

# ART HUMANITIES: PRIMARY SOURCE READER

## Section 5: Bruegel

### Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 20

#### **Karel Van Mander, "Pieter Bruegel of Bruegel"**

Karel van Mander (1548-1606) accomplished for Netherlandish painters of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries what Vasari had done for Italian artists when he published the *Schilder-boeck*, or *Book of Painters* in 1604. The text consists of six sections that reflect both van Mander's background as a painter and draughtsman and his understanding of the nature and purpose of Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*. He includes accounts of the lives of ancient Greek painters, painters of the Italian Renaissance (which he translated and adapted directly from Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*), and most importantly, of Northern European painters, as well as tracts on the theory of painting and an interpretation of the symbolism in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The selection below from the biography of Bruegel is drawn from van Mander's treatment of Netherlandish artists which discussed the careers of nearly 200 individuals, thereby setting important groundwork for the history of Dutch and German painting. In this passage, the author adopts Vasari's manner of prose, glorifying the artist's talents and evaluating the technical merits of his work. He also refers particularly to Bruegel's interest in peasant life, reflected in such works as *The Peasant Wedding*, and his travels across the Alps, which influenced the character of the landscapes he often included in his compositions, as in *Christ Carrying the Cross*. (Introduction by Christine Sciacca)

#### EXCERPT FROM DUTCH AND FLEMISH PAINTERS, 1604

Nature was wonderfully felicitous in her choice when, in an obscure village in Brabant, she selected the gifted and witty Pieter Breughel to paint her and her peasants, and to contribute to the everlasting fame of painting in the Netherlands.

Pieter was born not far from Breda, in a village called Breughel, a name he took for himself and his descendants. He learned his craft from Pieter Koeck van Aelst, whose daughter he later married. He often carried her in his arms when she was little, and when he lived with Aelst. From Aelst he went to work with Jeroon Kock, and then he went to France and to Italy.

He practiced a good deal in the manner of Jeroon van den Bosch, and made many similar, weird scenes and drolleries. For this reason, he was often called Pier den Droll. Indeed, there are very few works from his hand that the beholder can look at seriously, without laughing. However stiff, serious, and morose, one may be, one cannot help laughing, or smiling.

Pieter painted many pictures from life on his journey, so that it was said of him, that while he visited the Alps, he had swallowed all the mountains and cliffs, and, upon coming home, he had spit them forth upon his canvas and panels; so remarkably was he able to follow these and other works of nature.

He settled down, selecting Antwerp as his residence, and there he entered the guild of the painters in 1551. He did a great amount of work for a merchant by the name of Hans Franckert, a noble and worthy man who liked to chat with Breughel. He was with him every day. With this Franckert, Breughel often went on trips among the peasants, to their weddings and fairs. The two dressed like

peasants, brought presents like the other guests, and acted as if they belonged to the families or acquaintances of the bride or of the groom. Here Breughel delighted in observing the manners of the peasants in eating, drinking, dancing, jumping, making love, and engaging in various drolleries, all of which he knew how to copy in color very comically and skillfully, and equally well with water-color and oils; for he was exceptionally skilled in both processes. He knew well the characteristics of the peasant men and women of the Kampine and elsewhere. He knew how to dress them naturally and how to portray their rural, uncouth bearing while dancing, walking, standing, or moving in different ways. He was astonishingly sure of his composition and drew most ably and beautifully with the pen. He made many little sketches from nature.

As long as he remained in Antwerp, he lived with a servant girl whom indeed he would have married, had it not been for the unfortunate fact that she used to lie all the time, which was repugnant to his love of truth. He made a contract or agreement with her that he would check off all her lies upon a stick. For this purpose he took a fairly long one, and he said that if the stick became full of notches in the course of time it would prevent the wedding. This happened before much time had elapsed.

At last, since Pieter Koeck's widow had finally settled in Brussels, he fell in love with her daughter, whom, as we have said, he had often carried in his arms, and he married her; but her mother requested that Breughel leave Antwerp, and make his residence in Brussels, in order that he might get his former girl out of sight and out of mind. This also happened.

Breughel was a quiet and able man who did not talk much, but was jovial in company, and he loved to frighten people, often his own pupils, with all kinds of ghostly sounds and pranks that he played.

