

Radical Carnivalesque of Religion in Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly*

Sarbani Chaudhury (University of Kalyani, India)

Abstract This article delineates the conceptual, thematic and structural links of Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly* to popular culture and the dynamics of this incorporation that subsumes moral righteousness in riotous wonder (Gordon 121) and lends an anarchic quality to the text despite authorial attempts to inscribe it within the framework of orthodox Christian scepticism. The inability of the 'professed' programme to contain and channel the means adopted for its propagation generates a hectic spill-over and highlights the possibility of unearthing repressed implications gravitating towards an acknowledgement of conflict and social dissonance. It also forwards a general critique of social, moral and intellectual hierarchy and privilege through the use of parodic travesty in the first two sections of the book. More significant is the paradoxical insistence on material life divested from the ideological referentials stipulated by established religion in the first part and the climactic evocation of a popular festive non-hierarchical Christian existence as the ultimate manifestation of collective desire. Taken together, Folly's triptych – celebration, castigation, and renunciation – exemplifies a deliberate foregrounding of the faultlines of the accepted schema and of proposing a positive, plebeian antidote. The complex use of laughter, in both its conciliatory and destructive role, as the principal mode of expression (and response) further problematises the issue. Contrary to the common assumption of an irreducible dichotomy between laughter and philosophy, «laughter is recuperated as philosophy» in *The Praise of Folly* and constitutes «a way of knowing the truth about the world that is accessible neither to solemn academic discourse nor to the reduced genres of personal satire» (Michael D. Bristol). The article illustrates how the evocation of grotesque, popular, festive laughter by Folly's 'learned' ignorance and her self-referential self-ridicule is, in effect, a 'carnivalesque' of religion that seems to be the only mode of attaining truth.

Sung by a bastard in an alien land with the ostensible purpose of self-amusement, *The Praise of Folly*,¹ written by Desiderius Erasmus in 1509, highlights the fact that the impulse towards an overall re-structuring of religio-social framework pre-dates the Reformation, which is only the foremost among numerous projections of this desire for change. Erasmus's advocacy of the twin movement towards *ad fontes* and *ad res* – to the sources and to reality – reiterates the Petrarchan conjunction between classical learning and Christian praxis: «The arts, moral philosophy, rhetoric are ac-

1 The ensuing discussion limits itself to English translations of *The Praise of Folly* and does not incorporate Greek and Latin editions.

quired to this end – that we may understand Christ and celebrate his glory» (Erasmus [1703-1707] 1962, col. 1026B). The Platonic-Plautine inclinations of early English humanists echo this faith in the Christian purpose of classical texts. Together they focus on the need to return to the roots – the ancients and the Bible – to wrest true piety from empty ceremonies. The prospect of new management in France (Francis I), Spain (Charles I) and England (Henry VIII) at the turn of the century seems to auger well for the Erasmian vision of a Christian Europe cleansed of old demons. The suppressed excitement and fervent anticipation that permeates *Moria*, as Erasmus prefers to call his work, is reflected in the heady mix of contraries in its thematic and stylistic features – mock-classical declamation, satire, Epicurean philosophising, Christian precept *et al.* The delay in publication (1511, from Paris not England) and the deliberate suppression of authorial involvement in the process are perhaps symptomatic of the subsequent disillusionment in both spheres but that is not our immediate concern here.

The very history of survival of Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* can be summed up by the paradox 'lasting trivia'. Controversial and infamous in its own time, *Folly's* encomium has elicited wide-ranging responses in subsequent ages as well – from the «spiritual dynamite» of Victorian Froude and a damp, journalistic «theological squib» for the twentieth century critic of *Times Literary Supplement* («Book Review» 1936, p. 570; the critic quotes J.A. Froude's opinion in his article) to «an extended stand-up comedy routine» in more recent times (Wolfe 2004-2005, n.p.). The contrariness of the work reflects the personality of its creator. Erasmus with his consistent denunciation of meaningless rituals, superstitions and hypocritical religiosity is indeed partially responsible for «laying the egg that Luther hatched» (Dods 1891, p. 2). But then he turns upon the chicken and reiterates his orthodox yet naively optimistic dream of a refurbished Christendom without a break from the Catholic Church. His tenacious clinging to Latin as the sole medium of expression runs contrary to his persistent advocacy of the vernacular Bible. Labelled «an ornament to this realm» by Ascham's England, Erasmus is also the self-proclaimed vulgariser writing for «boys and blockheads» (Nichols 1904, epistles 555, 415, n.p.). Dods's description of «a man not of the very first order» (Dods 1891, p. 13) contrasts with Himelick's praise of Erasmus's «sense of human dignity» which makes him reject all «overwhelming simplicities of conviction» (Himelick 1970, p. 24). M.M. Phillips's astute observation on the polymerous personality of Erasmus is perhaps closest to the mark:

The Erasmus who worshipped learning and proclaimed the right of reason to its own judgement, and yet feared and despised intellectual subtlety, is the same Erasmus as we find calling the Cambridge carriers and the Channel boatmen by hardest of names, refusing to use any vernacular, and generally drawing his cloak round him with a fastidious gesture, and yet

writing in the tenderest and most understanding vein about the lives of girls, boys, mothers and simple men. (Phillips 1949, p. 91)

The tortuous illogicality of *The Praise of Folly* which yet manages to transmit an atypical cogency deeper than many rational, cohesive texts echoes the non-syncretic, protean quality of its author.

Himelick's exposition of the complex nuances of Renaissance and Reformation and the dogmatic orthodoxy of the latter simultaneously highlights the dislocated, lonely voice of Erasmus. His preference for «the equable middle register of emotional pitch», and the ability to see several sides to an issue could not align itself with the either/or fanaticism demanded by both the Inquisition and the Reformation. A man who could challenge Lutheran principles and equally earnestly intercede for Luther's life, could criticise Catholic practices and yet uphold the institution, was an incomprehensible misfit in an age looking for «the thrill of absolutes» (Himelick 1970, pp. 18, 26, 32-33). A more acute sense of dislocation permeates the modern critical response to *The Praise of Folly*. Douglas's dismissive appraisal of its «fundamental incoherence» and unconvincing aesthetics (Douglas 1970, p. 96), Kaiser's insistence on including it within an established literary format (Kaiser 1964, p. 49), or Rebhorn's anxiety to dispel the notion of a «flawed masterpiece» by emphasising the «dialectical and dynamic unity and meaning» of the text betray a fundamental discomfort regarding the discursive discourse of the text (Rebhorn 1974, pp. 463-464).

The difficulty owes partly to the ability of ironic discourse to generate fiction. Speaking of *Fiction and Folly in Early Modern Literature*, Duprat points to Folly and fiction's shared «capacity of creating alternative representations» which enables them to re-figure «the world depicted by reason or history» and also their shared paradoxical structure which lends a volatile instability to «their speech acts, which deny, suspend, or do not seriously guarantee the truth of their statements» (Duprat 2008, p. 141). This facility of generating fiction whose veracity is always somewhat suspect allows Folly to continually shift her ground with reference to both content and form. As Erasmus states in his reply to Martin Dorp in 1516, *Moria* is the comic complement - *sub specie lusus* - of *Enchiridion* and therefore, equally serious in purpose (Miller 1979, p. 143). But it is also a game indulged in by a sick man as Erasmus vouches in his prefatory letter to More: «I was simply playing with pawns for my own amusement» (Miller 1979, p. 3). While propagandist intent jostles with private diversionary aspect throughout the work, the subject shifts from human lapses to crime to sublimation in a divine Other beyond the mortal Self. Children, women, drunkards, aged people, bachelors, couples, lawyers, scholars, priests, princes, Christians - the whole sea of humanity is compressed within a survey that changes its perspective faster than a chameleon. The moods convey tolerance, irony, anger, laughter, derision, patience, irritation, exasperation,

deception, joy, gravity *et al.* Rebhorn reads in Folly's encomium, a grand «fabula» of life shifting from a «comedy» built on illusory hope and self-delusion, to the «tragedy» of horrifying reality and finally to the ultimate realm of «unreasoning joy» that transports one beyond the impermanence of comedy and the pain of tragedy (Rebhorn 1974, p. 469). Even this most extensive formulation of the three-part structure traditionally associated with *The Praise of Folly* cannot contextualise the protean variety offered in Folly's encomium.

Containment is truly a major problem of the text and extends well beyond the matter of content. Quintilian and Athonian paradigms sit uncomfortably over Folly and seem like stiff, dowdy overcoats deliberately preventing the eyes from feasting on a flamboyant, riotous array of colours and designs (Hudson 1946, pp. 129-142; Kaiser 1964, p. 49). 'Paradoxia epidemica' only answers for the classical orientation of the text. The medieval tradition of folly and estate satire; classical irony; mock encomium; Greek, Latin and vernacular proverbs; anti-clerical satire; utopian critique; salutary advice and sheer exuberance of language come in a now Epicurean, now macabre, now jocose nonsense. The inability of the **professed** programme to contain and channel the means adopted for its elucidation generates the impression of a hectic spill-over and highlights the possibility of unearthing **repressed** meanings embedded in the text. These repressed implications gravitate towards an acknowledgement of conflict and social dissonance and a general critique of social, moral and intellectual hierarchy through the use of parodic travesty in the first two sections of the book. Taken together, Folly's triptych – celebration, castigation, and renunciation – exemplifies a deliberate design of foregrounding the faultlines of the accepted schema and of proposing a positive, plebeian antidote to it. The assumption of radical intent ingrained in *The Praise of Folly* is substantiated when posited alongside the 1515 *Adagia* where the compilation of four thousand proverbs is not only headed by a proverb with a levelling impetus – «Between friends all is common» – but also vested with the classical authority of Pythagoras, to whom the proverb is attributed, and Plato, who promote the idea of a shared collective existence. According to Eden this «signals the protreptic aim» of the entire *Adagia* collection that calls for «*communitas* in the radical sense» and «invites its readers to join a community where all things are held in common (*commune*) including material property and, more to the point, what we would call intellectual property» (Eden 1998, p. 407).

