

Here following Master Thomas More wrote
in his youth for his pastime.¹

(I) *A merry jest how a sergeant would learn to play the friar.*² *Written by Master Thomas More in his youth.*

Wise men always,
Affirm and say,
That best is for a man:
Diligently,
For to apply, 5
The business that he can³
And in no wise,⁴
To enterprise,⁵
Another faculty,
For he that will, 10
And can no skill,
Is never like to thee.⁶
He that hath left,
The hosiers⁷ craft,
And falleth to making shone,⁸ 15
The smith that shall,
To painting fall,
His thrift is well nigh done.
A black draper,⁹
With white paper, 20
To go to writing school,
An old butler,
Become a cutler,¹⁰
I wene¹¹ shall prove a fool.

¹ Source text for our modernization comes from *The English Works of Thomas More*, editors W.E. Campbell, A.W. Reed, R.W. Chambers, and W.A.G. Doyle-Davidson, vol. 1 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, 1931). Cited as “Campbell and Reed” hereafter. We have modernized font and some spelling here, but left many archaic word forms in the text in order to maintain the original rhyme and meter.

² “Friar” for the obsolete form, “frere.” In the Roman Catholic Church, a friar was “a brother or member of one of the certain religious orders founded in the 13th century and afterwards, of which the chief were the four mendicant orders: the Franciscans; the Augustines; the Dominicans; and the Carmelites” (*OED*).

³ Campbell and Reed suggest “knows” for “can.”

⁴ Wise: “Manner, mode, fashion, style” (*OED*).

⁵ “Enterprise”: “To take in hand (a work), take upon oneself (a condition), attempt our undertake (a war, an expedition, etc.), run the risk of or venture upon (danger)” (*OED*).

⁶ Campbell and Reed suggest “thrive” for “thee.”

⁷ Hosier: “One who makes or deals in hose (stockings and socks) and frame—knitted or woven underclothing generally. Also used more generally for a man’s outfitter or haberdasher” (*OED*).

⁸ Shone: “Obsolete plural of shoe” (*OED*).

⁹ Draper: “Originally, one who made (wollen) cloth. Subsequently, a dealer in cloth, and now by extension, in other articles of textile manufacture: often qualified as wollen, linen draper” (*OED*).

¹⁰ Cutler: “One who makes, deals in, or repairs knives and similar cutting utensils” (*OED*).

¹¹ Wene: Variant of “ween”: In regard to what is present or past: To think, surmise, suppose, conceive, believe,

And an old trot, ¹²	25
That can God wot, ¹³	
Nothing but kiss the cup,	
With her physic, ¹⁴	
Will keep one sick,	
Till she have soused ¹⁵ him up.	30
A man of law,	
That never saw,	
The ways to buy and sell,	
Wenyng to rise,	
By merchandise,	35
I pray God speed him well.	
A merchant eke, ¹⁶	
That will go seek,	
By all the means he may,	
To fall in suit,	40
Till he dispute,	
His money clean away.	
Pleading ¹⁷ the law,	
For every straw,	
Shall prove a thrifty man,	45
With bate ¹⁸ and strife,	
But by my life,	
I cannot tell you when.	
When an hatter ¹⁹	
Will go smatter, ²⁰	50
In philosophy,	
Or a peddler,	
Wax a meddler, ²¹	
In theology,	
All that ensues,	55
Such crafts new,	
They drive so far a cast, ²²	
That evermore,	
They do therefore,	

consider" (*OED*).

¹² A "trot" is "an old woman; usually disparaging: an old beldame, a hag" (*OED*).

¹³ Know for "wot."

¹⁴ Physic: "The knowledge of the human body; especially, the theory of diseases and their treatment; medical science, medicine" (*OED*).

¹⁵ This line the *OED* uses as its example for "soused," which means "to bring to extremities."

¹⁶ "Eke" means "also."

¹⁷ Campbell and Reed suggest "pleading" for the archaic "pletynng."

¹⁸ Bate: "Contention, strife, discord" (*OED*).

¹⁹ Hatter: "A maker or dealer in hats" (*OED*).

²⁰ "Smatter" means "to talk ignorantly or superficially, to prate or chatter, of something" (*OED*).

²¹ Wax a meddler: Become or grow a meddler in theological matters.

²² That is, they throw so far off the mark.

Beshrew²³ themselves at last. 60
 This thing was tried
 And verified,
 Here by a sergeant late,
 That thriftly²⁴ was,
 Or he could pass, 65
 Wrapped²⁵ about the pate,²⁶
 While that he would
 See how he could,
 In God's name play the friar:
 Now if you will. 70
 Know how it feel,
 Take heed and ye
 shall hear.

It happed²⁷ so,
 Not long a go, 75
 A thrifty man there died,
 An hundred pound,
 Of nobles round,
 That had he laid aside:
 His son he would, 80
 Should have this gold,
 For to begin with all:
 But to suffice
 His child, well thrice,²⁸
 That money was too small. 85
 Yet or this day
 I have heard say,
 That many a man certesse,²⁹
 Hath with good cast,³⁰
 Be³¹ rich at last, 90
 That hath begonne with less.
 But this young man,

²³ "Beshrew" probably means one of the following: "treat evilly, use ill, abuse," or "to wish all that is bad," or as an "imprecatory expression" (a curse) such as "evil befall thee" (*OED*).

²⁴ Thriftly: "In a becoming or seemly manner, properly . . ." (*OED*).

²⁵ "Wrapped" for the original "rapped."

²⁶ "Pate" means "the head, the skull: more particularly applied to that part which is usually covered with hair" (*OED*).

²⁷ It happed so: it happened so.

²⁸ Well thrice: that is, three times the amount of money left to this child would not have been sufficient.

²⁹ Probably a variant of "certes," which means: "of a truth, of a certainty, certainly, assuredly. Used to confirm a statement" (*OED*).

³⁰ "Cast" is used in the following sense: "A throw or stroke of fortune; hence, fortune, chance, opportunity; lot, fate" (*OED*).

³¹ Be: that is, become rich.

So well began, His money to employ, That certainly, His policy, To see it was a joy. For lest some blast, Might overcast, ³²	95
His ship, or by mischance, Men with some wile, Might him beguile, And diminish ³³ his substance, For to put out, All manner doubt	100 105
He made a good purvay ³⁴ For every whyt, ³⁵ By his own wit, And toke ³⁶ an other way: First fair and well, Thereof much dele, ³⁷	110
He digged ³⁸ it in a pot, But then him thought, ³⁹ That way was nought, ⁴⁰	115
And there he left it not. So was he fain, ⁴¹ From thence again, To put it in a cup, And by and by, Covetously,	120
He supped it fair up. ⁴² In his own breast, He thought it best, His money to enclose, Then wist ⁴³ he well,	125

³² "Overcast" is made into a compound. The original reads "Might over cast . . .". The metaphor simply describes a ship that is overturned.

³³ "Diminish" replaces "minish."

³⁴ "Purvey" means "to forsee" (*OED*).

³⁵ Whyt: Probably a form of "wight," which means "person" (*OED*).

³⁶ Toke: obsolete past tense of take (*OED*).

³⁷ Dele: Obsolete variant of "deal" which appears "with other, and comparative words, as more, most, less, better, and the like, distinguishing one of two parts, or part from the remainder" (*OED*). "Much dele" refers to the amount of money that was placed into a pot.

³⁸ Campbell and Reed suggest "put" for "digged".

³⁹ But then him thought: that is, but then he thought, or a thought occurred to him.

⁴⁰ Campbell and Reed suggest "useless" for "nought."

⁴¹ Fain: "To be delighted or glad, rejoice" (*OED*).

⁴² He supped it fair up: A figurative use of "supped" wherein the inherited riches are swallowed up or consumed.

⁴³ Wist: knew.

Whatever fell,
 He could it never lose.
 He borrowed then,
 Of other men,
 Money and merchandise 130
 Never paid it,
 Up he laid it,
 In like manner wise.
 Yet on the gere,⁴⁴
 That he would were, 135
 He rought⁴⁵ not what he spent,
 So it were nice,
 As for the price,
 Could him not miscontent.⁴⁶
 With lusty⁴⁷ sport, 140
 And with resort,⁴⁸
 Of jolly company,
 In mirth and play,
 Full many a day,
 He lived merely.⁴⁹ 145
 And men had sworn,
 Some man is born,
 To have a lucky hour,
 And so was he,
 For such degree, 150
 He gat⁵⁰ and such honor,
 That without doubt,
 When he went out,
 A sergeant well and fair,
 Was ready straight, 155
 On him to wait,
 As soon as on the mayor.
 But he doubtless,
 Of his meekness,
 Hated such pomp and pride, 160
 And would not go,
 Companied so,
 But drew himself a side,
 To saint Katherine,
 Straight as a line, 165

⁴⁴ Campbell and Reed suggest “dress” for “gere.”

