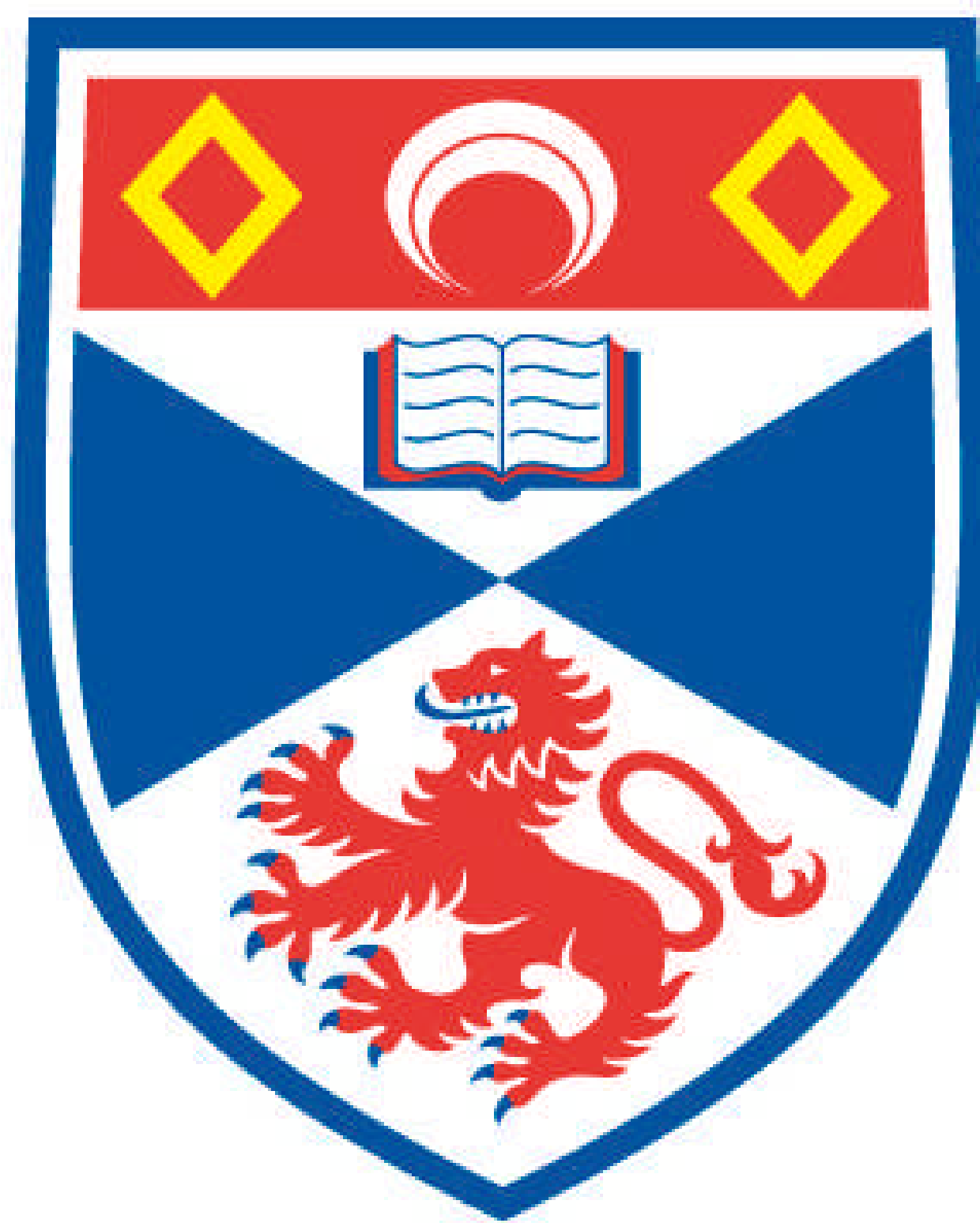


**CONCEPTS OF FOLLY IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE LITERATURE
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO SHAKESPEARE AND JONSON**

Lois Helen Bulman

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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CONCEPTS OF FOLLY IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE LITERATURE
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO SHAKESPEARE AND JONSON

BY

LOIS HELEN BULMAN

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY, submitted DECEMBER 1990

UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS



DECLARATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Chapter 1 considers Barclay's *Ship of Fools* in relation to other folly literature in English, particularly Lydgate's *Order of Fools*, Skelton's *Bowge of Courte*, and Croke Lorrel's *Bote*. Motifs, allegories and the woodcuts of the text are discussed and some are included in an Illustrations section.

Chapter 2 discusses Erasmian folly looking back to the Neoplatonic writings of Nicholas of Cusa, and to the debt Erasmian exegeses owe to Origen. Erasmus' own philosophical and theological views are examined, particularly as they are found in his *Enchiridion*, and in the influence of Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*. A close textual analysis of the *Moriae Encomium* is undertaken in this light.

Chapter 3 defines the lateral boundaries of folly, where it blends into madness. In the context of Renaissance psychology sixteenth century medical works are analysed, including Boorde's *Breviary of Healthe*, Barrough's *Method of Physicke* and Elyot's *Castel of Helth*. Blurring between madness and sin, the negative judgments on the mad as demon-possessed, and the biblical models from which such judgments largely arose give alternative perspectives on madness and its relation to folly.

Chapters 4-6 look at three Shakespearean comedies showing the development of a primarily Erasmian view of folly. This moves from overt references in *Love's Labour's Lost* to natural folly, the folly of love and theological folly, through carnivalesque aspects of folly and madness in *Twelfth Night*, to an embedded notion of folly which influences and affects the darker comedy of *Measure for Measure*.

Chapter 7 considers satires of Hall, Marston and Guilpin, and looks at Jonson's Humour plays in this context. *Volpone* and *Epicoene*, and *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair* are discussed in pairs, showing the softening of Jonson's attitude to folly, and his increasing representation of Erasmian folly reaching its full expression in *Bartholomew Fair*.

Then I turned my thoughts to
consider wisdom,
and also madness and folly.
What more can the king's successor do
than what has already been done?
I saw that wisdom is better than folly,
just as light is better than darkness.
The wise man has eyes in his head,
while the fool walks in the darkness;
but I came to realise
that the same fate overtakes them both.
Then I thought in my heart
"The fate of the fool will overtake me also.
What then do I gain by being wise?"
I said in my heart
"This too is meaningless."
For the wise man, like the fool,
will not be long remembered;
in days to come both will be forgotten.
Like the fool, the wise man too must die!

(Ecclesiastes 2.12-16, N.I.V.)

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INTRODUCTION

The starting point of this thesis was an interest in the concept of Erasman folly as seen in the comedies of Shakespeare. Erasman folly was perceived as the central type of folly represented in Shakespeare, but the first part of the thesis deals with other roots of folly prior to the writing of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, and with the boundaries of folly where it merges into concepts of madness. The scope of the thesis also extends beyond Shakespeare to look at folly in the comedies of Ben Jonson, comparing the varieties of folly in each, and tracing a line of development through their work. To this end the second and third parts of the thesis deal with three Shakespearean comedies and the six major comedies of Jonson looking, in each case, at the texts of the plays in relation to the positive and the negative concepts of folly as outlined in the more theoretical opening part of the thesis. Where Shakespeare seems to have been interested primarily in Erasman folly from the start, and his approach integrates the festival elements into an existing positive idea of folly, Jonson begins with a negative concept of folly verging on madness and using the festival motifs of disorder and inversion, but is more gradual in his introduction of Erasman tones into his comedies.

In Part One, concepts of folly are considered from the late Medieval period up to the Renaissance. Chapter 1 looks specifically at Alexander Barclay's English translation of the *Ship of Fools*, from the German *Narrenschiff* by Sebastian Brant. The *Ship of Fools* is considered in relation to other contemporary folly literature in English, particularly to Lydgate's *Order of Fools*, Skelton's *Bowge of Courte*, and the anonymous Tudor Satire, *Cocke Lorrel's Bote*. The

motifs and allegories of the *Ship of Fools* are also analysed, in particular those of the ship, the concept of embarking on a journey, and the idea of reaching a sanctuary or haven where the constraints of normal life are lifted and the behaviour of fools is permitted or even extolled. These motifs and concepts are also investigated through the medium of the illustrations in the *Ship of Fools*, woodcuts thought to be done by Dürer and his school. Some of these woodcuts, as well as other pictures illustrating concepts of the Dance of Death and the ship motif are included in a section of illustrations to Part One located between Parts One and Two. Finally, comparisons are made at the end of chapter 1 between the concept of folly in Barclay's *Ship of Fools* and that in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, emphasising mainly the differences between the two. The idea of folly we are left with at the end of chapter 1 is an essentially negative one, where folly is seen as an ignorance of God, a neglecting, whether consciously or unconsciously, of moral guidelines to the detriment of the individual. In other words, the folly of this period is seen as sin, its judgment is harsh, and the texts highlight the behaviour of fools, in the manner of a conduct book, as something to be avoided.

Erasmian folly forms the substance of chapter 2, discussed against the background of earlier, negative concepts of the fool. Chapter 2 looks back to the Neoplatonic writings of Nicholas of Cusa, and to the debt which Erasmian exegeses owe to Origen. The roots of Erasmian folly are also investigated as specifically theological too, but where Brant and Barclay take on the broadly Old Testament concept of the fool as primarily an unenlightened sinner (and then go about the process of exposure and condemnation), Erasmus takes on the New Testament and specifically Pauline concept of folly, emphasising its positive attributes of humility before God, and an awareness of human

limitation. Erasmus' own theological views are examined, particularly as they find expression in the *Enchiridion*, and in Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, influential in Erasmus' early life in particular. The second part of this chapter is a detailed textual analysis of the *Moriae Encomium*, since this is the book in which Erasmus most explicitly outlines his own concept of folly, both ironic and emphatically Pauline. In the course of this analysis the folly seen in chapter 1 and the Erasmian ideas are consistently contrasted, and the dramatic potential of Erasmus' concept, with its irony and ambiguity is emphasised.

Chapter 3 defines the lateral boundaries of folly, where it blends into madness. Having adopted a basically developmental outline of concepts of folly through the late Medieval period and into the Renaissance, the aim of this chapter is to look more precisely at the difficulty of defining madness, at the assumptions which are made in referring to a character as a fool, and in the possible confusion or overlap between fools and madmen, folly and madness. The chapter begins by briefly setting out the underlying theories of Renaissance psychology, and sixteenth century medical and quasi-medical works are then studied for their definitions and categories of madness. In particular, Boorde's *Breviary of Healthe*, Barrough's *Methode of Physicke* and Elyot's *Castel of Helth* are looked at, to try and ascertain contemporary views of madness, its causes and possible cures. From this medical perspective, the provision of care for the mentally ill is discussed, and the assumptions about the curability of madness considered. The second half of chapter 3 moves on to look at madness from a religious perspective, commenting briefly on the problems of madness being seen as demon-possession, and the effects of this view as shown in the events of the Inquisition and expressed in such works as the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

The religious problem of viewing madness as a sin, and seeing it directly as a punishment from God is further investigated from a biblical angle, looking at instances of madness in the Bible, and at how these are related to the changing biblical perspective on folly. Perceptions of madness, the blurring of madness and sin, the negative judgments of the mad, and the biblical models from which these views largely arose form the last part of chapter 3.

The aim of Part One of the thesis is thus to lay out, with a degree of critical analysis and comment, the various models of folly and its related concept, madness, in as broad a manner as possible. Particular emphasis is given to two texts, the *Ship of Fools* and the *Moriae Encomium*, and they are used as the basis of the analysis of the Shakespearean and Jonsonian comedies in Parts Two and Three of the thesis. From the theoretical approach of Part One we are left with two opposing views of folly: the negative concept of folly as sin, Godless and condemned, represented in the Old Testament view, "The foole hath said in his heart, there is no God" (Psalm 14.1), and the positive concept of folly as an admission of man's weakness and relative foolishness in the face of a wise God, represented by Paul's statement "Hath not God made the wisdome of this world foolishnesse" (I Corinthians 1.20).

It is with these two concepts of folly that the specific textual analyses of Parts Two and Three are undertaken. Chapter 4 concentrates on the early Shakespearean comedy of *Love's Labour's Lost*, and chapters 5 and 6 continue a developmental line through middle to dark comedy in *Twelfth Night* and *Measure for Measure*. In each case I maintain that it is primarily Erasmian folly which is used by Shakespeare, both in his actual fools, and in an underlying and crucial emphasis on folly as a human trait discernible in all the

characters, and effective as a potential means of enlightening and changing them in the process of comedy as a whole. Folly is not, therefore, simply seen in the fools of Shakespeare (and here my study differs from the many investigations of Shakespeare's use of the fool or jester figure), but rather is an underlying part of his comic theory. It is vital to the understanding of the plays in terms of the ridiculing of philosophies of stoicism and the accumulation of human wisdom in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Measure for Measure*. Similarly, it is crucial in terms of the interpretation of the characters: those who are unashamed and "natural fools", those who try to be wise, those who fall victim to the folly of being in love, those who judge others' folly while refusing to see their own, and even those who experience types of madness and platonic ecstasy.

In each of the three chapters of Part Two the Erasmian tones in Shakespeare are particularly stressed, and the texts are compared and juxtaposed with the *Moriae Encomium* throughout. An emphasis is placed on the progressive development of an overall concept of folly in Shakespeare's comedies, and on how this concept changes from being overt and easily recognisable as Erasmian in *Love's Labour's Lost*, to being gradually more embedded and assimilated into the comedy of *Twelfth Night* and *Measure for Measure*. The aspects of carnival and festival folly are also highlighted, particularly as they appear in *Twelfth Night*. Part Two works as a whole, therefore, moving from the earlier references to the folly of love, natural folly, and theological folly in *Love's Labour's Lost*, through the more carnivalesque aspects of folly and an interest in madness in *Twelfth Night*, to a more covert folly which influences and affects the darker comedy of *Measure for Measure*.

Part Three of the thesis is concerned with concepts of folly in the comedies of Ben Jonson. Here an alternative view is posed from the Erasmian folly which apparently attracted and influenced Shakespeare's concept from the start. In a single chapter the six major comedies of Jonson are analysed, showing how they represent a movement in their fundamental concept of folly from the negative view to the positive view, reaching the culmination of Erasmian folly in *Bartholomew Fair*. Jonson's approach is introduced by a consideration of Elizabethan verse satire, showing the scourging and satiric attacks of such writers as Marston, Hall and Guilpin as a later and more violent manifestation of the same view of humanity as we saw in the *Ship of Fools*, where mankind is condemned and folly punished and ridiculed. The satire of these poets is more negative, more purely satiric and more punitive than that we saw in Barclay, but the resulting view of folly as a concept useful in their attack on men, is correspondingly negative and relies on similar literary devices of the characterisation of fool figures and harsh authorial judgment.

This is the type of folly put to dramatic use in the Humour plays of Ben Jonson, where fools are incurable and their folly is almost seen as madness. The Humour plays are analysed in relation to the Elizabethan satires of which they were contemporary, and Jonson's approach to folly at this point is emphasised as being very different from that of Shakespeare and of Erasmus. The second part of chapter 7 looks at the four other Jonsonian comedies in a line of development. They are discussed in pairs: *Volpone* and *Epicoene*, and *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair*. This arrangement reestablishes the chronology lost in many studies of Jonson (where *Volpone* and the *Alchemist* are frequently discussed together) and demonstrates the importance of seeing a development in Jonson's work. Further, it is intended to stress the changes from a negative view of folly in the

first two plays, to a more positive and Erasmian view of folly in the last two. *Volpone* is discussed in relation to Garzoni's *Hospitall of Incurable Fooles*, and the emphasis is placed on Volpone's folly being both vicious and incurable. This folly is juxtaposed to that of his grotesques, which though similarly incurable, is more positive in the sense of being innocent and exempt from the final judgments of the play. *Epicoene* also deals with an incurable fool in its major role of Morose, whose behaviour is specifically anti-festive, an interesting comment on the related aspects of festival and feast to medieval notions of folly. In the ladies of the college too, we see inversions of order and authority associated with the festival liberties of fools and folly. It is not until *The Alchemist* that folly has any really positive overtones, however, and the cleverness of the wits in this play is blatantly contrasted to the greedy self-righteousness of the victims, as the gap between those praised and those condemned at the end of the play narrows. Although *The Alchemist* introduces more positive traits of folly, *Bartholomew Fair* stands out as the play in which Jonson discovers the full potential of folly as a positive and multi-faceted concept. The final part of the chapter deals with this development and shows the variety of Jonsonian folly to be closely related and indebted to that of Erasmus, and the thrust of the play to be concerned with the recognition of human weakness and humility, the keynote of our conclusions on Erasmian folly at the end of Part One.

This thesis thus works as a whole, building up a theoretical picture of folly in Part One, analysing it in relation to three representative comedies of Shakespeare in Part Two, and then in relation to the six major Jonsonian comedies in Part Three. The major interest of the work is the potential of Erasmian folly and how it is used by both Shakespeare and Jonson. When seen in the context

of earlier more negative views of fools and folly, Erasmian folly clearly stands out as being the widest and most positive development of the concept, taking full advantage of the paradoxical nature of the term "folly", and exploiting its ambiguities fully. This concept is the same one which Paul seized on in his explanation of the wisdom of God and the comparative folly of men in his Epistles to the Corinthians. However, Erasmus goes beyond this to stress positive aspects of Christian folly, showing not only that God's wisdom is man's foolishness, but that folly is a positive trait to be embraced, a recognition of one's weakness and humanity which is ultimately liberating. Nevertheless, such a positive concept of folly works only in juxtaposition to the overwhelmingly negative overtones of the words "fool" and "folly", negatives which are vital to the effectiveness of investing the terms with a positive meaning and exploiting the resulting ambiguities and paradoxes when wisdom is placed in the mouth of a fool.

Comparatively little has been written linking the humanist thinking of Erasmus with Shakespeare and Jonson. However, two studies have been of particular assistance to me: firstly, Walter Kaiser's book, *Praisers of Folly*, which alerted my interest to the juxtaposition of law and nature in Erasmus and its possible application to Shakespeare's plays. Kaiser's main investigation concentrates on the figure of Falstaff, and it has been my aim to broaden the discussion into a wider concept of folly and apply it to Shakespeare's comedies. Secondly, and more recently, R. Chris Hassel's book, *Faith and Folly in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies* was of considerable use early on in my thoughts both on folly, and on the doctrinal and theological issues which lie behind Erasmus and Shakespeare. There is even less written on Erasmus' influence on Ben Jonson, although several illuminating articles have been produced

relatively recently linking Jonson with the *Moriae Encomium* and related ideas (particularly David Kay's article "Bartholomew Fair: Ben Jonson in Praise of Folly"). Erasmian studies in themselves are very healthy, and I am particularly indebted to the scholarship of Betty Radice and A.H.T. Levi in the new Toronto edition of the *Moriae Encomium*. This edition has been used throughout and has been apposite to my own study because of its deliberately colloquial tone and comic accessibility. I have referred to the work by the Latin title and to its speaker as "Folly" throughout the thesis, to avoid confusion. References to Shakespeare's plays are from the Arden editions, to Jonson's plays from his works edited by C.H. Herford and Percy Simpson, and biblical references are from the Geneva Bible, which is most appropriate to the historical period of this thesis.

Finally, a word about the scope of the thesis. Clearly such a subject as this is wide-ranging by its very nature. The thesis moves between the Late Medieval period and the Renaissance, through texts literary, philosophical, theological and even medical, and the intention is to give as broad a picture of the genesis and elements of the concept of folly as possible in the time allowed. Within this framework Shakespeare and Jonson are analysed by selecting plays most pertinent to the study of folly and its developing use in their drama. In this sense, the thesis is not intended to be exhaustive, nor could it be, particularly given the time constraints of three years now expected for a Ph D. Nonetheless, the subject of folly has been curiously neglected in recent work, and this thesis will argue its centrality in the understanding of far more than the fool figure alone.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

BARCLAY'S *SHIP OF FOOLS*; THE FOLLY TRADITION1. The *Narrenschiff* and the *Ship of Fools*

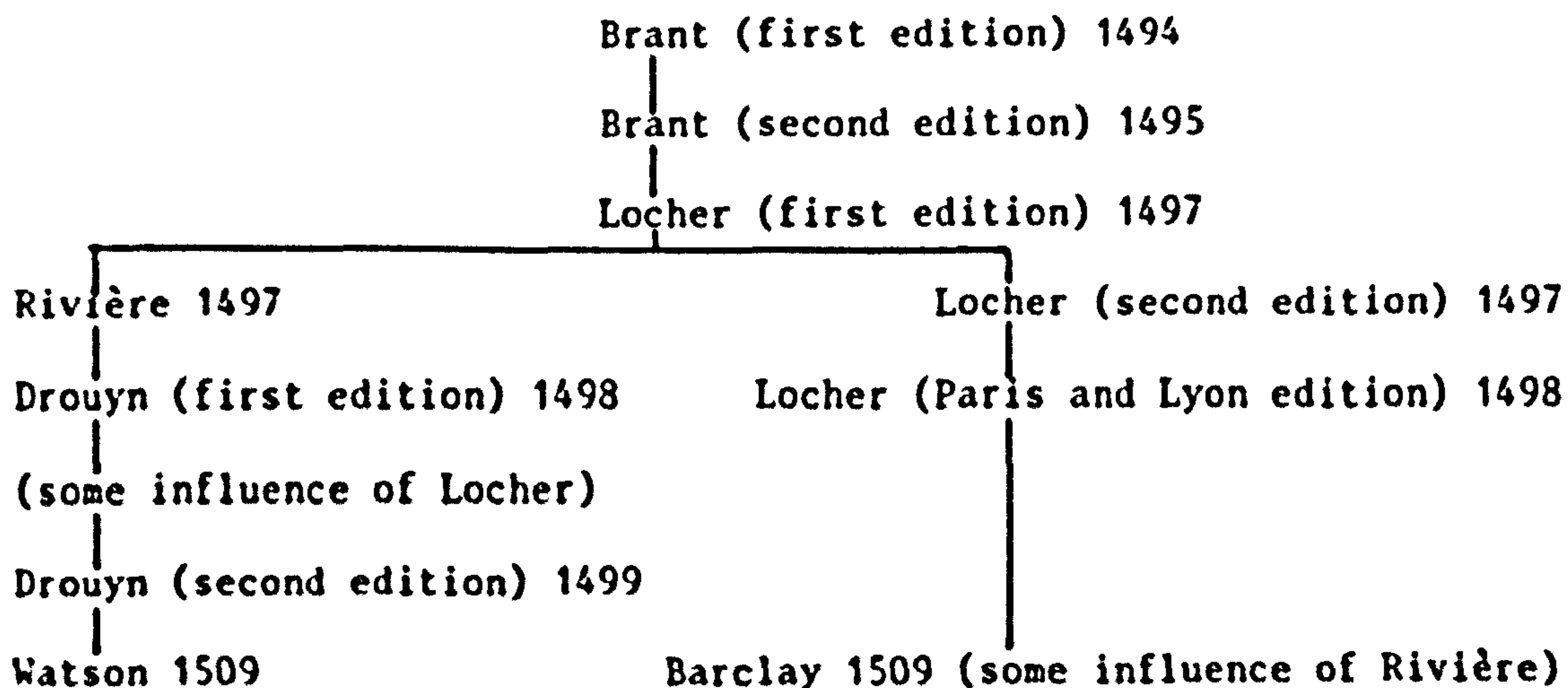
The literary context of Alexander Barclay's *Ship of Fools* is a transitional one. The book, first published in England in 1509, as a translation of Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* (1494) falls in literary-historical terms between the Medieval literature of folly (in which the *Narrenschiff* played a major role) and the humanist concepts of folly which were to emerge in the Renaissance. As such, it forms an important link between Medieval writers like Lydgate (d.1451?), the work of Tudor satirists like Skelton (b.?1460-d.1529), and the later developments of folly in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* (pub.1511). An investigation into Barclay's *Ship of Fools* can thus look back to the late Medieval roots of folly and forward to what it was to become.