Some of Breughel's most significant works are at present in the possession of the Emperor; for example, a great Tower of Babel with many beautiful details. One can look into it from above. Furthermore, there is a smaller representation of the same subject. There are, besides, two Carrying of the Cross paintings, very natural-looking, always with a few drolleries in them somewhere. Again, there is a Massacre of the Innocents, in which there is much to see that is done true to life, of which I have spoken elsewhere—a whole family, for instance, begging for the life of a peasant child whom a murderous soldier has seized in order to kill it; the grief and the swooning of the mother and other events appear realistic.

Finally, there is a Conversion of St Paul, also representing some very beautiful cliffs. It would be very hard to enumerate every thing Breughel did—fantasies, representations of hell, peasant scenes, and many other things.

He painted a Temptation of Christ, in which one looks down from above, as from the Alps, upon cities and country borne up by clouds, through the rents in which one looks out.

He made a Dulle Griet, who is stealing something to take to Hell, and who wears a vacant stare and is strangely dressed. I believe this and other pictures are also in the possession of the Emperor.

Sr Herman Pilgrims, art lover in Amsterdam, has a Peasant Wedding done in oils, which is very beautiful. The faces and bare limbs of the peasants in it are yellow and brown as if they were sunburned, and they show ugly skins, different from those of city dwellers.

He painted a picture in which Lent and Carnival are fighting; another, where all kinds of remedies are used against death; and one with all kinds of children at games; and innumerable other little, clever things.

Two canvases painted in water-color can be seen in the home of Sr Willem Jacobsz., who lives near the new church in Amsterdam. They represent a Peasant Wedding, where many amusing episodes together with the true character of the peasant may be seen. Among the group giving presents to the bride, is an old peasant who has his little money bag hanging around his neck, and who is busy counting the gold into his hand. These are unusual paintings.

Shortly before his death, the townsmen of Brussels commanded Breughel to represent in pictures the digging of the canal from Brussels to Antwerp. These pictures were not completed because of his death.

Many of Breughel's strange compositions and comical subjects one may see in his copper engravings. But he has made many skilful and beautiful drawings; he supplied them with inscriptions

which, at the time, were too biting and too sharp, and which he had burned by his wife during his last illness, because of remorse, or fear that most disagreeable consequences might grow out of them. In his will he left his wife a picture of A Magpie on a Gallows. By the magpie, he meant the gossips whom he delivered to the gallows. In addition, he had painted a picture in which Truth triumphs. According to his own statement, this was the best thing painted by him.

He left behind him two sons who were able painters. One was called Pieter and studied with Gillis van Coninxloo and painted portraits from life; the other, Jan, learned water-color painting from his grandmother, the mother of Pieter van Aelst. Jan studied the process of oil-painting with a certain Pieter Goe-kindt, who had many beautiful things in his house. He went to Cologne and then to Italy, where he made a great name as a landscape painter; he also made other subjects, very small in size, a type of work in which he excelled. Lamponius speaks of Pieter Breughel in the following lines, with the question:

Who may be this other Jeroon Bos,  
Who came in this world again,  
Who pictures to us the fantastic conceptions of his own master again,  
Who is most able with the brush,  
Who is even surpassing his master?  
Ye, Pieter, ye work in the artistic style of your old master.  
But you rise still higher:  
For reason that you select  
Pleasant topics to laugh about.  
Through these you deserve great merit  
And with your master you must be praised for being a great artist.

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## Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 21

### *Abraham Ortelius*

#### "TRIBUTE TO PIETER BRUEGEL," c. 1570

That Pieter Bruegel was the most perfect painter of his age, no one -- unless jealous or envious or ignorant of his art-- could ever deny. But that he was snatched away from us in the flower of his age -- I cannot say whether I should attribute it to Death, who thought Bruegel was more advanced in age (sc. than he actually was) when he observed the distinguished skill of his art, or whether I should attribute it to Nature who feared that she would be held up in contempt because of his artistic and talented skills at imitation.

A grieving Abraham Ortelius consecrates this to the memory of his friend.

When asked which of his predecessors he followed, the painter Eupompos is said to have declared that he followed nature herself, not an artist. This agrees with our Bruegel, whose pictures I would not really call *artificiosae*, but rather natural. Indeed, I would not call him the best of painters, but rather the very nature of painters. So I think that he is worthy of being followed by all.