⁴⁵ Campbell and Reed suggest “cared” for “rought.”

⁴⁶ Miscontent: discontent, which means “Not content; discontented, dissatisfied; ill-pleased” (*OED*).

⁴⁷ Lusty: “Of persons and their attributes: Joyful, merry, jocular; cheerful, lively” (*OED*).

⁴⁸ Resort: “That which one has recourse for aid or assistance, or in order to accomplish some end” (*OED*).

⁴⁹ Campbell and Reed suggest “merrily” for “merely.”

⁵⁰ Gat: past tense of get (*OED*).

He gate him at a tide,⁵¹
 For devotion,
 Or promotion,
 There would he needs abide.
 There spent he fast,⁵² 170
 Till all was past,
 And to him came there many,
 To ask their debt,
 But none could get,
 The valor⁵³ of a penny. 175
 With visage⁵⁴ stout,⁵⁵
 He bare⁵⁶ it out,
 Even unto the hard hedge,⁵⁷
 A month or twain,⁵⁸ 180
 Till he was fain,
 To lay his gown to pledge.
 Then was he there,
 In greater fear,
 Than ere that he came thither,
 And would as fain, 185
 Depart again,
 But that he wist not whither.
 Then after this,
 To a friend of his,
 He went and there abode,⁵⁹ 190
 Where as he lay,
 So sick alway,
 He might not come abrode.⁶⁰

It happed then,
 A merchant man, 195
 That he ought⁶¹ money to,
 Of an officer,
 Then gan inquire,⁶²

⁵¹ Tide: "time" (*OED*).

⁵² Fast: "With firm grasp, attachment, or adhesion; so as not to permit of escape or detachment; tightly, securely" (*OED*).

⁵³ "Valor" means "the amount in money, etc., that a thing is worth; = VALUE" (*OED*).

⁵⁴ Visage: "The face or features as expressive of feeling or temperament; the countenance" (*OED*).

⁵⁵ Stout: "Proud, haughty, arrogant" (*OED*).

⁵⁶ Bare: bore.

⁵⁷ Campbell and Reed suggest "very limit" for "hedge."

⁵⁸ Twain: "two" (*OED*).

⁵⁹ Abode: past tense of abide (*OED*).

⁶⁰ "Abrode" is probably an archaic spelling for "abroad," which means "out of one's house or abode; out of doors; out in the open air" (*OED*).

⁶¹ Campbell and Reed suggest "owed" for "ought."

What him was best to do. And he answered, Be not aferde, ⁶³	200
Take an action therefore, I you behest, ⁶⁴ I shall him rest, ⁶⁵ And then care for no more.	205
I fear quod ⁶⁶ he, It will not be, For he will not come out. The sergeant said, Be not afraid, It shall be brought about. In many a game, Like to the same, Have I been well in ure, ⁶⁷ And for your sake, Let me be bake, ⁶⁸ But if I do this cure.	210 215
Thus part they both, And forth then goth, ⁶⁹ A pace this officer, And for a day, All his array, He changed with a friar. So was he dight ⁷⁰ That no man might,	220 225
Him for a friar deny, He dopped and dooked, ⁷¹ He spoke and looked, So religiously. Yet in a glass, ⁷²	230

⁶² "Inquire" for the original "enquire."

⁶³ Aferde: afeard, which means "affected with fear or terror; frightened, afraid" (*OED*).

⁶⁴ "Behest" is a transitive verb that means "to vow, promise" (*OED*). *I promise you* is the line's meaning.

⁶⁵ Rest: "arrest" (*OED*).

⁶⁶ Quod: said.

⁶⁷ Campbell and Reed suggest "well used to."

⁶⁸ A figurative use of "bake," meaning "to prepare, make ready" (*OED*). In context, the sergeant will concoct a plan.

⁶⁹ Goth: goeth.

⁷⁰ Campbell and Reed suggest "dressed" for "dight."

⁷¹ Campell and Reed suggest "ducked" and "curtsied" for "dopped" and "dooked."

⁷² Glass: that is, in a mirror.

Or he would pass,
He toted⁷³ and he peered,
His heart for pride,
Leapt in his side,
To see how well he friared.⁷⁴ 235

Then forth a pace,
Unto the place,
He goeth in God's name,⁷⁵
To do this deed,
But now take heed, 240
For here beginneth the game.

He drew him nigh,
And softly,
Straight at the door he knocked:
And a damsel, 245
That heard him well,
There came and it unlocked.

The friar said,
God speed⁷⁶ fair maid,
Here lodgeth such a man, 250
It is told me:

Well sir quod she,
And if he do what then?
Quod he mistress,
No harm doubtless: 255

It longeth⁷⁷ for our order,⁷⁸
To hurt no man,
But as we can,
Every wight to forder.⁷⁹
With him truly, 260

Fain speak would I.
Sir quod she by my fay,⁸⁰

⁷³ Campbell and Reed suggest “looked” for “toted.”

⁷⁴ “Friared” replaces “freered.” More turns “friar” into a verb—friared—that puns upon “fared.” Fare means “to ‘go on,’ behave, conduct oneself, act. To ‘go’; to happen; to turn out.” (*OED*).

⁷⁵ The humor lies in the ambiguity of going forth in the name of God. Dressed as a friar—that is, in disguise—the sergeant goes in the name of God.

⁷⁶ God speed: “To further or assist (a person); to cause to succeed or prosper” (*OED*).

⁷⁷ It longeth: it belongs.

⁷⁸ For our order: that is, the religious order in which he feigns membership.

⁷⁹ Forder: further, which means: “To help forward, assist (usually things; less frequently persons); to promote, favor (an action or movement)” (*OED*).

⁸⁰ Fay: “Religious belief,” or “Faith” (*OED*).

He is so sick,⁸¹
 Ye be not like,⁸²
 To speak with him today. 265
 Quod he fare may,⁸³
 Yet I you pray,
 This much at my desire,
 Vouchsafe⁸⁴ to do,
 As go him to, 270
 And say an austen⁸⁵ friar.
 Would with him speak,
 And matters break,
 For his avayle⁸⁶ certain.
 Quod she I will, 275
 Stand ye here still,
 Till I come down again.
 Up is she go,
 And told him so,
 As she was bode⁸⁷ to say. 280
 He mistrusting,
 No maner thing,
 Said maiden go thy way,
 And fetch him hyder,⁸⁸
 That we togyder,⁸⁹ 285
 May talk. Adown she goeth,
 Up she him brought,
 No harm she thought,
 But it made some folk wrothe.⁹⁰

This officer, 290
 This feigned friar,
 When he was come aloft,
 He dopped then,
 And greet this man,
 Religiously and oft. 295
 And he again,

⁸¹ "Sick" replaces the original "sike."

⁸² Like: likely.

⁸³ Campbell and Reed suggest "maiden" for "may." "Fare may" is the sergeant's version of "fair maiden."

⁸⁴ Vouchsafe: "to confer or bestow (some thing, favor, or benefit) on a person" (*OED*).

⁸⁵ Austen: "variant of Austin, Augustinian" (*OED*). Here the poem reveals what kind of friar the sergeant dresses up as.

⁸⁶ "Avayle" could be a variant of "avail", which means "benefit" or "advantage" (*OED*).

⁸⁷ Bode: "command, order, behest" (*OED*).

⁸⁸ Hyder: "Obsolete form of "hither" (*OED*).

⁸⁹ Togyder: together.

⁹⁰ Wrothe: wrathful.

Right glad and fain,
 Took him there by the hand,
 The friar then said.
 Ye be dismayed, 300
 With trouble I understand.
 Indeed quod he,
 It hath with me,
 Been better than it is.
 Sir quod the friar, 305
 Be of good cheer,
 Yet shall it after this.
 For Christ's sake,
 Look that you take,
 No thought within your breast: 310
 God may tourne⁹¹ all,
 And so he shall,
 I trust unto the best.
 But I would now,
 Comen⁹² with you, 315
 In counsel if you please,
 Or else nat⁹³
 Of matters that,
 Shall set your heart at ease.