The *Ship of Fools* was published twice in England in 1509. First, at the press of Wynkyn de Worde, Henry Watson's prose version was published in July, under the title of *Shippe of Fooles*; then in December, at the rival press of Richard Pynson, Alexander Barclay's version, *Shyp of Folyes of the Worlde*, a verse translation, was released. The genealogy of the *Ship of Fools* is complex, and spans several years and several countries, reflecting the popularity of the book, especially among the general public.¹ Barclay's version comes

1. Aurelius Pompen, *English Versions of the 'Ship of Fools'* (London, 1925). The following stemma, adapted from Pompen, p.311, shows the versions of the text up to Barclay's edition in 1509.

to us mainly through the French version of Rivière, although Barclay's prologue also mentions the Latin and German versions. In the headings of the chapters where the French differs from the Latin it is the French that Barclay follows, and where the arrangement of the *Nef des Folz* differs from the *Navis Stultiferae*, the English does the same.² Although the rival English edition of Henry Watson was reprinted after eight years, and Barclay's version not reprinted until 1570, it is Barclay's *Ship of Fools* which seems to have stood the ultimate test of time, existing in numerous copies in Britain and the U.S.A. as well as being reprinted in 1874 by T.H. Jamieson.³ In contrast, Watson's version is extant as a unique copy of the first edition in the Bibliothèque Nationale and second editions are extremely rare.

It is in Alexander Barclay's version then that the *Narrenschiff* tradition whose popularity and success was tremendous in Germany, came to England and became an important link in the developing chain



2. *ibid*, p.375.

3. Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, edited by T.H. Jamieson, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1874). This is the most readily available version, all quotations will be taken from it, and the volume and page references noted in the text.

of folly literature. Although a specific comparison between folly as conceived of in Brant's *Narrenschiff* and that portrayed in the *Ship of Fools* is not the object here,⁴ some juxtaposition of the two will serve to show how Barclay is both Medieval like Brant, and writing within a Medieval sermon tradition, yet at the same time can be described as a proto-humanist in his interpretation of folly.

The concept of folly as sin is most important in such a comparison. Barclay carries on from Brant in this view, one which owes its origin primarily to the Medieval sermon tradition and the biblical fool, the *insipiens* of the Psalms and the *stultus* of Ecclesiastes. This fool is essentially a sinner, one who denies the existence of God, epitomised by Psalm 14.1: "the foole hath said in his heart there is no God." [fig.1]⁵ Brant's arrangement of fools, followed structurally by Barclay, forms a procession of foolish individuals climaxing in a frightening apocalyptic vision: "Of the falshode Antichrst", in which the fools meet their doom. However, this is not the end in either Brant or Barclay's versions, and their different qualifications of the judgment of the fool are significant.

In Brant's *Narrenschiff*, the vision of the Apocalypse is followed by a series of chapters in which the conventional classical choice - of following wisdom or foolishness - is laid before the reader. This choice is made even more explicit in the woodcuts which accompany the text. In chapter 107 "von lon der Wisheit" ("of the reward of virtue") the woodcut depicts a man with an open book addressing a young scholar; in the sky above them are a crown and a fool's cap. The conventional choice between *stultitia* and *sapientia*

4. Pompen has already done such a study exhaustively.

5. This psalm has been illustrated with numerous fool pictures, the one chosen alternates fools with kings around the border, while depicting the story of Joseph in the initial "D".

is one typically associated with the Renaissance, and not with the apocalyptic horrors of the Last Judgment. However, Brant goes further to end the *Narrenschiff* with a chapter entitled "der wys man" in which he freely paraphrases the pseudo-Virgilian "Vir Bonus". This chapter is illustrated by the final woodcut showing Wisdom enthroned and crowned with an earthly rather than heavenly crown. The effect is that, though Brant presents the fate of the folly of sin as the biblical Apocalypse and death, he follows this with the classical reward of wisdom - not eternal life or salvation - as a way to avoid this end. The conclusion from this would seem to be that Brant espouses something of the later views of the Renaissance in his *Narrenschiff*; that although he has some Medieval characteristics, these are combined with a foreshadowing of the notion of man's ability to help himself to find his own salvation. The final woodcut discussed above is also important in its elevation of Wisdom, who is apparently addressing the crowd. An immediate link can be made between this picture and the setting of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, in which Folly is a similarly elevated speaker. When the two are considered together, Erasmus' Folly makes an attack on precisely the kind of pagan/classical emphasis on the power of wisdom to save man, which Brant puts forward at the conclusion of the *Narrenschiff*.⁶

Barclay's qualification of the judgment of the fool is quite different. Like Brant, he too has a chapter on the wise man [fig.2], with the same choices between folly and wisdom. But, rather than this being the final chapter, instead it forms part of a series of illustrations of the strife and conflict between good and evil.

6. The original woodcut for this chapter was later used to illustrate Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* in the French edition of 1520. See John G. Rechtien "A 1520 French Translation of the *Moriae Encomium*", *Renaissance Quarterly*, 27 (1974), pp. 23-35.

Barclay's conclusion, in contrast to Brant's, is a prayer to the Virgin Mary emphasising man's need for eternal assistance to attain his salvation:

O moder of mercy syns thou well may
 Thy sonnes presence purchase for me
 By thy ayde and socour that I may say
 That I haue escapyd this stormy se.(II, 337)

Total dependence on God's mercy and the concepts of grace and salvation as the only antidote to the Day of Judgment link Barclay with Erasmus and later Renaissance concepts insisting on the folly of all humanity, since all have sinned.

To investigate the types of folly Barclay attacks in his *Ship of Fools* would be a long task, and not particularly helpful in an attempt to further elucidate his overall concept of folly. Basically the *Ship of Fools*, like the *Narrenschiff* before it, forms a parade of such variety to show the multi-faceted nature of folly. However, one particular type of folly can be isolated from Barclay's version which is emphasised in the *Ship of Fools* more than in the *Narrenschiff*, and which helps to place Barclay's work in literary tradition. Ruth Mohl in *The Three Estates of Medieval and Renaissance Literature*⁷ points out Barclay's particular concern for estate and his condemnation of the folly of seeking to change one's estate or rise above one's class. In this respect Barclay is conservative and pro-establishment in that he preaches, in keeping with the Medieval sermon and estates satire traditions, against the disruption of the social order. Not only does Barclay repeatedly return to the theme of estate, but he uses and refers to symbols associated with estates literature too: Fortune's Wheel [fig.3], the Dance of Death [fig.4], the love of St. Nummus, and the fallow horse

7. Ruth Mohl, *The Three Estates in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (New York, 1933), p.143.

are all isolated by Mohl. In the prologue Barclay announces his desire to show the "fautes...of all estatis as degrees temporall" (I, 15). Criticism of dissatisfaction with one's estate then follows in various forms, ranging from "Of the ouer grete curyosyte of men" - meddling in things which are not your concern - to "Of folys that are ouer worldly" with its emphasis on order, hierarchy and duty:

Serue god thy maker aboue all thyng
 And next that wyth thy herte and mynde
 Be true and loyall unto thy kynge
 And to his subiectis just and kynde.(II, 321)

Barclay's criticism of fashion and disguise concentrates on the "degre" and "state" of the fools who are all involved.⁸ Similarly, in "Of the Abusion of the Spiritualte", Barclay elaborates considerably on Brant, who merely complains about men entering the priesthood too young, to include specifically the folly of entering orders to improve one's social position.⁹

The most emphatic and obvious statement on the value of order and the folly of trying to change one's position comes in the chapter "Of the mutabylyte of Fortune". The original, in Brant, makes no mention of estates at all, but in Barclay the emphasis is clear:

That man whiche hopyth hie vp to ascende
 On fortunes whele, and come to state royall
 If the whele turne, may doute sore to descende
 If he be hie the sorer is his fall.(I, 186)

This typical description of the wheel of fortune is followed by an attack on social mobility in general:

Promote a yeman, make hym a gentyl man
 And make a Baylyf of a Butchers son
 Make of a Squyer knyght, yet wylly they if they can
 Coueyt in theyr myndes hyer promosyon.(I, 187)

Such kinds of social climbing are folly, Barclay maintains, since ultimately death comes to all. Barclay's *Ship of Fools* thus

8. In "Of newe fassions and disguised Garmentes" I, 34.

9. In "Of the abusion of the Spiritualte" II, 57.

links both with estates satire, and with the wider theme of the Dance of Death, in which men and women from all walks of life find themselves participants in the same *danse macabre* [fig.5 & 6].¹⁰

The Dance of Death seems to have originated in pictorial form, as an illustration of a moral lesson. Although Holbein's series of woodcuts is the best-known example of the Dance of Death, he was working within an existing tradition, and the earliest recorded date to which the study of this tradition can be referred is about 1376. However, the manuscript of Jehan Le Fevre, thought to be about this date is not extant. The oldest painting of which there is record is the Parisian "Danse Macabre", dated from about 1425 and preserved in a single woodcut series made for Guyot Marchant in 1485. From a basically French source, Dances of Death thence are often associated with outbreaks of the plague (the main epidemics in Europe were in 1348, 1360, 1373, and 1382). The madness associated with this disease, as well as the indiscriminate spread of the illness through the whole ranks of society often seem to spark off particular series of Dances of Death both in literary and pictorial form.

The most notable features of Hans Holbein's series, based on the Basel paintings of the Dance of Death (themselves commemorating the plague of 1439) and produced sometime around 1515, are common to their mid-fourteenth century French sources. Namely, Death is seen as omnipotent, unexpected and equalising in its ability to attack rich and poor, strong and weak. "Death" in Holbein's woodcuts is a

10. Two illustrations which show wide variation in the figures of the *danse macabre* tradition. The first, from a German series shows a popular figure, the doctor, distinguished both by dress and by the urine flask he carries, frequently used for medical analysis in the Middle Ages. The second is a charcoal depicting Death, personified as a rider on horseback, mercilessly carrying off his victims.

single individual who travels around visiting men. The woodcuts depict all manner of persons, arranged hierarchically, and Death's costume varies to suit the occasion. As well as this, the series is structured biblically, beginning with the creation and the fall and ending with the final judgment of men by God. Holbein has a particularly human personification of Death and the humour of the woodcuts is most striking: Death stands upon no ceremony, and his depiction is both realistic and dramatic. The individual pictures build up to an overall moral lesson and the sinful men, like Barclay's fools are paraded in an inexorable march of time towards a seemingly inescapable doom. The links between the Dance of Death and the *Ship of Fools* are thus both moral and visual, and each shares the same didactic thrust common to estates literature in general.

Two main points can be concluded from Barclay's interest in estates, which add to the assessment of the concept of folly shown in the *Ship of Fools*. Firstly, it reveals a concern for order, hierarchy and social stability; secondly, it adds to the picture of all men, high or low, being subject to the rule of folly. In both these points Barclay prefigures the humanists of the Renaissance, as Fritz Caspari writes:

Humanistic ideas...became a powerful element in the predominate sixteenth century belief in a social hierarchy which it was the duty of the ruler and of the aristocracy to maintain, and in which every man had his place, high or low. This hierarchical conception of society and the state contained many traditional elements.¹¹

And as Walter Kaiser has pointed out:

The outlandish costume of motley assigned to the medieval fool distinguished him sharply from other human beings; but the contribution of the Renaissance to this figure was precisely that of making him just like everyone else, of claiming that

11. Fritz Caspari, *Humanism and Social Order in Tudor England* (Chicago, 1954), p.7.

folly was the quintessence of humanity, and that all men were fools in one or another sense of that word.¹²

2. Late Medieval Folly Literature: *Speculum Stultorum*, *Order of Fools*, and the *Bowge of Courte*

The extent to which Barclay was innovative in his sense of folly can be discerned not only by making some comparisons with Brant's original *Narrenschiff*, but also by juxtaposing Barclay with earlier English folly literature. It is difficult to know why Barclay was attracted to the *Narrenschiff*, but Brant's tradition of folly was not the only one in late Medieval literature. The *Speculum Stultorum*¹³ by Nigellus Wireker (also known as Nigel Longchamp) was an ecclesiastical satire of the twelfth century, written in Latin and telling the travels of Burnel the ass through Europe. The book forms a collection of fables and stories which together point out the folly of mankind, and Burnel founds an order of "asses" in a direct attack on monastic orders of the time [fig.7]. Its popularity seems clear and there are twice as many extant copies of it as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.¹⁴ An Anglo-Norman ballad of a similar period, entitled "Le Ordre de Bel Eyse", puts forth a mock order of monks in

12. Walter Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963), p.14.

13. Nigel Longchamp, *Mirror for Fools*, translated by J.H. Mozely (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1963), p.vi.

14. David R. Anderson, "Critical edition of Barclay's *Ship of Fools* 1509" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve, 1974), p.24.

which various vices and follies are permitted.¹⁵ The tone is ironic and slanderous and the monks are allowed to enter the order with no fear of punishment. (A link could be made here to the order of monks described in *Cocke Lorrel's Bote* - see below, pp. 22-6.)

In contrast, John Lydgate's *Order of Fools* contains no irony but is the first humorous grouping of fools in English literature (written sometime before 1451). The poem is subtitled "a tale of threescore folys and thre" and consists of twenty-four eight-lined stanzas with a refrain line at the end of each. We are told in the first stanza that the order was begun a long time ago, but that the convent has recently had an increase in new members. The order consists of sixty-three ordinary members, with Bacchus, Juno, and Marcolf as senior figures. Unfortunately the poem promises to be more interesting than it actually turns out, and there is a degeneration from the interest in the order to a rather flat enumeration of vices and follies over which the senior members sit in solemn judgment. The poem has a little more interest in terms of the fool figure, since Marcolf has a literary history dating back to the twelfth century [fig.8], and subsists in various forms through to the sixteenth century.¹⁶

The sixty-three fools Lydgate describes come from similar areas as the fools in Brant and Barclay's *Ship of Fools*. C.H. Herford¹⁷

15. *Political Songs of England from the reign of John to that of Edward II*, edited by Thomas Wright, Camden Society (London, 1839), series 1, 6.

16. For a fuller discussion of the Marcolf figure see Erika B.G. Michael, *The Drawings by Hans Holbein the Younger for Erasmus' 'Praise of Folly'* (New York, 1986).

17. C.H. Herford, *Studies in the Literary Relations of England and Germany in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1886), p.330.

groups them into the insolent, the riotous, the self-neglectful, the presumptuous and the deceitful. Follies range from carousing at night and throwing away one's cloak in a rainshower, to insolent language and marrying an older woman. However as Herford points out, Lydgate's chief emphasis in his depiction of folly is on deceit and duplicity. Violating promises, dissimulating and double-dealing figure far more prominently than the rioting and sexual offences more subject to attack in Brant. Lydgate's folly is more clearly the two-faced man who will not admit his sin:

Nor he that never wil lere no goode;
 Nor he that hathe twoo faces in oon hoode,
 May be enrolled in this fraternyte.¹⁸

But even this man is not an individual in the sense that Barclay's fools are; Lydgate never really gets beyond an abstract description of vice and folly, and preaches in the biblical tradition noted earlier, that:

The chief of foolis, as men in bokis redithe,
 Is he that nowther lovithe God ne dredithe
 Nor to his chirche hathe none advertence.¹⁹

Lydgate's poem is more of a tabulation of anti-social and godless behaviour than an argument against folly in a conceptual way. The fools he lists are mere practitioners of specific behaviour, who are thereby made eligible for membership in a fraternity of fools.

David R. Anderson, in his unpublished thesis on Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, suggests another possible source, and certainly a forerunner to Barclay's concept of folly, in a Scottish poem of the second half of the fifteenth century. The "Foly of Fulys and the

18. John Lydgate, *Order of Fools*, in *Percy Society Early English Poetry*, (London, 1840), II, 164-171.

19. *ibid*, p.164.

Thewis [virtues] of Wysmen"²⁰ lists virtues in a similar manner to Barclay, especially comparable to Barclay's "Description of a Wyse man". Barclay's chapter concentrates on the duty of the wise to teach the errant:

A man that is gode, endued with sapience
 Repreuyth dedys nat good ne commendable
 He chastyseth wordes: whereof myght growe offence
 And that to ere haue sound abhomynable
 But unto the soule his wordes ar profytable
 He techyth vertue: hauynge inwarde regarde
 To his owne dedys (II, 273)

Similarly the Scottish poet singles out the teaching and reproving which is expected of men:

Fore we find wrytin in prophesy
 That men suld prech, tech and cry
 Raprufand erour, foly and wyce
 lovand wyt, wertew and Justice.²¹

The fools in this poem are universally disliked by the poet but, like Barclay, the poet depicts them in a manner at once condemnatory and humorous. Similarities can be found in the reproof of negligence, of ignorance and of not taking account of the mutability of fortune.

For atte last thai failze all,
 Thar folly takis a sudand fall;
 quhen thai wen to stand al-thir best,
 Thar fortone failzeis as tempest.²²

John Skelton's *Bowge of Courte*,²³ published in 1499 by Wynkyn de Worde (who later published Henry Watson's version of the *Ship of*

20. *Ratis Raving and other Early Scots Poems on Morals*, edited by R. Girven, Scottish Text Society, 3rd series, (Edinburgh, 1939 for 1937), II, 52-65.

21. *ibid*, pp.52-3, lines 27-30.

22. *ibid*, p.65, lines 469-472.

23. *The Complete English Poems of John Skelton*, edited by J. Scattergood (New Haven, 1983), pp. 46-61. All quotations will be taken from this edition and line numbers noted in the text.

Fools), is particularly interesting as a forerunner of Barclay, since it comes after the publication of Brant's *Narrenschiff*. Skelton borrows the central symbol of his poem from Brant, an image of a ship of fools, but adapts it specifically to his own courtly situation. The poem follows in the Medieval tradition of dream poems, and Skelton's voyage of the ship takes place in a dream of the protagonist. The ship, named the "Bowge of Courte", is owned by Dame Sans-Pareille and helmed by Lady Fortune, who has power over those who sail: "Fortune gydeth and ruleth all our shyppe. / Whome she hateth shall over the see-boorde skyp" (lines 111-2). The protagonist jostles with the others on the quay, but gains a passage on the ship, and there follows a parade of the fools who sail in her. Skelton's folly is represented by seven specific vices personified in the manner of the Morality Plays. Characters are drawn in some detail, each to exemplify one court vice, and each interacts in some way with the protagonist, in keeping with their allegorical name. The poem is set out as conversations Drede (the protagonist) has with each fool, and the physical characteristics of each denote their nature, as well as what they actually say. Thus, Disdain is a courtly snob, his garments are "gawdy", his hood lined with indignation: he rails at the social status of Drede at court, and becomes very angry:

Envye hathe wasted hys lyver and his lounge; (lung)
 Hatred by the herte so had hym wrounge
 That he loked pale as asshes to my syghte.
 Dysdayne, I wene, this comerous carkes hyghte. (troublesome)
 (lines 291-4)

Each fool exemplifies particular facets of folly, but all are linked as mere figures of vice as well as fools. The overriding concept of folly seems to be that it is synonymous with sin, and Skelton's poem owes a lot to the Medieval sermon tradition and Moralities in its use of conventional allegorical types. Links

between Skelton's *Bowge of Courte* and Barclay's *Ship of Fools* also become more significant when the later poem, *Cocke Lorrel's Bote* (1510), is considered. In both of the earlier poems the mixture of folly as sin and folly exemplified in sinful yet nonetheless humorous characteristics is important, and *Cocke Lorrel's Bote* goes on to celebrate the characterisations, while finding less sin and less need to preach.

A brief glance at the Medieval sermon tradition can also reveal a similar movement away from abstractions to more specific vice-figures and characters, as Benjamin Boyce comments:

Probably the realistic and dramatic merits of the *Ship of Fools* derived something from the increasing vividness of the type-figures in contemporary sermons. Probably too, sixteenth century readers saw resemblances between Barclay's fools and the strongly but simply characterised figures in current miracle and morality plays.²⁴

The heavy moral tone of Brant is continued in Barclay's version of the *Ship of Fools*, and a similarly contemptible picture of fools as vice-figures is seen in Skelton's *Bowge of Courte*. However, the tone of Skelton is not simply moral - although Drede is shocked by the personification of Riot: "I was ashamed so to hear hym prate / He had no pleasure but in harlotrye" (lines 373-4). Skelton's poem owes much more to the tone of satire, and it is in this area of tone and style that it can also be seen as a forerunner of Barclay.

Skelton is frequently acknowledged as the most important satirist of his period and the *Bowge of Courte*, though not his most effective or well-known satire, tempers its exemplification of sin and vice by a witty satiric tone. John Peter in his book *Complaint*

24. Benjamin Boyce, *The Theophrastian Character in England to 1642* (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1947), p.63.

and *Satire in Early English Literature* ²⁵ makes a distinction between the broader, more abstract and impersonal tone of complaint, and the realistic immediacy and individuality of satire. From the condemnation of folly as sin and exhortation to repentance, Skelton represents a move towards using poetry and drama to satirically expose vice and point more humorously to folly. The prologue of the *Bowge of Courte* shows this change of emphasis: here the moon laughs at the folly of mankind, and the narrator is declared "to dulle" to speak with any greater authority than the rest of humanity. It is true that both Brant and Barclay included themselves among the fools in their ships, but their tone remained stiffly moral. In the satire of the *Bowge of Courte* a concept of universal folly, common to mankind and reducing all men to one level, begins to emerge: it is this concept which later comes to fruition in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*. A willingness to acknowledge one's own folly is a vital step in fool satire, and Skelton's treatment of the fool-figure elevates him to a position where he has the right to reply, since he is no longer the mere dolt of the *Ship of Fools*.

It is clear then that while the *Bowge of Courte* preceded Barclay's *Ship of Fools* by about ten years, Skelton's contribution to the literature of folly and his own notion of folly is in some ways more "modern" than that of the more conservative Barclay. It is also interesting to note, in passing, that the two men, though acquainted, apparently did not see eye to eye. Certainly they were published at the rival presses of Wynkyn de Worde and Richard Pynson, and some have suggested this might have added a monetary element to their dispute and rivalry. It is also true that Skelton was somewhat addicted to foolishness and folly, and his own clownish antics

25. John Peter, *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (Oxford, 1956).

are recorded in biography;²⁶ it is perhaps harder to see the person of Alexander Barclay dressing-up as a fool!

From a survey of some of the English literature of folly preceding Barclay, it can be seen that the *Ship of Fools* fits into a native tradition as well as forming an Anglicisation of the German *Narrenschiff* tradition. However, none of the poems mentioned above can really be termed "sources" for Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, and a closer analysis of the text will reveal the unique significance this book has in the study of folly at the transition between the Medieval and Renaissance periods.