This Bruegel painted many things which are not able to be painted, as Pany says of Apelles. In all his works more is always to be understood than he actually painted, as the same writer says of Timanthes.

As Eunapius says in his commentary on Iamblichus, painters who paint pretty young people and wish to add some charm and grace of their own completely destroy the image presented to them, and stray both from the exemplar set before them and from true form. From this fault our Bruegel was free.

"Tribute to Bruegel" by Abraham Ortelius is reprinted from *The Prints of Pieter Bruegel* by David Freedberg. Copyright ©1989 Tokyo Shimbun.

## Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 22

### ***Ovid, The Fall of Icarus***

Born in 43 BCE, Ovid was the most well regarded poet in Rome until 8 BCE when he was banished by the Emperor Augustus for unknown reasons. His most significant work is *The Metamorphoses*, which contains stories drawn from Greek mythology and Virgil's *Aeneid*, retold with ironic overtones and linked by the theme of transformation. The influence of Ovid's writing extended beyond the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, as it was embraced by medieval and Renaissance writers as well as artists. The irony of human vainglory and audacity is the central goal of Ovid's rendition of the story of the Fall of Icarus. Daedalus, the great artist and craftsman, was famous for creating, amongst other things, the labyrinth to entrap the Minotaur on the island of Crete. He eventually helped Theseus to kill the beast, thereby enraging King Minos, who, in turn, imprisoned Daedalus in his own maze. The story that follows recounts his attempt to escape from exile with his son, Icarus. In keeping with his critical view of the shortfalls of human nature, Bruegel deals with this story in his painting of the same name, *The Fall of Icarus*. (Introduction by Christine Sciacca)

#### EXCERPT FROM THE METAMORPHOSES, C. 1 A.D.

Meanwhile Daedalus, tired of Crete and of his long absence from home, was filled with longing for his own country, but he was shut in by the sea. Then he said: "The king may block my way by land or across the ocean, but the sky, surely, is open, and that is how we shall go. Minos may possess all the rest, but he does not possess the air." With these words, he set his mind to sciences never explored before, and altered the laws of nature. He laid down a row of feathers, beginning with tiny ones, and gradually increasing their length, so that the edge seemed to slope upwards. In the same way, the pipe which shepherds used to play is built up from reeds, each slightly longer than the last. Then he fastened the feathers together in the middle with thread, and at the bottom with wax; when he had arranged them in this way, he bent them round into a gentle curve, to look like real birds' wings. His son Icarus stood beside him, and, not knowing that the materials he was handling were to endanger his life, laughingly captured the feathers which blew away in the wind, or softened the yellow wax with his thumb, and by his pranks hindered the marvellous work on which his father was engaged.

When Daedalus had put the finishing touches to his invention, he raised himself into the air, balancing his body on his two wings, and there he hovered, moving his feathers up and down. Then he prepared his son to fly too. "I warn you, Icarus," he said, "you must follow a course midway between earth and heaven, in case the sun should scorch your feathers, if you go too high, or the water make them heavy if you are too low. Fly halfway between the two. And pay no attention to the stars, to Bootes, or Helice or Orion with his drawn sword: take me as your guide, and follow me!"

While he was giving Icarus these instructions on how to fly, Daedalus was at the same time fastening the novel wings on his son's shoulders. As he worked and talked the old man's cheeks were wet with tears, and his fatherly affection made his hands tremble. He kissed his son, whom he was never to kiss again: then, raising himself on his wings, flew in front, showing anxious concern for his companion, just like a bird who has brought her tender fledglings out of their nest in the treetops, and launched them into the air. He urged Icarus to follow close, and instructed him in the art that was to be his ruin, moving his own wings and keeping a watchful eye on those of his son behind him. Some fisher, perhaps, plying his quivering rod, some shepherd leaning on his staff, or a peasant bent over his plough handle caught sight of them as they flew past and stood stock still in astonishment, believing that these creatures who could fly through the air must be gods.

