



– CALL FOR PAPERS –

Thomas More's 1518 *Epigrammata*

Thursday-Saturday, 7-9 November 2024

Call for Papers: You are invited to submit short position papers on any aspect of Thomas More's 1518 *Epigrammata*. Papers exploring literary, philosophical, historical, political, theological, rhetorical, legal, or cultural dimensions of the *Epigrams* are welcome, as are papers exploring the intertextual play of More's sources, his rich ironies, and the dialectical thinking his work provokes in readers. Of special interest will be

- New readings of the key sequences (see below), or major epigrams, or the work as a whole or Utopian connections
- Problems of legitimacy, dangers of monarchy, politeia and paideia
- More's "ars poetica" and his Letter to Brixius – art and imitation
- Significant additions to the new CTMS commentary section

N.B.: This year's conference will have a different focus and purpose than past conferences. That purpose is to "test-drive," refine, and help finish off the next CTMS publication – a bi-lingual edition of More's 260 Epigrams published with the 1518 *Utopia*. * **Important:** For the conference and for the papers submitted, we ask that you use the CTMS edition, English and Latin, of the *Epigrams*. If you would like access to the draft-texts of the CTMS epigrams and commentaries, please email Conference Coordinator Bobby Lueck at morestudies@gmail.com and he will send you the link and password.

Some major sequences include the following (see reverse for themes appearing in individual epigrams):

1. Role of harmonious love and partnership in civil society (blind and lame beggars): 27-33
2. Fortune, death and preparation for death: 40-41, 45-46, 47-50, 55-66, 68-70, 72, 73-82
3. On the good and bad king: 109-115, 120-121
4. Accuracy and truth in art: 87-88, 92-94, 97-98, 185
5. Brixius, inaccuracy and falsehood in poetry: 188-195, 209, 266-269
6. Astrology: 60-65, 67, 101, 118, 169 and 182.
7. The problem of the inveterate drinker: 199, 210 and 214
8. Responding to a failed marriage: 196, 205, 220 (see also 253)

*The complete 1518 *Utopia* & *Epigrammata* is at https://thomasmorestudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Utopia_March1518.pdf, complements of the *Amici Thomas Mori*.

Accepted papers will be distributed to the other members of your seminar group, and **each participant agrees to read the others' papers of your seminar group before** coming in November. The **maximum length** is ten double-spaced pages. Since we are using the seminar format, attendance is limited.

Deadlines:

Seminar paper abstracts are due by **January 30, 2024**. Acceptances will be sent by **February 15, 2024**.

Completed papers must be received by **August 1, 2024**.

Send these to: morestudies@gmail.com



The following index lists the themes and persons in the Epigrams and Progymnasmata roughly in order of appearance in the text.

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Study Questions:

What other themes, found in More's writings, are absent from this collection? Why might More have declined to address them here?

Epigrams

More wrote almost all his Latin poetry from 1500 to 1520. With the help of Erasmus, the *Epigrams* were first published in March 1518 by Froben in a volume that contained More's *Utopia*, his epigrams, and Erasmus's epigrams as well. Another edition followed from Froben in December 1518, and in 1520 the *Epigrams* were printed as their own volume, with More himself involved in the editing (*CW* 3.2: 7). The *Epigrams* were also later printed in the 1563 *Lucubrationes* and the 1565, 1566, and 1689 *Opera omnia*. As their correspondence indicates, More and Erasmus discussed the publication of the *Epigrams* before June 1516 (see Letters 19 [*EE* 424: 81], 20, 87, 90).

More's major source for his *Epigrams* is the Planudean Anthology, a collection of 2,400 Greek epigrams. At least 106 of More's poems are translations from this source; other sources for his *Epigrams* include Aesop, Plutarch, Seneca, Cicero, Aristotle, Martial, and Lucian, along with proverbs, English songs, and the work of a few contemporaries such as Bebel and Poggio (*CW* 3.2: 12). The prefatory letter from Beatus Rhenanus explains that good epigrams must display "wit combined with brevity," and must "end promptly with a witty point," to the delight of the reader. More's epigrams, Rhenanus observes, are seasoned by the author's mirth and sharp wit, displaying his learning and keen judgment as well.

More's *Epigrams* opens with the "Progymnasmata," preparatory exercises composed by Thomas More and William Lily, who was appointed high master of St. Paul's School in 1510. As the Yale editors observe, "More and Lily may be credited with the invention of the variorum translation of selected Greek epigrams that was to have a brilliant history in the schools and beyond" (*CW* 3.2: 13). These exercises were likely composed before 1510.

The rest of the poems in *Epigrams* address a rich array of subjects and human experiences, in a variety of tones and forms. There are poems on friendship, folly, family, law, philosophy, theology, politics, social life, death, and tyranny; there are personal poems on More's children, and on his meeting with an older woman, now a mother, with whom he had been infatuated as a young man; there is the "Coronation Ode," through which More addresses

England and the newly crowned Henry VIII in the fashion of a friendly, yet challenging, orator; there are poems on animals and other earthy subjects, which kindled More's comic muse throughout his life, to the occasional dismay of friends and readers.

More's international quarrel with Germanus Brixius began with the publication of More's satirical epigrams in 1518. These poems occasioned Brixius's counterblast, the *Antimorus*, which in turn prompted additional epigrams from More, as well as his "Letter to Brixius," printed in the "Humanist Letters" section below. The quarrel ended only through the intercessions of Erasmus, and More agreed to recall and destroy copies of his letter.

Among More's writings, few provide as many angles on the author, or reveal as much of his complex mind, as this collection of his poetry. Yale editors Leicester Bradner and Charles Lynch see More's work as "incomparably the best book of Latin epigrams in the sixteenth century," displaying a poetic style that is "never inflated or pompous, and almost always endowed with the virtues of his prose—logical energy, muscular realism, and penetrating intelligence" (*CW* 3.2: 63, 41). Regarding More's style and rhetoric in the *Epigrams*, Elizabeth McCutcheon points out that "More characteristically subverts, questions, or reopens an initial claim, inverts an old proverb, or otherwise renders an epigram open-ended, by juxtaposition, by ambiguity of language and allusion, by exploiting different points of view and incongruities of situation, and by innumerable other rhetorical strategies" (*Moreana* nos. 201–2: 219–20).

Among the groups of poems in the *Epigrams*, the political poems are particularly striking and reveal something of More's mature political philosophy. Bradner and Lynch see these political poems as a uniquely Morean contribution to the epigram genre (*CW* 3.2: 62).

Much work remains to be done studying these poems and relating them to More's other works, especially their companion piece in the early editions, *Utopia*, the Latin vocabulary of which connects to the *Epigrams* in rich and mutually illuminating ways.

The translations provided are from Yale *CW* 3.2; they are prose translations of the Latin poetry.