3. Motifs and allegories in the *Ship of Fools*

Barclay's use of the ship motif is of particular significance. The ship was a well established image in biblical illustration, and as an allegory frequently found in Medieval sermons. G.R. Owst discusses it at some length in his book, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*.²⁷ He finds no link with fools or folly, but a clear link with sin and virtue: the sea was frequently used as an image of the trials and tribulations of life; the ship as the vessel of humanity. Thus a good ship signified a good man, and elements of the ship were linked to elements of Christian faith and biblical teaching. In some instances the ship represents the church and is manned by clergy, but usually it is a more general image than this. Owst considers a sermon on Ecclesiasticus 43.26: "Let them that sail on the sea tell the dangers thereof", where the ship becomes the

26. See Maurice Pollet, *John Skelton: Poet of Tudor England*, translated from French by John Warrington (London, 1971).

27. G.R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1933).

realm of England. To quote from it here will help to show the general features of the ship allegory:

Therefore, the master mariner, oure sovereyn lord...desiringe from his heart the wele and honour of us all, besied him by great means to repair the brekkes of our ship, and rere up azen our spirit to God, that hath stalkid fro him mony day through vices and sins...Our ship, full repaired through virtue, according to its own desire can crosse sail when it pleases, and savelich take the sea...

God, sovereyn lord of lordes, spede him in his iorne, preserve him from perils, and increce his honour, and give us glory so as to repair our ship by increase of virtue that we mow passe the perils of the sea, and sail a true course to the port of Heaven. To that port, etc. Amen.²⁸

Barclay's use of the ship image relies heavily on the woodcut illustrations of the *Narrenschiff* for its real effectiveness. Although he takes the allegory more seriously than Brant, with more reference to it during the poem, still the voyage of the ship is barely a sustained allegory linking the book together: rather, the individual woodcuts illustrate the vessel in a variety of ways, some of which have something in common with the sermon illustration quoted above.

The original Pynson edition of Barclay's book used the "ship" woodcut as its first picture, and quoted Psalm 106 from the Latin *Vulgate* around the woodcut to form a border [fig.9 & 10]. This illustration was first used in Locher's Latin edition and contrasts with the pessimism of Brant, whose ship is still in peril at the end of the poem. The effect of the Psalm being used in this way is to show peril giving way to safety at the hand of God, returning the ship to the haven of peace. Barclay follows in this example, returning his ship to the "heauenly port aboue", but this is not

28. *ibid.*, p.75, quoting from Fols. 128b-133 ("Quo sailet opon the see may oft tele of perlys").

before he has illustrated the earlier part of the Psalm:

They mount up to heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul melteth away because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. (Psalm 106.23-27)

Not only does Barclay see heaven as a port, but he also pictures the boat as a means to attain salvation, a journey only to be made by those who have not yet received grace:

Amende you whyle ye may.
And yf ye so do and ensue Vertue and grace.
Wythin my Shyp ye get no rowme ne place.(I, 2)

The conditions of the boats vary too, and are exemplified by woodcut illustration; for example in "Of the despysynge of Mysfortune" [fig.11] the fool's boat is clearly splitting and sinking - perhaps owing to his lack of virtuous provision. The illustration to the apocalyptic chapter on the Anti-Christ ("Of the Falshode of Antichrst") [fig.12] has two ships, one containing the doomed, spilling its fools into the sea, the other held to shore by St. Peter's key, trying to avoid destruction by the first ship which threatens to capsize it too. The final optimism and possibility of salvation is also held out in Barclay's closing ballad to the Virgin Mary. As was noted above, Barclay deviates from Brant in his emphasis at the conclusion of the poem, and the Ballad not only affirms Christian hope, but uses a variation on the ship and sea allegory in its refrain line: "Direct our lyf in this tempestuous se" (II, 333).

Although there is a far stronger tradition of ship imagery and allegory in both German and French literature, suggesting the sources perhaps for Brant's *NarrenschiFF*, and although clearly Barclay's chief source in this instance was Brant, it is also true to say he was not using an entirely unknown image as far as English literature

was concerned, and further, Barclay's development and use of the ship allegory extends upon and elaborates Brant's.²⁹

One other point should be made about the use of the ship allegory in its specific role as a vessel containing fools. Michel Foucault in his opening chapter of *Madness and Civilisation*³⁰ tantalisingly asserts that such "stultifera navis" existed as a historical phenomenon. Writing about the literary ship tradition he continues:

But of all these romantic or satiric vessels, the *Narrenschiff* is the only one that had a real existence - for they did exist, these boats that conveyed their insane cargo from town to town.³¹

Foucault then goes on to give evidence of the custom of sending away the madmen, frequently handing them over to boatmen. Although there is plenty of historical evidence for such exiles, there are no precise references to ships and Foucault gives no hint as to where he gleaned this information. He merely goes on to speculate:

It is possible that these ships of fools, which haunted the imagination of the entire early Renaissance, were pilgrimage boats, highly symbolic cargoes of madmen in search of their reason.³²

Since no other references seem to assert a historical precedent for the ship of fools it is impossible to do more than speculate that the literary tradition did indeed grow out of actual ships, used to remove madmen who caused a nuisance to society so as to take them on some salvation-seeking pilgrimage.

29. For sources of the ship allegory in German and French literature see Aurelius Pompen, *English Versions of the 'Ship of Fools'*, p.295.

30. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, translated from French by Richard Howard (London, 1967), pp.3-37.

31. *ibid*, p.8.

32. *ibid*, p.9.

In drawing on the tradition of journeying and pilgrimage to attain salvation, Brant and Barclay both align themselves with a vast number of Medieval precedents both in literary and historical records. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* pilgrimage is an obvious example, but both Brant and Barclay draw on the classical story of Ulysses as the ultimate journey-motif. The main problem in discussing Barclay's *Ship of Fools* in this light is the absence of any real destination or sense of direction for the ship. Brant's *Narrenschiff* heads specifically for Narragonia, and in chapter 108 he calls his ship the "Ship of Cockayne". Barclay similarly aligns himself with the "Land of Cockayne" tradition, but neither poet follows the ship allegory closely enough to give any real sense of destination and voyage. The fools are not really on a voyage of self-discovery; the whole journey motif seems more a convenient structure within which to parade various types of fool. Thus, although Barclay's ultimate haven of salvation and the reaching of the heavenly port is clear, there is no real sense of a pilgrimage or journey of improvement. It is also true, of course, that the fictional Narragonia and Land of Cockayne were far from Barclay's heaven. In fact they were places where the moral strictures of heavenly living did not apply. More closely linked with the mock religious orders of Lydgate and the *Speculum Stultorum*, Cockayne was a *bona fide* paradise for those who did not wish to think ahead or take account of their actions; a place where ease of living and freedom from restraint were of paramount importance.

Further comment is made by Barclay on the popularity of journeying and voyages of discovery, in "Of the folysshe descripcion and inquyscion of dyuers countres or regyons". In this chapter Barclay elaborates on Brant's condemnation of the obsession for exploration in the purely geographical sense, by making a spiritual

parallel. Here is the only place a real sense of self-knowledge gained by journeying comes out:

Ye people that labour the worlde to mesure
 Therby to knowe the regyons of the same
 Knowe firste your self that knowledge is moste sure
 For certaynly it is rebuke and shame
 For man to laboure onely for a name
 To knowe the compasse of the worlde wyde
 Nat knowynge hym selfe, nor howe he sholde hym gyde.
 (II, 27)

The emphasis is on self-knowledge gained by spiritual insight, rather than a specific reference to pilgrimage, but the parallel is important when we come to see how central the element of self-discovery and self-knowledge is in later Renaissance concepts of folly.

4. Tudor Satire: *Cocke Lorrel's Bote*

That Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* had a tremendous impact on the folly tradition is a well-asserted fact, but the influence of Barclay's *Ship of Fools* is somewhat more difficult to ascertain. We can at least say that Barclay's edition made the German and Latin texts available to a wider circle, and came at a time when printing presses were expanding rapidly and books were in greater demand from the general public as well as in academic circles. The first significant product of the English *Ship of Fools* tradition begun by Barclay was the anonymous Tudor satire *Cocke Lorrel's Bote*. Published in about 1510, this poem forms an interesting comment on Barclay's work, as well as making a contribution to the literature of folly in the period.

C.H. Herford makes a contrast between Skelton's *Bowge of Courte* and *Cocke Lorrel's Bote* when he comments that each localises the eclectic folly of Barclay's *Ship of Fools*: Skelton in the direction of the court, *Cocke Lorrel's Bote* by concentrating on the low-life of

London.³³ The ships in each poem are significantly destined to disaster, being helmed respectively by mutable Fortune and a London vagabond; and both poets write in a light and satiric tone when compared to the heavy morality of Barclay.

Cocke Lorrel's Bote is a fragment, with the beginning of the poem missing, and no indication as to its author. It is based on the eponymous hero Cocke Lorrel's adventures, a notorious vagabond popular at the time of the poem. Historically it forms a very interesting comment on the habits and lives of tradespeople in London city during the reign of Henry VII. The editor of the Percy Society³⁴ edition suggests that the author borrowed the idea of the boat from the *Narrenschiff* tradition, as it was represented in Barclay's *Ship of Fools*. Certainly the poems have a common theme in the voyage and the Land of Cockayne, and a further more tangible link was made when some of the woodcuts from Watson's edition were used to illustrate the later poem.³⁵ *Cocke Lorrel's Bote* was also, significantly, a product of the press of Wynkyn de Worde, so it is possible to see it as some kind of answer to Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, which had been published just slightly earlier. (It is difficult to be precise here, but the date for *Cocke Lorrel's Bote* is usually

33. Professor Herford was writing at a time when it was thought that Skelton's *Bowge of Courte* was written after Barclay's *Ship of Fools*; but nonetheless I think the point remains a valid one.

34. *Cocke Lorreles Bote*, edited by E.F. Rimbault for Percy Society English Poetry (London, 1843), VI, 1-15. Quotations will be taken from this edition and page numbers noted in the text.

35. The Roxburghe Club publication of the text in 1817 contains the woodcut illustrations originally 18, 19, 77 and 108 of Watson's chapters in his 1509 edition. *Cock Lorrel's Boat*, edited by H. Drury, Roxburghe Club (London, 1817).

assumed to be 1510, and Barclay's *Ship of Fools* first came out in 1509.)

The figure of Cokke Lorrel himself is less interesting than the style and method of the poem. Since the opening of the poem is missing, there is no explanation of the boat or of Cokke Lorrel, instead it begins with a series of vividly-drawn individuals - who we then discover are embarking. The individuals have something in common with Chaucer's pilgrims, each representative and typical of their trade, yet stamped with a certain particularity. For example, the butcher is unmistakable:

Than came one wt two bolddogges at his tayle,
 And that was a botcher without fayle,
 All be gored in reed blode;
 In his hande he bare a flap for flyes,
 His hosen gresy vpon his thyes,
 That place for magottes was very good;
 On his necke he bare a cole tre logge, (a coulter log)
 He had as moch pyte as a dogge. (p.2)

It seems we have interrupted the poem at the point when the least amenable passengers are arriving, since following the butcher are two late-Medieval sewage workers who are so revolting as to make the assembled company throw-up! However, the poet is confident that Cokke will know what to do with such people: "Cokke dyde set the there as knaues sholde be, / Amonge the slouenly sorte" (p.3). So it seems even on this boat, there is still a sense of order, hierarchy and place. This is certainly borne out by the arrival of the Pardoner, who as one might expect, is in a position of some authority. This character, armed with his book, first collects the fares for the voyage and then proceeds to read a roll beginning with "Cokke Lorrell the knyght" and working exhaustively through the members and their homes.

The order is formalised even further when Cokke thankfully interrupts the roll-call and asks the Pardoner what benefits are to be had by joining "this fraternyte". Here there definite parallels

with the *Speculum Stultorum* and "Le Ordre de Bel Eyse", as well as with Lydgate's *Order of Fools*. The promised life is similar too, with an emphasis on liberality, ease and non-accountability: "And the pope darlaye hath grauted in his byll, / That euery brother may do what he wyll" (p.7). This even extends, the Pardoner adds, to wiping your nose on your sleeve without reproof.

The Pardoner's speech is interrupted again, this time by his needing a drink, and the poem shifts once more to becoming a list. C.H. Herford has noted a verbal parallel with Brant's *Narrenschiff* in the transitional lines:

Than Cocke cast a syde his hede,
And sawe the stretes all ouer sprede
That to his bote wolde come. (p.8)

The line in Brant reads "all strassen, gassen sindt voll narren" in a similar glance away from the subject. If this is more than a coincidence (and unfortunately Barclay has no similar lines) then it would link the following list of tradesmen more firmly into the tradition of a list of fools. The list that does follow becomes rather monotonous, although of considerable interest to the social historian, since the poet seems intent on mentioning every trade in London at the time.

All the people assembled, the poem changes again, this time to allot each to a task on board the ship; and with a blow of Cocke's whistle the poetry becomes vivid and active again, describing a triumphant leaving of the docks, with gun-salutes, pealing trumpets, singing and rowing. The voyage underway, the emphasis is placed on the light-hearted enjoyment of the ship:

They banysshed prayer, peas and sadnes;
And toke with them myrthe, sporte and gladnes;
They wolde not haue vertu, ne yet deuocyon;
But ryotte, and reuell, with ioly rebellyon. (p.13)

Here the ship is not like Barclay's at all, although some similarities can be seen with Skelton's *Bowge of Courte*, where Drede

is excluded from the dancing and revelry which take place. The poem has no moral condemnatory tone, rather the picture of banished prayer and devotion is described in a manner akin to the festivals and feasts of fools: it is almost as if we see licensed disorder, with the moon and stars looking down in favour: "But than came lucyna with all her pale hewe, / To take her sporte amonge the cloudes blewe" (p.13).³⁶

The ship sails through England (not the world as in Brant and Barclay's poems) and the narrator is left on the shore. Like Barclay's ship, Cocke Lorrel's boat has more willing passengers than it can take, and the narrator meets with some of the disappointed. They are members of religious orders too, hoping, it seems, to transfer into Cocke's more appealing fraternity. Interestingly, the narrator suggests that they return the following year, when, he implies, Cocke's boat will also return. The poem ends with the confident assertion that Cocke had "in his hande" every third person of England - implying the folly of the realm extends at least that far? Unfortunately we are given no further clue, as the poem ends with a spiritual codicil which seems to rest uneasily at the close of a poem in celebration of the flouting of religious law:

Thus of Cocke Lorrel I make an ende,
 And to heuen god your soules sende,
 That redeth this boke ouer all
 Chryst cover you with his mantell perpetuall.
 (p.15)

36. The mention of the moon here is also reminiscent of Skelton's *Bowge of Courte*, where, in the prologue, the moon looks down to see the folly of mankind, and smiles, half in scorn:

Whan Luna, full of mutabylyte,
 As emperes the dyademe hath worne
 Of our pole artyke, smyllynge halfe in scorne
 At our foly and our unstedfastnesse. (lines 3-6)

Cocke Lorrel's Bote transforms the *Ship of Fools* into a localised satire, written with a light-hearted enthusiasm. The voyage has lost the peril of the *Narrenschiff*, and appears to have no symbolic end or spiritual goal. The heedlessness of *Cocke Lorrel's* crew is encouraged and celebrated in a way Brant or Barclay could never have done. As such it is possible to view this anonymous fragment as a move in the direction of the Renaissance celebration of foolish antics. The heavy moral tone of Brant and Barclay stemmed from their fundamental belief in folly as sin, and therefore morally reprehensible. What we see beginning in *Cocke Lorrel's Bote* is a resurgence of the earlier Medieval carnival elements of folly in literature. (Certainly there was still carnival-spirit in Barclay's England, but in his literary presentation of folly carnival is far from celebrated.) At the same time there is a greater awareness of the prevalence of folly through all estates and social groups as being indicative of the common folly of humanity. Rather than the strict observance of degree that we saw in Barclay, *Cocke Lorrel's Bote* acknowledges the social differences, but once all are united in the crew and in their folly such differences become unimportant.

5. The importance of the *Ship of Fools* to Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*

Barclay's *Ship of Fools* is of particular interest to a study of Erasmian folly because of the theological concept of salvation by grace, which is common to both, a concern lost in *Cocke Lorrel's Bote*. Barclay's fools are condemned for their sinful folly, but the hope of reaching the final port of heaven is held out to those who recognise it and turn from their folly. The fundamental difference between this "message" of the *Ship of Fools* and that which Erasmus presents in his *Moriae Encomium* is the identity of the preacher. For

Barclay, although he calls himself one of the fools in the ship, there is always a moral distance between the preacher and the congregation of fools: the ironic step of Erasmus' mock encomium was to put Folly herself on the podium, and to reduce all mankind - preachers and self-confessed fools alike - to a common humanity, foolish before God.

The most specific link to make between the *Ship of Fools* and the *Moriae Encomium* is in the figure of Dame Folly herself. As was mentioned above, Erasmus elevates Folly as his speaker, where Brant and Barclay elevated wisdom. However there are some important iconographic links between Dame Folly (as she was popularised in French Joyeux Societies and in *sotties*) and Brant's woodcut of Venus [fig.13]. The latter is described by H.W. Janson³⁷ as a lady of "composite identity" containing symbols of Vanitas, Love, Folly and Mala Mulier. The skeletal figure behind Venus is reminiscent both of the *danse macabre* and of Vanitas - a voluptuous young lady usually pictured with a skeleton as escort to emphasise the ephemeral nature of her pleasures. The presence of the apes on her ropes associates Venus with the "mala mulier" figure from German moral encyclopaedias of the fifteenth century, who attracts and infuriates apes in this way. Love is symbolised by the Cupid figure, blind and armed with bow and arrows; and Folly, by the ass and fools, also on ropes. Two other contemporary pictures, a woodcut [fig.14] and an engraving [fig.15], compare with the *Narrenschiff* woodcut, showing similarities in the presence of asses, fools and apes pictured around Dame Folly.

The extent to which Erasmus knew of the *Ship of Fools* is difficult to establish. That he would have known the *Narrenschiff*

37. H.W. Janson, *Apes and Ape-Lore in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (London, 1952), p.199.

and the Flemish roots of folly³⁸ seems very likely; similarly it is hard to believe he would not have known Locher's translation, written in Latin, the international language of academics at the time. However, as has been shown, Barclay makes important changes to the theology of the *Ship of Fools*, closer to Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* than either Brant or Locher had been. There are several possible links between Barclay and Erasmus, though unfortunately none is conclusive evidence: both men could have been in Oxford at the same time - we know Erasmus visited in 1499, and Barclay mentions John Colet, a close friend of Erasmus, in his *Eclogues* (1513-4), while general opinion is that he studied in Oxford, since he dedicated work to Bishop Cornish, Master of Oriel. Secondly, both could have been in France at the same time. Again, we know more about Erasmus' movements than Barclay's, but the latter's *Introductory to Write and Pronounce Frenche*,³⁹ and his use of the Rivière version of the *Ship of Fools* confirms his linguistic knowledge. Further, Barclay adds a poem by French humanist Robert Gaguin in his edition of the *Ship of Fools*, a poem not found in Brant or Locher and, though present in Baldius and in the French editions, never acknowledged as Gaguin. It would seem that Barclay was at least acquainted with the work of an important French humanist, in the same circles as Erasmus. Finally, Barclay's patron, Sir Giles Alington was married to Alice, step-daughter of Sir Thomas More, with whom Erasmus was staying when he wrote his *Moriae Encomium* and to whom the book was dedicated.

Such circumstantial evidence cannot be conclusive, but does add some historic weight to the literary links between Barclay and

38. See Keith Moxey, "Ship of Fools and the Idea of Folly in Sixteenth Century Netherlandish Literature" in *The Early Illustrated Book*, edited by S. Hindman (Washington, 1982).

39. *Introductory to Write and Pronounce Frenche* (London, 1521).

Erasmus. Regardless of any deliberate links between the *Ship of Fools* and the *Moriae Encomium*, their juxtaposition is illuminating and shows the uniquely significant role the *Ship of Fools* had both on the folly tradition as it found it, and on the development of that tradition to its height in the Renaissance.

CHAPTER TWO

ERASMUS' *MORIAE ENCOMIUM*; THE HEIGHT OF FOLLY

1. Nicholas of Cusa and Origen

Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* was published in Paris in 1511 by Gilles de Gourmont. Written as a gift for Sir Thomas More, it was known in England from this date in the original Latin text, although the first English translation by Sir Thomas Chaloner was not printed until 1549 at the press of Thomas Berthelet.¹ Historically then, the book was published two years after Barclay's English version of the *Ship of Fools*, and some seventeen years after the probable date of Brant's *Narrenschiff*. The *Moriae Encomium* is the single most important book concerning folly written in the Renaissance period, and most would agree it is the most significant text in folly literature as a whole ever written. Certainly there are no other texts which deal with folly in such a comprehensive manner, and none we know of preceding Erasmus' "little book" which espouse such positive and humanistic attitudes towards the concept of folly itself.

Between Barclay's concepts and those of Erasmus there is a major shift from the primarily negative emphasis on folly as sin, to a more positive emphasis on the value of folly. Erasmus, though writing in contrast to Barclay and the tradition of folly analysed in chapter 1, is not writing in isolation from his forebears. Indeed he was

1. Dates and bibliographic details concerning the *Moriae Encomium* are taken from E.J. Devereux, *Renaissance English Translations of Erasmus: a Bibliography to 1700* (Toronto, 1983), p.134.

profoundly influenced by many classical and theological writers, two of whom will be considered here as those particularly significant to the development of his own concepts of folly.²

Nicholas of Cusa was a crucial forerunner of humanism. He was the fifteenth century representative of the philosophy of paradox, and though profoundly original in thought, esoteric elements of Neoplatonism emerge in his writings. The dominance of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages had largely forced any elements of Neoplatonism underground. Instead, the Thomists emphasised human effort: the persistent intellectualism of Aquinas attempted to solve problems, and convert mysteries into problems which themselves could be solved. Methods of rational analysis and inference were preferred in both philosophic and theological dilemmas, and the Thomists were only ready to admit a mystery when all efforts of the reason and human mind proved fruitless.

Nicholas of Cusa's *De Docta Ignorantia*, completed in 1440, forms a direct contrast with Aquinas' intellectual and problem-solving philosophy. The theory of enlightened ignorance is in fact a further extension of the *theologia negativa*, familiar to the Middle Ages, especially as it was found in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. In structure Nicholas' book is tripartite. Book I deals with the *maximum absolutum*, that is God; Book II deals with the *maximum contractum*, the sum of living things, or the universe; Book III considers the *maximum* within the universe, that is the Incarnation of God in Christ, the personal and existential identity of both *maxima*.

2. Other influences on Erasmus' thought are lucidly outlined in Albert Rabil, *Erasmus and the New Testament: the Mind of a Christian Humanist* (San Antonio, 1972), and Albert Hyma, *The Youth of Erasmus* (Netherlands, 1972).

The argument of learned ignorance centres on the comparison of what is unknown with what is known. Nicholas argues that the human mind can only learn by such comparison, and that this can only give an approximate rather than an absolute knowledge. Further, our finite minds can only comprehend the finite things, and since God, the *maximum absolutum*, is infinite he far exceeds the bounds of human reason and knowledge. Christ, as the incarnated word of God, forms the link between creator and created universe, between the absolute and the limited. The *docta ignorantia* is thus the belief that the wise man is only wise and learned if he is aware of the limitations of finite human reason, particularly in any attempt to comprehend the infinite transcendence of God.