Down went the maid, 320
 The merchant said,
 Now say on gentle friar,
 Of this tiding,
 That ye me bring,
 I long full sore to hear. 325

When there was none,
 But they alone,
 The friar with evil grace,⁹⁴
 Said, I rest the,⁹⁵
 Come on with me, 330
 And out he took his mace:⁹⁶
 Thou shalt obey,

⁹¹ Tourne: Obsolete form of turn (*OED*).

⁹² Campbell and Reed suggest "talk" for "comen."

⁹³ Nat: Obsolete form of not (*OED*).

⁹⁴ "Evil grace" is an oxymoron that captures some of More's humor in the poem.

⁹⁵ I rest the: I arrest thee.

⁹⁶ Mace: "A heavy staff or club, either entirely of metal or having a metal head, often spiked: formerly a regular weapon of war. In early use, a club of any kind" (*OED*).

Come on thy way,
 I have thee in my clouche,⁹⁷
 Thou goest not hence, 335
 For all the pence,⁹⁸
 The mayor hath in his pouch.⁹⁹

This merchant there,
 For wrath and fear,
 He waxing welnygh¹⁰⁰ wood,¹⁰¹ 340
 Said whoreson¹⁰² thief,
 With a mischief,
 Who hath taught thee thy good.

And with his fist,
 Upon the list,¹⁰³ 345
 He gave him such a blow,
 That backward down,
 Almost in sowne,¹⁰⁴

The friar is overthrow.
 Yet was this man, 350
 Well fearder¹⁰⁵ then,
 Lest he the friar had slain,

Till with good raps,
 And heavy claps,
 He dawde¹⁰⁶ him up again. 355
 The friar took heart,
 And up he start,

And well he laid about,
 And so there goeth,
 Between them both, 360
 Many a lusty¹⁰⁷ clout.¹⁰⁸

They rent and tear,
 Each other's hair,
 And clave¹⁰⁹ together fast,
 Till with lugging, 365

⁹⁷ Clouche: Obsolete form of "clutch" (*OED*); hence, "clutches."

⁹⁸ Pence: A collective plural of penny (*OED*).

⁹⁹ Pouch: "A bag, sack, or receptacle of small or moderate size, used for various purposes, esp. for carrying small articles; a pocket as a distinct receptacle worn outside the dress" (*OED*).

¹⁰⁰ "Welnygh" probably means "well nigh," or "well near."

¹⁰¹ Campbell and Reed suggest "mad" for "wood." In context, the line may read, "He was growing well near mad."

¹⁰² "Whoreson" replaces "horson."

¹⁰³ Campbell and Reed suggest "ear" for "list."

¹⁰⁴ Campbell and Reed suggest "swoon" for "swone."

¹⁰⁵ Fearder: "Affected with fear, frightened, afraid, timid" (*OED*).

¹⁰⁶ Campbell and Reed suggest "roused" for "dawde."

¹⁰⁷ Lusty: "Full of healthy vigor" (*OED*).

¹⁰⁸ Clout: "A small piece or shred produced by tearing or rending; in later use chiefly a shred of cloth, a rag" (*OED*).

¹⁰⁹ "Clave" is the "past tense of cleave" (*OED*).

And with tugging,
 They fell down both at last.
 Then on the ground,
 Together round,
 With many a sad stroke, 370
 They roll and rumble,
 They turn and tumble,
 As pigs¹¹⁰ do in a poke.¹¹¹

So long above,
 They heve¹¹² and shove, 375
 Together that at last,
 The maid and wife,
 To break the strife,
 Hyed¹¹³ them upward fast.
 And when they spy, 380
 The captains lie,
 Both waltrin¹¹⁴ on the place,
 The friar's hood,
 They pulled a good,
 Adown about his face. 385
 While he was blind
 The wench behind,
 Lent him laid¹¹⁵ on the floor,
 Many a joule,¹¹⁶
 About the noule,¹¹⁷ 390
 With a great batyldore.¹¹⁸
 The wife came yet
 And with her feet,
 She holpe¹¹⁹ to keep him down,
 And with her rock, 395

¹¹⁰ "Pigs" for "pygges."

¹¹¹ Poke: "A bag; a small sack: applied to a bag of any material or description, but usually smaller than a sack" (*OED*).

¹¹² Heve: Obsolete form of heave (*OED*).

¹¹³ Perhaps "hyed" means "tied."

¹¹⁴ Campbell and Reed suggest "rolling" for "waltrin."

¹¹⁵ Laid is a past participle of lay, which may mean: "To bring or cast down from an erect position (in Old English often, to strike down, slay)" (*OED*).

¹¹⁶ "Joule" is an obsolete form of "jowl," which means "a bump; a blow, especially on the head; a knock, a stroke" (*OED*).

¹¹⁷ "Noule" is probably an obsolete form of "noll," which means "the top or crown of the head; the head generally; the noddle" (*OED*).

¹¹⁸ "Batyldore" is probably a variant of "battledore," which was "a beetle or wooden 'bat' used in washing, also (when made cylindrical) for smoothing out or 'mangling' linen clothes; hence also applied to similarly shaped instruments, e.g. the paddle of a canoe, a utensil for inserting loaves into an oven, or a glass-ware into the kiln, etc." (*OED*).

¹¹⁹ Holpe: past tense and past participle of 'help' (*OED*).

Many a knock,
 She gave him on the crown.
 They laid his mace,
 About¹²⁰ his face,
 That he was wood for pain: 400
 The friar frappe,
 Gate¹²¹ many a swappe,¹²²
 Till he was full nigh slain.
 Up they him lift,
 And with ill thrift, 405
 Headling¹²³ along the stair.
 Down they him threw,
 And said adieu,
 Command¹²⁴ us to the mayor.

The friar arose, 410
 But I suppose,
 Amazed¹²⁵ was his head,
 He shook his ears,
 And from great fears,
 He thought him well a fled. 415
 Quod he now lost,
 Is all this cost,
 We be never the near.
 I'll mote¹²⁶ he the,¹²⁷
 That caused me, 420
 To make myself a friar.

Now masters all,
 Here now I shall,
 End there as I began,
 In any wise, 425
 I would avyse,¹²⁸

¹²⁰ "About" is an adverb modifying "laid," which describes position: "On the outside, on the outer surface of; on every side of; all around; around, surrounding" (*OED*). More simply means they strike the "friar" on the head.

¹²¹ Gate: "variant of 'got,' which means "acquired" (*OED*).

¹²² "Swappe" is probably a variant of "swap": "An act of swapping or striking; a stroke, a blow" (*OED*).

¹²³ Headling: "With the head foremost; headlong" (*OED*).

¹²⁴ "Command" is probably a variant of "commend": "To give in trust or charge, deliver to one's care or keeping; to commit, entrust" (*OED*). The word is used with sarcasm here.

¹²⁵ Amazed: "driven stupid; stunned or stupefied, as by a blow; out of one's wits;" or "bewildered, confounded, confused, perplexed" (*OED*).

¹²⁶ "Mote" means "expressing permission or possibility" (*OED*).

¹²⁷ Campbell and Reed suggest "thrive" for "the." Hence, the friar says in reference to his lost prisoner, "I'll bet he thrives."

¹²⁸ Avyse: "Obsolete form of advice, or advise" (*OED*).

And counsel every man,
His own craft use,
All new refuse,
And lightly let them gone:
Play not the friar,
Now make good chere,¹²⁹
And welcome every chone.¹³⁰

430

Finis.

¹²⁹ Chere: cheer.

¹³⁰ Every chone: every one.

THE PAGEANT OF LIFE (1492-1501)¹

Master Thomas More in his youth devised in his father's house in London, a goodly hanging of fine painted cloth, with nine pageants, and verses over every one of those pageants: which verses expressed and declared, what the images in those pageants represented and also in those pageants were painted, the things that the verses over them did (in effect) declare, which verses here follow.

In the first pageant was painted a boy playing at the top and whip. And over this pageant was written as follows.

Childhood.

I am called Childhood, in play is all my mind,
To cast a quoit,² a cock-stick,³ and a ball.⁴
A top⁵ can I set, and drive it in his kind.
But would to god these hateful books all,
Were in a fire burnt to powder small.
Than might I lead my life always in play:
Which life God send me to mine ending day.

In the second pageant was painted a goodly fresh young man, riding upon a goodly horse, having a hawk on his fist, and a brace of greyhounds following him. And under the horse feet, was painted the same boy, that in the first pageant was playing at the top and whip. And over this second pageant the writing was thus.

Manhood.

