

Readers and the Dangers of Reading in More's Works

Critics have long recognized the Utopians' complicated attitude toward books, reading, and study generally.¹ Neither the general respect for learning nor the specific privileges for scholars (*CW*4, 130/32-132/5) are enough to make Utopian scholarship altogether voluntary; like the shared agricultural labor, it remains "as if for recreation" (*quasi per ludum*, 124/24) at its root, with perplexing ramifications in the rest of Utopian society, as can be seen wherever "the freedom and culture of the mind" (*ad animi libertatem cultumque*, 134/19) are discussed as "the first and foremost of all pleasures" (*[voluptates] primas omnium principesque*, 174/30). Less often recognized is the continuity of Utopian attitudes with those of Thomas More himself, as they develop over the course of his career. The present essay, taking as given the familiar territory of *Utopia*, traces the arc of these attitudes from the early letters to the Tower works in order to show More's career-long sense of his changing readership and his altered strategies of address to those new readers, for whom heretical texts were a dangerous temptation.

More's extant letters to his children show both the preparation and the conventions that More shared with his readers, even when they were inexperienced. E.F. Rogers, in *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, catalogues almost two hundred letters written before his 1534 imprisonment. Only eight are addressed to his eldest child (and later confidante) Margaret and the other children of the household "school" (Letters 69, 70, 76, 101, 106-108, 128); Letter 163 (1518?) to William Gonell, the children's tutor until about 1518, discusses their education more theoretically. Of these, all but one were first published in Stapleton's *Tres Thomae* (and thus in Latin, 1588);

1588); Letter 76, a poetic *jeu d'esprit* that would not handily fit Stapleton's solemn hagiographical purpose, appeared in the 1520 edition of More's *Epigrammata*. The earliest letter Rogers dates 1518, when Margaret was thirteen or fourteen, and the latest 1523 -- the years of More's entry into the King's service and of his increasing international fame as the author of *Utopia*.

These letters' concentration on the children's skill in Latin composition results in part from Stapleton's editorial bias, shown in the way he cuts Letter 69 so as to focus on the studies at the More "school," his subject at that point.² Their common theme -- "the swift passage of days made joyous by literary pursuits" (*inter dulcissimos literarum fructus transiitis diem*, Letter 69/5)³ -- is at the root of a classical education that assumes the moral benefit of literary concerns in protecting the children from twin dangers: on the one hand, literary exercises encourage virtue by preventing sloth and idleness; on the other, they defend the children against the temptations of purely secular knowledge. More thus qualifies his approval of the children's secular, academic progress by his reminders of transcendent values. In responding to the children's news (in Latin) about their studies, he encourages their diligence because accomplished Latinity is a sure avenue to worldly success, but he deprecates a merely secular concern that might distract them from devout concentration on the world to come. He encourages Margaret to continue her study of astronomy but points out Boethius' reminder that raising the physical eyes to heaven is dangerous if the soul is not uplifted as well (Letter 101/19-23). In another letter, More details how a learned bishop encouraged Meg's study:

[The bishop] took [your letter] into his hand with pleasure and began to examine it ... [praising] its pure Latinity, its correctness, its erudition, and its expressions of tender affection.... He took out at once from his pocket a portague which you will find enclosed.... Write him your thanks carefully in the nicest letter you can. You will one day be glad to have given pleasure to such a man.

(Hallett, 152; Letter 108/8-26)

A keepsake rather than a tip, the portague (a fifteenth-century Portuguese gold coin, stamped with the figure of a cross) and the Latin text together compose an incidental but potent icon of the complex rewards for study: the worldly gold, once marked with a sign of higher worth, is itself enriched.

Letter 76 shows how More trained his children to be familiar with important conventions of literary decorum. The letter is a Latin poem, filled with the standard encouragements to persevere in study but couched as a mere pastime composed on the run:

Dum peragratur iter, pluuioque madescimus imbre,
Dumque luto implicitus saepius haeret equus,
Hoc tamen interea uobis excogito carmen
Quod gratum (quanquam sit rude) spero fore.