Now Juno's sacred isle of Samos lay on the left, Delos and Paros were already behind them, and Lebinthus was on their right hand, along with Calymne, rich in honey, when the boy Icarus began to enjoy the thrill of swooping boldly through the air. Drawn on by his eagerness for the open sky, he left his guide and soared upwards, till he came too close to the blazing sun, and it softened the sweet-smelling wax that bound his wings together. The wax melted. Icarus moved his bare arms up and down, but without their feathers they had no purchase on the air. Even as his lips were crying his father's name, they were swallowed up in the deep blue waters which are called after him. The unhappy father, a father no longer, cried out: "Icarus!" "Icarus," he called. "Where are you? Where am I to look for you?" As he was still calling "Icarus" he saw the feathers on the water, and cursed his inventive skill. He laid his son to rest in a tomb, and the land took its name from that of the boy who was buried there.

"The Fall of Icarus & Daphne and Apollo" is reprinted from *Metamorphoses* by Ovid, Mary M. Innes, trans., Copyright ©1955 Penguin Books.

## Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 23

### *Francisco da Hollanda*

#### EXCERPT FROM **FOUR DIALOGUES ON PAINTING, 1548**

What do you advise, Messer Lattanzio? then said the Marchesa: Shall I put a question to Michael Angelo about painting? Perhaps, in order to prove to me that great men are reasonable and not churlish, he will not be so severe with me as he is with others?

And Lattanzio answered: For the sake of your Excellency Michael Angelo will surely constrain himself to express here what he rightly keeps hidden from the world.

And Michael Angelo said: Your Excellency has only to ask for something that I can give and it is yours.

And smiling she said: I much wish to know, since we are on the subject, what Flemish painting may be and whom it pleases, for it seems to me more devout than that in the Italian manner.

Flemish painting, slowly answered the painter, will, generally speaking, Signora, please the devout better than any painting of Italy, which will never cause him to shed a tear, whereas that of Flanders will cause him to shed many; and that not through the vigour and goodness of the painting but owing to the goodness of the devout person. It will appeal to women, especially to the very old and the very young, and also to monks and nuns and to certain noblemen who have no sense of true harmony. In Flanders they paint with a view to external exactness or such things as may cheer you and of which you cannot speak ill, as for example saints and prophets. They paint stuffs and masonry, the green grass of the fields, the shadow of trees, and rivers and bridges, which they call landscapes, with many figures on this side and many figures on that. And all this, though it pleases some persons, is done without reason or art, without symmetry or proportion, without skilful choice or boldness and, finally, without substance or vigour. Nevertheless there are countries where they paint worse than in Flanders. And I do not speak so ill of Flemish painting because it is all bad but because it attempts to do so many things well (each one of which would suffice for greatness) that it does none well.

Excerpts from *Four Dialogues on Painting* by Francisco da Hollanda, Aubrey F. G. Bell, trans., Copyright ©1928 Oxford University Press.

## Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 24

### *Desiderius Erasmus*

Erasmus (1466-1536) began his career as a Dutch writer and humanist with studies at the cathedral school of Utrecht, and at the Augustinian monastery of Steyn. He was eventually ordained a priest in 1486, but he abandoned the clerical life for more secular scholarly pursuits. He traveled to England in 1499, and again in 1505, where he became acquainted with the English writer and statesman, Sir Thomas More, who encouraged his study of biblical texts. Subsequently, he became counselor to various high-ranking officials, including Charles V. While staying with More in England in 1509 he wrote his most famous work, *The Praise of Folly*, of which forty editions were published during the author's lifetime. His text follows the pattern of literature popular in Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries that dealt with the theme of foolish human behavior, such as Sebastian Brandt's *Das Narrenschiff*, or *Ship of Fools*. Here Erasmus speaks in the guise of Folly, personified as a woman, who illustrates the foibles of society by describing and praising herself and the power she has to dictate human behavior. He employed this vehicle to criticize the church and the papacy, as well as royalty and superstitious behavior, among other faults. While Erasmus's dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church was in keeping with the ideals of what was to become the Protestant Reformation, he disapproved of Martin Luther's means of distributing his message through printed pamphlets, as well as the violence of some Protestant zealots. Contemporary Netherlandish artists also frequently dealt with the theme of human folly, most notably Pieter Bruegel, as in his painting, *Netherlandish Proverbs*. (Introduction by Christine Sciacca)