Manhood I am; therefore I myself delight,⁶
To hunt and hawk,⁷ to nourish up and feed
The greyhound to the course, the hawk to the flight,
And to bestride⁸ a good and lusty steed.
These things become a very man indeed,

¹ Source text for modernization comes from *The English Works of Thomas More*, editors W.E. Campbell, A.W. Reed, R. W. Chambers, and W.A.G. Doyle-Davidson, 2 volumes (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, 1931). Cited as "Campbell and Reed" hereafter. The following annotations are by Travis Curtright.

² "Quoit" used here for "coyte," which was a "heavy flattish ring of iron, slightly convex on the upper side and concave on the under, so as to give it an edge capable of cutting into the ground when falls, if skillfully thrown" (OED). Casting a "coyte," therefore, represents an English Renaissance version of throwing a discus.

³ "Cock-stick" used here for "cokstele," which was a stick used for throwing at cocks on Shrovetide (OED, but see also S. G. Edwards, p.191).

⁴ OED notes that the following definition of the word "ball" was probably its earliest sense in English: "a globular body to play with, which is thrown, kicked, knocked, or batted about in various games . . .".

⁵ A "whipping top" was a toy that was "kept spinning by lashing it with a whip" (OED).

⁶ "Myself" for the original "me."

⁷ To chase or hunt game (OED).

⁸ To mount, to ride (OED).

Yet thinks this boy his peevish game sweeter,⁹
But after all¹⁰ without force,¹¹ his reason is no better.

In the third pageant, was painted the goodly young man, in the second pageant lying on the ground. And upon him stood lady Venus goddess of love, and by her upon this man stood the little god Cupid. And over this third pageant, this was the writing that follows.

Venus and Cupid.

Whoever knows not the strength, power and might,¹²
Of Venus and me her little son Cupid,
Thou Manhood shall a mirror been a right,¹³
By us subdued for all thy great pride,
My fiery dart pierces thy tender side,¹⁴
Now thou that before despised children small,¹⁵
Shall grow¹⁶ a child again and be my thrall.

In the fourth pageant was painted an old sage father sitting in a chair. And lying under his feet was painted the image of Venus & Cupid, that were in the third pageant. And over this fourth pageant the scripture was thus.

Age.

Old Age am I, with looks, thin and hore,¹⁷
Of our short life, the last and best part.
Wise and discreet: the public weal¹⁸ therefore,
I help to rule to my labor and smart.

⁹ The actual line is "Yet thynketh this boy his pevishe game swetter." More meant "pevishe" to mean "silly, senseless, foolish" (OED).

¹⁰ "But after" all replaces "But what" (OED).

¹¹ "But what no force" is the actual line, where "force" means "strength" in argument.

¹² The original line reads: "Whoso ne knoweth the strength power and myght."

¹³ This line and the next are exceptionally difficult to render due to anastrophe and use of obsolete word forms.

"Thou" is primarily a personal pronoun, but when it proceeds a noun, it works in a vocative address in which disdain is connoted; second, 'thou' is a personal pronoun used in the nominative, as in an ordinary address; finally, it may be used a verb, as in "thou traitor" (OED). All three are possibilities here. "Been" replaces the original "bene," which means either an archaic form of "bein," or "be." OED glosses "bein" as an adjective, meaning to flourish or fill in. I take "by" in its sense of time, as in "in the course of, at, in, on time" (OED). Accordingly, this line may mean: "You, manhood, shall be reflected rightly when by us subdued" or "Your manhood shall be rightly reflected when by us subdued." The syntax favors the later formulation. Hence: "Whoever knows not the strength, power, and might / Of Venus and me her little son Cupid, / your manhood shall be reflected rightly when by us subdued." In any case, Cupid begins with a threat.

¹⁴ Pierces for "pierceth."

¹⁵ The actual line reads: "Now thou which erst despisedst children small." "Which" for "that" (OED).

¹⁶ Grow for "wax" (OED).

¹⁷ "Hore" is "foulness, defilement, dirt, filth," but also an obsolete form of "hoar," which means "grey-haired with old age; venerable" (OED). Sylvester glosses the latter meaning, although the first also existed in More's day. See *St. Thomas More: The History of Richard III and Selections from the English and Latin Poems*, ed. Richard Sylvester (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); hereafter cited as "Sylvester."

¹⁸ I.e., the common public good. More's old man is involved in politics.

Therefore Cupid withdraw thy fiery dart,
Weighty¹⁹ matters shall of love oppress
The childish game and idle business.

In the fifth pageant was painted an image of Death: and under his feet lay the old man in the fourth pageant. And above this fifth pageant, this was the saying.

Death.

Though I be foul ugly lean and misshape,²⁰
Yet there is none in all this world wide,
That may my power withstand or escape.
Therefore sage father greatly magnified,
Descend from your chair, set apart your pride,
Deign²¹ to lend (though it be to your pain)
To me a fool,²² some of your wise brain.

In the sixth pageant was painted lady Fame. And under her feet was the picture of Death that was in the fifth pageant. And over this sixth pageant the writing was as follows.

Fame.

Fame I am called, marvel you nothing,
Though with tongues am compassed all round²³
For in voice of people is my chief living.
O cruel death, thy power I confound.
When thou a noble man hast brought to ground
Maugry thy teeth²⁴ to live cause him shall I,
Of people in perpetual memory.

¹⁹ The actual word is "Chargeable." Weighty is the gloss of Campbell and Reed, and the OED also recommends "grave."

²⁰ I.e., misshapen.

²¹ "Deign" replaces "witsafe," which the OED glosses as "vouchsafe."

²² "Fool" for the original "fole."

²³ The bizarre image of Fame More might have known from Chaucer, who describes her thus: "For as feele eyen hadde she / As fetheres upon foules be," or *for as many eyes had she as feathers upon birds be*; and, most similar to More, Chaucer writes that Lady Fame "had also fele upstondyng eres / And tonges, as on bestes heres," that is, *she had also many upstanding ears, and as many tongues as there are hairs on animals*. Perhaps the point in both Chaucer and More's imagery is that with many ears and tongues Fame can learn rumors of great deeds and men, and then trumpet those tidings throughout the world, thus preserving their memory for future generations. See Chaucer's *The House of Fame in The Riverside Chaucer*, third edition, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), and for modernizing Chaucer's vocabulary see Larry D. Benson, *A Glossarial Concordance to the Riverside Chaucer*, vol. 1 (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1993), and also Norman David, Douglas Gray, Patricia Ingham, and Anne Wallace-Hadrill, *A Chaucer Glossary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

²⁴ The fifth entry on "tooth" from the OED explains this line well: "in spite of (despite, maugre, etc) one's teeth: notwithstanding one's opposition or resistance; in spite of one, in defiance of one" (OED). Hence, Fame tells Death: In spite of your destructive powers, I will cause him [the old man of the previous stanza, now dead] to live on."

In the seventh pageant was painted the image of Time, and under his feet was lying the picture of Fame that was in the sixth pageant. And this was the scripture over this seventh pageant.

Time.

I whom thou see²⁵ with hourglass²⁶ in hand,
Am named time, the lord of every hour,
I shall in space destroy both sea and land.
O simple fame, how dare²⁷ thou man honor,
Promising of his name, an endless flower,
Who may in the world have a name eternal,
When I shall in process destroy the world and all.

In the eighth pageant was pictured the image of lady Eternity, sitting in a chair under a sumptuous cloth of estate, crowned with an imperial crown. And under her feet lay the picture of Time, that was in the seventh pageant. And above this eighth pageant, was it written as follows.

Eternity.

Me need²⁸ not to boast, I am Eternity,
The very name signifies²⁹ well,
That mine empire infinite shall be.
Thou mortal Time every man can tell,
Art nothing else but the mobility
Of sun³⁰ and moon changing in every degree,³¹
When they shall leave³² their course thou shalt be brought,
For all thy pride and boasting into nought.³³

In the ninth pageant was painted a Poet sitting in a chair. And over this pageant were there written these verses in Latin following.

The Poet.

Has fictas quemcunque iuvat spectare figuras,³⁴

²⁵ "See" for "seest."

²⁶ The original word is "horyloge," which Sylvester glosses as "hourglass."

²⁷ Dare for "darest."

²⁸ Need for "needeth."

²⁹ Signifies for "signifieth."

³⁰ Sun for "son."

³¹ Aristotle thought that time was the measure of matter in motion; accordingly, the sun and moon may endure in their motions, but that does not mean they are eternal. Eternity is an atemporal and nonmaterial condition.

³² Leave for "leve."

³³ Nothing (OED).