However, the Erasmian passage that Eden cites for corroboration makes no mention of «intellectual property» focusing instead on concrete material concerns and their Christian lineage:

Not only was Pythagoras the author of this saying, but he also instituted a kind of sharing of life and property in this way, **the very thing Christ wants to happen among Christians**. For all those who were admitted

by Pythagoras into that well-known band who followed his instruction would give to the common fund whatever money and family property they possessed. (Philips 1982, p. 30; my emphasis)

The positive insistence on material bodily principle contrary to the ideological stipulations of the established order is also instanced in the first part of *The Praise of Folly* but the climactic evocation of a festive non-hierarchical sublimation as the ultimate Christian goal adds a carnivalesque quality to collective apotheosis. According to Gordon,

The nonsense reaches its culmination at the close of the speech in Folly's paean to an ecstasy the meaning of which is unfathomable and where the self loses its psychological awareness in the Other. At this moment of climax, sense vanishes within the infinite, **the moral is lost in wonder, and righteousness is overwhelmed by the riotous.** (Gordon 1970, p. 121; my emphasis)

The subsuming of moral righteousness in riotous wonder lends an anarchic quality to the text that transforms the very definition of **true** Christianity by drawing it outside all institutional practices.

The carnivalisation of religion is reinforced by Folly's complex use of laughter as the principal mode of expression and response. Erasmus's definition of his work as «this *jeu d'esprit* of mine» in his prefatory letter to More (Miller 1979, p. 2), aligns it with the medieval topos of *ridendo dicere verum* [to speak truth with laughter].² Laughter's instinctive association with low life, its incompatibility with serious philosophical statements, dictates the ambience of *The Praise of Folly*. But Erasmus's dual deployment of laughter both as a disruptive and a conciliatory force deepens the text's ambiguities. Juvenalian satire bears down harshly upon theologians, kings and courtiers, and spiritual overlords. Thus the most «deadly enemies» of the church are, «impious popes, who allow Christ to fade away in silence, who bind him with mercenary laws, who defile him with forced interpretations, who murder him with the pestilent wickedness of their lives» (Miller 1979, p. 113).

On the obverse side, her conciliatory hand works against severance of relations: «the everyday life of married couples», for instance, «is supported and sustained by flattery, laughing things off, taking it easy, being deceived, pretending things are not as they are» – all of which are Folly's domain (Miller 1979, p. 33). This Janus-faced laughter defies fixity of location. Even more unique is that Erasmian laughter, at least in *The Praise of Folly*, defies its natural associations. Bristol illustrates how, contrary

2 See Curtius ([1953] 1990) and Barolsky (1978) for further elaboration.

to the common assumption of an irreducible dichotomy between laughter and philosophy, «laughter is recuperated as philosophy» in *The Praise of Folly*: «Laughter [...] built into the fictional mise-en-scène of Folly's oration» constitutes «a way of knowing the truth about the world that is accessible neither to solemn academic discourse nor to the reduced genres of personal satire» (Bristol 1985, p. 130). For Donald Watson, the evocation of grotesque, popular, festive laughter by Folly's learned **ignorance** and her self-referential self-ridicule is, in effect, a **carnivalisation** of literature that indicates the plebeian connection of this work (Watson 1979). In this context it must be noted that among the early humanists located in England, Erasmus was the only self-acclaimed vulgariser writing in the popular mode (albeit in Latin) and that two of these works - *The Praise of Folly* and *Colloquies* - were completed during his sojourn in England. The third, *Adagia*, was a life-long involvement.

However, to impute a «radical social theory», which completely rejects the basic sixteenth-century norm of the «Chain of Being», to the work and its author, as Margo Todd does, would be too ambitious and sweeping a generalisation (Todd 1987, p. 185). Any exploration of the work's topicality, implication and impact, major and minor concerns and stylistic devices will reveal that this extremely sophisticated production of Renaissance humanism has proved more disturbing than placatory. But its volatility owes more to the constant oscillation of perspective, and shifting, unreliable narrators rather than to a conscious inherent politics. Established order and dominant ideology are subverted obliquely through the eulogising of impermanence, flux, instability, inconclusive conclusions, **becoming** rather than **being**. It leaves us with a lasting impression of an invigorating shake-up of a moribund edifice. Moreover, the nature and object of destabilisation are modified by the factors of timing, reception and topicality. With *The Praise of Folly* in particular, even the early history of its reception indicates that «literature is [...] a troubling and indeed troublesome institution» (Bristol 1985, p. 13). The structuring of his narrative as a **re-counting** and not an **invention** by Erasmus in order to minimise authorial responsibility indicates his apprehension of adverse response from powerful quarters. But he had not foreseen the fundamental political and religious upheavals that would make his book explosively subversive and force retraction.³

The context of reception is crucial to the present interrogation which engages primarily with the translated version. The appearance of the first English translation made by Thomas Chaloner in 1549 during an intensely Protestant phase of English administration under another youthful sovereign, Edward VI, underscores this **Catholic** text's accessibility to Reformist

3 Erasmus's letter to Martin Dorp, May 1515, disavows any frivolous work written before that date, «I would not want anything that I have written, even in jest, to detract from Christian piety in any way whatsoever» (Miller 1979, p. 161).

interpretations. The appropriating intent of the translator is evident in his prefatory letter to the readers, where he speaks of bestowing an «englisshe liuery vpon this latine boke» (Chaloner's «Preface», in Miller [1549] 1965, p. 3). Chaloner's negotiation of the original text operates at multiple levels. Vernacularising aims at transcending the limits of elite reception and appealing to a wider audience. Erasmus's foregrounding of Christ and of religion as a **state of mind** as opposed to external conformity, signals the potential for **Protestant** popularisation. However, the radicalism implicit in the complete breakdown of hierarchy celebrated by the text is beyond the scope of the Anglican **re-formation** of Christianity. Chaloner's emphasis on the status of the translator («knight») and his covert appeal to the gentle reader are attempts at controlling the subversive dynamism of the text (Chaloner's «Preface», in Miller 1965, p. 3). Chaloner admits that he is «moued to englisshe it, to the end that meane men of baser wittes and condicion, myght haue a maner of comfort and satisfaction in theimselfes [...] without aspyryng to things aboue theyr reache» (Chaloner's «Preface», in Miller [1549] 1965, pp. 4-5). Yet the language and content of the translated product combine to defy such restrictive popularisation in the interests of the new power elite. Chaloner's rendition thus occupies «a wonderfully ambiguous social space» which, as Baker elucidates, is epitomised by the metaphor of «englisshe liuerey»: «Chaloner's bestowal of an 'englisshe liuerey' identifies his translation with the trappings of both feudal service and urban corporations. It will become clear that Chaloner uses Folie to reinforce the necessity of a hierarchy, but, as a livery, the vernacular could also blur social distinctions» (Baker 1996, p. 5). This duality is manifested in Chaloner's rendition despite his recourse to Erasmus's revised version of *The Praise of Folly* which tries «to make the paradox of Christian folly more guarded and less open to the charge of blasphemy» (Miller's «Preface», in Miller [1549] 1965, p. xiv).

The positive creed of «**carnal** peace and quiet» – which generates similar discomfiture in Luther and for which he upbraids Erasmus (Packer, Robinson trans. 1957, p. 92; my emphasis) – is best exemplified by the material utopia foregrounded in the opening section of *The Praise of Folly*. The disordered topsy-turvydom of Folly's domain is denoted by her alleviation of human suffering through the promotion of Self Love, Flattery, Forgetfulness, Laziness, Pleasure, Madness, Luxury, Rowdiness and Sleep (Miller 1979, p. 17): the very elements traditionally associated with chaos and confusion. Unlike More and Bacon's industrious and disciplined utopias, Erasmus celebrates a more ancient but thriving, hedonistic and popular notion of happy existence that aligns itself with the fourteenth-century satire, *Land of Cockayne*, the pictorial depiction of surfeit by Heironimo Bosch in his images of gluttony, Gonzalo's earthly heaven in *The Tempest*,

the Rabelaisian universe⁴ and the dream vision of Chaplin and his sweetheart in *Modern Times*. A.L. Morton, distinguishing between the elite and plebeian conceptions of ideal life, exemplifies the essential contradiction between the two. The former envisages a structured, cohesive hierarchic state free from want and exploitation and based on honest labour. The latter, engendered by an everyday experience of starvation, drudgery and expropriation, dreams of an unstructured state-less life of indolence and wasteful abundance (Morton 1968, pp. 15-45). Folly's creed of self-indulgent delusion, unrestrained pleasure and the undercurrent of compassion for the lowly, the weak and the unempowered – women, children, aged, drunkards, cuckolds, fools – reiterates the plebeian connection of these sophisticated Latin trivia.