#### **EXCERPTS FROM MORIAE ENCOMIUM OR THE PRAISE OF FOLLY, 1511**

#### **AN ORATION OF FEIGNED MATTER, SPOKEN BY FOLLY IN HER OWN PERSON**

At what rate soever the World talks of me (for I am not ignorant what an ill report Folly hath got, even amongst the most Foolish), yet that I am that She, that onely She, whose Deity recreates both gods and men, even this is a sufficient Argument, that I no sooner stepped up to speak to this full Assembly, than all your faces put on a kind of new and unwonted pleasantness. So suddenly have you clear'd your brows, and with so frolique and hearty a laughter given me your applause, that in troth, as many of you as I behold on every side of me, seem to me no less than Homer's gods drunk with Nectar and Nepenthe; whereas before, ye sat as lumpish and pensive as if ye had come from consulting an Oracle. And as it usually happens when the Sun begins to shew his Beams, or when after a sharp Winter the Spring breathes afresh on the Earth, all things immediately get a new face, new colour, and recover as it were a certain kind of youth again: in like manner, by but beholding me, ye have in an instant gotten another kind of Countenance; and so what the otherwise great Rhetoricians with their tedious and long-studied Orations can hardly effect, to wit, to remove the trouble of the Mind, I have done it at once, with my single look.

But if ye ask me why I appear before you in this strange dress, be pleas'd to lend me your ears, and I'll tell you; not those ears, I mean, ye carry to Church, but abroad with ye, such as ye are wont to prick up to Jugglers, Fools and Buffons, and such as our Friend Midas once gave to Pan. For I am dispos'd awhile to play the Sophister with ye; not of their sort who nowadays buzle Young-men's heads with certain empty notions and curious trifles, yet teach them nothing but a more than Womanish obstinacy of scolding: but I'll imitate those Antients, who, that they might the better avoid that infamous

appellation of Sophi or Wise, chose rather to call'd Sophisters. Their business was to celebrate the Praises of the gods and valiant men. And the like Encomium shall ye hear from me, but neither of Hercules nor Solon, but mine own dear Self, that is to say, Folly Nor do I esteem those Wise-men a rush, that call it a foolish and insolent thing to praise one's self. Be it as foolish as they would make it, so they confess it proper: and what can be more, than that Folly be her own Trumpet? For who can set me out better than my self, unless perhaps I could be better known to another than to my self? Though yet I think it somewhat more modest than the general practice of our Nobles and Wise men, who, throwing away all shame, hire some flattering Orator or Lying Poet, from whose mouth they may hear their praises, that is to say meer lyes; and yet, composing themselves with a seeming modesty, spread out their Peacock's plumes and erect their Crests, whilst this impudent Flatterer equals a man of nothing to the gods, and proposes him as an absolute pattern of all Virtue that's wholly a stranger to 't, sets out a pittiful Jay in other's Feathers, washes the Blackmoor white, and lastly swells a Gnat to an Elephant. In short, I will follow that old Proverb that says, 'He may lawfully praise himself that lives far from Neighbours.' Though, by the way, I cannot but wonder at the ingratitude, shall I say, or negligence of Men, who, notwithstanding they honour me in the first place and are willing enough to confess my bounty, yet not one of them for these so many ages has there been, who in some thankful Oration has set out the praises of Folly; when yet there has not wanted them, whose elaborate endeavours have extol'd Tyrants, Agues, Flyes, Baldness and such other Pests of Nature, to their own loss of both time and sleep. And now ye shall hear from me a plain extemporary speech, but so much the truer. Nor would I have ye think it like the rest of Orators, made for the Ostentation of Wit; for these, as ye know, when they have been beating their heads some thirty years about an Oration, and at last perhaps produce somewhat that was never their own, shall yet swear they compos'd it in three dayes, and that too for diversion: whereas I ever lik't it best to speak whatever came first out.