(Lines 3-6)

(While I am making a journey, drenched by a soaking rain, and while my mount, too frequently, is bogged down in the mud, I compose these verses for you in the hope that, although unpolished, they may give you pleasure.)⁴

Like Erasmus' introduction to the *Praise of Folly* (1510), the poem offers a demonstration of humanist *sprezzatura*. It is hard to imagine that the writer, on horseback under such circumstances, would be composing Latin verses, yet it is this artful convention of ease that the poem teaches. The effort of composing the poem is not itself a fit subject, and whatever the circumstances of its composition, the work itself must seem *quasi per ludum*. The children thus absorbed the manner of presenting a text even as they engaged in the explicit effort of working through it. This convention of ease, known and practiced long before More wrote the letter-poem, is an ancient fiction that the children need to learn so as to understand the reality that it both disguises and reveals.⁵

Thus, even in these letters to More's most receptive audience, he presented a self that is "rhetorical," never "serious," to use Richard Lanham's terms:⁶ because the central self cannot be simply expressed in language, the written text always manifests an authorial "other" subtly but fundamentally different from the central self. Literary conventions and forms may

reveal, but they may also disguise and protect, insulating central selves from direct and abrasive contact even as they also mediate between those selves. The writer and the audience know each other as much by the language, form and manner of representation as by the presumption of a content independent of those choices, so that More's choices in Letter 76 do more than merely exercise the children's ability to scan and parse. The letter intimates a way of thinking about the world -- disciplined, expectant, rigorous, but also genial and graceful. This and the other letters to the children indicate enthusiasm for academic progress tempered by spiritual development; the nuances of this enthusiasm also suggest some reservations about the act and art of reading, a necessary skill but one not without its moral hazards. Proper education, the letters suggest, makes the students aware of the dangers that their familiar tools may carry by nature.

An audience of readers so educated, one supposes, More seems to have expected as he composed *The History of King Richard III*, where the possibilities of reading seem optimistically understood. Here More recognizes diverse audiences, including an English text for readers unfamiliar with the classical forms he imitated, and a Latin text, with its informative parentheses for a presumably non-English audience, directed to a Europe-wide humanist republic.⁷ As Daniel Kinney suggests, the rhetorical elaboration of the most fully developed Latin version also points up the serious concern for declamation as a potent but double-edged weapon in a divided society.⁸ The nearly parallel English text, on the other hand, embodies the hope that humanist insights from the classical models could be translated into the vernacular, making this way of knowing available to those without classical learning.

It seems at first purely coincidental that this optimistic attitude is implied in a text from which the private self is almost entirely effaced: the narrator has a distinctively flexible style, but remains ironically detached so that the *ethos* of the narrator is purely formal, not localized in a particular named and known speaker. Thomas More copied from the classical historians the representation of authorial distance as a credibility device within the text. Such devices assume the capacity of the

reader to be persuaded, which may be at least in part the capacity to be deceived. The optimism of the form resides in a textual *auctoritas* that, as Judith Anderson demonstrates, assumes an author both more knowledgeable and more artful than the reader.⁹ From this optimism descend the works of Sir Thomas Elyot, for example, who assumes that the "base tongues" can contain knowledge, but only by a kind of artful distillation from the true springs of wisdom in the classical past. Threatening that assumption, however, is the larger and vaguer guess that, in the commonwealth of the vernacular, the franchise would be much extended by the growth of literacy.

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When *Utopia* was published in 1516, at the height of Erasmian optimism about a realized Christendom, questions like those set in Book 1 could be asked without threatening central structures of reality. The beginning of the Reformation made this optimism impossible to sustain, and by 1522 -- about the time More wrote the last letters to his "school" -- Luther was an excommunicate and the fabric of European society was beginning to unravel.

More was brought into the controversy with Luther, his first battle in the polemical wars to follow, by Luther's *Contra Henricum* of 1522, which assailed positions on tradition and authority that Henry had taken -- with More's editorial advice (Letter 199/204-11) -- in the *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* of 1521.¹⁰ Despite official statements of indifference to Luther's rebuttal, More appears to have been under some pressure to answer the *Contra Henricum*, especially because the invective of Luther's text was regarded as *lèse majesté*. In the *Responsio ad Lutherum* of 1523, More attacked heresy using some humanist assumptions that also appeared in the Latin *Richard III*. Whatever their other differences, More and Luther shared certain conventions of this territory, including the modes of answering in kind a Latin text addressed to a learned audience, and even the decorum of invective that modern readers find so alarming in both works. Furthermore, the fictional structure of More's *Responsio*, originally set in Spain, then revised to an English

setting and protagonist, has certain marked similarities to the fiction of *Utopia*: both works presuppose an audience able to interpret the significance of prefatory materials that frame the larger central work, even if in the *Responsio*, More crafted the frame for himself, rather than depending upon the solicitations of Erasmus or the contributions of his friends.