The non-conformist ambience of Folly's world is witnessed particularly in the representation of the women.⁵ An important aspect of the re-allocation of power and the general shaping of identities during the Renaissance is the fashioning of secular male selfhood. Attempts to reconceptualise 'manhood' generates an uneasy dynamics of power in which sexual anxiety vis-à-vis women is a predominant factor. The region-centric construct of the nation, for example, is deeply etched with sexual-political tensions during the Elizabethan rule in England. The humanist concern for **beleaguered masculine identity** negotiates the sexual threat by either denying the female presence, as in Erasmus's own pedagogical writings like *On Civility in Boys* (1530), or by projecting a conciliatory model of woman's subordination mutually agreed to by the sexes (Castiglione's *Il Cortigiano*), or by adopting the orthodox Christian notion of woman as an intransigent, personification of wantonness to be kept on a tight leash (Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man*). *The Praise of Folly* accepts the essentially negative function of women but then goes on to «create a strange model of substitute power: the power of the women to create the conditions [...] [of their] own subordination» which becomes an oblique signifier of «a failing of masculinity» (Corelli 1990, pp. 246-247, 244). Erasmus's gender construct restricts woman to the private domestic sphere where she epitomises folly and her very being is defined by the demands of the opposite sex: she exists to «season and sweeten the sourness of the masculine mind with her folly» (Miller 1979, p. 28). Innately foolish, vain, capricious, and preoccupied with physical beauty, self-delusion and conjugal deceit, she is associated in every way with the lowly, trivial and reprehensible, and yet this woman-representation focuses on the subversive **material consequences** of the man-woman encounter. The weaker sex is able to exploit the du-

4 Kaiser (1964) is one of the most forceful exponents of the link between Erasmus, Rabelais and Shakespeare as 'the Praisers of Folly'.

5 The following discussion of Erasmus and gender is inspired by Corelli (1990).

ality and ambivalence of the gendered power structure precisely because of her lowly attributes. Her beauty and seeming youth are validated solely as objects of male desire yet they allow her to usurp the male function of domination and «tyrannise [...] over tyrants». She is further empowered to affect the superior male in an adverse, reductionary manner, alter his «inward cogitation» and re-fashion him in her own image: «consider how childishly men talk, how frivolously they act when they have decided to indulge in the pleasure to be found in women» (Miller 1979, pp. 29-30).

The figuration of pre-nuptial and post-marital unfaithfulness conforms to the traditional notion of intrinsic female deviancy. But the prolonging of marital bliss through successful feminine deception also denotes the inability of masculine authority to contain female sexuality (Miller 1979, p. 33). It is interesting to note that the sage whose exhumed body bore traces of syphilis⁶ identifies sexuality as the major source of female empowerment: even old women «are as hot as bitches in heat» (Miller 1979, p. 48). Her material body is the object that subjects her to the male exercise of power and simultaneously enables her to transgress, contest and invert male superiority. The issue of gender ascendancy is deliberately problematised by refusing to locate **real** and **virtual** power within a single hierarchic model. Female prerogative is, in fact, surreptitiously and obliquely extended beyond the domestic to the macropolitical arena first by reiterating Folly's female identity in the context of woman's foolishness and secondly by encapsulating the history of human generation in the foolish and sexual act of copulation (Miller 1979, pp. 18-19).

Just as the female body is an important determinant of the woman's position in society, the physical body is the site where Folly successfully combats her adversaries: Reason and Intellect. Reason is limited «to the **narrow confines** of the head» whereas the rest of the body is given over to passion. Besides, against «solitary reason» are set «two most fierce tyrants»: «anger, which occupies **the citadel and very fountain head of life**, the heart; and passionate desire, which holds wide sway over the rest, **all the way down to the genitals**» (Miller 1979, p. 28; my emphasis). The spatial primacy of emotion over intellect within the human body determines Folly's ubiquitous sway over human relations (most of which are affective) and by extension, over social formations. Inverting the common association between unreason and chaos, Folly asserts that all social formations and individual relationships cohere because of her benign interception:

In short, without me no companionship among friends, no blending of lives in marriage can be either pleasant or stable. The people would no

6 Correlli refers to the team of German pathologists who actually conducted the investigation (Corelli 1990, pp. 244, 260 n. 12).

longer tolerate their prince, nor the master his servant, nor the maid-servant her mistress, nor the teacher his pupil, nor one friend another, nor the wife her husband, nor the landlord his tenant, nor a soldier his barracks-buddy, nor one messmate another, if in their relations with one another they did not sometimes err, sometimes flatter, sometimes wisely overlook things, sometimes soothe themselves with the sweet salve of folly. (Miller 1979, pp. 33-34)

The typical Erasmian blend of radical perception and conciliatory strategies of containment is observed in all its complexity in the above instance. Most individual and collective affiliations are viewed as hierarchic power relations involving an irrevocable conflict of interest between the authorised and the subordinate and the disruptive potentiality of an immediate confrontational intercourse. Folly's participation neither resolves the contradictions nor creates real conditions for the removal of exploitation. Instead, her placatory strategies involving error, deflection, flattery, self-praise, deceit, amnesia and a myriad of other diversionary tactics merely reinforce the status quo. She connives with the established order to invoke appeasement, but the method of reducing to absurdity all serious action undermines the hegemony of that order. The complex ambivalence of Folly's interventionary role is exemplified by the fact that her positive participation as a healer of social friction is conservative in nature but hinges upon a kind of negative radicalism. The indiscriminate application of the strategy of ridicule subverts impartially both the forces **for** and **against** social transformation. While indeterminacy per se cannot be deemed progressive it definitely associates itself with the dual aspect of carnival laughter which seems to permeate the treatment of human foibles in *The Praise of Folly*.

Conciliatory laughter, aimed at marginalising social tension, also of necessity accommodates an awareness of social unease. When amity and cohesion are achieved through inversion, as in the **fools' paradise** created by Folly, there is the suggestion of a levelling out of hierarchic distinctions. The claim to privileges on the basis of moral and intellectual superiority in the divine and human order is exposed as farcical imposture. The Olympians engage in unrestrained Bacchanalian revelry after forcibly ejecting Momus, who «was always rudely disturbing the happiness of the gods with his wisdom» (Miller 1979, pp. 26-27). All «ivory-tower philosophers», from Socrates and Theophrastus to Plato, and specially philosopher-kings such as Brutus, Cicero, Demosthenes and Marcus Aurelius, are declared totally «inept in absolutely all the activities of human life» (Miller 1979, pp. 36-39). Nestor's drunken stupidity is life-saving while the superior intellect of a Diogenes or a Chiron pushes them to suicide (Miller 1979, pp. 21, 47-48, 51). «Theologians starve, physicians freeze, astronomers are ridiculed, logicians are ignored» while the Stoic wise-man purged of emotions is actu-

ally a dehumanised figure (Miller 1979, pp. 45-46). The standard against which superior gods and men are judged and found wanting is a **material** one, not a spiritual or a transcendental one. This inversion of the evaluating apparatus and the exaltation of human frailty, weakness and deficiency as essentially regenerative, dispels the fear and intimidation generated by official imposition. Folly's assertion of an abundant, material, Epicurean existence is in effect a Latinate, classically sophisticated version of carnival laughter's endorsement of a joyous irreverent, popular utopia, every aspect of which subverts the structures of monolithic officialdom. Bakhtin notes that such laughter creates a sense of freedom in the midst of restrictions especially during the Renaissance, «A boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal cultures» (Bakhtin [1965] 1984, p. 4.)

Huizinga and Kaiser's contemptuous dismissal of the significance of the procession of fools in authority in the middle section of *The Praise of Folly* is an arrogant and arbitrary denial of the history of critical response to the text down the ages.⁷ Ironically, it is also an admission (although by omission) of the persistent volatility of this section and its stubborn refusal to yield any 'deeper' meaning. Scholars have noted the 'souring of the grin' as it were in this section with the shift in focus from folly to vices, from sympathetic tolerance to scathing invectives.⁸ Dorps' anxiety over the «great disturbance» caused by *Moria* even among the «most devoted admirers» of Erasmus (Nichols 1904, epistle 304, n.p.) presents us with a cue to the hostile contemporary response to *The Praise of Folly* that intensifies with the burgeoning Reformation and is still capable of generating irate reaction as with Tangelder: «It is a cold-blooded, deliberate attempt to discredit the church, and its satire and stinging comment on ecclesiastical conditions are not intended as a healing medicine but a deadly poisons (Tangelder 2009, n.p.). The theological speculations ridiculed by Folly might raise a ripple of laughter from the modern reader at their exaggerated absurdity but Miller demonstrates the «wicked accuracy» of Erasmus acerbic volleys by tracing them to specific theologians except for the transubstantiation of Christ into a devil, a cucumber or a piece of flint (Miller 1974, pp. 499-511).⁹ Peter Lombard, Bonaventure, Godefroid de Fontaine were variously involved in discussing how «original sin is transmitted to Adam's posterity», what time Christ took to be «fully formed in the Virgin's womb», whether Christ could have turned himself into a woman or an ass (Miller 1979, p. 88). Jean

7 Huizinga designates it as an «ordinary satire on human folly» while Kaiser dismisses it as a «simple satire that is mere invective» (Huizinga 1952, p. 74; Kaiser 1964, p. 50).

8 See Smith 1962 for a detailed history of responses to Erasmus' works in general and to *The Praise of Folly* in particular.