But let none of ye expect from me, that after the manner of Rhetoricians I should go about to Define what I am, much less use any Division; for I hold it equally unlucky to circumscribe her whose Deity is universal, or make the least Division in that Worship about which every thing is so generally agree'd. Or to what purpose, think ye, should I describe my self, when I am here present before ye, and ye behold me speaking? For I am, as ye see, that true and onely giver of wealth, whom the Greeks call Mwpía, the Latines Stultitia, and our plain English Folly. Or what need was there to have said so much, as if my very looks were not sufficient to inform ye who I am? Or as if any man, mistaking me for Wisedome, could not at first sight convince himself by my face, the true index of my mind? I am no Counterfeit, nor do I carry one thing in my looks and another in my breast. No, I am in every respect so like my self, that neither can they dissemble me, who arrogate to themselves the appearance and title of Wisemen, and walk like Asses in Scarlehoods; though after all their hypocrisie Midas's ears will discover their Master. A most ingrateful generation of men, that, when they are wholly given up to my Party, are yet publicly asham'd of the name, as taking it for a reproach; for which cause, since in truth they are ☐ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Fools, and yet would appear to the World to be Wisemen and Thales's, wee'll ev'n call 'em ☐ ☐☐☐☐☐☐us Wise-fools.

Nor will it be amiss also to imitate the Rhetoricians of our times, who think themselves in a manner Gods, if like Horse-leeches they can but appear to be double-tongu'd; and believe they have done a mighty act if in their Latin Orations they can but shuffle-in some ends of Greek, like Mosaick-work, though altogether by head and shoulders and less to the purpose. And if they want hard words, they run over some Worm-eaten Manuscript, and pick out half a Dozen of the most old and absolute to confound their Reader, believing, no doubt, that they that understand their meaning will like it the better, and they that do not, will admire it the more by how much the lesse they understand it. Nor is this way of ours of admiring what seems most Forreign without it's particular grace; for if there happen to be any more ambitious than others, they may give their applause with a smile, and, like the Asse, shake their ears, that they may be thought to understand more than the rest of their neighbours.

But to come to the purpose: I have giv'n ye my name; but what Epithet shall I adde? What but that of the most Foolish? For by what properer name can so great a goddess as Folly be known to her Disciples? And because it is not alike known to all from what stock I am sprung, with the Muses' good leave I'll do my endeavour to satisfie you. But yet neither the first Chaos, Orcus, Saturn, or Japhet, nor any of those thred-bare, musty Gods, were my Father, but Plutus, Riches; that only he, that is, in spight of Hesiod, Homer, nay and Jupiter himself, *Divum Pater atque Hominum Rex*, the Father of Gods and Men; at whose single beck, as heretofore, so at present, all things Sacred and Prophane are turn'd topsie turvy. According to whose Pleasure War, Peace, Empire, Counsels, Judgements, Assemblies, Wedlocks, Bargains, Leagues, Laws, Arts, all things Light or Serious-I want breath-in short, all the publick and private business of mankind, is govern'd; without whose help all that Herd of Gods of the Poets' making, and those few of the better sort of the rest, either would not be at all, or if they were, they would be but such as live at home and keep a poor house to themselves. And to whomsoever hee's an Enemy, 'its not Pallas her self that can befriend him: as on the contrary he whom he favours may lead Jupiter and his Thunder in a string. This is my father and in him I glory Nor did he produce me from his brain, as Jupiter that sowre and ill-look'd Pallas; but of that lovely Nymph call'd Youth, the most beautiful and galliard of all the rest. Nor was I, like that limping Black-smith, begot in the sad and irksome bonds of Matrimony. Yet, mistake me not, 'twas not that blind and decrepit Plutus in Aristophanes that got me, but such as he was in his full strength and pride of youth; and not that onely, but at such a time when he had been well heated with Nectar, of which he had, at one of the Banquets of the Gods, taken a dose extraordinary.