In content, More here dealt literally with the matter of literal *auctoritas* that is only metaphorical in the earlier humanist works. At issue are the central Lutheran tenet *sola scriptura* and the corollary importance of scriptural translation, which is necessary to insure access to scripture for all believers. More's denial of this necessity led him to an argument about the particular kind of authority that translation requires, a question to which he returned in the *Apology* (1533) and other works of controversy. As a classical humanist and erstwhile translator himself, More was far from claiming that translations are necessarily defective in authority. Translation is problematical not because of the text but because of the audience, which may be incapable of understanding the full meaning, known only through the very broad cultural familiarity that classical education bestows. For More, the whole apparatus of exegesis, commentary and interpretation, confirmed by the *magisterium* of the Church, gave the faithful the understanding of truth and sanctity instilled by God through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Here as elsewhere, however, the polemical conflict arose at least in part because the humanists had so successfully shown how scripture was subject to the corruptions of time and thus needed emendation.¹¹ Luther and his followers replied that if the essential text be corrupt, how much more, then, should this enormous machinery of interpretation be corrected; it would be far better to begin from the priority of individual experience and the consequent authority of instilled belief. More responded that to depart from the *magisterium*, to presume one's ability to receive such direct guidance individually, invalidated the capacity of human understanding. We can at any rate see the evolution of the *magisterium*, but we cannot see how God validates the private interpretation of scripture to a believer who claims independent authority. This question of ecclesial authority over

the text of scripture, expanded in subsequent works, became progressively more central to More's polemics against heresy.

In the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529, augmented 1531) and *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (1532-33), More followed the same line of argument but altered its form, particularly in its salient representations of reading. The *Dialogue* was More's initial effort under Tunstall's 1528 commission, which required him to adjust his polemical approach. In the fictional framework and structure of the *Dialogue*, More naturalized a classical dialogue form: instead of the plane tree or gymnasium of Socrates, the two disputants -- "Master Chancellor" and a university scholar known only as "the Messenger" -- meet at a table under an arbor in a very English garden; and above all else, the work itself is *in English*, an explicit admission that heresy no longer concerned just the learned Latin audience on the continent but had spread even to readers at home in England and in English. Heresy at the universities was of course a sign of serious trouble, but there Latin would be the normal language of disputation; this work by its linguistic fabric intimated a far more pervasive danger abroad in the polity, paradoxically showing the university not as the first foothold for heresy but as the last bulwark against it.

Books are very much the issue in the dialogue. The Messenger reports the heresies he has heard at the university, and Master Chancellor answers his doubts and refutes the heresies in several face-to-face discussions. At the end, Master Chancellor gives the Messenger a test: a handful of heretical books to read overnight. The next day he examines the Messenger to find out whether the dialogue did in fact inoculate him against heresy. In the *Dialogue*, therefore, reading is a much more potent and likely source of heresy than daily conversation at the university, but only a similar daily conversation can prepare the Messenger to resist the heretical texts. The book thus concludes hopefully: the Messenger is now prepared to do battle for the faith if necessary. One can only guess that More hoped for a similar effect from the reading of this book, even if within the text, face-to-face discussion is the only resource upon which Master Chancellor depends.¹²¹

Tyndale's brief but pointed *Answer* (1531) attacked not only the substance of More's defense but also its form: the dialogue is a fiction, and fiction is lying, said Tyndale, and lies cannot withstand the force of the reformers' truth. More's reply, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (1532-33), shows that he abandoned fiction in favor of direct assault. The method is literally to overwhelm the heretical text: a short quotation from Tyndale is followed by a much longer refutation of particular points in the quoted passage, so that the whole long work becomes an exegesis in which, once again, humanist philology serves orthodoxy -- the same philology, of course, that the reformers use to support their arguments. After seven books on Tyndale (almost 850 pages in the modern edition), ending with a long disquisition upon Tyndale's use of the word *church*, More digresses to consider the same word as used in another heretical text, Barnes's 1531 *Supplication*.¹³ This "confutation of Barnes" is followed by a Book 9, which was meant to recapitulate the whole work. More left it unfinished and unpublished. The 1557 editor ends the fragment with this remark: "There can be no more found of this .ix. book" (CW8, 1033).