9 More detailed and specific instances are cited throughout Miller 1979.

Buridan, a teacher at the University of Paris in the 1590s, had raised the question whether «God the Father hates the Son» (Miller 1974, pp. 500-501). The citation of pertinent passages from Augustine and Gratian to demolish men who follow the letter rather than the spirit of the law, the ridiculing of Aquinas's diktat on worshipping the charcoal sketch of Christ, references to Innocent III and William Durandus's emblematic interpretation of ecclesiastical vestments to remind wayward bishops of their true duty (Miller 1979, pp. 90, 92, 110) infuriated Erasmus's enemies because «he knew where to look for the weak points in their invincible and irrefragable armor» (Miller 1974, p. 502).

The illusion of leisure-time amusement that Erasmus continuously claims for the work is stretched to its limits by homing in on specific targets even while discussing generalities. His aversion to merchants presented as perjurers, cheats, and usurers can be retraced to the traditional medieval denunciation of profiteers. But in their wake come «flattering friars who stand in awe of them and openly call them 'venerable' clearly for no other reason than to get a little share of their ill-gotten gains» (Miller 1979, p. 77) which points an accusing finger at Bernadino of Siena and Fransiscan Antoninus of Florence, who spent «much time and effort explaining how necessary and useful 'mercatio' is and under what circumstances profit may be taken from the exchange of goods or money» (Miller 1974, p. 503). The epithet «rickety old man» used to describe warmongering popes who reduce «all human affairs, laws, religion, peace, to utter chaos» alludes to the highly combative Pope Julius II (1503-1512), whom Erasmus attacks more extensively in *Pope Julius II Excluded from Heaven* written in 1513 and published in 1517 (Miller 1979, p. 114).

Unlike Dryden, or even Ben Jonson during the *Poetaster* controversy, Erasmus is not engaged in a game of one-upmanship with his detractors. The predominance of dead celebrities among those denounced sustains this assumption. Ironically, after establishing the need of role-playing to maintain the illusion of happiness, Erasmus's own mask of folly starts slipping and any doubts about his earnestness vanishes. The world-as-theatre *topos* also changes its context: the arena of make-believe is transformed to one of action where real participants will change the course of the narrative. Having delineated the characters and dreams of the common public, the self-appointed reformer moves on to classify the hindrances towards achieving the common good by pinpointing as accurately as possible the regions that require careful scrutiny and alteration. The specific citations - now of authorities, now of texts or individuals - are merely illustrative instances of a larger negative pattern that needs to be discarded for a healthy commonwealth.

Derisive laughter aimed at spiritual and secular governors is ill-fitted to the requisites of an encomium as Folly herself admits towards the end of this section. Although close to the destructive Juvenalian satire in tone, this sec-

tion also draws heavily upon the popular medieval literary tradition of estate satire to critique the perceived medieval vestiges of moribund scholasticism, theology and philosophy in his times as irrational superstition. Erasmus's conception of society as «a large complex, interrelated organism» is a great advance on the haphazard shapeless catalogue of different estates evidenced in contemporary complaint literatures like the enormously popular Brant's *Ship of Fools* identifying, according to Miller, only two broad categories, academic and social: the academics include «grammarians, poets, rhetoricians, writers of books, lawyers, dialecticians, philosophers, theologians, and monks» while the social class incorporates «kings, courtiers, bishops, cardinals, popes, and priests» (Miller 1974, pp. 503-504).

A slight modification of the Millerian model cited above would highlight how such simplified demarcation makes for a very special kind of estate satire. First, accepting the application of 'class' in a very loose sense, it would perhaps be more accurate to designate the second group of kings, courtiers etc. as a 'political' rather than a 'social' class responsible for the administration of the nation. Conventional estate satire considers all degrees of hierarchy and satirises the disparity between the ideal and the actual at every level tracing it primarily to the refusal to maintain one's degree. Erasmus's narrow focus limits itself to the **officially endorsed shapers** of collective destiny. The academics forge the human mind as instructors to intellect; conditioning the access to and utilisation of knowledge. And knowledge, according to the early humanists is the key to a new beginning, a new conscious fashioning of the self. Similarly, the **political** group monitors social and individual actions. Thus between them the two groups have complete control over *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* of all mankind.

Erasmus's confines the investigation of deviant behaviour to the empowered class perceiving a direct connection between the superiority of one's position and his potency as an evil doer: «As if the church had any more deadly enemies than impious popes, who allow Christ to fade away in silence, who bind him with mercenary laws, who defile him with forced interpretations, who murder him with the pestilent wickedness of their lives» (Miller 1979, p. 113). The princes whose «whole concern is to lead a soft life [...] raise thoroughbred horses [...] make a profit by selling appointments», usurp citizens' wealth unlawfully; courtiers who don the «symbols of virtue and wisdom» such as gold, gems and robes, but yield to others «the endeavor to put these qualities into actual practice»; bishops who have forgotten the implication of their title «namely, painstaking labor and concern» and are obsessed with «casting their nets for money»; cardinals who act as lords, not «ministers of spiritual gifts»; priests who «fight for their [...] tithes with sword, spear, stones, with every imaginable sort of armed force» – all denote authority, lay and clerical, whose individual aspirations and their manifestations run counter to their designated social responsibility (Miller 1979, pp. 109, 110, 114).

Erasmus's rhetoric of condemnation pre-figures closely the post-Reformation counsellors' voices in Henry VIII and Edward's time. Like Latimer, Brinkelow and Crowley, he is invoking the stewardship theory of possession and warning all transgressors that «they will soon have to give a most exact account» (Miller 1979, p. 110; see, for instance, Cowper 1874; Cowper 1872; Corrie 1884). His admonition is indistinguishable from theirs, except perhaps in intensity. This continuity between the medieval, humanist and post-Reformation critique of social order is occasioned by their sharing of the notion of primitive Christian community. More crucial, and reflected in Erasmus alone, is the awareness of the legitimising power of authority. The princes usurp citizens' wealth only after forwarding «suitable pretexts so that downright injustice may at least have some appearance of justice» (Miller 1979, p. 108). The battle-lust of spiritual leaders is hailed as religious «zeal, piety, fortitude» and the consequent «loss of much Christian blood» is valorised as «the very way to defend apostolically the church» (Miller 1979, pp. 113-114). For Erasmus, the gravest threat posed by the ruling elite is not the contravention of socio-political obligations for self-aggrandisement, but their manipulative re-construction of universally applicable laws of justice and morality, which distorts human values and perception beyond recognition. The official ordination of this antipodal frame of reference ensures a truly grotesque dance macabre that can culminate only in destructive chaos. In a way their powers supersede those of Folly: her oscillations foster the possibility of multiple alternatives and thus **expand** human knowledge whereas the monolithic imposition of warped signification by dominant authority obliterates the very memory of other choices.

The unusually narrow focus on the topmost level in the identification parade organised to expose the **enemy of the people** and the deliberate specificity of personal salvoes leaves no doubt among his contemporaries that Erasmus is bombarding in deadly earnest, the very citadel to which he belongs. Entrenched authorities were not entirely off the mark in interpreting Erasmus's emendatory zeal as demolishing mania. Full implementation of the Erasmian programme of rehabilitating Christianity would have sounded the death knell of all orthodox institutions. Neither Erasmus nor his adversaries are ignorant of the fact. Folly's materially powerful retinue is branded as criminal, not foolish and her response is shame and anger not tolerance. Critics marvelling at the perpetual wavering generated by Folly's encomiastic mode of articulation tend to ignore the stylistic volte-face in this section: fiction-making is displaced by proof-mongering, irony and paradox give way to diatribe and invectives, fixity replaces flux and ambivalence and «rhetorical *action* actually lead to a real *mimesis*» (Duprat 2008, p. 144) as Folly mounts an uncharacteristically clear-cut endorsement of a non-exploitative social structure. She herself acknowledges this wide divergence from the encomiastic scheme in a studiedly abrupt closure of the exposé of empowered deviants, underscoring the deployment

of satire through ostensible denial: «But it is no part of my present plan to rummage through the lives of popes and priests, **lest I should seem to be composing a satire rather than delivering an encomium**» (Miller 1979, p. 115; my emphasis). In a French sottie by Juleville, Mother Folly is entitled «la Reformeresse» and Enid Welsford invokes this association to describe Folly's denunciatory rather than accommodating stance in the «roll call of social types» (Welsford 1969, pp. 102, 104). This castigation, placed alongside the celebration of the *Weltanschauung* of the marginalised in the preceding section and the formula for a new empowerment that would transcend material inequalities in the concluding pages, brings the suppressed subversiveness of the text close to the surface and allows the incendiary potential of unlicensed carnival to take over.

The transition from brusque dismissal of the catalogue of rogues to eulogistic iteration of Christian life is mediated by an oft ignored passage on the folly-wisdom dialectic. Manetti, Pico and even Erasmus in his educational writings, express deep faith in man's self-fashioning abilities, specially his capability to metamorphose himself into a godlike superior being (Rebhorn 1974, p. 467). Although Erasmus foregrounds this **divine metamorphosis** against a Christian backdrop as in *Enchiridion* or *The Colloquies* - man will create himself in the image of God as per Christ's directives - it nevertheless implies a positive faith in human reason and intellect. Rebhorn cites Folly's derogatory comparison of wise men to Titans - «types of unregenerate pride in the Renaissance» - to illustrate the text's rejection of humanism's homocentric confidence (Rebhorn 1974, p. 467) but limits his investigation of Folly's anti-wisdom, pro-nature sallies to the first section of the book. However, the double condemnation of «the pursuit of wisdom as a sign of spiritual pride and as a threat to concord» (Rebhorn 1974, p. 467) runs throughout the book. Wisdom-seekers are «fools twice over» because they transgress their station and «aspire to the life of the immortal gods» and «wage war against Nature with the **engines of learning**» (Miller 1979, p. 54; my emphasis). Philautia or 'self-love' is considered Folly's closest ally as she activates the process of social bonding: from self-love begins the love for others (Miller 1979, pp. 34-35). But for those aspiring after knowledge, self-love culminates in self-pride and social distancing. Folly's main charge against the «died-in-the-wool stoic» is that he is «uniquely self-satisfied [...] thinks he alone is rich, he alone is healthy, regal» and proceeds to transform himself into «some new sort of divinity [...] completely deaf to all human emotions» (Miller 1979, pp. 44-46). Learning, knowledge and wisdom thus lead to a truncated metamorphosis, a monstrous divinity, responsible for social discord. As Folly's harangue further illustrates, self-endorsed superiority of the political elite yields similar results.