Nothing could be more beneficial for even the most zealous searcher for knowledge than his being in fact most learned in that very ignorance which is peculiarly his own; and the better a man will have known his ignorance, the greater his learning will be. It is in bearing this in mind that I have undertaken the task of writing a few words on learned ignorance.³

In Nicholas' philosophy a major emphasis is placed on degrees of truth, wherever the subject is not entirely known. Philosophers have been so unsuccessful in their search for the exact nature of things precisely because we can only know things indirectly if they are similar to things we already know indirectly - and things are never exactly similar. Such partial knowledge as we can have implies at the same time a partial ignorance, and without such enlightened ignorance we should be guilty of genuine error in claiming to know more than we really know. Religion evidently demands a more affirmative theology, in which we can assign positive attributes to God, but on philosophical consideration, Nicholas joins with other

3. Nicholas Cusanus, *Of Learned Ignorance*, translated by G. Heron (London, 1954), pp.8-9.

mystics in feeling that negative theology - the *theologia negativa* - is nearer the truth:

Sacred ignorance has taught us that God is ineffable, because he is infinitely greater than anything that words can express. So true is this that it is by the process of elimination and the use of negative propositions that we come nearer to the truth about him.⁴

Positive divine attributes are, in the end, seen to be relative to creatures, in so far as our minds can infer. By the way of negation, however, we are properly denying of God the created characteristics which in himself he does not possess, and thus we are nearer to the real nature of God. This is a philosophical position on the verge of agnosticism, but Nicholas stops just short of this in his conclusions. Just as a denial of a greater degree of imperfection to God is more adequate than a denial of a lesser degree, so the affirmation of a greater perfection is nearer the truth than the affirmation of a lesser perfection. Nicholas leaves us with :

the conclusion that, in a way that we cannot comprehend, absolute truth enlightens the darkness of our ignorance. That then, is the learned ignorance for which we have been searching.⁵

The importance of Nicholas of Cusa to Erasmian folly lies in his emphasis on the need to abandon worldly knowledge and approach theological issues with humility and an awareness of human limitation. In these views, Nicholas echoes St. Paul's New Testament teaching concerning the foolishness of the apparent wisdom of men.

4. *ibid*, p.60.

5. *ibid*, p.61.

The second forerunner of Erasmus to be considered here is Origen. Origen is thought to have lived between c.185 and c.254⁶ and is chiefly known through his Platonising exegeses of scripture, interpretations which were enthusiastically received by Erasmus, and which prefigure important elements of Nicholas of Cusa's Neoplatonic theology. Both Nicholas of Cusa and Origen emphasise the need to empty oneself of human wisdom, they dwell on the need for humility and an admission of ignorance before any comprehension of the divine is possible. In the work of Origen we can see these tenets specifically applied to scripture, particularly to the New Testament, and it is clear that the Pauline epistles are as crucial to them as they later proved to be for Erasmus' own theology.

Professor M.A. Screech, in his book *Erasmus: Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly*⁷ points to the influence of Origen's exegeses of Matthew's Gospel, the Song of Songs and the Old Testament Homilies on Erasmus' formation of his theological standpoint, shown particularly clearly in the *Moriae Encomium*. He points specifically to Origen's *Eighth Homily on Jeremiah* as the clearest exposition of Christian folly. Here Origen develops the theme of human wisdom being as folly when compared to the wisdom of God: "Every man has been made a fool by wisdom" (Jeremiah 10.14). This interpretation Origen then links to his reading of I Corinthians 1.20 & 21: "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world". Here the emphasis is not simply on the fact that God's wisdom seems to be foolishness, but that the small measure of his wisdom which he chooses to bestow on mankind is, in

6. Biographic details of Origen can be found in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, 16 vols, edited by Mircea Eliade (New York, 1987), XI, 108-11. The dates are taken from this source.

7. M.A. Screech, *Erasmus: Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly* (London, 1980), p.14.

relative terms, as foolishness. We can see some parallels with Nicholas of Cusa's definitions by relative and negative terms, stressing that the greatest of human wisdom is still divine foolishness.

The link between human created and divine creator in Nicholas of Cusa's philosophy is the incarnation: the personal and existential identity of both *maxima*. For Origen likewise, the incarnation is the eventual access to the otherwise incomprehensible wisdom of God. The incarnation is thus God's act of folly, himself revealed in his divine word. Origen links in this way divine wisdom, Jesus Christ, the Logos and the incarnate message of God to man, as a variety of terms which all refer to the ultimate expression of the foolishness and wisdom of God. For Origen, the way of knowledge culminates in the figure of Jesus Christ, as the fulfilment of the Old Testament law and prophecies, and it is through looking at him that man can achieve the highest knowledge possible for a mortal. Thus the person of Christ in the gospels, and in the Transfiguration in particular, symbolises in Origen's theology a glimpse of the wisdom of God which man will see fully only in heaven.

The only-begotten Son, therefore, is the glory of this light, proceeding inseparably from [God] Himself, as brightness does from light, and illuminating the whole of creation. For, agreeably to what we have already explained as to the manner in which He is the Way, and conducts us to the Father; and in which He is the Word, interpreting the secrets of wisdom, and the mysteries of knowledge, making them known to the rational creation; and is also the Truth, and the Life, and the Resurrection, - in the same way ought we to understand also the meaning of His being the brightness.⁸

Origen's emphasis is essentially Pauline, and his theology follows closely, in this particular, that of Paul's epistles to the churches.

8. *De Principiis*, in *The Writings of Origen*, translated by Frederick Crombie, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Edinburgh, 1869), X, i, 24.

Clearly there are many other elements in Origen's theological and philosophical writings which cannot concern us here, although Erasmus was influenced by Origen in many of his exegetical emphases. In seeing the literal, philological sense of scripture as the foundation for the spiritual sense, in concentrating primarily on the New Testament texts in which Old Testament prophecies and images are seen to be fulfilled by Christ, and finally, in applying what is said of Christ to the Christian, seeing a pastoral and practical purpose in theological exegeses, in each of these ways, Erasmus follows Origen, but it is in the concepts of folly and wisdom that Origen is so significant to a study of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*. As Professor Screech comments:

Origen's platonising tendencies were well fitted to please Erasmus. And indeed few if any of the ancient fathers - none indeed that I know at first hand - could supply more ammunition to a man looking for authority to support a particular concept of the theme of the folly of the Gospel.⁹

2. The *devotio moderna*

Erasmus joined an English circle of humanists who were united in their interest in Neoplatonism, and who were in correspondence, via John Colet, with the group of Florentine Neoplatonists based in Italy. The Platonic tenets most important to a study of the *Moriae Encomium* centre on the notion of dualism - which sees the composition of man as a union of body and spirit. Dualism further emphasises that the body is in certain measure a tomb of the spirit, locking it in and preventing it from rising into ecstasy and freedom. Immortality consists of such freedom, the liberation of the spirit from its bodily confines - a state partially achieved through ecstasy. Such dualism lies at the heart of the ecstasy of folly as

9. M.A. Screech, *Erasmus: Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly*, p.19.

expressed in the *Moriae Encomium*, and will be returned to when the text is analysed in detail. For the present, it is important to see that Erasmus' book should be approached with some understanding of the philosophical and theological influences upon its author, which in turn help us to see his own synthesis of ideas and the roots of Erasmian folly.

Erasmus' own theology, or his *philosophia christi*, as he called it, grew out of his monastic experience and familiarity with the *devotio moderna*. Like the philosophy of Origen, the *devotio moderna* emphasises a way of life, applying the scriptural truths to practical living, rather than a bookish philosophy. "Devotio moderna" means "present-day devotion," and the term originated in the fifteenth century, applied to a group of mystics and teachers mostly belonging to the Brethren of the Common Life and the Augustinian Canons Regular of the congregation of Windisheim. The movement originated with the work of Gerard Groote of Deventer (1340-84) and was venerated by Thomas à Kempis, whose immensely popular book, *The Imitation of Christ*, is probably the best-known exposition of the movement. Erasmus' period as an Augustinian monk between 1487 and 1494 at Steyn, near Gouda, meant that his initial beliefs centred on the *devotio moderna*, and were thus influenced by the *Imitation*.¹⁰

The underlying concepts of the *Imitation of Christ* are important here, as they too have elements in common with the concepts of humility and practicality seen in the teaching of Nicholas of Cusa and Origen. In the *Imitation* man is considered to be an exile, a pilgrim through fleshly life, imprisoned in the flesh since it is this which blocks his way to Paradise and the heavenly life. The *Imitation* thus teaches the depravity of human nature, a concept we

10. The *devotio moderna* is discussed in fuller detail by Albert Hyma, *The Youth of Erasmus*, p.29.

have encountered specifically in Nicholas of Cusa, Origen and Neoplatonism, as well as an important element in the concept of folly as exemplified in Medieval folly literature, and particularly in Barclay's *Ship of Fools*. However, unlike some of these earlier thinkers, the *Imitation* urges self-examination and holds out the hope of salvation. Since man is created in the divine image, it is his task to seek inwardly the elements of the divine within himself, and by tending this inner light, to purge away sin and make room for pure love. Christian mysticism pervades the book, and man is urged to cooperate with God through faith to achieve personal sanctification and eventual salvation.

The emphasis on personal sanctification runs strongly through Erasmus' own works, and is particularly clear in the *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* (1503). (A work Erasmus himself mentions as being the more serious exposition of what he goes on to write "in the form of a joke" in the *Noriae Encomium*.) The imitation of virtue, of the saints, and preeminently of Christ himself is central to this process:

No devotion to the saints is more acceptable to God than the imitation of their virtues. Say you have a great devotion to St. Peter and St. Paul. Then by all means imitate the faith of the former and the charity of the latter.¹¹

Erasmus follows the *Imitation* in his dislike of dogmatism and ritual, the outward and physical manifestations which he considered frequently took place with no inward motivation from the soul, and which often stood in the way of a sincere inward search for union with God through Jesus Christ. As he wrote to Servatus Roger, "I

11. *Enchiridion*, translated and edited by John P. Dolan in *The Essential Erasmus* (New York, 1964), p.66. All other references to the *Enchiridion* will be from this edition.

disliked ritual and loved freedom".¹² The *Imitation of Christ* and its influence on Erasmus' early conception of Christianity is most important in relation to his own works then, because of its insistence on the individual's responsibility before God - to account for his own actions and to seek the purgation of his sin - and its view of life as a period of exile where man is, to a certain extent, trapped in the body and at war with the flesh. Once again, the emphasis is on the need for man to acknowledge and accept his human limitations with humility:

It is good for us to encounter troubles and adversities from time to time, for trouble often compels a man to search his own heart. It reminds him that he is an exile here, and that he can put his trust in nothing in this world. It is good, too, that we sometimes suffer opposition, and that men think ill of us and misjudge us, even when we do and mean well. Such things are an aid to humility, and preserve us from pride and vainglory. For we more readily turn to God as our inward witness, when men despise us and think no good of us.¹³

3. Humanist scholarship

If the *devotio moderna* and the *Imitation of Christ* were the primary theological teachings Erasmus was exposed to in his youth, then the other strands of teaching which must be considered are the secular classics which formed the basis of his education. We must shift our emphasis to the secular and humanist influences, which it

12. *The Correspondence of Erasmus 1501-14*, translated by R.A.B. Mynors and D.F.S. Thompson, annotated by Wallace K. Ferguson, in *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, II, 295, (8 July 1514). This is also quoted by De Molen, *The Spirituality of Erasmus* (The Hague, 1987), p.41, and an interesting discussion concerning freedom in personal union with Christ follows.

13. Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, translated and with an introduction by Leo Sherley-Price (Harmondsworth, 1952), p.39.

was Erasmus' particular ability to synthesise with his theological beliefs to form the *philosophia christi*. As J.K. McConica puts it:

It was his genius to fuse into a single stream of thought the converging currents of the late Fifteenth Century: humanistic textual scholarship, Florentine Neo-Platonism, Netherlands piety of the *devotio moderna* and the Windisheim reform movement, and the manifold discontents of a middle class suddenly aware of its power and its needs. It was this blend which received the alluring label of *philosophia Christi* - a phrase rich with patristic overtones, signifying a life of wisdom entirely consecrated to God.¹⁴

Albert Rabil¹⁵ sees the *Enchiridion* as the first indication of a synthesis worked between Christianity and humanism, and links this to Erasmus' discovery of Lorenzo Valla's *Notes on the New Testament*,¹⁶ which he later published. This discovery led Erasmus to put his intellectual tools of grammar and philology to work on scripture, realising the authority of the original Greek manuscripts over the accepted Latin *Vulgate*. In this way, Erasmus follows Valla in setting himself up as a humanist scholar, translator and editor of the sources of theology, using both classical and theological erudition to this end.

Erasmus is widely considered to be the major Renaissance representative of humanism, upholding ideals which were essentially derived from the pagan classics. His ideal of humanity was based on the Roman concepts of *humanitas* and *virtus*, and he was convinced of

14. J.K. McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics* (Oxford, 1965), p.14.

15. *Erasmus and the New Testament*, p.58.

16. Lorenzo Valla's *Notes on the New Testament* were found by Erasmus in 1503 and published by him later that year. By taking three Latin and three Greek manuscripts, Valla showed how they produced discrepancies which could affect central issues of faith and doctrine.

the importance of these ideals, although to a Christian mind they could not be seen as complete in themselves. Rather, Roman humanism and Christianity should work together to form a peaceful and harmonious order.

According to Erasmus, it was the synthesis of ancient wisdom with the new creed into the *philosophia Christi*, as achieved by Fathers of the church like St. Jerome and Origen, which won the battle for Christianity.¹⁷

Erasmus, recognising the crisis within the church, the decay and degeneration in its institutions and clergy, insisted that a moral programme of humanism, an appeal to individuals' *humanitas* and *virtus*, was the way for reform.

A full study of the classics is thus advocated by Erasmus in his *Enchiridion*, although only those which are edifying should be imitated! Plutarch, Aristotle's *Poetics* and Cicero's *De Officiis* are particularly recommended, along of course with Plato. These are not recommended purely for intellectual education, but specifically for their ethical and moral content, their exemplification of *humanitas* and *virtus*. Here, as was seen in the *devotio moderna*, the principle of imitation is most important. Erasmus intends his readers to follow examples of virtue in the secular world, just as ultimately he sets up Christ as the example *par excellence*:

so pick out from pagan books whatever is best. In studying the ancients follow the example of the bee flying about the garden. Like the bee, suck out only what is wholesome and sweet; reject what is useless and poisonous.¹⁸

It can be seen from the discussion of his humanism so far, that Erasmus' emphasis was always on the individual, and he becomes vague when these principles are extended to the organisation of society in

17. Fritz Caspari, *Humanism and the Social Order in Tudor England* (New York, 1968), p.59.

18. *Enchiridion*, p.39.

general. Additionally, he expresses a great optimism when speaking of the role of education, which seems to be seen as a means of overcoming all manner of social or hereditary defects, transforming the individual by an appeal to the *ratio*, man's reason. Thus, very simply, Erasmus saw the rule of reason, achieved via education, resulting in harmonious order. Education and learning are therefore crucial, but not as ends in themselves:

If you are interested in learning, certainly this is a fine quality, provided you turn your knowledge to Christ. If, on the other hand, you love letters only for the sake of knowledge, you have not gone far enough...Let your study bring you to a clearer perception of Christ so that your love for him will increase and you will in turn be able to communicate this knowledge of Him to others.¹⁹

Just as the *philosophia christi* places piety above theology, so the study of pagan classical texts should place their ability to improve the study of scripture above the purely intellectual gaining of knowledge. Thus, coupled with a firm belief in education and the use of humanist philological skills in exegesis, there is an emphasis on the figure of Christ and on personal sanctification;

This philosophy is of the heart rather than the understanding, of life rather than knowledge, of inspiration rather than erudition, of transformation rather than reason.²⁰

It would be wrong to imply that Erasmus' concepts of *humanitas* and *virtus* were immediately formed into a single comprehensive "humanism", or that the circle of friends Erasmus found on his first visit to England in 1499 were linked by a fully worked-out humanism either. Rather, the process was a gradual one, and the emergence of

19. *ibid*, p.58.

20. Quoted in John W. Aldridge, *The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Zürich, 1966), p.52, from Erasmus' writings on "Paraclesis". Aldridge emphasises the prevalence of the ideas quoted above from the *Enchiridion*, to Erasmus' other writings. Most important is the idea that intellectual study should lead to personal sanctification.

humanism as a movement has to be seen as the net result of a variety of influences and individuals' thoughts. On his first visit, Erasmus met John Colet and Thomas More - two among a whole circle of intellectuals who were to influence him most profoundly. His second visit took place in 1506, when Henry VIII was still a young boy and a promising heir to the throne of England. With the new reign just begun, Erasmus returned for his third and most influential visit in 1511-15. Until this third visit, humanism had existed only as a common concern amongst a group of intellectuals, and it is only in the period 1511 onwards, that is after Erasmus wrote the *Moriae Encomium*, that we can speak of humanism as a movement interested in affecting the wider society, indeed the Renaissance world.

Humanist thought first entered England in the 1480s and 90s with academics such as William Grocyn and Thomas Linacre.²¹ It began with a renewal of interest in Greek classics, and in philological analysis of texts. In 1496 John Colet returned to England after a visit to Italy, where he had learned Greek. His lectures, delivered soon after in Oxford University, demonstrated a new approach to the Pauline epistles, an approach which combined scholarly erudition with theological exegesis. Colet's interest coincided with that of a number of intellectuals in Italy, notably Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, reviving an interest in the ancients, particularly in the work of Plato. These initial developments were followed by the publication of new editions of scripture which emphasised their significance as texts of literature. Johannes Reuchlin's *De Rudimentis Hebraicis* (1506) enabled a scholarly, critical approach to the Old Testament via Hebrew philological study. Similarly, Jacques

21. See Maria Dowling, *Humanism in the Age of Henry VIII* (Beckenham, Kent, 1986) for a fuller account of the spread of humanism at this point.

Lefevre's later edition of the Pauline epistles (1512) used such an approach in its commentary. Lorenzo Valla's *Notes on the New Testament* was also published in 1504 - another text which revealed the importance of a careful, scholarly and philological approach to theological texts.

4. The *Enchiridion*

Up to the writing of the *Moriae Encomium*, Erasmus' fame rested on two books, his enormously popular *Adagia* (1500) and the *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* (1503). In both the emphasis is on the use of the wisdom of the ancients and of the scriptures for the benefit of the individual man. The *Adagia* was commonly used in schools to teach boys, by a collection of popular sayings, the fruit of the wisdom contained in the classics. The approach Erasmus takes is to make the sayings both relevant and accessible to people in general, not just to the intellectual few. In the same way, the *Enchiridion* was written as a general handbook for the individual christian soldier in his everyday spiritual battles. As J.K. McConica writes:

The Christianity of the *Enchiridion* is both unsacramental and untheological, and its strength lies in its elevation of the layman's vocation, seen as the potential source of new life in a church and society fallen into decay.²²

As we saw above, Erasmus' chief concern is with the education of the individual, and the application of his humanist and scholarly abilities to educate others in ethical, moral and religious matters.

The *Enchiridion*, [fig.16] is a product of its time, in its use of secular ethics and scholarship to religious ends. In it we can see a fusion of influences, an awareness of purpose and a prefiguring

22. *English Humanists and Reformation Politics*, p.23.

of the *Moriae Encomium* in its interest in the efficacy of a blending of secular and religious teaching:

Now his humanism would serve his religion, not the other way around. In the *Enchiridion*, for the first time, his humanism is integrated with his earliest religious consciousness. Christ is the center from which everything else is judged.²³

The *Enchiridion* begins to show the fruits of such a fusion, as Fritz Caspari writes:

In this manner, Erasmus Christianized classical erudition and at the same time humanized Christian education. He transformed Christian *humilitas* into Christian *humanitas*.²⁴

The book divides into two parts: the first dealing more abstractly with the purpose of man on earth and the nature of man; the second more specifically dealing with twenty-one "rules" for living a Christian life. Erasmus looks into the common sins of lust, avarice, ambition, pride, anger and others, to give practical guides and instruction on how best to overcome them. Designed as a handbook - "Enchiridion" can be translated both "dagger" or "manual", in either case a weapon for the Christian soldier - it was initially written at the request of a pious wife for her wayward husband. It proved to be one of Erasmus' most popular works, with fifty-one Latin editions and translations into German, English (ten editions between 1533 and 1576), French, Dutch and Spanish, all in the author's lifetime.

Unlike the *Moriae Encomium*, the *Enchiridion* is serious throughout. It is a plain statement of Christian living and an exhortation to develop and use the weapons of knowledge and prayer. There is an emphasis on secular study, although as has been pointed out, this was seen very much as a means to the end of the higher study of scripture. The book follows in the *devotio moderna* tradition of the *Imitation of Christ*, with the same emphasis on the

23. *Erasmus and the New Testament*, p.79.

24. *Humanism and the Social Order in Tudor England*, p.59-60.

inwardness of spiritual life, and the same low opinion of the outward but insincere observance of religion. Finally, the book is significantly condemnatory of the priesthood, who further outward religion while neglecting the true, inner spiritual health of their flock. Here again the *Moriae Encomium* is anticipated, as is the revolt of Luther and others - an event which took place some sixteen years after Erasmus was writing the *Enchiridion*.

Not only does the *Enchiridion* exemplify many of the influences and ideas which will reappear in the *Moriae Encomium*, but it is also, to a certain extent, a statement of Erasmus' future policy. In it he outlines the way of grace and its availability to all men, and the vision of a laity steeped in practical Christianity based on a firm first-hand knowledge of the gospel, correctly interpreted. He outlines the efficacy of the ethical elements of a classical education in preparing the mind and heart for spiritual understanding, and denounces the outward trappings of organised religion. Throughout there is an insistence that Christian religion is an attitude of mind and ethical code which comes from a knowledge and imitation of the person of Jesus Christ. The success of the book was perhaps more than Erasmus had expected, and in his typical modesty he comments in a letter dated 2 November 1517: "The *Enchiridion* is read everywhere; and it is making many people either good, or at any rate - we do hope - better than they were."²⁵

Finally, the *Enchiridion* displays an interest in the ethical code of the Stoics in particular. This will be significant in the later analysis of the *Moriae Encomium*, since there is a greater tension between the Stoic ideals shown here, and Folly's self-

25. *The Correspondence of Erasmus 1517-18*, translated by R.A.B. Mynors and D.F.S. Thompson, annotated by Peter G. Bietenholz, in *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, V, 175.

confessed Epicureanism. The chief elements of Stoic ruling philosophy to note are as follows. Firstly, man is distinguished from other animals by the natural gift of reason, it is this fact which leads him to seek virtue for its own sake.²⁶ Secondly, only man, of all created beings, is able to perceive God, via his divine designs evident in the universe.²⁷ Thirdly, human society is made possible only because all men are motivated by a common humanitarian social instinct, which motivates them to seek the common good before that of the individual. Since the supreme good is to live by nature, all sane men will choose to live by "natural law".²⁸ Lastly, according to Stoic philosophy, all human affairs should be ruled by reason, subduing and controlling the fickle passions at all times.²⁹ These are the central teachings of Stoicism as found in the writings of Cicero and Seneca, and those which Erasmus uses in several of his important works. Man's better nature and responsibility to fight against his passions are well-illustrated by the *Enchiridion*, while elements of Stoic philosophy can also be found in *Antibarbari* (1520) - where educational policy is grounded in the belief that man can better himself. Likewise, the *Declamatio de Morte* and *De Pueris Instituendis* (1534 and 1529 respectively) both use Stoic terms and show admiration for Stoic practices.