More's object in this work was obviously more expansive than the title implies: the heretical antagonist was hydra-headed. Twenty heretical texts, canvassed in the preface, were also objects of confutation, as well as all unpublished or potential heretical texts, which More nevertheless tried to anticipate and rebut. Because he chose to reprint passages from Tyndale's text and attack them individually without reference to the whole, the book grew to ungainly length and almost unmatched redundancy: the forms of heresy are manifold, but the truth More espoused is and remains one. Here and in the *Supplication of Souls* (much longer than Fish's *Supplication to the Beggars*, which it answers), as later more theoretically unfolded in the *Apology* (1533), More resolved to sacrifice artful economy, elegance, and integrity of form so as to protect the more important integrity of the faith. The loss of artfulness resulted not from inner compulsion, as Alistair Fox presents it,¹⁴ but from deliberate choice in urgent circumstances: either to write the one page of truth answers all heresies (and so to leave to the reader the work of accommodating that single truth to the varieties of heresy) or

else to answer heresies page for page, or two or ten for one -- either a single page or an endless book. Modern readers may decry a choice that violates the canons of literary art, especially that paradox of approaching truth by means of fiction, but even so, in this as in more perilous matters later on, More did not confuse instrumental with absolute values. More's choice leaves him with Qoheleth: of making many books, there is no end (Eccl. 12:12).

And thus the books did come, built variously on old humanist plans or modelled after the reformers' attacks, as many scholars have shown.¹⁵ The last of these polemical works and the last work More published in his lifetime -- *Answer to a Poisoned Book* (1533) -- unfolds the complex metaphorical equations that drove much of More's polemical writing against heresy.¹⁶ After the anonymous *Supper of the Lord* (1533) attacked the doctrine of the Real Presence, More's *Answer* set forth the doctrine of the eucharist in the metaphor of food for the body and the soul, and contrasted it with the metaphor of heresy as poison, a figure he had favored -- with that of "infection" -- in the *Confutation* (e.g., CW8, 28/21, 29/2-9). As the Real Presence is "the best dish" (CW11, 7/8) served forth at the altar, the memorial meal of the *Supper* is "the most poisoned heresy" that kills the soul. Furthermore, as the title *Answer to a Poisoned Book* implies, the "poison" is not limited to the eucharistic meal but rather pervades every consciousness touched by the heretical book. The memorial eucharist, the heretical doctrine that underlies it, and the books in which it is propounded are each in their separate ways poisonous to those who touch them; in contrast, the eucharist of the Real Presence, its doctrinal bases, and the ancillary texts (like More's) that support it are all, in the words of *A Dialogue of Comfort*, both "wholesome" and "medicinal" to human need (CW12, 23/13-24/14; 27/2, 8, *passim*).

Throughout his work, images of persons sitting down to table together, sharing food as they have shared ideas, signal a hopeful condition of human community. In the inset story from Book I of *Utopia*, Chancellor Morton presides and mediates over meals and arguments at his table (CW4, 60-84), dismissing anyone who too much disrupts either; Morus takes Raphael by

the hand at the end of each book to go in to a meal (CW4, 108/26, 244/27-28); the interlocutors in *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* leave the "little table" of their discussion in Book I for the dinner table and then retire to the garden in Book II (as again in Book IV) for further talk (CW6, 35/24, 185-87, 344-45). This collocation of the table, the discourse, the food, and even the garden is thus more than scene-painting for verisimilitude: it is an iconic representation of an ideal human condition. In the eucharistic controversies, the icon is radically revalued: the food, the discourse, and the table are reimaged sacramentally; and the garden is no longer Eden but Gethsemane. In these works, the landscape of Plato's dialogues gives way to that of the Gospels, and the *Answer to a Poisoned Book*, with its metaphorical and iconic freighting, becomes a necessary introduction to the opening of *De Tristitia* (1535), which begins with Jesus and the apostles leaving the Last Supper to go to Mount Olivet.¹⁷ Ultimately, as the priest and faithful at the altar reenact the saving mystery of the eucharist, so also do More and his readers: the metaphorical equation proposed in this work links all together in this mystery.