³⁴ Joshua Avery's translation: *Whoever delights himself in gazing at these figures, and even thinks that they accurately depict man with marvelous skill, can also delight his soul with true things in*

Sed mira veros quas putat arte homines,
Ille potest veris, animum sic pascere rebus,
Ut pictis oculos pascit imaginibus.
Namque videbit uti fragilis bona lubrica mundi,
Tam cito non veniunt, quam cito pretereunt.
Gaudia laus & honor, celeri pede omnia cedunt,
Qui manet excepto semper amore dei?
Ergo homines, leuibus iamiam diffidite rebus,
Nulla recessuro spes adhibenda bono.
Qui dabit eternam nobis pro munere vitam,
In permansuro ponite vota deo.

the same way that he gratifies his eyes on the images. For he will see how the uncertain goods of the ephemeral world do not come so quickly as they swiftly fade away. Joys, praise, honor and all things are overturned; what remains forever except God's love? Therefore, men, henceforth place no trust in trivial matters, and no expectations in a fleeting good. Present your prayers to the eternal God, who will bestow upon us the gift of everlasting life.

A RUEFUL LAMENTATION¹

A rueful lamentation (written by Master Thomas More in his youth) of the death of Queen Elizabeth mother to King Henry the Eighth, wife to King Henry the Seventh, and eldest daughter to King Edward the fourth, which Queen Elizabeth died in childbed in February in the year of Our Lord 1503, and in the 18th year of the reign of King Henry the Seventh.

O ye that put your trust and confidence,
In worldly joy and frail prosperity,
That so live here as ye should never hence,
Remember death and look here upon me.
Example, I think, there may no better be.²
Yourself know well that in this realm was I,
Your queen but late, and lo³ now here I lie.

5

Was I not born of old worthy lineage?
Was not my mother queen, my father king?
Was I not a king's wife in marriage?
Had I not plenty of every pleasant thing?
Merciful God this is a strange reckoning:
Riches, honor, wealth, and ancestry
Hath me forsaken and, lo now, here I lie.

10

15

¹ Source text for modernization comes from *The English Works of Thomas More*, editors W.E. Campbell, A.W. Reed, R.W. Chambers, and W.A.G. Doyle-Davidson, vol. 1 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, 1931). Cited as "Campbell and Reed" hereafter.

² More typically uses the scheme known as "anastrophe" in which the typical sentence order is re-arranged to correspond with the demands of meter and rhyme. Occasionally, however, the sense of the sentence becomes obscure because of it. Here commas are inserted to separate out "I think" in order to better illustrate the subject and verb.

³ According to the *OED*: "Lo" is a) "an interjection of vague meaning, corresponding approximately to the modern O! or Oh!," or b) used "to direct attention to the presence or approach of something, or to what is about to be said," as in "Look! See! Behold!";

⁴ Worship: "The condition (in a person) of deserving, or being held in, esteem or repute; honour, distinction, renown; good name or credit. (Common down to the 16th century)" (*OED*). What the deceased Queen argues, then, is that if praise and high-opinion of others were sufficient, she never would have died, for she possessed this praise in abundance.

If worship⁴ might have kept me, I had not gone.
 If wit might have me saved, I needed not fear.
 If money might have helped, I lacked none.
 But, O good God, what avails⁵ all this gear?⁶
 When death is come, thy mighty messenger,
 Obey we must, there is no remedy;
 Me hath he summoned, and lo now here I lie;

Yet was I late promised otherwise,⁷
 This year to live in wealth and delicacy.⁸
 Lo, where to comes thy blandishing⁹ promise,
 O false astrology and divining,¹⁰
 Of God's¹¹ secrets making thyself¹² so wise?
 How true for this year thy prophecy?
 The year yet lasts, and lo now here I lie.¹³

O brittle¹⁴ wealth, ay full of bitterness,
 Thy single¹⁵ pleasure doubled is with pain.
 Account my sorrow first and my distress,
 In sundry ways,¹⁶ and reckon there again
 The joy that I have had, and I dare not say,¹⁷
 For all my honor, endured yet have I,
 More woe than wealth, and lo now here I lie.

⁵ The actual word is "vaileth" for which Campbell and Reed recommend "availeth."

⁶ The original is "gere," which is an obsolete form of "gear." Gear means "apparel, attire, dress, vestments" (*OED*). Alternatively, "gere" means a "sudden fit of passion" (*OED*). The former meaning is probably the one intended, although we cannot rule out the possibility that Elizabeth, as fictive speaker of the poem, refers to her own heavy laments.

⁷ "Otherwise" juxtaposes her death with her promised condition, which is described in the next line.

⁸ Delicacy for "delice," which probably indicates a life of luxury.

⁹ Blandishing: "Softly flattering, soothing, coaxing" (*OED*).

¹⁰ "Divining" replaces "devynatrice." Divination is the "foretelling of future events or discovery of what is hidden or obscure by supernatural or magical means; soothsaying, augury, prophecy" (*OED*). Apparently, the Queen consulted diviners, who promised her a year of abundance, instead of her death.

¹¹ "God's" replaces "goddess."

Where are our castles, now where are our Towers?
Goodly Richmond, son art thou gone from me,
At Westminster that costly¹⁸ work of yours,
Mine own dear lord¹⁹ now shall I never see.
Almighty God, vouchsafe to grant that ye,
For you and your children well may edify.
My palace built is, for lo now here I lie.

Adieu, mine own dear spouse, my worthy lord,
The faithful love that did us both combine,
In marriage and peaceable concord,
Into your hands here I clean resign,
To be bestowed upon your children and mine.
Before were you father, and now must ye supply,
The mother's part also, for lo now here I lie.

Farewell, my daughter, lady Margaret;
God knows how often it has grieved my mind,²⁰
That ye should go where we should seldom meet.
Now am I gone, and have left you behind.
O mortal folk, that we be very blind,
That we least fear, how often it is most near,²¹
From you depart I first, and lo now here I lie.

¹² "Thyself" is in reference to the arts of astrology and divining, now personified such that the speaker may address them in apostrophe.

¹³ That is, in the midst of the year of foretold blessings, how is it possible for Elizabeth to die?

¹⁴ Brittle: weak.

¹⁵ The Yale editors gloss "single" as "singular." See *The Complete Works of Thomas More*, vol. 1, editors Anthony S.G. Edwards, Katherine Rodgers, Clarence H. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), xxx. Cited as "S.G. Edwards" hereafter.

¹⁶ "Sundry wise" is the original, which means "various ways."

¹⁷ "Say not" for "sayne."

¹⁸ Costly: "Of great price or value; sumptuous" (OED). In context, Elizabeth means that "dear" – because of the cost and sacrificed involved – work of yours.

¹⁹ "Mine own dear lord" refers to her husband.

²⁰ "God wotte full oft it grieved hath my mind" is the original line.

²¹ "Full oft it is most nye" is the original. "Nye" is an obsolete form of "nigh," which means "near" (OED).

Farewell, Madam, my lord's worthy mother,
 Comfort your son, and be ye of good cheer.
 Take all a worth,²² for it will be no other.²³
 Farewell, my daughter Katherine, late the wife²⁴
 To prince Arthur, mine own child so dear
 It remedies not for me to weep and cry;
 Pray for my soul, for now lo here I lie.

Adieu, Lord Henry, my loving son, Adieu.
 Our Lord increase your honor and estate;
 Adieu, my daughter Mary, bright of hue.²⁵
 God make you virtuous, wise, and fortunate.
 Adieu, sweet heart, my little daughter Kate;
 Thou shalt,²⁶ sweet babe, such is thy destiny,
 Thy mother never know, for lo now here I lie.

Lady Cecily, Anne, and Katherine,
 Farewell, my well-beloved sisters three,
 O Lady Briget, other sister mine,
 Lo²⁷ here the end of worldly vanity.
 Now well are ye that earthly folly flee,
 And heavenly things love and magnify,
 Farewell and pray for me, for lo now here I lie.

22. "A worth" probably means "in good worth" here: "a" is a preposition that attaches to "worth" to form an obsolete word form, "aworth." From the *OED*: "To take at, of, or to worth; to take (accept, bear, have) in worth, or in good worth; to take (or bear) well in worth: to take (something) at its true or proper value; to take in good part; to be content with." See the following note for interpretation.

23. "No nother" is the original. "Nother," as a pronoun, means "none other" or "an other" (*OED*). Interpretation of the line depends on what one thinks "it" refers to—the son, or life in general. Hence, Elizabeth may tell her mother-in-law: Be content with [take all a worth] your son, or take him at his proper value, for there will be no other (new) child for you. Alternatively, Elizabeth could be referring to life generally: Accept everything according to its true value in life [take all a worth], for there will be no second chance at living [it will be non nother]." Without ruling out second option as a possibility, the reference to "your son" indicates the former suggestion as most likely.