Dominant ideology and authority have always deployed **superior knowledge** for self-legitimation and to obscure the truth. Montaigne, in his essay

Of Experience, speaks of the distorting and refractory power of knowledge, «so many interpretations dissipate and confound all Truth» (Florio [1603] 1910, p. 325). Implicit in this anti-intellectual stand is the plebeians' experience-acquired distrust of wisdom as a tool of exploitative obfuscation as exemplified in Jack Cade's paranoia regarding lawyers (4.2.64-68) and educators (4.7.25-38) in Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI*. Folly echoes this popular apprehension almost verbatim when she quotes Saint Paul and Saint Bernard as her authorities for believing that «Lucifer established his throne [...] [on] the mountain of knowledge» (Miller 1979, pp. 130-131). Her final salvo against wisdom, in keeping with her earlier interpretation of the myth of the Golden Age and the Fall, is both a fundamental rejection of the humanist principle of self-elevation and an extension of the plebeian utopia based on «nature, artless and carefree» rather than civilisation (Miller 1979, pp. 118-121; see also pp. 47, 50-51). Sifting through classical and scriptural authority, Folly arrives at the double conclusion that «mankind is foolish, the title 'wise' applies to God alone» (Miller 1979, p. 130). There is still a paradoxical play between the worldly-wise and the foolish-wise but the essential concept is that of the Christian fool which bears an ancient legacy of being subjected to contradictory interpretations. On the one hand it has served to underscore a way of life that turns away from the material world for a transcendental, sublime reunion with the Holy Spirit. On the other hand the reiteration of the superior position of the have-nots in the spiritual hierarchy has been translated into a scriptural sanction for a just crusade for the material rights of the peripheralised. One has only to look back to the medieval peasant revolts or even to the series of Tudor rebellions that used religious symbols to validate their demands: the banner of five wounds adopted by the Pilgrimage of Grace is one obvious instance. This tension between radical and transcendental Christianity permeates the concluding section of *The Praise of Folly* which strives hard to accommodate the pluralities and marks no clear distinction between the material and the spiritual.

The ultimate solution forwarded by Folly therefore, is not a glorious apotheosis of «transcendent, mystical theolepsy» through the paradigm of the Christian fool as Kaiser or Rebhorn would have us believe (Kaiser 1964, pp. 89-90; Rebhorn 1974, p. 472). The tortuous route undertaken by Folly to first attack wisdom and reason to delineate **true** faith and then replace it with **true** religion may be traced to the humanist prioritisation of *ad fontes* - a return to the roots (Christians 1998) which, in this encomium, paradoxically undercuts the humanist belief in individual potential by propagating the **loss of self** as a necessary precondition for absolute self-realisation and aligns itself with the anti-authoritarian strand of medieval sectarian Christianity like that of the peasant leader John Ball who, as early as 1381, resorts to the scriptures to question social hierarchy, «We be all come from one father and one mother, Adam and Eve: whereby

can they [i.e. lords and noblemen] say or show that they be greater lords than we be?" (Anderson 1963, p. 161). The genuine dilemma of balancing the dual strategies of conversion implicit in the notion of the Christian fool – the radical and the transcendental – leads Erasmus to a carnivalesque concoction of millennial aspirations and plebeian leveling with Pauline scepticism and Anabaptist articulations to promote a highly unstable Christian apotheosis infused with apocalyptic volatility. Christ's condemnation of «savants who rely on their own wisdom», his unrelenting attack on scribes, Pharisees and doctors of law in the gospels as opposed to his befriending of the «ignorant populace [...] simple people, women and fishermen» (Miller 1979, pp. 128-129) is a dual reference to Christ's association with the foolish **and** the weak and his alienation from the empowered. The antagonism between divine and material power is made explicit through the emblematic use of animal associations. Christ chose to ride an ass when he could have mounted a lion, the Holy Spirit descended in the shape of a dove, not an eagle or a hawk (Miller 1979, p. 129). Folly's intentional highlighting of this calculated rejection of animals symbolising worldly authority and the primary characteristic of the Christian fools – «they throw away their possessions» (Miller 1979, p. 132) – could be read as a call for radical realignment of the existing social order with an **ideal** spiritual one.

Erasmus's advocacy of the special piety of the lowly and the ignorant is not without precedence. The basic impulse towards humility and material dis-empowerment embedded in the Christian narrative has been frequently recognised even by mainstream hermeneutics. Nevertheless such emphasis, particularly in a powerful climatic section following closely on the heels of a catalogue of corrupt authority, religious and secular, is not congruent with the hopes of magisterial reform with which Erasmus had landed in England in 1509 nor is it an acceptable alternative to either the Catholic or the Protestant camp. This is amply demonstrated by the contemporary reception of the text. It was posthumously placed on the Index of Prohibited Texts by the Catholics after the Council of Trent (1545-1563) (Rummel 2004, n.p.). Luther's marginalia in his 1532 edition of *Moriae Encomium* published from Basle, registers his disgust: Erasmus had at last «begot a daughter like himself» (Smith 1962, p. 127). That Erasmus himself recognises the dangerous implications of upholding the spiritual supremacy of the marginalised is exemplified by the sudden reversal in the last two pages of the book. Assertive Christian praxis is subsumed by the programme of self-realisation through self-abnegation, foregrounding the concept of Christian folly. Stockard traces the Erasmian formulation of Christian folly to «two distinct but closely related traditions»:

the neoplatonic tradition of mystical vision and the tradition of the «folly of the cross». On the one hand, according to the neoplatonic tradition,

those who experience a mystic vision of a spiritual reality appear foolish to the rest of the world. On the other hand, a central tenet of Christianity is that God bestows his love upon mankind regardless of merit, in an apparently unreasonable or foolish manner. (Stockard 1997, p. 1)

The quasi-platonic subjection of the body to the mind and the ensuing equation of highest mental happiness with the pursuit of the invisible diffuse the socially subversive connotations of the earlier formulation (Miller 1979, pp. 133-135). In the true spirit of Folly, the final empowerment is paradoxically the ultimate disempowerment: man will receive «unspeakable joy from that Highest Good» only when «he is **located outside himself**», when bodily life becomes «a mediation and a certain shadow» (Miller 1979, p. 137; my emphasis). Though the joyous, celebratory nature of man's conclusive metamorphoses is carnivalesque in ambience, it involves the «taming, extinguishing and burying» of all bodily passions (Miller 1979, p. 135) a far cry from the carnival's absolute celebration of the material bodily principle (Bakhtin [1965] 1984; Burke 1978).

The «folly of the Cross» entails the double folly of God who allows his Son to be sacrificed at the altar of human ignorance and of Christ who willingly lets himself be crucified for the deliverance of mankind. It is, as Stockard pronounces, «a gesture of love that is the ultimate foolish act» (Stockard 1997, p. 1) and privileges **Godly folly** as the supreme redemptive act. In exhorting all Christians to emulate this foolish madness Erasmus posits «a kind of vision in the face of which the limits imposed by everyday rationality are themselves only illusory» (Greenfield 1968, p. 244). The inverted relationship between worldly and Christian wisdom which enables Erasmus to develop the theme of Christian folly with such success, as Screech explains, is itself a response to the scepticism directed at it by older European religions:

Christian religion did seem particularly stupid and absurd to both the Jewish and the Gentile worlds in which it first appeared [...]. That God [...] should take man's nature upon himself [...] live really and truly as a man - flew in the face of all mature philosophical and religious assumptions. That this God-Man should then allow himself to be legally executed as a criminal by the properly constituted political authorities, seemed even more insane [...]. Defenders of the doctrines of the Incarnation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of the body in such a hostile intellectual atmosphere tended to insist on the 'foolishness' of what they preached. (Screech 1980, p. 19)

The conjoining of human and divine irrationality and their simultaneous celebration in *The Praise of Folly* is, however, associated with another strand of scepticism closer to home. Erasmus's foregrounding of the «folly

of the Cross» is expressly mediated by Saint Paul, «Even as Paul saith, he was made sin also, to cure and heal the sins of the world: to which sins yet it pleased him to minister none other medicines, than the *Folly of the cross*» (Miller 1979, p. 118). This connection is reiterated in his vexed questioning of the hostile reception to his work. Writing to Martin Drop in 1515 he almost defends himself by passing the buck to Paul of Tarsus, «My words offend the ears of the pious. Then why aren't they offended when Paul speaks of the 'folly of the cross'?» (Radice [1515] 1971, n.p.). «Throughout the latter portion of *The Praise of Folly*, a central tenet emerges in both the Pauline and Folly-esque pronouncements: the curious, almost symbiotic relationship between wisdom and folly» (Tipton 2008, p. 4). Although attracted to this «relativistic religiosity», Erasmus is often troubled by what Tipton terms as Paul's «schizophrenic spiritualism»:

When Folly celebrates Paul's foolishness, she is also mindful of Paul's reluctance to assume the moniker of 'fool' because of his overarching conviction to become the essential foundation for Christian theology. As Folly remarks, Paul wanted to carry forward this conviction «without his words sounding arrogant and offensive, so he made folly his pretext to forestall objections, writing 'I speak as a fool' because it is the privilege of fools to speak the truth without giving offence.» (Tipton 2008, pp. 1-2, 4)

Folly's panegyric of Pauline theology premised upon his declared self-deprecation as a prototypical fool of the Christian variety sits uneasily alongside her exposure of Paul's duplicitous twisting of the «Holy Writ, like a cheverel» to serve his ends as instanced in his elision of several words in an altar inscription during his trip to Athens to propagate the Christian faith (Wilson 2014, n.p.). Such «Janus-faced spiritual machinations» surmises Tipton, «places him squarely within the realm of scepticism» (Tipton 2008, p. 7). I would like to argue further that Paul's opportunistic dialectic of folly combined with Erasmus's own ambivalent response to it begs two vital questions: (a) whether Christian wisdom (or, by extrapolation folly) is largely unconscious or whether it is a consciously adopted stance facilitating proselytism, and (b) to what extent can Logos be disseminated through fallible human beings. The paradox of promoting Christian folly «not through its 'best spokesperson' Jesus, but rather through its loudest bullhorn, Paul» (Tipton 2008, p. 5) generates an even more fractious scepticism regarding the efficacy of the programme.

This self-defeating radicalism that despairs of finding a single truth even as it promotes it and the discomfiture resulting from the allocation of a **suddenly revealed** metaphysical ultimate to an encomiastic pattern fore-grounded in the material world is considerably alleviated if one views the final phase of Folly's oration as a consistent pre-figuring of some major tenets of Anabaptist theology. More than a few scholars have noted

the Erasmian influence on low class sectarian movement. George Williams acknowledges Erasmus as the «patron» of radical Reformation (Williams 1962, pp. 8-16). More specific connection between the early Zwingli and pre-1525 Erasmus is established by Alistair McGrath (McGrath 1987, pp. 48-50) while Kenneth R. Davis reaches the following conclusion: «the most influential leaders [...] such as Grebel, Manz, Reublin, Denck and Hubmaier, were demonstrably and strongly influenced by those aspects of Christian Erasmanism which mediated specifically the basic, lay, ascetic reform principles of the *Devotio Moderna*» (Davis 1974, p. 296). In *The Anabaptists and the Problem of Religious Unity*, Irvin Horst maintains that Anabaptists were closer to Erasmus than to the Reformers in their ideas on the ways of rejuvenating the Church (Horst 1967). This affinity is implicitly sanctioned by Erasmus through his refusal to write against them when asked to do so. He is even accused of being an Anabaptist (Davis 1974, p. 277). The Erasmian notion of Christocentric piety is particularly pervasive among the Anabaptists and scholars have noted the affinity between Anabaptist teachings and the serious works of Erasmus. Leo Jud's Swiss translation of *Paraphrases on the New Testament* and *Enchiridion* influence the Swiss Brotherhood. Castelberger, as early as 1522, seemed to echo passages from *Enchiridion* (Davis 1974, p. 276). Few however reflect on the Anabaptist tendencies embedded in Erasmian trivia.

The transition from lay-oriented reform to a sudden turning away from the material world for a climactic participation in divine life coincides with the **grand design** of social and spiritual reform shared by the early Zwinglians, Swiss Evangelists and the Anabaptist Swiss Brethren. Interested, like Erasmus, in «restoring all things in Christ», they envisage a holier (rather than a moral) community based on gospels and asceticism (Davis 1974, p. 278). It is a shared «design» of a general renaissance to a purer Christianity with practical applications and on a redemptive basis (Davis 1974, p. 278). This assimilation in Christ, which entails the highest joy, locates within a larger theological context Folly's apparently unexplainable turn-around and her sudden rejection of the material for the spiritual. Anabaptists' pre-occupation with the lack of **moral fruitage** in contemporary Christian praxis and their subsequent interrogation of all ostentatious display of authority is anticipated by Erasmus's sustained attack on the pomp and pageantry of highly placed clerical officials who have forgotten the symbolic (and therefore inner) significance of their clothes and ceremonies. His relentless exposure of the hypocrisy and duplicity of the empowered, placed against the apotheosis of the Christian fool, can be construed as an overt summon for the 'Reformation without tarrying for the magistrate', thus establishing a close connection with the non-conformist, if not specifically Anabaptist, agenda. Regeneration, for Anabaptists, is related to inner, personal faith, which, however, must be manifested in outward conduct such as rejection of usury, luxury, gratification of the senses

etc. The Erasmian formulation of the active discipleship of Christ which requires **visible** signs of one's faith such as fasting, restraining passions, controlling anger and pride, is a re-statement of the Anabaptist clauses of regeneration (Miller 1979, p. 135; Davis 1974, pp. 278-281). The positive involvement of the will in the mortification of the flesh and the triumph of the spiritual is endorsed by both Erasmus and Anabaptists and is distinctly separate from the Lutheran conception of passive submission: the *Bondage of the Will*.

Folly's construct of the Christian fool foreshadows three principal and related premises of Anabaptist doctrine (Davis 1974, pp. 283-284). The Anabaptist belief in an absolute disjunction of the true Christian from the material world is embodied in the Erasmian projection of Christian fools: «they throw away their possessions, ignore injuries [...] find satisfaction in fasts, vigils, tears, and labors, shrink from life, desire death above all else» (Miller 1979, pp. 132-133). The two-kingdom concept central to Anabaptism and the clear distinction between the members of the two kingdoms is similar to the ethical dualism of Folly's world where the rest of Folly's followers are clearly demarcated from the Christian fools. The former enjoy the pleasures of the body while the true Christians «escape from its prison», from «the contagion of the body». The antithetical, mutually exclusive relationship of the two spheres is evident in the following observation: in pious people «lower powers harden and atrophy»; in ordinary people «these perceptions are highly developed; the higher ones, hardly at all». Finally, for Anabaptists and Erasmus alike, the body of the true believer constitutes the true church since God inhabits it. Folly praises the condition thus: «the spirit, stronger at last and victorious will absorb the body [...]». Then the spirit will be absorbed by the highest mind of all, whose power is infinitely greater» (Miller 1979, pp. 132-134, 136-137).

The parallelism between Folly's final adherents and the credo of a sectarian movement uniformly ostracised as **low class heresy** together with the reiteration of spiritual as opposed to material hierarchy, reopens the issue of **repressed** meanings. When this subversive religious context is further problematised by equating the perfect metamorphosis with a state of carnivalesque incompleteness, the text's anti-authoritarian, transgressive, popular inclinations come to the fore. Moreover, the mode and effect of the final sublimation in the Other are imbued with radical disruptive potential and dispel any notion of peaceful transcendence. Firstly, it is an **imperfect** union because it involves dismemberment, a loss of power and a chaotic relationship between the mind and the body: «the mind is set on **leaving the body and no longer has perfect control over the bodily organs**» (Miller 1979, p. 136; my emphasis). This discord and atrophy of power are not congruent with the motif of a harmonious monochromatic interrelation between the microcosm and the macrocosm - the self and the state - idealised by the entrenched powers. Additionally, the obvious and

deliberate emphasis on the body/mind dichotomy, that is, misrule at the individual level, re-invokes critically analogous images of covert and wilful misrule by constituted authority in the public, religious and private arena and subjects them to re-scrutiny.

Secondly, «the gathering unto God», far from affecting an Elysian tranquillity, culminates in a crescendo of restless irrationality: the affected are «now happy, now sad, now crying, now laughing, now sighing – in short, they are **completely beside themselves**» (Miller 1979, p. 137; my emphasis). The blurring of all distinctions between divine and demoniac frenzy, the quality of being possessed rather than liberated, the triumph of incoherence over reason and wisdom, and the underpinning of violence point to a novel and inverted mode of empowerment. Whether this unconditional surrender to a supreme agency will be read as a parable advising the subjection of the populace to the highest secular authority or as a revolutionary message for empowering the powerless depends, as demonstrated earlier, substantially on the historic contingencies of the response. But the text does raise the terrifying prospect of indiscriminate violence and permanent disruption of social order by projecting as ideal a transubstantiation that thoroughly conflates sanity with insanity, order with disorder and contemptuously sweeps aside all temporal differences. That this paradox of self-annihilating self-realisation is more a vehicle for registering discontent with the status quo than a cultural apparatus for promoting surveillance is most apparent during a scrutiny of the stylistic devices adopted by the text.

Among those attempting to pin a classical label on Folly's self praise, Colie's *Paradoxia Epidemica* comes closest to the mark (Colie 1966, pp. 15-22). The rhetorical paradox engaged in delivering a mock encomium in a mock classical mode pivots on the principle of inversion. For example, Folly, haughtily declining to follow «the common herd of rhetoricians» (Miller 1979, p. 12) in introducing her subject (i.e. herself), through the traditional oratorical pattern of **definition** and **division** promptly launches into self-advertisement along these very lines. Such constant undercutting of previous positions, evaluations and expectations, disrupts the sense of order and cohesion associated with any successful literary production, and yet, the degree of *Moria's* success is directly proportional to the degree of inversion in the text. Of the numerous classical models available, the author's conscious choice of the paradox, an «inherently subversive stylistic format», to negotiate a series of sophisticated, complex equivocations and self-contradictory positions so that the multiple inversion «folds into itself» establishes a close parallel between the thematic and stylistic features of the text (Colie 1966, p. 11). The complex reader-text relationship is an illustrative instance of the multiple layers of irony involved in each of Folly's propositions.