26. Cicero, *De Officiis*, edited by W. Miller (London, 1913), iii, 12, 50.

27. Cicero, *De Finibus bonorum et malorum*, edited by H. Rackham (London, 1914), iii, 20, 67; iii, 22, 73.

28. *ibid*, ii, 50, 50; iii, 5, 23.

29. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, lxxv. Notes 26-29 are taken directly from R.P. Adams, "Designs by More and Erasmus for a new Social Order", *SP*, 42 (1945), pp.131-145.

5. The *Moriae Encomium*:

(i) Editions

Any judgments concerning the concept of folly in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* are thus surrounded by an awareness of his eclecticism and expression of a wide variety of classical, philosophical, theological and historical influences. To merely locate Erasmus in a chronological development from what we observed in Barclay's *Ship of Fools* would not be enough. Instead, it is vital to be aware of the vast difference between an author like Barclay and an eclectic scholar like Erasmus. Extrapolating a single definition of folly from the *Moriae Encomium* would be impossible, since the complexity of sources and influences in turn leads to a complexity of types and varieties of folly; and this in the end will be the implicit point - Erasmian folly is a multi-faceted, multi-coloured concept.

The genesis of the *Moriae Encomium* is well-known. Erasmus wrote it while recovering from an illness, staying at the house of Sir Thomas More. He began it as a private joke, a play on More's surname ("moria - folly") and an apparent working-out of an idea he had while travelling to Italy for his first visit there in 1506-9. He completed the work in the Summer of 1509, and showed it in manuscript form to some approving friends. Urged by them to publish it, he went to Paris two years later to see it through the press in 1511. The first edition, with an Epistle Dedicatory to More dated June 9th., was printed without date by Gilles de Gourmont at Paris in 1511. The book was reprinted at Strasburg in August 1511 and October 1512, at

Antwerp in January 1512 and again in Paris, this time by Badius,³⁰ revised by the author, in July 1512. In all it seems some forty editions were called for during the author's lifetime.

Additional interest is found in the 1515 Froben edition, which has marginal commentary by Gerard Lystrius.³¹ We know from letters at the time that extensive assistance was given by the author in this, although the hand and name are those of Lystrius. This edition is also interesting because of the illustrations added by Hans Holbein the Younger and others. Translations of the *Moriae Encomium* began in 1517 with a French version by George Halwyn, first printed in Paris, 1520.³² The first of several Italian editions was in 1539, and the first of many Dutch in 1560.³³ The English translation by Chaloner was also the first of many editions, all of which are listed and commented on by E.J. Devereux in *Renaissance English Translations of Erasmus: a Bibliography to 1700*. It is clear overall that the *Moriae Encomium* was an enormously popular and well-read book and it seems that folly was at least as well-received from Erasmus as it had been from the *Narrenschiff*.

30. Dates and publication information are taken from Preserved Smith, *Erasmus, A Study of his Life, Ideals and Place in History* (New York, 1923), p.123.

31. See "Erasmus in English", newsletter published by the University of Toronto, 11, 1981-2.

32. Following this, French translations were made in 1642, 1670, 1713, 1780, 1789, 1826, 1867, 1870-2, and 1877, Preserved Smith, p.125.

33. Other known translations are as follows: German, 1520; Swedish, 1738; Danish, 1745; Russian, 1840; Spanish, 1842; Modern Greek, 1864; Czech, 1864; Polish, 1874, Preserved Smith, p.125.

(ii) Structure

The complex and multi-faceted nature of folly is initially represented in the structure of the book. Structurally it can be divided into three sections,³⁴ each revealing a different type of and attitude to folly. Part one (pp.86-121) treats folly as a mindless, uncritical attitude towards life: the happy idiot or the instinctive, unthinking man is extolled, though clearly ironically. A major movement takes place between this section and the next, second part of the book (pp.121-147). The attack on theologians, monks and miscreants which forms 'the substance of the middle section is far stronger in condemnatory tone, as folly becomes something morally reprehensible. The fools isolated here are malicious and evil, having a serious and negative effect on society by their behaviour. Stupidity and self-deception are the characteristics of those in this section who think they are wise, and they are not only satirised but condemned. In the third and final part of the book (pp.147-153), folly is addressed in another manner, altogether different to the preceding sections. Here the theological Pauline concept of folly is praised, and the ecstasy of folly is pointed to as a Platonic rejection of this world's standards. Paradoxically, folly becomes the spiritual wisdom of the Christian whose perspectives are beyond those of this world. Folly, in this final guise, is categorically and unambiguously venerated.

34. Most critics agree that the work falls into three sections, my suggestions for such a division are given by page references to *The Collected Works of Erasmus, Moriae Encomium*, translated and annotated by Betty Radice (Toronto, 1986), XXVII, 78-153 (notes in XXVIII). All further references to the *Moriae Encomium* will be from this edition and will be noted in the text.

The structure of the *Moriae Encomium* also dictates, to a certain extent, how we conceive of folly. The form of the mock encomium complicates any attempt at critical analysis of Erasmus' own concept of folly, since it is entirely given in a speech of self-praise by the figure of Folly herself. Particularly in the first part of the book, Folly attributes many things to herself. Commenting on the style, Huizinga writes:

This is bolder and more chilling than Machiavelli, more detached than Montaigne. But Erasmus will not have it credited to him: it is Folly who speaks. He purposely makes us tread the round of the *circulus vitiosus*, as in the old saw: A Cretan said, all Cretans are liars.³⁵

Erasmus' revival of the classical genre of mock encomium, writing primarily in imitation of Lucian, means that he is distanced from what he writes by a double twist, as Folly speaks in praise of herself. The mock encomium may be defined as a declamation in which the methods of legitimate encomium are used to praise persons or objects which are clearly undeserving of such praise. The trivial, useless or ridiculous are praised, as Folly comments:

There has been no lack of persons ready to spend lamp-oil and lose their sleep working out elaborate speeches in honour of tyrants like Busiris and Phalaris, quartan fever, flies, baldness, and plagues of that sort. (p.87)

Erasmus was well aware that some would criticise his style and treatment of his subject, as he preempts a certain amount of such criticism in his candid *Epistle Dedicatory to More*:

There may well be plenty of critical folk rushing in to slander it, some saying that my bit of nonsense is too frivolous for a theologian and others that it has a sarcastic bite which ill becomes Christian decorum. They will clamour that I'm reviving Old Comedy or Lucian, carping and complaining about everything. Well, those who are offended by frivolity and fun in a thesis may kindly consider that mine is not the first example of this; the same thing has often been done by famous authors in the past. (p.83)

35. *Erasmus and the Age of Reformation* (New York, 1957), p.71.

The list of famous precedents Erasmus goes on to give is indeed impressive, but as Sister M. Geraldine points out, stylistically:

Erasmus' list includes no work so complex as his own. Parody is not always panegyric, nor mock panegyric always parody; neither is necessarily satiric. Homer's *Battle* is parody but not mock praise; Virgil's gnat tale likewise; of the mock eulogies listed, only Lucian's two are parodies of rhetorical declamations; and of the fifteen works listed only five are satirical.³⁶

She goes on to conclude that the *Moriae Encomium* is unique because it displays all the qualities of the works listed, in one book. Parody is found in the mocking figure of Folly posing as an orator and following rhetorical rules; eulogy and censure in the serious moral criticism of the church and society; exhortation in its final pointing towards heaven (the traditional conclusion of any Renaissance exhortation); and finally, the book is an example of human dramatic monologue, using the varying moods of Folly as a woman to satirical and allegorical ends.

Although the mood of the *Moriae Encomium* is amusing, even whimsical, there is no doubt in Erasmus' mind that its subject matter is no joke, indeed its very severity is the more forcibly presented because of the paradoxical style:

Nothing is so trivial as treating serious subjects in a serious manner; and similarly, nothing is more entertaining than treating trivialities in such a way as to make it clear you are doing anything but trifle with them. The world will pass its own judgment on me, but unless my self-love entirely deceives me, my praise of folly has not been altogether foolish. (p.84)

Despite such explanations and despite the awareness that some would find his work offensive, Erasmus was merely proved right by, and not successful in preventing, precisely this kind of criticism. The

36. Sister M Geraldine, "Erasmus and the Tradition of Paradox", *SP*, 61 (1964), 41-63, (p.41). This article goes on to analyse in some detail the tradition of praises and paradoxical works which followed the *Moriae Encomium* in the sixteenth century.

whole point of the choice of form was to emphasise the paradoxical teaching of truth. The move from comedy to theology in the discussion of folly follows the Horatian concept "ridendo dicere verum" (to tell the truth with a smile, or in comic form). Nonetheless critics leapt upon the audacity of including the so-called Christian teaching in such an apparently scurrilous book, and Erasmus was forced to restate his position in his defence-letter to Dorp, in 1515:

My aim in the *Folly* was exactly the same as in my other works. Only the presentation was different. In the *Enchiridion* I simply outlined the pattern of Christian life...And in the *Folly* I expressed the same ideas as those in the *Enchiridion*, but in the form of a joke.³⁷

The ironic and paradoxical tone of the *Moriae Encomium* pervades the whole book, and delivers an implicit warning that to take things at face-value is usually dangerous. Seeming contradictions and hidden messages are the hallmarks of much ancient literature, not least the Bible, but common too in classical works and especially in Erasmus' model, Lucian. This style reflects an attitude towards life, a perception of its ambiguities and an awareness of the gap between appearance and reality. J.C. Olin writes:

Erasmus was preoccupied with this discordance, and with the distorting and reversing of values that accompany it, and whatever else it is, the *Praise of Folly* is a *jeu d'esprit*, a witty, verbal game, on this theme.³⁸

At the same time, and of course, paradoxically, it is a serious discourse on man and his behaviour. Folly gives a clue to the understanding of the book by her allusion to the Silenus figures, a symbol from Platonic dialogue, which were rough on the exterior, but concealed a beautiful, carved interior:

37. Quoted in the Introductory note to the *Moriae Encomium*, p.78.

38. J.C. Olin, *Six Essays on Erasmus* (New York, 1979), p.53.

It's well known that all human affairs are like the figures of Silenus described by Alcibiades and have two completely opposite faces, so that what is death at first sight, as they say, is life if you look within, and vice versa, life is death.(p.102)³⁹

Such a paradox has strong echoes of the words of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Mark 8.35: "For whoever will save his life shall lose it; but whoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospel's, he shall save it."

6. The *Moriae Encomium*:

(i) analysis of Part I

The *Moriae Encomium* begins with Folly enumerating her rights to attention. She mounts the rostrum [fig.17], she says, to deliver a eulogy in praise of herself. Marjorie O'Rourke-Boyle has linked the reasons Folly gives for her right to speak with those given by Wisdom in the Proverbs.⁴⁰ Proverbs 8 and 9 are a discourse given by the Lady Wisdom, beginning:

O men! I am calling to you;
my cry goes out to the sons of men
You ignorant ones! Study discretion;
and you fools, come to your senses! (Prov.8.4-5)

She enumerates her rights to attention in chapter 8, thus: firstly, because of her sincerity, her words conform to reality and she speaks the truth (v.6-11); secondly, because of her sound judgment and willingness to give advice and favours (v.12-16 & 17-21); and thirdly, because of her divine origin, as the first-born (v.22-26) and her own important role in creation (v.27-31). Parallels can be

39. The Silenus figures Erasmus refers to are taken from Plato, *Symposium* 215 A.

40. *Christening Pagan Mysteries* (Toronto, 1981), pp.53-61.

drawn between each of these notions and the opening of Folly's speech. She declares her sincerity and ability to proclaim herself (folly) better than anyone "Who could portray me better than I can myself? Unless, of course, someone knows me better than I know myself" (p.86). She goes on to protest her superior ability to deliver a speech, by contrasting her sincerity and directness with the hypocritical and dissembling use of long foreign words by the rhetoricians of the day. And finally, laying claim to her prestigious and divine origin by declaring "I didn't have...any...of those out-of-date mouldy old gods for a father, but Plutus, god of riches himself, the sole father of gods and men" (p.88). Folly then lists her nurses and followers to conclude "This, then, is the household which serves me loyally in bringing the whole world under my sway, so that even great rulers have to bow to my rule" (p.89).

With the divinity and authority of Folly thus established, (although of course, ironically), part one continues in the carefree manner of the goddess herself. As was mentioned in the structural summary above, this section deals with folly as a natural and instinctive attitude towards life. Folly argues for her necessity to life, and keeping the wheels of human living oiled. What we are presented with is folly as illusion - a mask of silly fun behind which to hide unpleasant realities of life like getting old or quarrelling in marriage, an illusion which all men will propagate simply in order to live, and which, Folly argues, is a benefit entirely attributable to her.

Folly claims power over life itself, since in propagating it man is involved in a foolish act, "if the philosopher ever wants to be a father it's me he has to call on" (p.90). Similarly, life and the ageing process would be intolerable without the illusion and assistance of Folly - indeed it is she who restores the senile to a

happy second childhood, in a parodic representation of metamorphosis: "Just as the gods of fiction often come to the aid of the dying with some metamorphosis, so do I recall people who are on the brink of the grave...to childhood once again" (p.91). The method of this transforming is forgetfulness - a quality which will recur in the *Moriae Encomium* with significance in part III, where it is treated in a theological manner as the forgetfulness of self, resulting in Christian humility and other-worldliness. In part I Folly maintains her metamorphic power is superior to that of the gods of antiquity, because they turned people into another being (in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Daphne is transformed into a tree, Ciris into a bird⁴¹). In contrast, Folly's change brings about a realisation of the self, a manifestation of man, couched in existential terms:

Now I restore a man unchanged to the best and happiest time of his life. But if mortals would henceforth have no truck with wisdom and spend all their time with me, there would be no more old age and they could be happy enjoying eternal youth. (p.92)

The implication here is that folly returns man to the happy illusion, undoing any false acquisition of sense or worldly-wisdom which may have tainted the original man.

The first conscious definition of folly is given in part I, where Folly uses Stoic wisdom as her starting point, and sets up the old passion versus reason conflict:

By Stoic definition wisdom means nothing else but being ruled by reason; and folly, by contrast, is being swayed by the dictates of the passions. So Jupiter, not wanting man's life to be wholly gloomy and grim, has bestowed far more passion than reason. (p.95)

Folly here aligns herself with Epicurean rather than Stoic philosophy, and attacks the Stoics whose philosophy saw *stultitia* as the basic evil. Several times in part I Folly adds to this argument, stating that a man must love himself in order to love others (p.98),

41. *Metamorphoses* 1, 452 and 12, 526.

he must allow himself to make mistakes and learn by them, but more than this, he must leave his false prudence behind: "few mortals realize how many other advantages follow from being free from scruples and ready to venture anything" (p.102). She returns explicitly to the Stoics to comment again on the segregation of the passions from the reason, stating that such false virtue leads to nothing but a "kind of marble statue of a man, devoid of sense and any sort of human feeling" (p.104).

The argument against Stoicism leads into a more specific attack on the gaining of learning and false wisdom. Folly has no time for "verbal wizards" who try to better themselves by accruing knowledge. She contrasts such men with the happy innocents of the Golden Age (p.107) who lived under natural instinct. But here there is an interesting shift in Folly's speech, since the "innocent folk" now become the "pious", and Folly reveals her belief in natural law, something we noted above, as part of the Stoic teachings of Cicero (and others):

They had...no demand for jurisprudence when there were no bad habits, which are the undoubted antecedents of good laws. They were also too pious in their beliefs to develop an irreverent curiosity for probing the secrets of nature, measuring the stars, calculating their movements and influence, and seeking the hidden causes of the universe. They thought it sacrilege for mortal man to attempt to acquire knowledge outside his allotted portion. (p.107)

Folly argues that men have lost their natural allegiance to her, to natural folly, and have sought an unnatural knowledge which it is not their business to know. (An interesting parallel can be drawn here with Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, in which the specific knowledge of the measurements of the universe is condemned - see Chapter 1, pp.20-26).

The Epicurean elements evident in part I of the *Moriae Encomium* form an attack on philosophers who try to rid themselves of emotion and who boast self-sufficiency. Folly insists life is a comedy which demands illusions to continue even its most basic functions.

Finally, the philosopher's sin is to aspire to wisdom beyond the limits of human nature, when the proper and prudent behaviour of the Golden Age was to be happily, even blissfully, ignorant. Folly goes on to contrast the happy life of an ignorant fool with those who continually strive after wisdom:

they are in fact doubly stupid simply because they ignore the fact that they were born men, try to adopt the life of the immortal gods, and like the giants would rebel against Nature, with the sciences for their engines of war. Conversely, the least unhappy are those who come nearest to the instinctive folly of dumb animals and attempt nothing beyond the capacities of man. (pp.108-9)

The privileged life of a clown, idiot, nit-wit, simpleton or fool is then described, with an emphasis on the happiness of such people's ignorance and lack of fear, and the special right of impunity for speaking the truth which is theirs alone. This description at once looks back and forward in folly literature. Looking back, Folly's attitude contrasts sharply with the morally hard line taken by Brant and Barclay. There the biggest fool was he who neglected to fear death or make any preparation for it. At the same time, Folly sets a precedent for Shakespeare's later use of the wise fool, the privileged clown who can speak out; "they're the only ones who speak frankly and tell the truth," says Folly (pp.109-10). A discussion of the happiness of insanity follows, which will be looked at more closely in chapter 3. Mild insanity though, Folly equates with folly itself, and lists the happiness and pleasures of those who follow their foolish whims, the hunters, the builders [fig.18], the adventurers by land and sea and the gamblers [figs.19 &

20]. All these categories can find parallels in Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, where they are all condemned as sinful.⁴²

Although Folly does not condemn these categories of fool, she subtly changes the tone and mood of her speech when she moves on to ridicule and condemn the religious practices of trusting in relics and senseless repetitions of holy words (p.114). There is not the cutting criticism of part II here, but there is a shift to a more serious note as Folly points to the serious consequences of trickery in religion and adopts a line more like that of Barclay. These more serious comments are not prolonged at this point though, and Folly continues in the lighter vein we are accustomed to, to list some more fools. She mentions those who glory in their ancestral past, and dismisses them with a favourable smile, since at least they are happy, if ignorant.

The final section of part I sums up the general relaxed tone. Folly expounds the virtues of self-love and of flattery of oneself and of others. Again, in contrast to Barclay who openly condemns the false flatterers and smooth dissemblers,⁴³ Folly's attitude is one of tolerance: "but it's sad, people say, to be deceived. Not at all, it's far sadder *not* to be deceived" (p.118). To this end, Folly considers herself vital to the well-being of mankind, and responds to the lack of formal thanks in truly foolish spirit:

But no one offers sacrifice to Folly, people say, or sets up a temple. Well...I'm easy-going and take it all in good part. Besides, I can't say this is what I really want...I hold the view that I'm worshipped with truest devotion when all men everywhere take me to their hearts, express me in their habits, and reflect me in their way of life - as in fact they do. (p.120)

42. Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, hunters, I, 103; adventurers, II, 23; gamblers, II, 69. The illustrations of gamblers from both Barclay's and Erasmus' works show similarities in the depiction of these fools.

43. *ibid*: flatterers, I, 107 and 210; dissemblers, I, 53 and 66.

In this comment, Folly is already echoing the notes of true devotion by imitation which were noted earlier in the *Enchiridion*, and which will be returned to with greater force later in the *Moriae Encomium*. For now, Folly has said enough, and part I ends with her announcement of her intention to list the various lives of her followers, the fools.

We have already seen several parallels between the *Moriae Encomium* and Barclay's *Ship of Fools* in the discussion of part I of Erasmus' work. However it is in the central section, or part II of the *Moriae Encomium* that the similarities are most marked, and in which Erasmus' style of writing, although still within the mock encomium, most resembles the literary heritage of lists or orders of fools outlined in chapter 1. The long mid-section of the book shifts in tone from the light-hearted banter to a more critical and satiric attack on fools. The persona of Folly, established in part I as a merry and humorous speaker, becomes more complicated to discern, and the negative voice in its place suggests an authorial moral tone closer to that of Barclay. The types of fools correspond in large measure to those mentioned by Barclay, although by now this is hardly surprising: both writers pick on the stock types of fool, the young man in love, the money-grabbing dowry-wedder, the cuckold figures, the glutton, the idler [fig. 21 & 22], the busy-body, the fortune-seeker, the dishonest dissembling merchants.⁴⁴ The list could go on, but such types of fool seem to interest the author less than the overt seekers of wisdom, and the corrupt churchmen. All those listed above are dealt with by Folly in virtually one breath (p.121), and despite their parallels with earlier folly literature, the types of

44. *ibid*: dowry-seekers, I, 247; cuckold-figures, I, 98; dishonest merchants, II, 219.

fool are of less interest to us here than the development of an overall concept of folly.

(ii) analysis of Part II

Part II of the *Moriae Encomium* is most significant in its lengthy attacks on the high-ranking in society, those who consider themselves to be leaders in the academic, political and religious spheres. In its attack on these individuals the section shows an interest in social criticism, not of the silly fools, those whose folly affects few but themselves, but of the hypocritical fools, who ape wisdom and in whose hands rests the power of influence over others. As such, the *Moriae Encomium* is the first real work of social criticism written by Erasmus. He had previously criticised theologians but the thrust of the criticism here is not at any group for its own sake, but at any group which has the ability to lead others astray. A species of *noblesse oblige*, like that seen in some parts of the *Ship of Fools*, is evident here. The *Moriae Encomium*, Albert Rabil writes, was:

The first clear indication that Erasmus' program of scholarship had as its goal the reform of *society*, both political, and above all, religious...from the *Praise of Folly* on, virtually everything Erasmus wrote had as its intention the reform of some aspect of society - the conduct of the schools, the behaviour of rulers, the restoration of piety within the Christian church through reform of the church's leaders and structures. The *Praise of Folly* is inconceivable before 1509. Viewed in the context of a growing vision of his own life and its significance, it was a fusion of concerns he had long entertained literally bursting forth.⁴⁵

Although the *Moriae Encomium* is startling in its critical and satiric attack on people in authority, Erasmus had always aimed his teaching at those of nobler birth, intending others to follow their good example. Here again, the emphasis is shifting somewhat from the

45. *Erasmus and the New Testament*, p.78.

appeals made in the *Enchiridion* and the *Instituto Principis Christiani* (1516):

Moriae Encomium, which mocks Erasmus' fundamental belief that man can improve himself through education, shows a temporary ascendancy of the Epicurean element (as opposed to the Stoic element) in his conception of *humanitas*. More permanently, it marked a weakening of his humanist (and Stoic) disdain for the masses.⁴⁶

Although those higher up in society are still aimed at, the attitude towards the individual is stronger, and it is because of his concern for the ability of the masses to be easily led astray that such barbs of satire are aimed at academic, political and religious leaders.