24. Wife replaces "fere," which meant "a consort, spouse; a husband or wife" (*OED*).

25. "Hue" means "form, shape, figure; appearance, aspect" or "external appearance of the face and skin, complexion" (*OED*).

26. Thou shalt: that is, Kate will die eventually too.

Adieu, my lords, adieu my ladies all;
Adieu, my faithful servants every one;²⁸
Adieu, my commons whom I never shall
See in this world, wherefore to thee alone,
Immortal God, verily²⁹ three and one,
I commend me to thy infinite mercy,³⁰
Show it to thy servant,³¹ for lo now here I lie.

²⁷ Here "Lo" means "Look! See! Behold!" (*OED*). Hence, Elizabeth tells Briget: "Look here at my death, the end of worldly vanity."

²⁸ "Every chone" is the original for which Campbell and Reed suggest "every one."

²⁹ Verily: "In truth of verity; as a matter of fact; in deed, fact, or reality; really, truly" (*OED*).

³⁰ The original line reads: "I me commend thy infinite mercy."

³¹ We insert "it" in reference to mercy. The original reads: "Show to thy servant, for lo now here I lie."

*Through you come ill
 And mortal wars,
 All disadvantages;
 Over mountains and valleys
 And in the hospitals* 35
So many people die.

Fortune, O mighty and variable,
 What rule you claim, with your cruel power!
 Good folk you destroy, and love reprobable [folk].
 You may not warrant^o your gifts for one hour. 40 ^o guarantee
 Fortune unworthy men sets in honor.
 Through Fortune, the innocent [man] in woe and sorrow shrieks.
 The just man she spoils,^o and the unjust enriches. ^o robs¹¹

Young men she kills, and lets old men live,
 Unrighteously dividing time and season. 45
 That^o good men lose, to wicked does she give. ^o what
 She has no difference, but judges all good reason:^o ^o rational conduct
 Inconstant, slippery, frail, and full of treason,
 Neither forever cherishing whom she takes,
 Nor forever oppressing whom she forsakes. 50

End. Said T. M.

The Words of Fortune to the People [Section 2]

My high state, power, and authority,
 If ye not know, search and ye shall spy
 That riches, worship, and dignity; 55
 Joy, rest, and peace; and all things, finally;
 That any pleasure or profit may come by
 To man's comfort, aid, and sustenance,
 Is all at my devise^o and ordinance. ^o will, inclination¹²

Without my favor, there is nothing won. 60
 Many a matter have I brought at last
 To good conclusion, that fondely^o was begun. ^o foolishly
 And many a purpose, bound sure and fast
 With wise provision,^o I have ^oover cast.^o ^o foresight ^{oo} destroyed
 Without good hap^o, there may no wit suffice: 65
 Better is [it] to be fortunate than [to be]¹⁴ wise. ^o luck¹³

And, therefore, have [there]¹⁵ some men been or^o this ^o before
 My deadly foes, and written many a book
 To my dispraise; and other cause there nys,^o ^o isn't
 But for me lyste^o not friendly on them [to] look. 70 ^o it pleases
 Thus, like the fox they fare,^o that once forsook ^o behave¹⁶
 The pleasant grapes, and began for to defy^o them, ^o despise

Because he leapt and leapt, and could not come by them.*

But let them write; the labor is in vain.
For well ye wote:° mirth, honor, and riches 75 ° know
Better is than shame, penury and pain.
The needy wretch, that lingers in distress,
Without my help, is ever comfortless:
A weary burden, odious and loath[some]¹⁷
To all the world and to himself, both. 80

But, he that by my favor may ascend
To mighty power and excellent degree,° ° status in society
A commonweal to govern and defend,
O in how blessed condition stands he!
Himself in honor and felicity, 85
And over that, may further and increase
A whole region in joy, rest, and peace.

Now in this point there is no more to say:
Each man has of himself the governance.
Let every wight° then take his own way. 90 ° person
And he, that out of poverty and mischance
Lyste° for to live, and will himself enhance ° desires
In wealth and riches, come forth and wait on me;
And he that will be a beggar, let him be.

To Them That Trust in Fortune [Section 3] 95

You that are proud of honor, shape° or kin, ° beauty
That heap up this wretched world's treasure,
(Your fingers shined with gold, your tawny skin
With fresh apparel garnished °out of measure°) °° excessively
And weneste° to have Fortune always at your pleasure, 100 ° hope
Cast up your eye; and look how slippery Chance
Eludes her men with change and variance.

Sometimes, she looks as lovely, fair, and bright
As goodly Venus, mother of Cupid;
She beckett° and smiles upon every wight.° 105 ° curtsies¹⁸ ° person
But this feigned cheer may not abide;
There comes a cloud, and farewell all our pride.
Like any serpent, she begins to swell,

* Aesop's fable: One hot summer's day a Fox was strolling through an orchard till he came to a bunch of grapes just ripening on a vine which had been trained over a lofty branch. "Just the thing to quench my thirst," he said. Drawing back a few paces, he took a run and a jump, and just missed the bunch. Turning round again with a One, Two, Three, he jumped up, but with no greater success. Again and again he tried after the tempting morsel, but at last had to give it up, and walked away with his nose in the air, saying: "I am sure they are sour."
Moral: *It is easy to despise what you cannot get.*

And looks as fierce as any fury of hell.

Yet for all that, we brittle men are ffayn,^o 110 ° glad
(So wretched is our nature and so blind)
As soon as Fortune list^o to laugh again, ° desires
With fair countenance and deceitful mind,
To crouch and kneel and °gape after the wind.^o °° desire something insubstantial
Not one or twain, but thousands °on a rowt,^o 115 °° in a crowd
Like swarming bees, come flattering her about.

Then, as a bait, she brings forth her ware:
Silver, gold, rich pearl, and precious stone,
On which the amazed people gaze and stare, 120
And gape therefore, as dogs for the bone.
Fortune at them laughs; and in her throne,
Amid her treasure and wavering riches,
Proudly she hovers as Lady and Empress.

Fast by her side does weary Labor stand,
Pale Fear also, and Sorrow all bewept;^o 125 ° tearstained
Disdain and Hatred on that other hand;
Eke^o restless Watch, from sleep with travail kept, ° also
His eyes drowsy and looking as he slept;
Before her stand Danger and Envy, 130
Flattery, Deceit, Mischief, and Tyranny.

About her comes all the world to beg:
He asks [for]¹⁹ land; and he to pass^o would bring ° surpass
This toy and that, and all not worth an egg;
He would in love prosper above all things;
He kneels down and would be made a king; 135
He °forces not,^o so he may money have, °° doesn't care
Though all the world account him for a knave.

Lo, thus [ye see]²⁰ diverse heads, diverse wits.
Fortune alone, as diverse as them all,
Unstable, here and there among them flits; 140
And °at aventure^o down her gifts fall. °° at random
Catch who so may; she throws great and small,
Not to all men, as comes sun or dew,^o ° rain
But, for the most part, all among a few.

And yet, her brittle gifts may not last. 145
He that she gave them [to] looks proud and high;
She whirls about and plucks away as fast,
And gives them to another by and by.
And thus, from man to man continually,
She vsith^o to give and take, and slyly toss 150 ° enjoys
One man to winning of another's loss.

With her is Bias, whose country lacked defense,
 And whilom° of their foes [they] stood [so]²⁸ in doubt, 195 ° once²⁹
 That each man hastily began to carry [his things] thence,
 And asked him why he naught° carried out. ° nothing³⁰
 "I bear," quod° he, "all mine with me about." ° said
 Wisdom he meant, no[t]³¹ Fortune's brittle ffees;° ° goods
 For naught° he counted his that he might lose. 200 ° nothing³²

Heraclitus, eke°, liste° fellowship to keep ° also ° desires
 With glad Poverty; Democritus also;
 Of which the first can never cease but weep
 To see how thick° the blind people go ° numerous
 With great labor to purchase care and woe. 205
 That other laughs to see the foolish apes,
 How earnestly they walk about their japes.° ° foolish acts

Of this poor sect,° it is the usage ° group
 Only to take that [which]³³ nature may sustain.
 Banishing clean all other surplus, 210
 They be content, and of nothing complain.
 No niggard eke° is of his goods so ffayn;° ° also ° glad
 But they more pleasure have a thousand fold,
 The secret drafts° of nature to behold. ° plans

Set Fortune's servants by themselves and° ye will: 215 ° if
 That one is free, that other ever thrall;° ° enslaved
 That one content, that other never full;° ° satisfied
 That one in surety,° that other likely to fall. ° security
 Who lyst° to advise them both, perceive he shall ° desires
 As great difference between them as we see 220
 Betwixt wretchedness and felicity.