In the first place, since *The Praise of Folly* is a written text in a declam-

atory mode, we simultaneously occupy the dual position of the reader-auditor. The ambiguity is intensified by the complicated positioning of the different characters associated with the text. Folly's domain of fools includes all mankind. The commoners, administrators and Christian fools catalogued **in** the text and the reader-auditor **outside** the text - all come under her purview. Yet her **creator** is Erasmus who by virtue of being human is her subject! This incessantly shifting location of authority belies all notions of a well-ordered polity grounded upon hierarchic principles and enhances our awareness of it by implicating us (as reader-auditor) in the design. Pavloski elaborates on how the appreciation of the book is enhanced by «the ironic ambiguity of our status»:

like anyone and everyone else, we are fools Folly creates, but we also watch the process of creation from some point outside it while we realize we are reading a speech put together by Erasmus, and put by him into the mouth of his fictional creature Folly [...]. As readers of learned Erasmus' book, we are, of course, intelligent, but since Erasmus [...] aims at edifying us [...] we cannot be completely, fully intelligent [...]. As characters within the work, we obviously are fools, like all men; yet even in this capacity we concurrently contain intelligence and foolishness. (Pavloski 1983, p. 19)

This infinitely elusive nature of the reader-auditor's engagement with the work is highlighted by Folly herself when she acknowledges his applause for her life/pleasure equation: «Your applause has answered for you - I was certain that **none of you is so wise, or rather foolish - no, I mean wise** - as to be of that opinion» (Miller 1979, p. 19; my emphasis).

But Folly occupies no fixed directorial chair as she continuously re-situates her followers. Apart from the three major metamorphoses - from the Epicurean critique of all didactic positions and Juvenalian denunciation of authorised governance to unworldly Christian fool - there are innumerable positional shifts and concurrent enactment of several roles within each of these larger transformations. In the initial stages, for example, Folly is, among other things, the goddess rejuvenating mankind, a Sophist, an enchantress *à-la-Medea*, Circe, Venus and Aurora, an empiricist extolling man as a «mistake-maker» and a social adhesive (Miller 1979, pp. 33-34; see also pp. 9, 10, 24, 28). Without the slightest warning, she changes tack from instinct to self-love to self-deception. Unlike most fictional prototypes, which emerge through a series of assertions, Folly's transportation to Fury, her quintessential protean variety is achieved through a series of subversive cancellations that are accommodated within a biographic order barely equipped to incorporate such irreconcilable binaries. This inversion of the conventional mode of character construction contributes to the «irreducible irony» (Kaiser 1964, p. 38) of Folly's persona and a carnivalesque co-

piousness of character conception which extends the plebeian connection from the text's content to its form.

The centrality of irony is reasserted by the self-referential framework of the mock encomium. Kaiser acknowledges that with the assignation of self-praise to Folly, Erasmus not only introduces sustained irony into European literature but literally invents a «new kind of irony» (Kaiser 1964, p. 37). Folly's arbitrary sway over her dominion allows the creation of wholly internal referential parameters for self-evaluation that becomes in effect a point-by-point inversion of the conventional standards of measuring such discourse. The complete exclusion and defiance of all external and accepted frames of reference initiates the supremely autonomous, topsy-turvy self-legitimation of the carnival world. As the sole initiator and validator of all action within her dominion, her function is analogous to that of absolutist monarchy. But in contrast to monarchy's coercive mechanisms of subjection, Folly enjoys the **natural** allegiance of her self-deluded subjects. More significant is that her magisterial success and control over men's **inward cogitation** spring from her flouting of the established modes of imposing authority. Unlike the prince who wilfully mystifies the distinctions between truth and untruth, justice and injustice, order and disorder, Folly maintains the differences, extols the negative and aims at a carnivalesque debunking of the official norms of legitimisation.

Her endgame, with its abrupt cessation and the rejection of memory - «I hate a listener with a memory» (Miller 1979, p. 138) - is her most spectacular *tour de force*. The lack of formal closure deprives the reader-auditor of experiencing the satisfaction of discovering a climactic joyous utopia via a negative imprint. The abrupt abandonment is complete with Folly's deliberate undermining of her entire exposition through the renunciation of the value of memory. The reader-auditor is not to adopt Folly's wisdom, but to reach his own conclusion through his own devices. As Colie observes: «The discourse stops [...] but in such a way as to stimulate further thought in the reader, even further speculation - Folly cuts off her own discourse, but not discourse in general» (Colie 1966, p. 21). The resultant need to generate a conclusion compels the reader-auditor to actively engage with the text. The essential plurality of this participation - because of the numbers of readers and listeners involved - fosters diversity of discourse and makes possible, in Himelick's brilliant summing up, «a plethora of 'ultimate conclusions'» (Himelick 1970, p. 33). A more trenchant critique of an absolutist framework is embedded in the manner in which the space for multiple responses is engendered. Folly legitimises the participation of numerous voices in the creative process by abjuring her own authority. Placed against this context, Erasmus's transference of the responsibility of defending Folly's self-praise to More, his ostensible reader, seems not an attempt to escape, but an admission of the composite nature of literary production involving among other things - the author, the reader and the

foci of attention. The possibility of stretching the intellectual intercourse to infinity, that is, extending it well beyond textual parameters, and the de-recognition of authorial hegemony dislodges the notion of a finite, single text with the radical concept of a multiplicity of ever continuous texts generated through collective participation.

The sense of **spilling over boundaries** also permeates the language of *The Praise of Folly*. Terence Cave, examining *De Copia*, comments on the series of eating and drinking metaphors through which Erasmus conveys his ideas on writing (Cave 1979, pp. 24-31). The abundance of language is celebrated as a form of «positive intoxication» which, Cave observes, occasionally displaces «the hierarchy of values», between ‘true’ and ‘false’, and the two are «allowed to slide together and contaminate one another» (Cave 1979, pp. 25, 30-31). The smudging of boundaries between right and wrong, illusion and reality occurs consistently in Folly’s oration as exemplified by the delineation of divine activity after Momus’s exile:

What endless jokes are provided by Priapus, that worthless fig-wood puppet. What fun is supplied by Mercury with his pocket-picking and magic tricks. Indeed, even Vulcan himself often plays **the clown** at the banquets of the gods, enlivening their drinking bouts by limping around, or making smart remarks, or telling funny stories. Then Silenus, that white-haired wooer, dances a **frisky jig**. Polyphenus stomps around to the **thrum-thrum of a guitar**, and the nymphs pimp about **dancing with bare feet**. The satyrs, human above and goat below, flounce around doing bumps and grinds. Pan makes everybody laugh by singing some silly song, which they would rather hear than a performance by the muses themselves, especially when they are beginning to get soused on nectar. I suppose there is no need to mention what the Gods do after the banquet, when they are quite drunk – such tomfoolery that sometimes its all I can do to keep from laughing out loud. (Miller 1979, p. 27)

This enormously entertaining fantasia, through sheer richness and concreteness of presentation, lures the audience into reversing, not so much their notion of what constitutes godly action, but acknowledging the inherent emptiness of arid, humourless godliness. Folly’s obvious distortion is an exposure, through implicit contrast, of the opaque misrepresentations orchestrated by official propaganda in their own interests. In a similar but more forthright manner, a veritable verbal *festivitas* unmaskes the highest authority in Christendom as an anti-Christ. Folly debates on the consequences in store for the popes in case they truly imitate Christ’s way of life:

who on earth could be more miserable? Or who would spend everything he has to buy that office? Or defend it, once it was bought, with sword, poison, and all manner of violence? How many advantages would these

men be deprived of if they were ever assailed by wisdom? [...] **So much wealth, honor, power, so many victories, offices, dispensations, taxes, indulgences, so many horses, mules, retainers, so many pleasures! [...]** These would be replaced by vigils, fasts, tears, prayers, sermons, studies, sighs, and thousands of such wretched labors. Nor should we neglect another point: so many scribes, copyists, notaries, advocates, ecclesiastical prosecutors, so many secretaries, mule-curriers, stableboys, official bankers, pimps (I had almost added something more delicate, but I am afraid it might sound indelicate to some ears). (Miller 1979, pp. 111-112; my emphasis)

The teeming rush of rhetorical questions followed by a surfeit of analogical images is more convincing than any rational, logical analysis and results in what Cave designates a «rupture» in the texture of the language through which passes a series of «word-things» (Cave 1979, p. 31). For example, in the emphasised section above, the absolute superfluity of words iterates, through their very copiousness, the thoroughly base, material concerns of the pope. It seems as though somewhere along the line the principal idea has abandoned all efforts to maintain a control over the words through which it is expressed. Thus the very «activity of writing asserts itself as a kind of hedonism» (Cave 1979, p. 31).