Folly as a concept here becomes detached from Folly the goddess. In part I the two had an easier alliance, Folly praised that of herself which was shown in the simple and ignorant, and we as readers could see and enter into the joke while taking in the grains of truth it held. In part II the orientation of the reader is disturbed. The narrative voice of Folly is less clear, as the authorial tone of Erasmus increases in severity; however we are still in the midst of a mock encomium, and we are still listening to a speech by a garrulous goddess. It seems there are two major effects from this. Firstly, the author maintains some safety of distance. The criticisms written in the *Moriae Encomium* are certainly real, and any reading of Reformation history will reveal how pertinent and potentially inflammable they were. By using the mock encomium and the now-accepted tone of Folly herself, Erasmus can hide and make full use of the double twist when it is most effective and necessary. Secondly, lest the *Moriae Encomium*, written as a light-hearted book to a personal friend, be in danger of becoming too straightforwardly a list of social criticisms, the form of the book and the personality

46. James D. Tracy, *Erasmus, the Growth of a Mind* (Geneva, 1972), p.113.

of its narrator are used to work as an antidote against this. While Folly's voice becomes less jovial, her style is still very much in evidence and the book has a far greater impact because of it. It is all part of Horace's concept "ridendo dicere verum", and it is in this important area that the major difference between Barclay and Erasmus' chosen method to portray folly lies. Where Barclay does degenerate into too much of a list of social criticism, Erasmus does not.

One example will serve to illustrate this difference and show that, where Barclay and Erasmus are at their most similar, they are still very different. Both writers reserve a large portion of their venom for the falsity of theologians, yet their opposing approaches are remarkable. On the one hand, Barclay condemns in a strident tone those who take Orders without serious motives, and those who affect religious knowledge and learning.⁴⁷ There is never any humour but what we might find ourselves, and the tone, though fervent, is aloof. Erasmus, or should we say Folly, has humour on her side from the outset. Her tone has always been chatty, so there is no reason for it to alter here, and its very colloquialisms are powerful in bringing down the mighty and self-righteous in one easy comment: "then there are the theologians, a remarkably supercilious and touchy lot" (p.126). She goes on, reaching a climax not in worldly condemnation, but in an ever-ascending, ever more ridiculous imitation of their religious debates, passing over the questions of sin, the Virgin birth and the Eucharist:

There are others more worthy of great and enlightened theologians (as they call themselves) which can really rouse them to action if they come their way. What was the exact moment of divine generation? Are there several filiations in Christ? Is it a possible proposition that God the Father could hate his Son? Could God have taken on the form of a woman, a devil, a donkey, a gourd, or a flintstone? If so, how could a

47. *Ship of Fools*, II, 57.

gourd have preached sermons, performed miracles, and been nailed to the cross? (pp.126-7)

Despite the obvious differences of context (Erasmus actually uses some real examples here!) Barclay and Erasmus still handle their material very differently, and the latter's writing serves to show not only his personal skill, but his vital grasp of the effectiveness of style, and primarily of humour, in making social criticisms have real bite.

The criticisms of theologians continue in strong tone, becoming more condemnatory, yet never losing the edge of humour, as satire almost becomes pure sarcasm. Folly warns against such self-filled ministers of the Word, since by the intrusion of so many man-made rules and additions to scripture, the original simplicity and point of the apostolic gospel is lost. Criticism extends beyond theologians to monks, and Folly illustrates her talk with the stock examples of gluttony and debauchery among those who profess strict and frugal living (pp.131-2). Folly explicitly aligns herself with Christ's words of judgment on those who glory in outward shows of piety while neglecting their inner sanctification. Here the parallels are clear with Erasmus' own insistence on the transformation of the inner man, the imitation of Christ, as opposed to the rituals and duties of organised religion. Folly specifically refers to such misguided theologians and monks as "fools", and the final transition has been made from the praise of folly in terms of its natural ignorance and simplicity, to the condemnation of folly where it is taken to refer to the self-deceived, those full of earthly knowledge but corrupt within. Part II of the *Moriae Encomium* is the point where it most closely resembles folly literature such as Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, in which folly is conceived of as sin and condemned outright. Erasmus achieves a condemnation through the means of an encomium, putting to perfect use the full power of the

mock encomium, the praise of something not worthy of praise: his particularly brilliant innovation is to have that condemnation come from the mouth of Folly herself on the grounds of her displeasure at their hypocritical attempts to deny folly and appear wise:

For my part, I'm only too glad to leave these hypocrites, who are as ungrateful in their attempts to conceal what they owe to me as they're unscrupulous in their disgraceful affectations of piety. (p.135)

The jibes at courtiers, kings and princes which follow are less bitterly critical and more couched in humour and ridicule. Again Folly's complaint centres on their pretence of being something they are not, a fault heavily censured in the *Ship of Fools* and a favourite in folly literature: dissembling of any kind is worse than being a fool, pure and simple. Just as the hierarchy of the political scene is criticised, so is the ecclesiastical hierarchy. With the return to religious subjects, Folly's anger is roused again, and the criticisms of Pope, cardinals, bishops and priests are severe. The emphasis returns to their collective failure to imitate Christ, let alone serve him, and their fastidiousness instead going into outward shows of religious behaviour and earthly pleasure. Most critics agree that Erasmus takes over the reins from Folly in his description of the Papal extravagances, presumably a picture painted after his recent trip to Italy (1506-9) and first-hand observations of the Papal train of Julius II (Pope from November 1503 to February 1513). It is Folly, however, who claims such men as her own:

Thanks to me, practically no class of man lives so comfortably with fewer cares; for they believe they do quite enough for Christ if they play their part as overseer by means of every kind of ritual, near-theatrical ceremonial and display, benedictions and anathemas, and all their titles of "your Beatitude," "Reverence," and "Holiness." For them it's out of date and outmoded to perform miracles; teaching the people is too like hard work. (pp.138-9)

Not only do the men of the church do the wrong things, but more significantly, they fail to do the right. Their biggest sin is that

of failing to imitate Christ, and in the list that follows Folly builds up her argument to a poignant and chilling climax by reminding us of Christ's actions, even to sacrifice his own life:

Interpreting the Holy Scriptures is for schoolmen, and praying is a waste of time; to shed tears is weak and womanish, to be needy is degrading; to suffer defeat is a disgrace and hardly fitting for one who scarcely permits the greatest of kings to kiss his sacred feet; and finally, death is an unattractive prospect, and dying on a cross would be an ignominious end. (p.139)

Folly quickly returns to satire and criticism only to excuse herself from being satiric when she is meant to be delivering a eulogy. The tone of part II begins to change again as Folly reminds us that her complaint is against those who will not admit their need of, and debt to her: "I touched briefly on these matters only to make it clear that no mortal can live happily unless he is initiated in my rites" (p.141).

In defence of herself, Folly concludes this part of the book with an appeal to other writers who testify to her in their "writings and behaviour alike" (p.141). There follows a collection of proverbs and sayings concerning fools and folly taken from classical sources. (In this case mostly from Horace's *Odes*, *Satires* and *Epistles*.) She quickly decides that the best authority is scripture itself, and we enter into a series of exegetical but satirical comments on the Old Testament citations of fools and folly. In both classical and biblical sources there is no shortage of sayings on folly and only a few are used here, as much as evidence of the power of logical-sounding argument as anything. Folly promises to argue like lawyers with "nothing to the point" (p.142), and though her references are relevant, it is the style and skill of specious argument which seems to be the real point.

Again we are in complex territory interpretatively, since Folly's tone will soon shift to a genuine praise of folly, as she

moves on to the exposition of Pauline folly and the folly of Christ. However, here she quotes exclusively from the Old Testament, and it is this which gives us our main clue that she is somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Nowhere in the Old Testament is there any really positive use of the concept of folly, since it is most usually found in opposition to the venerated Wisdom - the goddess figure discussed above (pp.54-5). In 170 occurrences of "folly" and related words in the Old Testament ("fool, foolish, foolishly, foolishness, fool's, fools,") none employs them paradoxically or positively, but all see folly in a contemptuous way. It is not until the New Testament, and then almost exclusively in the Pauline epistles (Christ's gospel uses of the words are usually negative and Old Testament in interpretation) that the positive paradoxical use is encountered.⁴⁸

Other clues to the less than serious tone of the argument are the very loose quotations of verses, and other hints follow in Folly's allusion to Paul's speech in Athens: "He left out all the words which would have damaged his case" (p.145), and in her aligning her technique with that of a "blockhead theologian" begging indulgence "if my quotations aren't always quite accurate" (p.147). However, the carelessness of the argument acts as a clever cover for what is actually happening, and in amongst all the Old Testament quotations we are suddenly faced with a reference to St. Paul and the second Epistle to the Corinthians. Professor Screech comments:

This introduction of a serious theological element into Folly's oration is managed with considerable art; it is so embedded in the light-hearted allusions to the verses from Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus that the point is made - and apparently done with - almost before we have noticed it.⁴⁹

48. Figures are taken from *Nelson's Complete Concordance of the RSV Bible* (New York, 1957). Fool: 73; foolish: 39; foolishly: 8; foolishness: 7; fool's: 5; fools: 38.

49. *Erasmus: Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly*, p.16.

Professor Screech points to the mis-quotation from Corinthians as a flaw in the argument, working against the thrust of the *Moriae Encomium*. Where Folly quotes in the 1511 version "who is unwise? I am more", in the 1514 revision Erasmus alters it to "I speak as a fool - I am more". Still the verse is a conflation of the two texts, II Corinthians 11.23 "less wise, I say I am more," and II Corinthians 11.29 "who is weak and I am not weak?". Not only does Erasmus confuse the point by his conflation, but as Screech shows, the *Vulgate* text he uses is a weak rendering of the Greek original, and Erasmus misses the opportunity to drive home the point of Christian "madness". The Greek word Paul uses is translated as "out of his wits" or "insanely beside himself", both versions of which would have added considerably more to the argument of Christian folly and ecstasy which follows this passage.

The main argument, however, is stalled again while Folly aims another attack at pedants and theologians and indulges in more distorted convolutions. Part II of the *Moriae Encomium* is thus ended, and the substance of the argument concerning Christian folly is found in the final short section (p.147 to the end of the book) which was altered in the 1514 revision, and which represents Erasmus' most radical statement of his Christian concept of folly, as found in the New Testament writings of St. Paul.

(iii) analysis of Part III

The last section of the *Moriae Encomium* reveals Folly making her final metamorphosis into a mouthpiece for Christian folly. The tone of the book alters once again, and though the colloquial voice is still recognisable, there is little use made of the satirical distancing of the author or of mock praise. Rather we are presented

with a powerful argument, packed full with biblical reference (for the most part accurate!) and paradoxically logical in its setting out of the gospel message. The progression of the book as a whole relies on Folly's ability to metamorphose, to change her stance and thereby reveal another angle of the multi-faceted concept of Erasmian folly. In this last metamorphosis the progression is complete and the climax is reached as Folly shows that even scripture recognises the universality and indeed the necessity of folly.

An analysis of the folly of the gospel leads us back to the theological and philosophical influences discussed earlier, particularly to the influence of Origen and Nicholas of Cusa. The concept of the incarnation as God's act of revelation of his wisdom, an access to the divine wisdom of the Father otherwise incomprehensible, and the concept of divine ignorance, an admission of our own ignorance and humility before God, combine to show how God in his mercy works out his redemptive plan. Paul is happy to acknowledge his humility, to receive gladly his divine ignorance as a "fool for Christ's sake" (the message of II Corinthians 11). At the same time, he urges the need for all men to do likewise before they can gain true wisdom: "whoever among you thinks himself wise must become a fool to be truly wise" (p.147). More than this, foolishness and folly can be attributed to God, since, as we have seen in Origen, the incarnation of Christ is the message of God to man, the making comprehensible his incomprehensible wisdom, the revelation which in relative terms is folly. "God's foolishness...is wiser than men" (p.147).

The two-fold concept of folly here rests on our own admission of sinfulness and inadequacy, our willingness to become as a fool, empty of self-seeking, worldly knowledge and acceptance of our humility before God. At the same time it rests on God's grace, his emptying

of himself (the doctrine of "kenosis", literally meaning the "emptying-out" of the Godhead in the taking of flesh in incarnation⁵⁰) in order to become comprehensible to men. In this way, we are fools, and Christ is the expression of God's folly: "Christ too, though he is the wisdom of the Father, was made something of a fool himself in order to help the folly of mankind" (p.148). Folly goes on to point out how Christ taught a way of life which was foolishness in the eyes of the world: forgetfulness of the morrow and dependence on him both call for a trust which is innocent, childlike, and folly to the self-sufficient. She sums up: "It is quite clear that the Christian religion has a kind of kinship with folly in some form, though it has none at all with wisdom" (p.149).

The last stage of Folly's exposition of Christian folly relies on the Neoplatonic roots we mentioned earlier. Here Folly touches on the concept of ecstasy and madness in folly, a release from the confines of the body and an uplifting of the soul. In explicitly Platonic language, Folly outlines the breaking free from the fetters of the body "which by its gross matter prevents the soul from being able to contemplate and enjoy things as they truly are" (p.150). Ecstatic madness will be considered further in chapter 3, but it is important to note that the final concept of folly which Erasmus leaves us with in his *Moriae Encomium* is one which combines a Christian humility and concept of God's saving grace, with an essentially pagan/classical notion of the parting of body and soul to

50. Professor Screech goes into more detail on Erasmus' later reluctance overtly to defend the concept of kenosis, which because of its emphasis of the total emptying of the Godhead in Christ, rather than a partial or gradual lowering, caused some controversy with theologians, notably Lefevre d'Etaples. See *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly*, pp.23-30.

allow an ecstatic union of the soul with God. "The pious direct their entire endeavour towards God, who is absolute purity, and after him towards what is closest to him, the soul. They have no thought for the body" (p.150). That blending of Christian and pagan elements, the quotation of both biblical and classical precedents which we noticed earlier in our discussion of Erasmus, is most evident and most telling in this his most enduring work.

Paul's epistles would have revealed to Erasmus the profound ambivalence of the concept of Christian folly, God's confounding the wise by means of the incarnation. The nature of folly, and how one discerns wisdom from folly, are questions pertinent to the *Moriae Encomium*, which though following a tradition of folly literature, differs very significantly in its concepts of folly and in its attribution of a positive role to a concept Barclay and others viewed only negatively, as a sin. The paradox of the Christian message is thus brilliantly contained and fittingly revealed by a paradoxical presentation through the mouth of a scurrilous goddess. The *Moriae Encomium* combines style of delivery with content in a celebration of paradox, a praise of folly.

The conclusion of Folly's speech, as she prepares to descend from the rostrum [fig.23] returns to the person of the orator, Folly herself. Marjorie O'Rourke-Boyle sees her comment "but I've long been forgetting who I am" (p.153) as a kind of coda to the eulogy she has given, a eulogy signalling the death of her personality and her own symbolic metamorphosis into another life:

Moria's own method of metamorphosis was to lead the elderly to the spring of Lethe, where they could drink to forget their former lives as an easement into death. As she herself drifts into death, she becomes forgetful, in preparation for a true forgetting in which she will no longer live, but Christ in her...But her apology also marks the reason why the eulogy must

end, as Moria forgets her former life and dies, mystically transformed.⁵¹

This Christian interpretation of the *Moriae Encomium* is linked with a pagan gesture in her words to her initiates as she leaves: "Clap your hands, live well, and drink" (p.153). In her farewell she enjoins them both to live and to drink. Boyle points out the pagan significance of drinking and its traditional association with the feasts of fools and foolish behaviour, but at the same time, the words have biblical connotations with Christ's command to drink of the waters of eternal life, and obtain satisfaction. The fusion of Christian and pagan elements seems a fitting way for the *Moriae Encomium* to end, giving folly universal significance as well as particular force.

51. *Christening Pagan Mysteries*, p.45.

CHAPTER THREE

FOLLY AND MADNESS; THE BOUNDARIES OF FOLLY

1. The roots of Renaissance psychology

The boundary between madness and folly is not always easy to define. Having outlined a development of various concepts of folly, from the Medieval, rather negative view of folly as predominantly sinful, to the more positive, humanist view of folly shown in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, we have established a range of types of folly on which to base the later analysis of the comedies of Shakespeare and Jonson. The preceding chapters give a linear, chronologically developing framework for folly, and it is the purpose of this chapter to give some lateral boundaries to this framework, and to look more concisely at madness as it appears on the edges of definitions of folly. Thus the investigation into madness here is not seen as an end in itself, but rather as a means of showing how the boundaries of concepts of folly often lie in the area of madness, and how a knowledge of Renaissance concepts of madness will influence and affect any analysis of Renaissance concepts of folly.

Definitions of madness are fraught with difficulty, and some would argue that it is almost impossible to separate madness from other forms of deviant behaviour. Even today there is considerable debate between psychiatrists on what constitutes madness, and the term, though perhaps more familiar to the modern ear than folly, is still one steeped in myth, tradition and confusion. To a certain extent, madness is culturally-defined, dependent on the accepted

cultural conceptions of normality and sanity for its own boundaries. Similarly, as the culture alters, so varying theories of madness go in and out of vogue, and the phenomena are labelled accordingly.

Just such a situation faces us when we try to investigate folly and madness in the Renaissance period. On the one hand, much of the basis of Renaissance "psychiatry" lies in the classical texts, still accepted as authorities well into the sixteenth century. On the other hand, the inherited Medieval concepts concerning sanity and insanity were also heavily influenced by accepted interpretations of biblical authority as well as by a considerable heritage of folklore and superstition. It is these two major areas that will form the basis of this investigation of madness as it relates to folly; that is, the medical and pseudo-medical concepts, derived mostly from Greek medical writings and adapted through the Medieval and Renaissance periods, and the religious and folkloric concepts, derived mostly from the Bible and related religious literature.

It is remarkable to see that when studying medical theories of the late Medieval and Renaissance periods, the persons we are most concerned with are the ancient Greeks. Although anatomy was an area in which the Renaissance added profoundly to man's understanding, in medicine in general, Galen, Hippocrates, Aretaeus and others are quoted through the eighteenth century and even into the early nineteenth century. Medicine relied heavily on authority and classical precedent, and although significant medical advances were made during this period, the established ideas still had enduring weight and significance. Simon Bennett, in his book *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece*,¹ singles out two particular characteristics of the

1. *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece* (London, 1978), pp.215-227.

authoritative Hippocratic Corpus, both relevant here. Firstly, its durability, as we have mentioned, which extended into the nineteenth century in some areas; and secondly, its simplicity in stressing when dealing with mental illness that any disease of the mind is first and foremost a disease of the body.

This last point is most significant in its assertion of the importance and predominance of natural causes when diagnosing madness, with the obvious correlative of the importance of natural and physical approaches in its treatment. The basic explanation for various forms of madness thus centred on the theory of deprivation of air to the brain, caused by excess phlegm blocking the way. Such a theory relies on the physiological cause rather than a religious, superstitious or mythological cause and as such directly opposes the views which will be considered in the second part of this analysis. It is because of such an emphasis that Lawrence Babb describes Renaissance psychology as a "physiological psychology"² where mind and body are not only closely related, but have direct influence over each other.

Thus in considering Renaissance psychology, what we actually go back to is the Greek philosophy of medicine which began with the doctrine of the four indivisible elements. This doctrine is ascribed to Thales of Miletus (639-544 B.C.) and is simply the theory that all natural substances are ultimately made up of a combination of any or all of the four elements earth, air, fire and water. The general doctrine is thought to have been included in a study of medicine by Empedocles of Sicily in approximately 400 B.C., with the application that good health required a balance of all the elements and poor

2. *The Elizabethan Malady* (East Lansing, 1951), p.1.

health was a result of an imbalance, which if unchecked would lead to greater disease and eventual death. In its medical form the four indivisible elements became the better-known four humours by a combination of temperature and moisture. Blood was classified as hot and moist, phlegm as cold and moist, yellow bile as hot and dry, and black bile as cold and dry. The theory was further refined by Hippocrates, who added to it a greater knowledge of astronomy, before it reached its Aristotelian form when the four temperaments, sanguine, choleric, melancholic and phlegmatic were derived from the four humours. The humoral theory in its basically Aristotelian form is what became the basis of medical theory for the following centuries until it was finally displaced by the discovery of the circulation of the blood by William Harvey in 1628. Even so, it is interesting to note both that medical discoveries like Harvey's met with a very mixed response, and that in Harvey's book, *De Motu Cordis* (1628) in which he outlines his theory of circulation, and in *De Generatione animalium* (1651) in which he discusses his scientific method, Harvey bases his work on and attributes a large part of his discoveries to Galen and Aristotle.

Galen was the last great authority in the Greek medical writings, most noted for his description of the cardio-vascular system, (the study of the flaws of which led to Harvey's new theory), and the mechanism of breathing. Galenic physiology was, however, not widely known in Medieval Britain since at this point his work was mostly preserved in Eastern Islamic texts. In fact, it was not until the late fifteenth century that medical learning, in the hands of the humanists, showed a renewed interest in the ancient texts of Galen and others, and it was Thomas Linacre who urged for a complete Greek edition of Galen to be published, some of which he translated

himself. (Galen's *On the Use of Parts* was translated into Latin by 1500 and Linacre translated *On the Natural Faculties* into Greek in 1523.) The concept of the four temperaments, central to Galen's work, is illustrated from a sixteenth century *Book of Hours* [fig. 24].

Aristotle and Galen together formed the basis of much medical training in the Renaissance period, and their work, though not specifically concerned with mental disease or insanity, is vital to an understanding of Renaissance concepts of madness. As was stressed earlier, the body and mind were rarely considered apart as separate entities, and the dominating humoral theory, by which most complaints were explained, demanded a total approach to mind and body in any search for causes or cures of mental disease. As Thomas Rogers wrote in a Renaissance treatise: he who "thoroughly would know him selfe, must as well knowe his boddie, as his minde".³

The physical constitution, then, directly affects the psychological condition, and a brief explanation of the physical will help our understanding of the theories of mental illness in the Renaissance period. Heat and moisture were the two indivisible elements considered necessitous to life. Youth had a high proportion of both, and as the body approached old age it became both cooler and drier, until the cold stiffness of death. The process of digestion, though variously interpreted, was vital to this. Theories ranged from the redistribution of food, essentially unchanged, to all parts of the body, to the theory of food naturally turning by putrescence into flesh, or to the most commonly accepted theory of concoction, the cooking of food by natural body heat. Once concocted by the

3. *A Philosophicall Discourse, Entitled, the Anatomie of the Mind* (London, 1576), "To the Reader", p.5.

stomach the food became milky "chyle" and was processed in a second concoction by the liver. Here the chyle was turned into blood and the other humours, although blood was the most plentiful. The blood proceeded to the tissues, while the yellow bile or choler passed via the gall bladder to the duodenum, the black bile or melancholy passed to the spleen, and the fourth humour, phlegm, formed by half-digested chyle, passed to the lungs and kidneys. Each humour was further described in physical terms, so for example in Valentinus' *Epitome of the Whole Course of Physicke* we read, "melancholy, or the blacke choler is a naturall humor, cold and dry, thick, grosse, blacke, and sharpe".⁴

The principle behind diagnosis and cure is thus that of humoral balance, since the processes of the body are all involved in the production and regulation of the four humours. Diseases are classified by means of hot and cold, dry and moist, and cures aim at righting the imbalance. Suggestions for cure frequently include blood-letting or purgation, varying the humidity and temperature of the individual's surroundings, and altering patterns of lifestyle. Additionally, since humours originate in the digestion of food, dietary intake was of crucial significance, and Renaissance dietries categorise food under the same headings of hot and cold, dry and moist, as the classification of diseases. An ailment of almost any kind, including a mental disease, could therefore be treated by an attempt to redress the humoral imbalance.