In *Answer to a Poisoned Book*, the equation of eucharistic sustenance and reading -- a less exalted but still sustaining intellectual diet -- is worked out through the "poisoned book" metaphor of the title, implying a transitive extension to reading and verbal discourse, an extension worked out more concretely in the preface. Thomas More charted the progress of heresy very succinctly, linking it specifically to the decay of ordinary civility: formerly it was a mark of "every good man ... that heresy would he no man suffer to talk at his table, but would both rebuke it and detect it too" (CW11, 4/11-13); latterly, people talked at will, despite apostolic prohibition (CW11, 4-5), and their idle talk promoted "such a vain curious mind" (CW 11, 6/7-8) that the heretical books found a wider audience -- the books, that is, arose from the minds of those inclined to but not yet corrupted by heresy (CW11, 6). Finally, therefore, the market for heretical books developed from those without the disciplined habit of reading ideally pictured in the earlier humanist works.

Thus, both the methodical redundancy of *The Confutation* and the outpouring of More's polemical works emerged from and

embodied his recognition of -- and capitulation to -- a concept of audience radically different from that with which he began his career. This new concept expressed a cultural change in literacy and in the size and character of the literate public, even if (as H.S. Bennett indicates) the reading public was below the 60% of the population that can be inferred from the *Apology* (CW9, 13/17-24).¹⁸ As the commonwealth of letters expanded, More could no longer assume or represent within the text an audience that shared his cultural expectations of artfulness in the service of truth. The confrontation with heresy was the major force effecting this change. In the polemics against Luther, More hypothesized the dangers of heresy when it was extended through literacy; in the polemics against Tyndale and other English reformers, he faced the danger head-on and -- in retrospect -- unsuccessfully. During his imprisonment, More gave up polemic for religious and consolatory works that nevertheless show his awareness of the fundamentally dangerous nature of language. In *A Dialogue of Comfort* (1534), where he returned again to dialogue as a structural device, face-to-face conversation paradoxically symbolizes both the answer to heretical reading and a yearning for that earlier time when reading had not yet constituted itself as a pervasive social and religious threat.¹⁹

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NOTES

1. Quotations from the Yale edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More (15 volumes, 1963-), whether More's text or editorial commentaries, are hereafter cited by the Yale system ("CW[volume], [page] / [line]," with the editor's or commentator's name noted as necessary. In the case of the Latin works, citations for the Latin text only are given; the parallel

English passage is on the facing odd-numbered page in the Yale volume. Quotations from the letters, unless otherwise noted, come from *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Elizabeth Frances Rogers (Princeton, 1947) and are cited by letter and line number. All quotations from old-spelling English texts have been silently modernized.

2. See Philip E. Hallett's translation of the *Vita Mori* from *Tres Thomae* in *The Life and Illustrious Martyrdom of Sir Thomas More*, ed. E.E. Reynolds (New York: Fordham UP, 1966), 100. Margaret More Roper's education has been studied at length but to various conclusions by Peter Iver Kaufman → "'Absolute Margaret': Margaret More Roper and 'Well Learned Men,'" *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 20 (1989), 443-56, and the many authorities he cites there. Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth Century Europe* (Harvard UP, 1986), esp. ch. 2, 29-57, give Kaufman's argument a broader cultural perspective in the period; they discuss Margaret Roper's education briefly (56).

3. Philip E. Hallett's English translation is cited from *St. Thomas More: Selected Letters*, ed. Elizabeth Frances Rogers (Yale UP, 1961), 109. Other translations from the *Selected Letters* are cited parenthetically as "Hallett."

4. Trans. Leicester Bradner and Charles A. Lynch, *Latin Poems, CW3, Part II* (1984), 279.

5. William Nelson, *Fact or Fiction: The Dilemma of the Renaissance Storyteller* (Harvard UP, 1973). In earlier versions of this essay, I wrote at length about More's "ambivalence" toward reading and thus echoed those recent critics (whether of More or of his contemporaries) for whom such ambivalence is a central doctrine. A mind capable of the precise, specific qualifications of response that appear in the letters to the children, however, seems not to be ambivalent at all, unless the capability to tally up so exactly the intermixed benefits and liabilities of a human activity is by some oddity of usage a kind of "ambivalence."