Now have I shown you both; choose which ye liste:° ° desire
 Stately Fortune, or humble Poverty;
 That is to say, now lies it in your fist° ° power
 To take you to bondage, or free liberty. 225
 But in this point, and° ye do after me ° if
 Draw you to Fortune, and labor her to please,
 If that ye think yourself too well at ease.

And [at] first, upon you lovely shall she smile,
 And friendly on you cast her wandering eyes, 230
 Embrace you in her arms, and, for a while,
 Put you into a fool's paradise.
 And forthwith, all what so you liste° devise,° ° desire to ° imagine
 She will [to] you grant it liberally, perhaps.
 But for all that, beware of after-claps.° 235 ° unexpected events

Reckon you never of her favor sure:

Ye may in the clouds as easily trace° a hare, ° pursue
 Or in dry land cause fishes to endure,
 And make the burning fire his heat to spare,
 And all this world encompass to forfare,° 240 ° destroy
 As her to make (by craft of engyne°) stable, ° ingenuity³⁴
 That of her nature is ever variable.

Serve her day and night as reverently
 Upon your knees as [any]³⁵ servant may,
 And in conclusion, that° you shall win thereby 245 ° what
 Shall not be worth your service, I dare say.
 And look yet: what she gives you today,
 With labor won, she shall haply° tomorrow ° perhaps
 Pluck it out of your hand with sorrow.

Wherefore, if you in surety° liste° to stand, 250 ° security ° desire
 Take Poverty's part and let proud Fortune go.
 Receive nothing that comes from her hand.
 Love manner° and virtue; for °they be only° those [things]³⁶ ° moderation °° they alone are
 Which double° Fortune may never take °you from;° ° inconstant °° from you
 Then may you boldly defy her, turning Chance. 255
 She can you neither hinder nor advance.

But and° you will nedes° meddle with her treasure, ° if ° necessarily
 Trust not therein, and spend it liberally. °° do not behave proudly³⁷ °°
 °Bear you not proud,° nor take not °out of measure.°
 excessively
 Build not your house high up in the sky. 260
 None falls far, but he that climbs high.
 Remember, nature sent you hither bare;
 The gifts of Fortune, count them [as]³⁸ borrowed ware.

To Them that Seek Fortune [Section 4]

Whoso delights to prove and assay 265
 Of wavering Fortune the full uncertain lot,
 If that the answer please you not always,
 Blame not me: for I command you not
 Fortune to trust; and eke° full well ye wot,° ° also ° know
 I have of her no bridle in my fist. 270
 She runs loose, and turns where she lyste.° ° desires

The rolling dice, in whom your luck does stand,
 (With whose unhappy chance ye be so wroth°) ° angry
 Ye know yourself came never in my hand.
 Lo, in this pond be fish and frogs both. 275
 Cast in your net; but be you leve° or loath,° ° glad ° reluctant
 Hold you content as Fortune liste° assign, ° desires to
 [For]³⁹ it is your own fishing, and not mine.

And, though in one chance Fortune you offend,
 Grudge^o not thereat, but bear a merry face; 280 ° grumble, complain⁴⁰
 In many another she shall it amend.
 There is no man so far out of her grace,
 But he sometimes has comfort and solace;
 Nay none again so far forth in her favor,
 That fully satisfied is with her behavior. 285

Fortune is stately, solemn, proud, and high,
 And riches gives, to have service therefore.
 The needy beggar catches a halfpenny;
 Some man a thousand pounds, some less, some more.
 But for all that, she keeps ever in store 290
 From every man some parcel^o of his will,^o ° portion ° that which one desires⁴¹
 That he may pray^o therefore, and serve her still. ° beg, crave⁴²

Some man has goods, but children has he none.
 Some man has both, but he can get no health.
 Some [man] has all three, but up to honor's throne 295
 Can he not creep, by no manner [of]⁴³ stealth.
 To some [man] she sends children, riches, wealth,
 Honor, worship, and reverence all his life;
 But yet she plucks^o him with a shrewed^o wife. ° afflicts ° ill-disposed

Then (forasmuch as it is Fortune's gyse^o 300 ° practice, custom
 To grant no man all things that he will ask,
 But as herself liste^o order and devise)
 Does every man his part^o divide and tax.^o ° desires to
 I counsel you: either truss up your packs, ° duty⁴⁴ ° burden
 And take nothing at all; or be content 305
 With such reward as Fortune has you sent.

All things in this book that ye shall read,
 Do as ye liste;^o there shall no man °you bind ° desire
 Them to believe^o as surely as your creed. °° bind you to believe them
 But, notwithstanding, certes^o in my mind 310 ° certainly
 I durst well swear: as true shall ye them find
 In every point, each answer by and by,
 As are the judgments of astronomy.

Here Finishes Lady Fortune [Epilogue]

Fortune Speaks 315

*Fortune, where is David, and Solomon;
 Methuselah, Joshua, Maccabeus
 Holofernes, Alexander, and Sampson;
 Julius Caesar, Hector, also Pompey?*

Where is Ulysses and his great renown; 320
Arthur the king, Godfrey, Charlemagne,
Darius the great, Hercules, Ptolemy?
They have all died; this world is a futile thing.

What has become of Pharaoh, the felon king;
Job the courteous, Tobias, and their lineages; 325
Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Plato;
Judith, Esther, Boethius, Penelope,
Queen Dido, Pallas, Juno, Medea,
Guinevere, and the very noble Helen;
Palamides, Tristan with his sword? 330
They have all died; this world is a futile thing.

¹ I have used my critical edition of the Fortune Verses, which appears as Appendix A (pp. 97-116) to my article “The Structure, Design, and Argument of Thomas More’s Fortune Verses” (*Moreana*, Vol. 48, No. 185-186, Dec. 2011, pp. 69-120) as the basis for this modernization. Within these notes, the following abbreviations are used: *CW I* refers to *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 1, ed. Anthony S. G. Edwards, Katherine Gardiner Rodgers, and Clarence H. Miller (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1997). *O*, 1556, and 1557 refer to an early manuscript and the two earliest printed editions of this poem, respectively (For more information, see *CW I*, p. cxv & my critical edition). *GL* refers to another early, but much more recently discovered manuscript (See A. S. G. Edwards & M. T. W. Payne, “A New Manuscript of Thomas More’s ‘Fortune Verses,’” *Review of English Studies*, Sep 2009, Vol. 60 Issue 246, pp. 578-587).

This is a word-for-word rendering of the Fortune Verses into modern English spelling. I have, however, sometimes combined two or more words into one modern word, such as “nothing,” “forever,” “nowadays,” etc, or split one of More’s words into two (line 42, e.g.). I have added and removed prefixes and suffixes as required by modern usage. All ampersands have been expanded. I have always modernized the endings on 2nd and 3rd person verbs, even when it alters the number of syllables on a line (the different texts are not themselves consistent in this regard; cf. e.g. lines 112 and 170 in *O* and *GL*), and always replaced archaic forms of the 2nd person singular pronoun with “you.” When the modern word with similar spelling and/or pronunciation differs substantially in meaning from More’s word, and whenever I thought it helpful to clarify More’s usage of certain words, I have provided a marginal gloss on the same line. Those glosses which are not otherwise cited are from the glossary of *CW I*. In cases where I judged that modernization of a word was impossible or unhelpful, I have preserved the spelling of my critical edition, while providing the appropriate gloss. I have maintained the capitalization of the initial letter of each line, but in all other cases, I have added or removed capitalization to both accord with modern practice and provide consistency. Of particular note, I have consistently capitalized Fortune and Poverty, as personifications, when *CW I* and *GL* usually (but not always) render these words with lower case. So, too, I have (with 1557) personified Fortune’s attendants in lines 124-130; see however *CW I*, cxvii for why that editor did not. In two instances (lines 101 & 255), I have also capitalized Chance where the word seems to refer to Fortune by that name. I have modernized the punctuation to make the poem more intelligible to modern readers.

