copious critical commentary. This commented textual juxtaposition, analysis and comparison of 24 poems (pp. 73—211) forms the nucleus of the book. Its results, general as well as specific, are conveniently reviewed, complemented and summed up in the introductory study on Wyatt's language and style (pp. 3—72), while the remaining pages (214—220) are devoted to classified bibliography.

Our review being unable, for lack of space, to discuss Dr. Hietsch's work as fully as it deserves we have to concentrate only on its main object, viz. its examination of Wyatt's method of translating selected specimens from Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. The results of this examination may not seem surprisingly novel in the main, but they are highly interesting in details illustrating Wyatt's independent attitude to Petrarch and confirming his old-established status as one of the earliest modern English lyricists. For in spite of his reverence for Petrarch's mastery of poetic form and expression, and in spite of his sincere efforts to make his English countrymen acquainted with the Italian poet in a faithful translation, Sir Thomas Wyatt was no mere disciple and imitator. Dr. Hietsch has convincingly demonstrated, for instance, what many other scholars have denied or doubted, that Wyatt's knowledge of Petrarch's poetry as regards the language, content and form was quite sufficient to enable him to produce a faithful, if not a congenial rendering of it. Yet Wyatt's extant Petrarchan translations are but more or less free adaptations differing from their original not only in metrical pattern, but also in poetic devices and imagery, ideological and emotional content, and many other respects. These essential differences between Wyatt and Petrarch are obviously even more apparent in the English poet's creative imitations of his Italian master (Dr. Hietsch calls them „Um- und Nachdichtungen“ and discusses them at length on pp. 167—211) where the original is sufficiently noticeable but serves only as incentive, inspiration and model for Wyatt's personal poetic creation. To sum up in our own words, Wyatt's Petrarchan translations are neither faithful, let alone congenial versions of the Italian original, nor are they mere poetic exercises, though both these aims may have been present in Wyatt's intention and influenced their final character. These translations are rather original variations on Petrarchan poems. This becomes evident when we compare them with Wyatt's original pieces and find that nearly all important elements of content and form in which Wyatt's translations deviate from the original are characteristic of Wyatt's own production. As poet in his own right, Sir Thomas Wyatt has undoubtedly felt the strong influence of his English and foreign literary predecessors, not least of Petrarch, but the best qualities of his creative poetry were due to his native talent and personal living experience. Some of them were so strong as to penetrate even into his translations. By their incongruity with the original they sometimes impaired the value of the product as a translation; but on the other hand, they not seldom heightened its value as poetry.

Karel Štěpaník