Following the two digestive processes, there are two other refinements, both from the blood, to produce the vital spirits and

4. Petrus Pomarius Valentinus, *Epitome of the Whole Course of Physicke*, second impression (London, 1612), p.9.

the animal spirits. After digestion the blood travels to the heart, where the purest blood is refined into vital spirit. This substance was associated with heat and moisture and was seen as the vehicle for life. Flowing from the heart to the brain, some of the vital spirit was refined into animal spirit, the fluid of the nervous system, acting as a link between the brain and the nerves in the body. Even the spirits could be linked to the humoral balance, since both depend on the quality of the blood for their own quality - thus there is a direct link between the mental and physical processes of the body.

Concepts of the mental faculties are largely explained with reference to the soul, and here again Renaissance thinking is derived from the Greek models which saw the soul as animator of an otherwise inert body.⁵ Classifications of the soul most commonly divided it into three separate, yet in practice, indivisible parts: the vegetative soul, the sensitive soul and the rational soul. Plants and animals were also endowed with vegetative souls, animals with sensitive souls too, but it was a distinguishing feature of man that he alone possessed all three parts, including the highly significant rational soul. We shall see how madness links with folly in this area when it is defined, at least in part, as a loss of or suppression of reason. (For Erasmus' comments on folly and reason see chapter 2, pp. 56-8)

It is in the areas governed by the sensitive and rational souls that what we would now describe as psychology is located, and a

5. I am indebted here to Lawrence Babb, for his clear exposition of the mental and psychological processes as understood by Renaissance physicians.

closer look at the functions of these two souls can illuminate some of the concepts of madness and insanity which were the result of their malfunction or disease.

The rational soul is clearly viewed as being in control of all bodily processes, physical or mental, and should have the senses as its agents rather than its rulers. It is divided into two, the reason and the will. The former controls judgment between good and evil, the knowledge of truth, and is the decisive force behind the will. The will is informed by the reason, and makes the decision to act or desire via the sensitive soul. The will, because it is controlled by the reason, desires good and hates evil, but conflict can arise between the rational soul as a whole and the sensitive soul, since the sensitive soul may desire evil. In a normal person, the rational soul will win, since the reason is seen as the absolute controlling force. Thus we can see how abnormality can initially be defined simply as the breakdown of reason, and how the behaviour of an individual is linked with his mind and his body.

Mind and body were further linked by the effects of the humours on the passions and will. A passion was considered to be a physiological phenomenon, a muscular movement in the heart, properly instigated by reason, but not necessarily, since it was also possible for a passion to be caused directly by a superfluity of any one humour. Any passion resulting from a humour in this way assumes the qualities of that humour, so that such a passion would initially worsen the imbalance which was its cause, and unless the imbalance was redressed, could ultimately kill. The link between mental and physical health is again emphasised, and the importance of maintaining both the reason, by which soul and body are controlled,

and the humoral balance, which can independently affect the mind as well as the body, is clear.

2. Madness in sixteenth century medical books: *Breviary of Healthe, Methode of Physicke* and the *Castel of Helth*

Such a firm connection between physical and mental health, and between external and internal conditions led to many Renaissance writers hedging their bets when it came to the diagnosis of madness. Most divide madness as a whole into several categories, including mania, frenzy, epilepsy, or more general terms such as "affects of the mind". Andrew Boorde in *The Breviary of Healthe* (1547) does this when he writes under several headings concerning madness, but does little to actually distinguish the types. Under the heading of "mania" we read:

This infirmytie doth come of a corrupte bloude in the head, and some doth saye that it doth come of a bylous bloud intrused in the head, and some saye it doth come of wekenes of the brayne the which letteth a man to slepe, and he that can not slepe muste nedes have an ydle brayne, and some say it is a turnyng up so downe in the head, the which doth make the madnes.⁶

Such theories add weight to the notions of head operations whose primary function seems to have been the alleviation of the pressure caused by "corrupt blood in the head," or removal of the "folly stone", [fig. 25 & 26]. Other writers take great care to note down all the symptoms of the sufferer, as well as giving a more theoretical medical diagnosis. For example, Philip Barrough in *The Method of Physicke* (1583) begins with a description of madness along the lines of excess blood leading to an increase in pressure: "it [madness] is caused of much bloud, flowing up to the braine, sometime

6. *The Breviary of Healthe*, book I (London, 1547), folio 65.

the bloud is temperate, and sometime only the aboundance of it doth hurt". He then goes on to list some of the better-known symptoms in much more general terms:

There goeth before madnes debility of the head, tinckling of the eares, & shinings come before there eies, great watchings, thoughtes, and straunge thinges approach his mind, and heavines with trembling of the head.⁷

Philip Barrough's book was widely read and re-issued several times before 1652, with little alteration. The book is interesting here in two main ways, firstly as an illustration of the authority of Galen and Aetius - both of whom he uses to back up his comments. Secondly it shows clearly the detailed divisions made in the classification of mental problems, when the differentiating factor was usually the crude test of the presence or absence of a fever, measured by the pulse-rate. Barrough divides mental illness into six areas, labelling them as follows: "frensie, lethargy, apoplexy, epilepsia, madnes and melancholie". The category of mania or madness was quoted above, and the other category most closely related is frensie, described in medical detail thus:

Aetius saith that it is an inflammacion of the filmes of the braine with an acute fever, causing raging and vexation of the mind. Ther be three kindes of frensies (as Galen doth witnesse in his fourth Booke *de Locis affectis*.cap.40.) according to the internal senses, which be three in number, that is imagination, cogitation & memory, which may severally be hurt. Two of those kinds be simple, and the third is compounded of those two. For some be frenetick, which can judge rightly of those things that they see as touching common sense & imagination, and yet in cogitation & fantasy they erre from naturall judgement. Some other being frenetick are not deceived in cogitation and reason, but only in imagination they erre. Ther be other some frenetick which do erre both in sense and cogitation (that is) both in imagination & reason, and doe ther with also lose ther memory.⁸

7. *The Methode of Physicke* (London, 1583), p.31.

8. *ibid*, p.17.

Barrough's comments ally with the generally accepted explanation of the sensitive soul, consisting of a hierarchy of memory, imagination, and common-sense. His attention to detail also shows that, though Renaissance concepts of madness may have been based on little that was actually true, they were by no means crudely generalised or non-specific. Madness is described in various categories, their symptoms noted, and cures, along with the likelihood of their ultimate success, were carefully recorded.

Definitions of madness in such sixteenth century books vary in their details, but most seek to divide it into several different types, and pinpoint the humours as the cause of such inflammation or disease of the brain. Since humoral imbalance is primarily to blame in cases of madness, a cure is nearly always considered possible. There seems to be little emphasis on congenital madness, (although Burton, writing later in the period does go into this) and little concept of madness being a permanent damage to the brain. Cures are many and wide-ranging and, though some warn of possible death if they don't work, few writers suggest that no cure is possible at all.

Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Castel of Helth*, first published in 1539, was the first manual of popular medicine written in the vernacular and has a section on the "affectes of the mynde". Elyot is refreshingly down-to-earth in his advice, and as well as stressing the need for counsel - some kind of psychotherapy - he suggests physical cures:

The fyrste counsayle is, that duryng the tyme of that passion, eschewe to be angry, studyous or solytarie, and rejoyse the with melody, or els be alway in suche company, as best may content the.

Avoyde all thynges that be noyous in syghte, smellyng, and heryng, and imbrace al thinge that is dilectable.

Flee darknes, moche watche, and busynesse of mynde, moche companieng with women, the use of thinges very hote and drie:

often purgations, immoderate exercise, thirst, moche abstinence, dry wyndes and colde.⁹

Although Elyot's advice is almost more common-sensical than specifically medical, he still makes mention of the humoral cures in his closing lines when advising the patient against immoderate heat, cold or dryness. Certainly he seems to make more sense to the modern ear than Pope John XXIst's suggestions amongst various folk remedies where we read "certayne men say that a rosted mous eaten doth heale franticke persons".¹⁰

The curability of the mad is clearly an issue when we consult early records of hospitals and institutions for the mentally ill. St.Mary of Bethlem (also known as Bethlehem or Bedlam) hospital [fig.27] seems to have aimed at curing, and the first known written reference to this appears in the same manuscript as William Gregory's *Chronicle of London*, dated about 1450. Patricia Alderidge quotes it in her illuminating article on the much-maligned Bedlam hospital:

A church of our Lady that is named Bedlam. And in that place be found many men that be fallen out of their wit. And full honestly they be kept in that place; and some be restored unto their wit and health again. And some be abiding therein for ever, for they be fallen so much out of themselves that it is incurable unto man.¹¹

9. *The Castel of Helth* (London, 1541), folio 5[7].

10. Quoted from R. Hunter and I. McAlpine, *Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry 1535-1860* (London, 1963), p.12. This book has a number of interesting excerpts from medical and psychological treatises at the time and later.

11. Quoted from Patricia Alderidge, "Bedlam: fact or fantasy?" in *The Anatomy of Madness*, edited by W.F. Bynum, Roy Porter and M. Shepherd, 2 vols (London, 1985), II, 17-33 (p.29). A second article by Alderidge, "Management and Mismanagement at Bedlam, 1547-1633",

Here there is a distinction made between the curable and the incurable, a distinction further exemplified by the presence of an "incurable" department noted in the hospital records, implying that this was an exception to the other "curable" departments where most inmates were housed. Alderidge also points to the patient admissions records as frequently referring to the release of cured patients, for example the case of Priscilla Campbell is found in an entry of 1682:

Whereas Priscilla Campbell about six months since was admitted into the hospital of Bethlem for cure of her lunacy And now the said Priscilla being by the blessing of God and the means that hath been used recovered and restored to her former senses It is ordered that she be discharged.¹²

It is unfortunate that the "means that hath been used" are not specified, but the principle of curing is there. The same records note an attempt to clear the hospital of incurable patients in 1681, and certainly later in its history the asylum was keen to limit the stay of its inmates to one year unless there was a good prospect of a cure. A hint concerning the means of cure, as well as the intention, is given in the case of Dr. Hilkiah Crooke, keeper of the hospital from 1619. Found to be the epitome of his name, Dr. Crooke was several times investigated for fraud and mismanagement, and ultimately dismissed. However, one of the charges is particularly illuminating, since the Board complained that he had made no attempt to cure people. Dr. Crooke's reply was that he had cured seventeen patients on his arrival, but had since ceased because the governors

is included in *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, edited by C. Webster (Cambridge, 1979), pp.141-64.

12. *ibid*, p.30, quoting from the Minutes of the Court of Governors of Bridewell and Bethlem, 20 May 1682.

refused to pay his apothecary bills. This is interesting not only because it shows expectation of cure, but because it hints at the use of early druggists of some kind. It proves to be a dangerous hint to take too seriously though, as most of Dr. Crooke's assertions were found to be untrue when investigated by the Board.¹³

Sir Thomas More's *The Apologye of syr T. More, knyght*, (1533) also mentions Bedlam, but speaks of cure in the more familiar terms of correction. Madness in this case seems to be more a term applied to socially unacceptable or abnormal behaviour, "cured" by disciplinary action. More describes:

Another was one, whyche after that he had fallen in to ye frantike heresydes, fell soone after in to playne open fransye bysyde. And all be it that he had therfore ben put uppe in bedelem, and afterwarde by betynge and correccyon...beganne to come agayne to hym selfe.¹⁴

The more brutal methods of "curing" the insane are ones which have survived more readily in folklore and myth. Although clearly madness was misunderstood by some and madmen widely mistreated, much of the evidence of such behaviour is suspect, and Bedlam in particular is somewhat misrepresented.¹⁵ The negative moral attitudes to the mad will be considered in the second part of this chapter, together with the religious and biblical models of madness from which they largely sprang.

13. *ibid*, pp.29-30.

14. *The Apologye of syr T. More, knyght* (London, 1533), folios 197-8.

15. Patricia Alderidge makes a convincing case for the misrepresentation of the facts concerning Bedlam hospital in particular, in her article, "Bedlam: fact or fantasy?", quoted above.

Before going on to look at these moral and religious concepts of madness, more must be said on the link, if any, between the vernacular medical and pseudo-medical books quoted and referred to above, and the actual care of the mad in medical and social terms. This is an important issue, since there is little evidence really to link the two areas, yet both have bearing on our overall picture of the concepts of madness in the Renaissance.

The first problem in consulting medical and pseudo-medical books of the sixteenth century is one of definition. "Medical" as a term is not precise enough, since the books range from paternal advice to practical manuals. One distinction does lie in the fact that most anatomical and strictly medical books (in the sense of surgery manuals and the like) were still written in Latin, on the other hand the subjects of the vernacular literature tend to be more discursive and written for the layman. Indeed, Paul Slack, in his article "Mirrors of Health and treasures of poor men: the use of the vernacular medical literature of Tudor England",¹⁶ postulates that we can tell from booksellers' records that a large number of such books were collected by country gentlemen to supply them with basic guidance and expertise on household medical matters. Slack also points out that, more surprisingly, some of the ostensibly "popular" books seem to be aimed at a medical audience, since for example, Andrew Boorde lists the Latin names for herbs and medicines in his *Breviary*.¹⁷

16. In *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, pp.237-73.

17. *The Breviary of Healthe*, see note 6.

Many medical books were translations or adaptations from foreign treatises or reissues of collections of old remedies under new titles. This was accepted largely because of the importance, mentioned above, of authority and precedence, a concern far more valid than that of originality, or even of authorial expertise. Thus the medical establishment - such as we can identify - played a relatively small role in the writing and publishing of medical literature in the vernacular. Although precise figures are difficult to obtain, Slack estimates that only approximately one-third of the textbooks, regimens and books of remedies with identifiable authors were written by known physicians. More authors were concerned with medical matters than simply those who practised medicine, an obvious example being Sir Thomas Elyot, as quoted above. The definition of medical literature also becomes blurred into religious writings, and many authors were clergy who were concerned with the physical as well as spiritual health of their flock - an area we will consider later in more detail. Further blurring exists between medical books and almanacs, which became extremely popular in the sixteenth century. (The first author of English almanacs was the same Andrew Boorde as quoted.) Almanacs frequently had a medical section in which were listed the best days to engage in bloodletting, humoral treatment and surgery.

The content of popular medical literature has been seen already in some of the quotations above, but it is useful to summarise briefly the typical emphases of such books. Firstly, they are generally conservative and reassuring in tone, reinforcing current popular notions of cures and giving advice on easing the patient's symptoms. As such they usually attempt some definitions of typical symptoms, explanations of causes and suggestions for cures. Most use

the prevailing humoral theory in some way, as was seen in the quotation from Elyot, although there are some additional more innovative remedies. Reassurance was also given in the citing of previous successful cases, or in name-dropping some important ancient authority. Slack comments: "the rationale behind such remedies was never articulated" and points out that collections and reissues of remedies had a legitimising and self-perpetuating effect:

In doing so, they reflected something of the pluralist medical system of Tudor England, the appeal of which lay less in any understanding of its diverse intellectual origins than in respect for tradition and the habits engendered by repetition.¹⁸

So much for the medical literature of the sixteenth century, but what, if any, connection did it have with the actual attitudes to and care of the mad? Some mention has already been made of the most famous mental institution, Bethlem Hospital. It is difficult to be precise about when specific hospital care for the mentally ill began. The earliest provision positively known is the hospital by St.Bartholomew's church in London, founded in 1123.¹⁹ Although this did not specifically cater for mental patients, some of the early recorded cases were definitely diseases of the mind or illnesses with strongly emotional symptoms. The staffing of this hospital did not initially include a doctor, and it is not clear as to whether the hospital - in the modern sense of the word - was really separate from the general accommodation provided for visitors to St.Bartholomew's shrine.

Other hospitals or monastic infirmaries are more notable for their exclusion of the mentally ill from their lists - Basil Clarke

18. "Mirrors of Health and Treasures of Poor Men", p.266.

19. See G. Whitteridge and V. Stokes, *A Brief History of the Hospital of St. Bartholomew* (London, 1961).

in his book, *Mental Disorder in Earlier Britain* notes that St. John's, Coventry excluded the mad, quarrelsome and leprous, and Ewelme in Oxfordshire allowed "no wood man".²⁰ Clarke also refers to a licensed plan for the London hospital, All Hallows by the Tower, by its chaplain Robert Denton, so that it could provide for "poor priests and others, men and women, who in that city suddenly fell into a frenzy and lost their memory".²¹ This plan was dated 1369, and he records a similar statute in 1414, in which a call was made for provision for the helpless and poor, including those "out of their wits".

The history of Bethlem hospital will not be gone into here, but its origins were in The Stone House near Charing Cross, and this could be labelled the first real mental hospital. It was moved in about 1377 to Bethlem at Bishopsgate, because the king objected to the inmates being so near to his palace at Whitehall!²² The administration of the hospital was eventually merged into that of Bridewell, and they were run jointly from 1557 onwards.

Hospitalisation was not the only answer to madness, although it is more difficult to give documentary evidence for other remedies. Rather like Michel Foucault's reference to the mad being sent off in ships (see chapter 1, note 30), the references we have to other expulsions and enforced pilgrimages are difficult to substantiate and form into a coherent picture of policy. George Rosen, in *Madness in*

20. Basil Clarke, *Mental Disorder in Earlier Britain* (Cardiff, 1975), p.78.

21. *ibid*, p.112.

22 See E.G. O'Donoghue, *The Story of Bethlehem Hospital* (London, 1914).

Society, gives examples of expulsion from communities as a remedy for the mad in Germany, from the Hildesheim Municipal Accounts, 1384-1480, and of confinement in town jails as a method of restraining the mentally ill before expulsion, practised in fourteenth century Basel.²³ In each of these cases it seems the local authorities were financially responsible for the management, by expulsion or otherwise, of their own mad.

Special mental institutions became increasingly evident in the sixteenth century, when identifiable social policies were instituted by local and municipal government. Rosen links this tendency with the Protestant reformers and the rise of absolutist government, and points to the humanist Jan Luis Vives who included the mentally ill in his proposals for reform in 1526 in Bruges. Both Rosen and Foucault²⁴ mention the use of old lazar houses as early mental institutions, following the extinction of leprosy in Europe in the fifteenth century.

We might summarise the investigation into the medical concepts of madness by saying that it was a medical condition seen always in relation to the physical body, and generally explained by means of the humoral theory. Secondly, and as a consequence of this view, it was normally considered curable and treated in a similar way to other disease. Thirdly, actual medical care was patchy and variable and frequently seems to have involved some sort of segregation of the mentally ill from other complaints. Medical and pseudo-medical books show a variety of cures, although certain specific remedies prevail

23. George Rosen, *Madness in Society* (Chicago, 1968), p.140.

24. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* (London, 1967), pp.6-7

due to the self-perpetuating and cross-fertilising nature of the medical literature of the period.

3. Madness and sin: disease or demon-possession?

These general conclusions lack one perspective, isolated at the beginning of this chapter, which throws a very significant light on the subject of madness in both the late Medieval and Renaissance periods, that is the perspective of religion. Any investigation into madness at this point in history must take serious note of religious influence, since the body and its physical and mental health was inexorably bound up with God and an individual's spiritual health. The dominance and authority of the church in the Medieval period, and the centrality of religion to the turbulence of the Renaissance is obviously important in many areas of social history, but in the study of madness it is especially relevant. It is here too that there are clear links with folly, particularly with the morally condemnatory attitude to folly encountered in chapter 1 when considering Barclay's *Ship of Fools*.

Most disease, but especially madness, is traditionally associated with guilt in the Medieval period. An Old Testament concept of God visiting disease and madness on his people or their enemies as punishment or vengeance, is the basis of the attitude towards madness in this period and earlier. Indeed, Penelope Doob asserts in her book *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature*:

whatever the reason, medical theory from pagan antiquity through the Renaissance assigned moral as well as physical causes to

disease, and religious remedies were proposed in conjunction with more purely physiological ones.²⁵

In Greek and Roman authorities madness was frequently linked with disobedience or displeasing the gods, and conversely the kind of Platonic ecstasy discussed in chapter 2, (pp. 70-1), directly links madness with a religious experience or mania.

Religious teaching held that ultimately all disease comes from God, is allowed by his permissive will, and is used either as a punishment for an unrepentant sinner, or as a test for the improvement of the soul, or as a reminder to the sinner in order to turn him away from his sins. By means of these three explanations, disease could be justified in the cases of the morally bad and the morally good. Madness, however, was a slightly specialised subsection of disease and, more than any other ailment, was most frequently viewed as a direct punishment from God, depriving man of his reason, which was the controlling force of the physical and mental body.

Divine inspiration and demon-possession are the other possible explanations offered for madness, particularly in the Medieval period. As was mentioned earlier, madness is culturally-defined to a certain extent, and explanations similarly reflect the acceptable norms of society as well as the current theories. This seems to have been the case in the period of transition between the Medieval period, when primarily religious explanations dominated, and the Renaissance period, when the interest in medicine gave greater weight to the humoral theory as an alternative explanation for madness. Simon Bennett, discussing the development of models of mental illness

25. *Nebuchadnezzar's Children* (New Haven, 1974) p.1.

gives high precedence to the power of cultural norms in its explanation:

At various times in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, for example, a person who felt and acted in a decidedly peculiar manner might report that he had recently experienced an encounter with a demon or succubus. He would be taken for healing to a priest, who would confirm that such events did indeed happen, and would apply appropriate diagnostic criteria to establish if this was such a case. He might be able to determine which particular demon was involved and to prescribe treatment. It was not until physicians began to claim rather energetically that many people were victims of illness, not demon possession, that a rival theory was introduced. When certain judges, physicians, and patients began to accept the theory of illness, more people began to report their experiences in forms that fitted a medical-humoral theory.²⁶

In fact, the influence of religious explanation continued longer than this quotation suggests, and although the humoral theory became an alternative possibility, the sixteenth century was one in which there were still deep-seated religious cultural norms and an extremely large number of people more willing to accept a moral and religious explanation for madness than a medical one.

The link between madness and sin is one both reminiscent of late Medieval attitudes to folly already discussed, and one which, as in the case of folly, stresses a potential universality. By linking anything to sin, the immediate implication is that we are all universally condemned, since all have sinned:

when reason implies not conformity to a norm but ideal conduct, unquestioning obedience to God, then madness encompasses us all, for the just man falls seven times daily, and even one sin suffices to justify the name of madness.²⁷

Few people actually went as far as to claim universal madness, although a distinction must be made here between madness and folly, since universal folly is a position held by Dame Folly, as we have

26. *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece*, p.34.

27. *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, p.37.

seen, in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*. However the predilection for demon and witch hunting in the late Middle Ages to the seventeenth century (the last execution for witchcraft in England was in 1684 but witch hunting had reached its peak earlier than this), had at its heart a principle not far from this position. How many individuals accused of witchcraft or demon-possession were actually mad, in the modern sense of the word mentally ill, is impossible to say, but the links between the supernatural and any deviant behaviour were very strong. Certainly the conviction of Reginald Scot was precisely this, that many of those accused of being witches were simply confused and misjudged old women. Scot's work will be considered in more detail below.