Cave further notes the Lucianic model advocated by Erasmus in *De Copia* where allusions and allegories take precedence over the imitation of reality (Cave 1979, p. 33). For Erasmus, the most powerful ‘method’ of substantiating one’s proposition is «the force of *exempla*» which «embraces», among other things, «the fabula [...] the proverb [...] the parable, or *collatio*, the *imago* and analogy» (King; Rix 1963, p. 67). The primacy of fables, parables, proverbs and of association over analytical exposition, is however, also intrinsic to ‘low’ literature. In the absence of argumentative and oratorical skills affordable only through sustained academic training, plebeian culture and language often resorts to a series of associated word pictures to state its case. Erasmus’s own citation of the numerous instances of «fables» quelling rebellion more effectively than «philosophical oration» (Miller 1979, p. 38) are testimony to the fact that the uninitiated populace are more responsive to appropriate, preferably familiar, analogical illustrations than to abstract reasoning. In other words, rational exposition and sequential thought processes are alien to marginalised consciousness that moves literally through allegorical and allusive exposition. Folly’s adoption of this popular stylistic device is best evidenced in her wilful conflation of Nemesis and Fortuna and the elaboration of the concept of the fortunate fool through a repetition of proverbs:

From this fact [i.e., Nemesis blesses the fool] Timotheus [...] derived both his name (= ‘honored by god’) and the proverb applied to him

(**'his net catches for him even while he sleeps'**). Then there is that other proverb, **'The owl is flying.'** Quite different are the sayings applied to wise men: **'born on the fourth day,' 'he has got Sejanus' horse,'** or **'the gold of Toulouse.'** But I will stop **propounding apothegms** lest I seem to have rifled the commentaries of my friend Erasmus. (Miller 1979, p. 116)

Chaloner was the first to note the density of proverbs and the difficulty of translating the peculiar flavour they lend to the work (Chaloner's «Preface», in Miller 1965, pp. 5-6). About 285 proverbs and proverbial expressions are sprinkled throughout the 24,500 words (approximately) of the text; an average of one in every eighty six words. The distribution is uneven. But it is interesting to observe that apart from the proem which has one proverb for every forty five words and the «non-epilogue» that has one for every twenty three words; the largest number of proverbs is compressed in the section on Christian folly (Miller 1978, p. 84). Miller associates the profusion of proverbs with Folly's role as a dialectical sophist and a consummate rhetorician. She alternates between a step-by-step illustration of different issues and a large kaleidoscopic tableau of swarming groups to keep the reader off balance but the proverbs are pressed into the service of both – deception **as well as** persuasion. He elucidates the various ways in which Folly alludes to, quotes, extends, fractures, misapplies and modifies maxims and adages to reduce clarity and to assiduously avoid the risk of explaining or qualifying her inconsistent, ambivalent position (Miller 1978 pp. 85-93) but concentrates exclusively on classical proverbial allusions and consequently misses two vital aspects in the shaping of Folly's declamation.

The first is noted by Wesseling who, taking off from Miller, unveils the Dutch connection behind Folly's aphoristic utterances (Wesseling 1994, pp. 351-378). Folly herself identifies the non-classical, native allusion to the foolishness of the Brabanters and the Dutch, but Wesseling discloses the vernacular underpinning of a few more recognisably classical references. Women are conceived as «twice foolish» in Dutch colloquies; Juvenal's mention of cuckold's horns, the citation of the disastrous offsprings of Marcus Aurelius and Socrates and of fortune favouring stupid Timotheus, all mirror vernacular proverbs of equally ancient lineage; and familiar Dutch expressions are rephrased in Latin to deride monks and define Christian insanity (Miller 1979, pp. 23, 29, 33, 38-39, 99, 136; Wesseling 1994, pp. 352-360). Wesseling admits the diminutive size of Dutch contribution especially when compared to classical allusions, but his scrutiny opens up possibilities of exploring the hitherto neglected vernacular links of Folly, for instance, Dutch influence outside proverbs and expressions and linguistic echoes of other native European languages as well. Secondly, it would be worthwhile to remember that literary devices such as maxims, because of their intrinsic quotable quality and brevity, easily percolate from oral to written language and back again into general usage. It is very

likely for such aphorisms to be in common circulation before a Horace or a Catullus hones them for entry into the lofty portals of written literature. Therefore proverbs – classical, biblical or vernacular – are by their nature familiar to the masses. Erasmus not only focuses on «popular currency» as an essential characteristic of the proverbs and expands the definition to include «novelty» and «shrewdness» authorised by «antiquity and erudition» (Philips 1982, pp. 4-7) but also deploys them in a manner that parallels their usage in common parlance to elicit a kind of associative endorsement of her opinions.

The recurrent re-framing of an idea, the multiple fictional re-renderings, the recourse to common repository of accepted wisdom hark back to the oral antecedents of plebeian culture. The inability to comprehend the written word meant that the memory of the uneducated masses had to be activated to register textual presentation. Erasmus's profuse deployment of strategies familiar to oral transmission in a highly sophisticated, complex, satirical propaganda directed at an exclusive audience problematises the issue of appropriation and dissemination. Does the text successfully commission a popular literary device in the service of high literature or does the ploy boomerang and transform the corrective critical orientation of the text into provocative radicalism? Before proceeding further, it must be iterated that *The Praise of Folly*, based on the classical *declamatio* model, highly influenced by Lucian and written in Latin, does not address the illiterate peasant. It directs a revisionist message at the establishment, religious and secular, to restore parity between material and spiritual gradations. Whatever advances his project of Catholic social reformation is pressed into service – popular aspirations and protest formats to humanistic concern for man's material existence and the highly sophisticated critical apparatus of the mock encomium.

Erasmus is at least partially aware of the dangerous game he is playing because he installs two diffusing mechanisms in his controversial text to ensure utmost freedom and mobility – the license of laughter and the *paradoxia epidemica* – both intrinsically linked with the element of play especially during the Renaissance. Huizinga and Bakhtin together view the Renaissance age as the pinnacle of human playfulness and Bakhtin proposes its association with laughter as an essential medium of accessing truth, «Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter» (Bakhtin [1965] 1984, p. 66; see also Huizinga 1955, p. 180). Colie remarks on the non-committal nature of *paradoxia epidemica* (Colie 1966, p. 38) whose playful ambiguity permits Renaissance authors to critique «prevailing institutions and behaviours without committing themselves to any new orthodoxy» (Findlen 1998, p. 250). As the success of Erasmus's reformist agenda hinges upon effective instruction, he resorts to the «Renaissance tradition of *serio ludere* (playing seriously), which viewed play as a divine activity» (Findlen 1998, p. 255) allowing full freedom to Folly's game-plan

in the belief that nothing is «learned better than when it is learned as a game» (Findlen 1998, p. 255).

By mediating his serious intent through Folly's ludic side, Erasmus hopes to contain the fireworks erupting from the clash of apparently indiscriminately picked miscellanies stuffed in Folly's basket. Thus hedonism, Epicureanism, carnival ideology, Christian ethics, medievalism, humanist learning, estate satire, classical oratorical models, irony, paradox, fables, allusions, allegories, proverbs, idiomatic expressions, open-ended resolution jostle against each other till the bag bursts at the seams. The original patent for a **partial revolution** is subsumed by the rampage of sheer abundance and incessant reversals. In the initial stage itself paradoxical inversion combines with carnivalesque topsy-turvydom to generate a complete breakdown of all surveillance gadgets and engender its own radical energy. The very adherence to the stated fictive decorum of encomiastic representation of Folly's attractions, as Fox illustrates, threatens to dislocate the didactic authorial design of propagating a «fixed, determinate moral norm» (Fox 1989, p. 88). Folly's restorative attempts, both as the licensed satirist and as the unworldly sage, insist on the repudiation of existing moral and social absolutes thus creating a crisis on the spiritual and the material plane.

This is exemplified by the simultaneous reversal and invocation of conventional values. It rejects as false, dominant ideology's claim to superiority based on tradition and convention, by positing an alternate and older tradition of social interaction based on the scriptures. The disjunction of official standards of endorsement from a more ancient Christian norm of legitimisation exposes the manipulative utilisation of the concepts of 'tradition' and 'convention' by the ruling elite and deprives it of a major valedictory prop. More crucial is the fact that the text aligns the endorsing authority of time-honoured custom with the popular conception of equitable and just governance. The conjunction of difficult times with Erasmus's inadvertent (or perhaps deliberate?) amalgamation of combustible elements bound to produce an explosive chemical reaction transforms his blueprint for civilisation into a document of contemporary barbarism perpetrated primarily by the ruling elite. The call for new empowerment likewise embodies an unresolved ambiguity: ultimate authority is transcendental but it is vested in the material pauper. Erasmus's humanist critique of the existing status quo is almost perversely polyvalent; twisting and turning every which way to elude any fixity of position. Indeterminacy and instability become the ultimate facet of Christian deliverance, «For now shall you see them of glad cheer, now of as sad again, now they weep, now they laugh, now they sigh, for brief, it is certain that they are wholly distraught and rapt out of themselves» (Miller 1979, p. 128). But given the political and historical context of the work's reception, Erasmus's inscription of the consciousness of the 'lowliest of the lowly' within the realm of high literature can

be read as an act of betrayal parallel to that of Desdemona. Her voluntary submission to Othello had rocked the white citadel from within; as far as *The Praise of Folly* is concerned, Erasmus is, for contemporary authorities, the **enemy within** demolishing it with quips and jokes. If, alongside Bakhtin, we view the historically specific relationship between unofficial laughter and official seriousness in the progress of civilisation as a battle between the competing aesthetics of Carnival and Lent where the graver alternative gradually emerges victorious, Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* audaciously transforms Lent into Carnival through the frenzied ecstasy of being subsumed in the glory of God that awaits true Christians:

[they] only know this, as it were in a mist or dream, that they were the most happy while they were so out of their wits. And therefore they are sorry they are come to themselves again and desire nothing more than this kind of madness, to be perpetually mad. And this is a **small taste of that future happiness**. (Wilson 2005, n.p.; my emphasis)

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