And as to the place of my birth, forasmuch as nowadays that is look'd upon as a main point of Nobility, it was neither, like Apollo's, in the floating Delos, nor Venus-like on the rolling Sea, nor in any of blind Homer's as blind Caves: but in the fortunate Islands, where all things grew without plowing or sowing; where neither Labour, nor Old-age, nor Disease, was ever heard of; and in whose fields neither Daffadil, Mallows, Onyons, Beans, and such contemptible things would ever grow; but, on the contrary, Rue, Angelica, Buglosse, Marjoram, Trefoiles, Roses, Violets, Lillies, and all the Gardens of Adonis, invite both your sight and your smelling. And being thus born, I did not begin the world, as other Children are wont, with crying; but streight perch'd up and smil'd on my mother. Nor do I envy to the great Jupiter the Goat, his Nurse, forasmuch as I was suckled by two jolly Nymphs, to wit, Drunkenness, the daughter of Bacchus, and Ignorance, of Pan. And as for such my companions and followers as ye perceive about me, if you have a mind to know who they are, ye are not like to be the wiser for me, unlesse it be in Greek: This here, which you observe with that proud cast of her eye, is *ἑαυτοῦ φιλία*, Self-love; She with the smiling countenance, that is ever and anon clapping her hands, is *ἑπαιτήσιμος*, Flattery; She that looks as if she were half asleep, is *ἄμνησις*, Oblivion; She that sits leaning on both Elbows with her hands clutch'd together, is *ἄσκησις*, Laziness; She with the Garland on her head, and that smells so strong of perfumes, is *ἡδονή*, Pleasure; She with those staring eyes, moving here and there, *ἄνοια*, is Madness; She with the smooth Skin and full pamper'd body is, *ἄσχητος*, Wantonness; and, as to the two Gods that ye see with them, the one is *ἄκρασία*, Intemperance, the other *ἄνεσις* Dead Sleep. These, I say, are my household Servants, and by their faithful Counsels I have subjected all things to my Dominion, and erected an empire over Emperors themselves. Thus have ye had my Lineage, Education, and Companions.

Do but observe our grim Philosophers that are perpetually beating their brains on knotty Subjects, and for the most part you'll find 'em grown old before they are scarce young. And whence is it, but that their continual and restless thoughts insensibly prey upon their spirits, and dry up their Radical Moisture? Whereas, on the contrary, my fat fools are as plump and round as a Westphalian Hogg, and never sensible of old age, unless perhaps, as sometimes it rarely happens, they come to be infected with Wisdom; so hard a thing it is for a man to be happy in all things. And to this purpose is that no

small testimony of the Proverb, that sayes, 'Folly is the onely thing that keeps Youth at a stay, and Old age afar off'; as it is verifi'd in the Brabanders, of whom there goes this common saying, 'That Age, which is wont to render other Men wiser, makes them the greater Fools.' And yet there is scarce any Nation of a more jocund converse, or that is less sensible of the misery of Old age, than they are. And to these, as in scituation, so for manner of living, come nearest my friends the Hollanders. And why should I not call them mine, since they are so diligent observers of me that they are commonly call'd by my name? – of which they are so far from being asham'd, they rather pride themselves in 't. Let the foolish world then be packing and seek out Medeas, Circes, Venuses, Auroras and I know not what other Fountains of restoring Youth. I am sure I am the onely person that both can, and have made it good. 'Tis I alone that have that wonderful juice with which Memnon's daughter prolong'd the youth of her Grandfather Tithon. I am that Venus by whose favour Phaon became so young again that Sappho fell in love with him. Mine are those Herbs, if yet there be any such, mine those Charms, and mine that Fountain, that not onely restores departed Youth but, which is more desirable, preserves it perpetual. And if ye all subscribe to this Opinion, that nothing is better than Youth, or more execrable than Age, I conceive you cannot but see how much ye are indebted to me, that have retain'd so great a good, and shut out so great an evil.

In fine, I am so necessary to the making of all society and manner of the both delightful and lasting, that neither would the people long endure their Governors, nor the Servant his Master, nor the Master his Footman, nor the Scholar his Tutor, nor one friend another, nor the Wife her Husband, nor the Userer the Borrower, nor a Souldier his Commander, nor one Companion another, unlesse all of them had their interchangeable failings, one while flattering, other while prudently conniving, and generally sweetning one another with some small relish of Folly.

Again, take notice of this no contemptible blessing which Nature hath giv'n fools, that they are the only plain, honest men and such as speak truth. And what is more commendable than truth? for though that Proverb of Alcibiades in Plato attributes Truth to Drunkards and Children, yet the praise of it is particularly mine, even from the testimony of Euripides; amongst whose other things there is extant that his honourable saying concerning us, 'A fool speaks foolish things.' For whatever a fool has in his heart, he both shews it in his looks and expresses it in his discourse; while the wise men's are those two Tongues which the same Euripides mentions, whereof the one speaks truth, the other what they judge most seasonable for the occasion. These are they that 'turn black into white,' blow hot and cold with the same breath, and carry a far different meaning in their Breast from what they feign with their Tongue. Yet in the midst of all their prosperity, Princes in this respect seem to me most unfortunate, because, having no one to tell them truth, they are forc't to receive flatterers for friends.

