



“A Merry Jest: How a Sergeant Would Learn to Play the Frère”

- **A Poem for Performance:** Assuming that this poem was written to celebrate his father’s election to the prestigious position of sergeant of law, read it aloud dramatically to help reveal the comedy.
- **Proverbial Wisdom:** The poet opens by stating a moral (lines 1-14), of sorts, and restating it (57-62) after a list of comic examples. It is introduced as a sort of proverb (“wise men always/ affirm and say...”). How is the moral supported by the list of examples given between the two articulations? How do we hear it differently when it is again restated in the final lines of the poem (426-431), in light of the story as a whole?
- **Comedy and Irony:** What are some of the funniest passages and most effective comic tools used in this poem? In particular, note instances of irony and understatement. How are these used for comic effect? A few specific examples: the son’s hiding of money in a pot (113) and cup (119). Why would one generally put money in a pot in an effort “well...to employ” one’s money (94-5)? And why is it done here? Similarly, consider the threat of arrest (155-8) and its evasion (159-161). How does Morean comedy work in these few lines? How does Morean irony function? Look for the ways More’s poetry states the opposite of what it is communicating.
- **A Merry Tale in Verse:** More’s later prose writings will deploy “merry tales” for both delight and instruction. What kind of instruction on human folly does the poet offer through this merry tale? What counsel does the poet offer on “learning to play” parts in life? Note how the comic emphasis on learning to play a role well anticipates similar points in More’s later writings, such as the Lucian translations and *Utopia*.

“The Fortune Verses”

- **Structure:** This poem is structured with several sections, each with a slightly different speaker and/or audience. Consider the perspective of each. What is the effect of juxtaposing these words and viewpoints? Is the argument of the poem more persuasive, for example, when it gives “Fortune” her own voice?
- **Dialogue Form:** Compare this poem’s use of dialogue to More’s practice in his later dialogues such as *Utopia* and *Dialogue of Comfort*. What does this poem reveal about the strength of this form and More’s interest in it?
- **Fortune in Human Affairs:** Consider Fortune’s promises. Are they compelling? What strategies does Fortune use to entrap her followers? How does the speaker suggest one can be free from Fortune’s fickleness and power?
- **Poverty as Alternative:** Consider his position on poverty. What state of mind is suggested? Does poverty refer specifically or exclusively to lack of material goods? If not, what else is involved?
- **Perspective:** How does this poem change one’s view of the two states of life, poverty and good fortune?

“Lewis the Lost Lover” and “Davy the Dicer”

- **Titles:** The titles of these poems might seem almost flippant. Do the rhymes themselves suggest flippancy? More is famous for his merry tone, even under seemingly incongruous circumstances. Could this be an instance of that quality? What might be a reason? Does the tone strengthen or weaken the speaker’s position?
- **The Young More and the Seasoned More:** These poems are written in the last months of More’s life, much later than the “Fortune Verses,” yet they return to the same theme. Is there a development in More’s thinking? What is the significance of More’s composing these poems so near the end of his life?