6. *Motives of Eloquence* (Yale UP, 1976), 3-25.

7. Richard S. Sylvester, "Introduction," *The History of King Richard III*, CW2 (1963), xxxiii.

8. "Introduction," *In Defense of Humanism ... With a New Text of Historia Richardi Tertii*, CW15 (1986), clii. For further discussion of declamation as an important influence on dialogue form, see Elizabeth McCutcheon, "My Dear Peter": *The Ars Poetica and Hermeneutics for More's Utopia*, (Angers: Moreana, 1983), and Andrew M. McLean, "Thomas More's *Utopia* as Dialogue and City Encomium," in *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Guelpherbytani*, ed. Stella P. Revard, Fidel Rädle and Mario A. Di Cesare (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 1988), 91-97.

9. *Biographical Truth: The Representation of Historical Persons in Tudor-Stuart Writing* (Yale UP, 1984), 75-109.

10. John M. Headley, "Introduction," *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523), CW5 (1969), 713-831; Louis A. Schuster, "Sir Thomas More, Polemicist of Christendom," *Forum*, 9 (1980), 42-45, and "Thomas More's Polemical Career, 1523-1533," *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (1523-33), CW8 (1973), 1135-1268.

11. Gilbert Schrenk, "Profils d'humanistes: Budé, Erasme, More, d'après leur correspondance (1500-1530)," *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature*, 21.2 (1983), 105-119.

12. Dale B. Billingsley, "The Messenger and the Reader in Thomas More's *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*," SEL, 24 (1984), 5-22.

13. Barnes's treatise, ed. James P. Lusardi, is reprinted as Appendix A in CW8, 1037-52.

14. *Thomas More: History and Providence* (New Haven, 1983), 147-205. Fox's very powerful argument is persuasive as long as one grants the "inner experience which shook him to the core of his being" (127). The present alternative explanation, although still hypothesizing an internal process, accepts external crisis as sufficient motive without suggesting an internal crisis of faith or personality.

15. In addition to Fox, see J.B. Trapp, "Thomas More as Controversialist," *The Apology*, CW9 (1979), xvii-lxxxviii; John Guy, "Introduction," *The Debellation of Salem and Bizance* (1533), CW10 (1987), xvii-xcviii; Richard Marius, *Thomas More: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 325-50, 386-417; Louis L. Martz, "Thomas More: The Search for the Inner Man," *Moreana* 100 (1989), 397-417, and *Thomas More: The Search for the Inner Man* (Yale UP, 1990), 31-51.

16. Ed. Stephen Merriam Foley and Clarence H. Miller, CW 11 (1985).

17. Ed. Clarence H. Miller, CW 14 (1976), 3/3-5.

18. *English Books and Readers, 1485-1557*, second ed. (Cambridge UP, 1969), 28. Bennett's chapter on literacy (19-29) hazards no numerical estimate of the reading public but argues that the variety of printed material available, both in subject matter and in cost, indicates a broad readership that cut across social class and economic power. Roger Chartier, in "The Practical Impact of Writing," *A History of Private Life, III: Passions of the Renaissance*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1989), 111-59, specifies the wide variety of changes that increasing literacy and access to texts introduced in

European culture; on the effect of Protestant doctrine on the spread of literacy, see esp. 119-20, 130-34.

19. Dale B. Billingsley, " 'Imagination' in *A Dialogue of Comfort*," *Moreana* 74 (June 1982), 51-63.

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Un très long article de David Carlson, "Erasmus, Revision, and the British Library Manuscript Egerton 1651" (199-232), décrit un manuscrit de dix feuilles qui date du premier séjour d'Érasme en Angleterre. P.S. Allen l'a utilisé en 1922 dans son édition des épîtres d'Érasme, et une note nous apprend que l'auteur a soumis à Harry Vredeveld le fruit de sa propre recherche -- ainsi l'on est sûr que compte en est tenu dans l'édition des *Poèmes* d'Érasme en traduction anglaise, que Vredeveld vient de publier en collaboration avec Clarence Miller. Carlson rappelle qu'Érasme eût sans doute quitté l'île dès 1499, n'eût été le décret du 20 août 1499 interdisant toute sortie sans autorisation royale. A ce décret nous devons le trimestre qu'Érasme passa à Oxford.

G.M.