And next these come those call themselves the Religious and Monks; most false in both Titles, when both a great part of 'em are farthest from Religion, and no men swarm thicker in all places than themselves. Nor can I think of any thing that could be more miserable, did not I support 'em so many several wayes. For whereas all men detest 'em to that height, that they take it for ill luck to meet one of 'em by chance, yet such is their happiness that they flatter themselves. For first, they reckon it one of the main Points of Piety if they are so illiterate that they can't so much as read. And then when they run over their Offices, which they carry about 'em, rather by tale than understanding, they believe the Gods more than ordinarily pleas'd with their braying. And some there are among 'em that put off their trumperies at vast rates yet roave up and down for the bread they eat; nay, there is scarce an Inne, Waggon, or Ship into which they intrude not, to the no small damage of the Commonwealth of Beggars. And yet, like pleasant fellows, with all this Vileness, Ignorance, Rudeness and Impudence, they represent to us, for so they call it, the lives of the Apostles. Yet what is more pleasant than that they do all things by Rule and, as it were, a kind of Mathematicks, the least swerving from which were a crime beyond forgiveness:-as, how many knots their shooes must be ti'd with, of what colour every thing is, what distinction of habits, of what stufte made, how many straws broad their

Girdles and of what fashion, how many bushels wide their Cowle, how many fingers long their Hair, and how many hours sleep; which exact equality, how disproportionable it is, among such variety of bodies and tempers, who is there that does not perceive it? And yet by reason of these fooleries they not onely set slight by others, but each different Order, men otherwise professing Apostolical Charity, despise one another, and for the different wearing of a habit, or that 'tis of darker colour, they put all things in combustion. And amongst these there are some so rigidly Religious that their upper Garment is hair-Cloth, their inner of the finest Linnen; and, on the contrary, others wear Linnen without, and hair next their skins. Others, agen, are, as affraid to touch mony, as poyson, and yet neither forbear Wine nor dallying with Women. In a word, 'tis their onely care that none of 'em come near one another in their manner of living, nor do they endeavour how they may be like Christ, but how they may differ among themselves.

In brief, go whither ye will, among Prelates, Princes, Judges, Magistrates, Friends, Enemies, from highest to lowest, and you'll find all things done by money; which, as a Wise man contemns it, so it takes a special care not to come near him. What shall I say? There is no measure or end of my praises, and yet 'tis fit my Oration have an end. And therefore I'll ev'n break off; and yet, before I do it, 'twill not be amiss if I briefly shew ye that there has not been wanting even great Authours that have made me famous, both by their Writings and Actions, lest perhaps otherwise I may seem to have foolishly pleas'd my self only, or that the Lawyers charge me that I have prov'd nothing. After their example, therefore, will I alleadge my proofs, that is to say, nothing to the point.

And first, every man allows this Proverb, 'That where a man wants matter, he may best frame some.' And to this purpose is that Verse which we teach Children, "Tis the greatest wisdome to know when and where to counterfeit the Fool.' And now judge your selves what an excellent thing this Folly is, whose very counterfeit and semblance only has got such praise from the Learned. But more candidly does that fat plump 'Epicurean bacon-hogg,' Horace, for so he calls himself, bid us 'mingle our purposes with Folly'; and whereas he adds the word brevem, short, perhaps to help out the Verse, he might as well have let it alone; and agen, 'tis a pleasant thing to play the fool in the right season'; and in another place, he had rather 'be accounted a dottrel and sot, than to be wise and made mouths at.' And Telemachus in Homer, whom the Poet praises so much, is now and then called **GREEK TEXT** Fool and by the same name, as if there were some good fortune in 't, are the Tragedians wont to call Boyes and Striplings. And what does that sacred book of Iliads contain, but a kind of counter-scuffle between foolish Kings and foolish People? Besides, how absolute is that praise that Cicero gives of it! 'All things are full of fools.' For who does not know that every good, the more diffusive it is, by so much the better it is?

Excerpts from *The Praise of Folly* are by Desiderius Erasmus, translated by John Wilson, Clarendon Press, 1913.