Since my intention in this modernization is different than that of a critical edition, I have sometimes added words here from textual variants which I rejected in my critical edition. Such additions are bracketed and referenced. My critical edition reflects my best judgment as to how the poem was originally written by More. This modernization tries to make this poem more accessible, especially to undergraduate students and other non-specialists, by expressing its meaning clearly to contemporary ears. The *CW I* editor notes some cases where the print versions are trying to make More’s English more clear (*CW I*, 204, on line 154; *CW I*, 206 on line 206), or modernizing (*CW I*, 206 on line 239). I am continuing their work in this respect, and thus in some cases I have added words of my own to clarify the meaning. These words are bracketed with no references. More very often uses a word order that is different from modern standard usage. I have never altered the word order in the poem, but in a few cases where I thought the original word order made the meaning difficult to grasp, I have provided a rearrangement as a marginal gloss in order to clarify. I inserted the notes marked with asterisks as reading aids. The bracketed section numbers (which are used as shorthand references in my article mentioned above) and the title of Section 1 are also mine.

² The four stanzas that appear in 1556 in French are here translated into English. This translation is based on the work done by Andrea Frank. I have made slight changes to Frank’s translation based on my comparison of her rendition with the translations by Dr. Stephen Maddux and Dr. Robert Dupree; and the partial translations provided by Sister Mary Edith Willow in *An Analysis of the English Poems of St. Thomas More* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1974), p. 185; A. W. Reed in *The English Works of Sir Thomas More, Volume One*, ed. W. E. Campbell, with introductions and philological notes by A. W. Reed (New York: Lincoln Mac Veagh, The Dial Press, 1931), pp. 226-227; and Alistair Fox in *Thomas More: History & Providence* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1983), p. 19. All translations are italicized.

³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, s.v. “rude,” Vol. XIV, p. 209, definition 1a. Subsequent references to this dictionary will be abbreviated in the following manner: *OED*, “rude,” XIV.209.1a.

⁴ As in note 3 above.

⁵ *OED*, “somewhat,” XV.997.4a.

⁶ *OED*, “care,” II.894.4.

⁷ *OED*, “spare,” XVI.115.6d.

⁸ *OED*, “wade,” XIX.794.2a.

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- ⁹ *OED*, “lustily,” IX.120.2.
- ¹⁰ *CW I* glossary has “supercilious” (p. 393).
- ¹¹ *OED*, “spoil,” XVI.295.8a.
- ¹² *OED*, “device,” IV.567.3.
- ¹³ *OED*, “hap,” VI.1094.1. *CW I* glossary has “chance” (p. 398).
- ¹⁴ From *GL* (Edwards & Payne, 584).
- ¹⁵ From 1556 and 1557 (*CW I*, 33).
- ¹⁶ *OED*, “fare,” V.730.4.
- ¹⁷ From *CW I* glossary (p. 400).
- ¹⁸ *OED*, “beck,” II.42.3.
- ¹⁹ See note on “asketh;” *CW I*, 203.
- ²⁰ From 1557 (*CW I*, 36).
- ²¹ *OED*, “train,” XVIII.368.11.
- ²² From 1557 (*CW I*, 37).
- ²³ It is not clear to me if we should understand that Fortune “flies” or “flees.” *GL* has “flyeth,” *O* has “ffleith,” 1556 has “flyeth,” and 1557 has “fleeth” (*CW I*, 37; Edwards & Payne, 586). The sense seems the same either way.
- ²⁴ *OED*, “case,” II.933.2b.
- ²⁵ From 1556 and 1557 (*CW I*, 38).
- ²⁶ From 1557 (*CW I*, 38).
- ²⁷ *OED*, “tun,” XVIII.667.1. Cf. Willow, p. 214, note 120.
- ²⁸ From 1556 and 1557 (*CW I*, 38).
- ²⁹ “At some past time.” *OED*, “whilom,” XX.234.2.
- ³⁰ *OED*, “naught,” X.251.A1.
- ³¹ From 1556 and 1557 (*CW I*, 38).
- ³² See note 30 above.
- ³³ See note for line 209; *CW I*, 206.
- ³⁴ *OED*, “engine,” V.250.2a.
- ³⁵ From 1556 and 1557 (*CW I*, 40). See also note on *CW I*, 206.
- ³⁶ From *CW I* glossary (p. 406).
- ³⁷ See *CW I*, 392 on “bere” and p. 402 on “prowde.”
- ³⁸ From 1556 (*CW I*, 41).
- ³⁹ From 1557 (*CW I*, 41).
- ⁴⁰ *OED*, “grudge,” VI.901.1.
- ⁴¹ *OED*, “will,” XX.341.3a.
- ⁴² *OED*, “pray,” XII.291.3a.
- ⁴³ From 1556 and 1557 (*CW I*, 42).
- ⁴⁴ *OED*, “part,” XI.259.8.

DAVY THE DICER (c. 1535)⁴

Long was I, lady luck,⁵ your serving man,⁶
And now have I lost again all that I got,⁷
Wherefore when I think on you now and then,
And in my mind remember this and that,
You may not blame me though I beshrew⁸ your cat,⁹ 5
But in faith I bless you again a thousand times,¹⁰
For lending me now some leisure¹¹ to make rhymes.

⁴ S.G. Edwards observes that dice was used for answering questions about the future; such determinations were made by the correspondence of the numbers thrown to their assigned fates in the “book of fortune” (xxx). So it is that the speaker comments on this kind of dicing from the *Book of Fortune*: “The rolling dice in which your luck doth stand / With whose unhappy chance ye be so wroth, / Ye know yourself came never in mine hand” (*Book of Fortune*, Center for Thomas More Studies Website, lines 218-220).

⁵ According to the *OED*, this is the first time that luck is personified as a lady in English.

⁶ The poem represents a dialogue between the speaker and a personified figure of luck in which we hear only the response of the speaker. Accordingly, we separate “lady luck” with commas to show the poem’s addressee.

⁷ “Got” used for the original “gate.”

⁸ “Beshrew” probably means one of the following: “treat evilly, use ill, abuse,” or “to wish all that is bad,” or as an “imprecatory expression” (a curse) such as “evil befall thee” (*OED*). All three senses give More room to play: He may be cursing lady luck for cursing him with bad luck, or he may be wishing her ill as she caused ill to befall him, or he may mean to evilly use her as she evilly used his devotion.

⁹ Sylvester notes that ‘to turn the cat’ was a term used in dicing, which meant “to reverse the order of things so dexterously as to make them appear the opposite of what they really were”; according to how “beshrew” is taken, then, More means to curse fortune’s reversals, to wish ill towards fortune’s reversals, or to evilly use fortune’s reversals in his verse. As the language indicates, the point remains that More’s speaker now controls fortune, or lady luck.

¹⁰ Note the ambiguity involved in the word “faith” and “bless.” In Christian “faith,” More may now “bless” lady luck because he is free from superstition, or “in faith” he simply thanks lady luck for sending him “leisure”—a blessing.

¹¹ Leisure used here for the original “laisour.” Leisure means either “having time at one’s own disposal” or “freedom or opportunity to do something specified” (*OED*). If More did compose “Davy” while in prison, note the irony involved in using the word.

MORE'S PSALM ON DETACHMENT

Tower of London, 1534-35

Give me thy grace, good Lord:
To set the world at nought;

To set my mind fast upon thee,
And not to hang upon the blast of men's mouths;

To be content to be solitary, 5
Not to long for worldly company;

Little and little utterly to cast off the world,
And rid my mind of all the business thereof;

Not to long to hear of any worldly things,
But that the hearing of worldly phantasies may be to me displeasing; 10

Gladly to be thinking of God,
Piteously to call for his help;

To lean unto the comfort of God,
Busily to labor to love him;

To know mine own vility and wretchedness, 15
To humble and meeken myself under the mighty hand of God;

To bewail my sins passed,
For the purging of them patiently to suffer adversity;

Gladly to bear my purgatory here,
To be joyful of tribulations; 20

To walk the narrow way that leadeth to life,
To bear the cross with Christ;

To have the last thing in remembrance,
To have ever afore mine eye my death that is ever at hand;

To make death no stranger to me, 25
To foresee and consider the everlasting fire of hell;

To pray for pardon before the judge come,
To have continually in mind the passion that Christ suffered for me;

For his benefits uncessantly to give him thanks,
To buy the time again that I before have lost; 30

To abstain from vain confabulations,
To eschew light foolish mirth and gladness;

Recreations not necessary – to cut off;
Of worldly substance, friends, liberty, life and all, to set the loss
at right nought for the winning of Christ; 35

To think my most enemies my best friends,
For the brethren of Joseph could never have done him so much good
with their love and favor as they did him with their malice and hatred.

These minds are more to be desired of every man
than all the treasure of all the princes and kings, 40
Christian and heathen, were it gathered and
laid together all upon one heap.