The text most influential in witch hunting at this time was undoubtedly *Malleus Maleficarum*, written by Jacobus Sprenger and Heinrich Krämer, two inquisitors of Pope Innocent VIII. The book was published in 1486, but its effects were long-lasting. The *Malleus Maleficarum* is the most extreme evidence that some actually believed in a direct and inevitable link between illness in the form of madness, and sin. Lillian Feder comments:

For the student of psychopathology, the book is especially interesting for its portrayal of neurotic and psychotic personalities in complicity with their accusers, providing through their fantasies and their conduct the very evidence of evil inspired by the devil that the Inquisitors demanded. The bizarre disclosures of the so-called witches express an identification with the church's craving for victims: sexual yearnings, repressed aggression, terror, conflict, and, above all, feelings of guilt, became the material of sin, the devil inhabiting the human soul.²⁸

Feder goes on to conclude that by the fifteenth century the view that insanity resulted from sin was so commonly accepted that lunatics in general were considered victims of the devil, either directly

28. *Madness in Literature* (Princeton, 1980), p.110.

possessed or under the influence of lunar phases or of particular witches:

Both medical and literary evidence of the period point to a consistency of interpretation of insanity both by those afflicted and by those who described its symptoms and effects: madness is a sign of possession by supernatural powers.²⁹

The situation in England was perhaps less severe than that on the Continent, although five English editions of *Malleus Maleficarum* were published between 1584 and 1669. While on the Continent books were written to oppose the *Malleus Maleficarum's* apparent monopoly of opinion,³⁰ in England its views were generally accepted as one possible explanation for madness, along with others. Amongst those opposing the views of the Inquisitors, Reginald Scot wrote *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, in 1584, and Timothy Bright composed his *A Treatise of Melancholie* (1586). In each it will be seen that a balance was sought, an attempt to represent the two notions of madness, as a medical illness of the whole body, or as a spiritual affliction.

Reginald Scot wrote from personal experience, being a Justice of the Peace in a rural area who was repeatedly faced with cases of supposed demon possession and witchcraft. Scot's observations were innovative and daring, his basic argument centred on "not witchcraft but melancholie", (a chapter heading in *The Discoverie*). His

29. *ibid*, p.112.

30. The two most notable opponents to the *Malleus Maleficarum* were Ludwig Lavater's *De Spectris* (Geneva, 1570), translated into English in 1572, and Johann Weyer's *De Prestigiis Daemonum* (Basel, 1564). Both sought to propagate a more sympathetic approach to the mad, as well as to expose some of the fallacies of the *Malleus Maleficarum's* own concepts.

argument is important here for two reasons: firstly, it represents a humanitarian approach to the insane, removing the moral stigma of madness; and secondly, it is innovative, because Scot substitutes for that moral judgment a judgment of melancholy. The study of melancholy initially comes out of a wider study of the humoral theory, since melancholy was the product of the second concoction, passed to the spleen. However the term became increasingly synonymous with forms of madness and depression, since melancholy delusions were thought to be due to the effects of adust or burnt melancholy, the result of the vapours given off by black bile, the melancholy humour. As Valentinus writes, "when melancholy is burned, it becommeth vitious, and causeth madnesse".³¹

Scot notes cases in his book where old women, accused of witchcraft, can simply be seen to be exhibiting signs of melancholy. He urged that the confessions of witchcraft should be viewed in the light of this, and stated that confessions, even when made voluntarily, were often false delusions induced by the accusers:

If anie man advisedlie marke their words, actions, cogitations, and gestures, he shall perceive that melancholie abounding in their head, and occupieng their braine, hath deprived or rather depraved their judgements, and all their senses: I meane not of coosening witches, but of poore melancholike women, which are themselves deceived. For you shall understand, that the force which melancholie hath, and the effects that it worketh in the bodie of a man, or rather of a woman, are almost incredible. For as some of these melancholike persons imagine, they are witches and by witchcraft can work woonders, and doo what they list: so doo other, troubled with this disease, imagine manie strange, incredible, and impossible things.³²

It is quite clear here that Scot describes the women's symptoms as those of melancholy, not of witchcraft, referring to their condition explicitly as a disease, and not as a spiritual affliction at all.

31. Valentinus, *Epitome of the Whole Course of Physicke*, p.9.

32. *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584), p.xi.

Timothy Bright's *Treatise on Melancholie* approaches the issue from a different perspective, but with the same end of clarifying the distinction between melancholy as an illness of the mind, and melancholy as a spiritual or moral affliction.

The book is addressed to an imaginary friend suffering under melancholy, and contains descriptions of the two types of melancholy along with advice on curative measures to be taken. He has a predominantly theological aim, expressed at the outset:

I have layd open howe the bodie, and corporall things affect the soule, & how the body is affected of it againe: what the difference is betwixt natural melancholie, and that heavy hande of God upon the afflicted conscience, tormented with remorse of sinne, & feare of his judgement.³³

Bright essentially views madness as a disease of the brain, which displaces reason, the ruling force and conscience of the human animal, so that it descends below the condition of the other beasts. When melancholy is diagnosed as being of a religious or supernatural origin the cure is usually effected by a divine, and Bright includes the now familiar elements of diet, regimen and purgation.

A more psychological approach to religious melancholy is also suggested by several authors, including Bright and Scot. Victims of extraordinary visions or hallucinatory forms of madness - imagining themselves to be dead or unable to act normally - are to be given therapy, in the form of a sympathetic ear. Along these lines were cures agreeing with a madman's delusions, so as to gain his confidence and eventually convince him that the situation was rectified. Lawrence Babb quotes one such story, appearing in several Renaissance works:

To illustrate, a certain melancholy man believed that he had an enormous nose, and no friend or physician could persuade him

33. *Treatise on Melancholie* (London, 1586), p.1-2.

otherwise. Finally "a physician more expert in this humour than the rest" visited him. The doctor showed great astonishment at the size of the patient's nose and thus won his complete confidence. Two or three mock operations (performed while the patient was blindfolded) convinced him that his nose was reduced to normal proportions. Thereupon, "the man's mind being satisfied, his griefe was eased, and his disease cured".³⁴

The restoration of reason is thus of primary concern, whether this is achieved by physical or spiritual means. Hence analyses of madness and suggestions for cure could range from the often fatal "stone operations", illustrated in Bosch's painting and usually suggested among the physical cures, or diets for the correction of humoral imbalance, to torture and punishment for witchcraft, or a psychotherapeutic approach among the spiritual cures. Sir Thomas Elyot, in his sensible way, combines both physical and spiritual, writing:

Affectes and passions of the mynde...yf they be immoderate, they do not onely annoy the body, & shorten the lyfe, but also they do appaire, and sometyme lose utterly a mans estimation. And that moche more is, they bringe a man from the use of reason, and sometyme in the displeasure of almighty god. Wherefore they do not only require the helpe of phisyke corporall, but also the counsell of a man wyse and well lerned in morall philosophye.³⁵

4. Biblical madness: links with folly

Finally, in considering the religious perspective on concepts of madness in the Renaissance, a summary will be made of biblical portrayals of madness, to show how the Bible affected the Renaissance

34. *The Elizabethan Malady*, pp.46-7. Babb quotes from a later edition of Scot's *Discoverie*, edited by Nicholson (London, 1886), pp.41-2, but also notes that the tale appears in many Renaissance works.

35. *The Castel of Helth*, folio 62.

view of madness on its own, and in relation to folly. As mentioned earlier, biblical views on madness expressed in the Old Testament are essentially negative, as are the views on folly. Madness is first referred to in the Pentateuch, as a threatened punishment for disobedience. Amongst the pictures of despair and distress, the plagues of boils or blindness, comes the threat of madness. No symptoms are given here, Deuteronomy 28.28 simply lists madness along with other distressing consequences of disobedience of God's law. The famous figure of the mad king, Nebuchadnezzar, is similarly portrayed as an example of a man who disregarded the power and supremacy of God, and was made mad as a direct punishment. Nebuchadnezzar's symptoms are the assumption of an animalistic dumbness, and the effect is clearly one of humiliation. In I Samuel 21.13 David feigns madness, for fear of Achish, and his symptoms include scrabbling like an animal at the door and drooling. Jeremiah 50.38 describes the worship of idols as madness, where madness could be seen as a loss of reason, a blending in meaning with folly, since it is foolish behaviour in which they indulge. In addition it could refer to the actual characteristics of their false worship - perhaps enthusiastic dancing, self-mutilation or trances. Other mentions of madness come in II Kings 9.11 and Hosea 9.7, both with reference to the behaviour of prophets, a specific type of religious madness which will be discussed below.

The largest number of references to madness come in the book of Ecclesiastes, where there is also much mention of folly. Here the word is generally used as a more severe term to refer to the extremes of folly, rather than as a physical illness or a threat of insanity. It is most commonly grouped together with foolishness and folly to describe a state of mind. For example Ecclesiastes 7.27 talks of the

writer's desire to find wisdom through study, to discover the "wickednesse of follie, and the foolishnesse and madnesse". In Ecclesiastes 10.13, with reference to the words of a man's mouth, such a scale is suggested beginning in foolishness and ending in "mischievious madness". Overall, madness in Ecclesiastes refers to the height of folly, rather than to any physical affliction or specific punishment visited by God. It is the opposite of the desire for wisdom, and sinful in so far as it does not recognise the important things in life but goes after the ephemeral pleasures of the world. It is the folly and madness of Ecclesiastes which Erasmus expands upon in his *Moriae Encomium*, and this is distinct from the alternative and negative biblical concept of the punitive use of madness by a wrathful God.

Demon possession as a cause of madness is not explicitly referred to in the Bible until the New Testament. Although demons are frequently found in the Gospels and the behaviour of the possessed is symptomatic of madness, the actual use of the words "mad" or "madness" with reference to such individuals is relatively infrequent. Christ himself is accused of being mad in John 10.20, due to his blasphemy in calling himself the Son of God. Here the people's conclusion is that he is possessed by a demon, and consequently is mad. A similar conclusion is drawn on other occasions throughout the ministry of Christ, but explicit references to his madness are rare, and are always meant in a spiritual sense, as a result of demon possession.

The word "mad" occurs twice in the Acts of the Apostles, in one case referring to a delusion, and in the other in connection with the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Rhoda is accused of being mad by the terrified disciples when she tells them of Peter's release from

prison (Acts 12.15). The implication is that the whole situation has been too much for her, and she is imagining things. There is no sense of a demon possession or even of sin, simply of delusion, a mental refusal to face facts. The other occasion, later in Acts takes place after the testimony of Paul before Festus (Acts 22.24). Paul is accused of being a madman, due to his account of a spiritual experience; the reason for his madness here is interestingly suggested to be too much learning. Excess study is something often warned against in Renaissance medical books (Elyot, and later Burton, are just two examples). It is particularly associated with the onset of melancholy, and Aristotle's views on genius - a positive extreme of the right kind of excess melancholy - suggest that the melancholy man is best suited to learning, and by such learning can achieve an extraordinary degree of illumination of mind.³⁶ This positive view of study would also link in with the statement in Ecclesiastes mentioned above where wisdom is sought through study. It seems again we have a warning for the ordinary man against extremes in anything, since the humoral balance depended above all on maintaining a healthy equilibrium.

Paul's own references to madness in his epistles to the churches come in I and II Corinthians. In the first, I Corinthians 14.23, he warns the church against the insensitive practice of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues, he argues, is beneficial to worship and the instruction of the church, but if used without explanation in front of visitors it can have a negative effect, simply causing them to think the believers are mad. Here the

36. For more information on Aristotle's views of genius see Lawrence Babb, pp.58-66.

implication is of senseless babbling being associated with demon possession, or at least as a loss of control of the body. In II Corinthians 11.23 we come across a reference to Paul himself being mad (as discussed in Chapter 2) because of his willingness to stand up for the apparent folly of the gospel. In this case too, madness is seen as an extension of folly - meaning the ultimate of otherworldliness.

This last concept of madness links with the other use of the word in both Old and New Testaments, with reference to prophetic ecstasy. Obvious links can be seen here with the final passages of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, discussed in the previous chapter. Biblical references are in II Kings 9.11 where Elisha the prophet is described as mad purely because of the revolutionary and anti-establishmentarian message he feels compelled to deliver. Similar references are found in Hosea 9.7, "the prophet is a foole, the spirituall man is madde", and the reason given for such madness is the weight of the iniquity of the people, trusting in organised religion and refusing to accept personal responsibility to God for their actions. Thus the people are devoid of true judgment, and see the truth as madness and folly. In Hosea the true prophet is rejected as a madman, but in Jeremiah the situation is reversed, and the false prophets claiming to be inspired are rejected by the word of the Lord as madmen. Prophecy and madness are linked in a double sense, since the enthusiasms and behaviour of the prophet in ecstasy are similar to the symptoms of the mad. Possession is seen to be both divine and demonic, and prophets need to be judged by their message to discern whether what they say is of God or of some other supernatural force. The writer of II Peter speaks of this need to differentiate between the false and the true when he refers to the

madness of the prophet, in chapter 2, verse 16, discussing the Old Testament story of Balaam and Balak (Numbers 22.4-25).

The essentially negative views of madness in the Bible, as seen above, help to explain some of the force behind the Inquisition and the overwhelming idea that madness, in all its possible manifestations, was a punishment by God. Its coupling together with folly as a more extreme form of the same problem is unfortunate, leading as it did to such sweeping judgments against victims both of genuine mental derangement and of fools in a much broader sense. Nevertheless, from the negative biblical concept of folly and madness was spawned the Pauline positive concept of folly which, as we have seen, forms the basis of Erasmian folly in the *Moriae Encomium* and which is thus ultimately behind later uses of Erasmian folly, as we shall go on to discuss in Shakespeare and Jonson. The major biblical passages on folly in II Corinthians 11 (and, to a lesser extent I Corinthians 1.28) referred to in Chapter 2 show Paul radically changing the negative for a positive and investing in the term "folly" a paradox which enables the later skill of Erasmus and others to condemn one fool while praising another. This paradox and the ambiguity generated from it form the basis of Shakespeare's adoption of the term in his comedies, and it is this which will be the subject of the second Part of this thesis.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig 1. "Dixit insipiens", the fool as courtier, Bodleian Laud. Lat. 114, fol 71, in *The Fool and the Trickster*, edited by P.V.A. Williams (Cambridge, 1979), p.21.



Fig 2. "The descripcion of a wyse man", woodcut, in Alexander Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, edited by T.H. Jamieson, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1874), II, 273.

The descripcion of a wyse man.



Fig 3. "Of the mutabylyte of fortune", ibid, I, 186.

Of the mutabylyte of fortune.



Fig 4. "Of folys that despysse deth makynge no prouysion therfore",
ibid, II, 113.

Of folys that despysse deth makynge no
prouysion therfore.



Fig 5. "Der doten dantz mit figuren clage und antwort schon von allen staten der werlt", c. 1485, facsimile edition (Leipzig, 1971), in Marcia Collins, *The Dance of Death in Book Illustration*, catalog to an Exhibition of the Collection in the Ellis Library of the University of Missouri (Columbia, 1978), p.53.

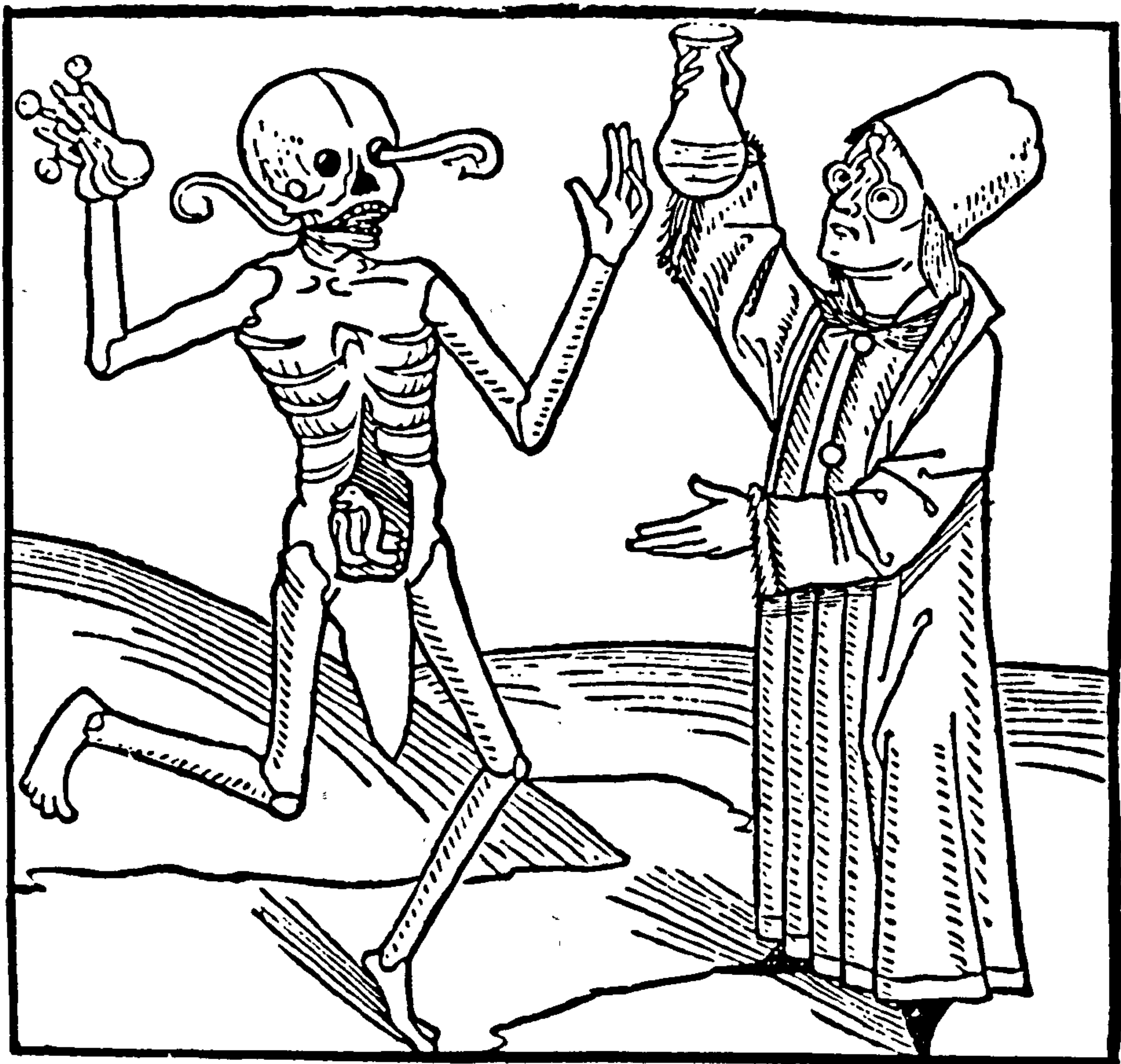


Fig 6. "Death on horseback", Albrecht Dürer, charcoal, in C. White, *Dürer, The Artist and his Drawings* (London, 1971), p.107.



Fig 7. "Gallenius, Brunellus and a fool", woodcut for Wirecker, *Brunellus in Speculo Stultorum* (Cologne, 1499), in Erika B. G. Michael, *The Drawings by Hans Holbein the Younger for Erasmus' "Praise of Folly"* (New York, 1986), p. 209.



Fig 8. "Solomon and Marcolf", woodcut for the title page (Leipzig, 1485-1500), in Erika B.G. Michael, p.247.



Fig 9. "Ship of Fools", woodcut for the title page of Alexander Barclay's *Ship of Fools*.

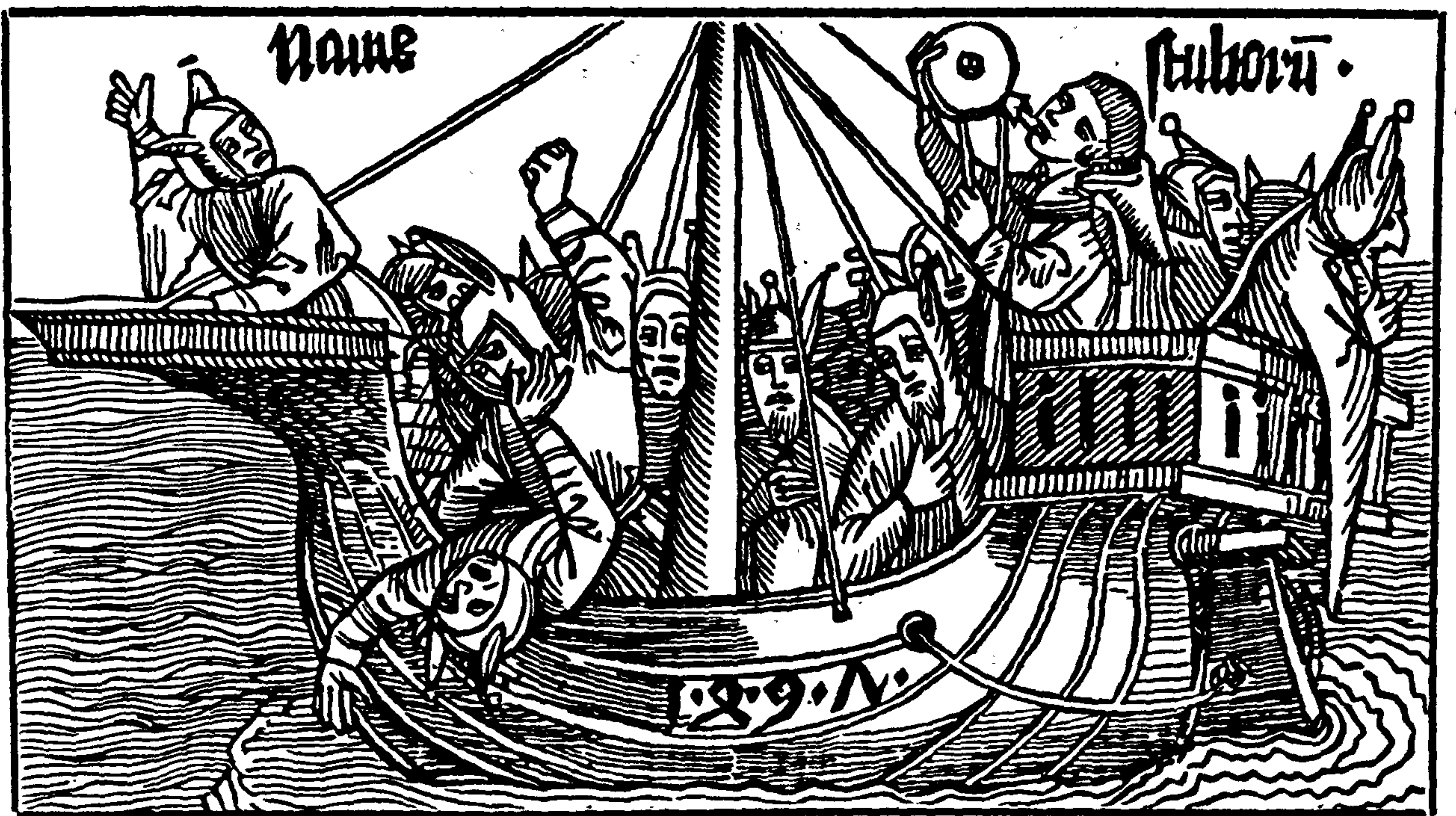


Fig 10. "Narrenschiff", woodcut for the back of the title page, Sebastian Brant, *Narrenschiff* (Basel, 1494), and incorporated in Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, II, 306.

The vnyuersall shyp and generall Barke
or barge
Wherin they rowe: that yet hath had no
charge.



Of the despysynge of mysfortune.



Fig 12. "Of the falshode of Antichrst", ibid, II, 224.

Of the falshode of Antichrst.



Fig 13. "Venus", woodcut for Sebastian Brant, *Narrenschiff*, and incorporated in Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, II, 306.

Of disordred loue and veneryous.



Fig 14. "Acedia - Folly", woodcut, Nuremburg, late fifteenth century, Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, in H.W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London, 1952), plate b.



Fig 15. "Dame Folly", engraving, School of the Master of the Playing Cards, c. 1450, *ibid*, plate c.

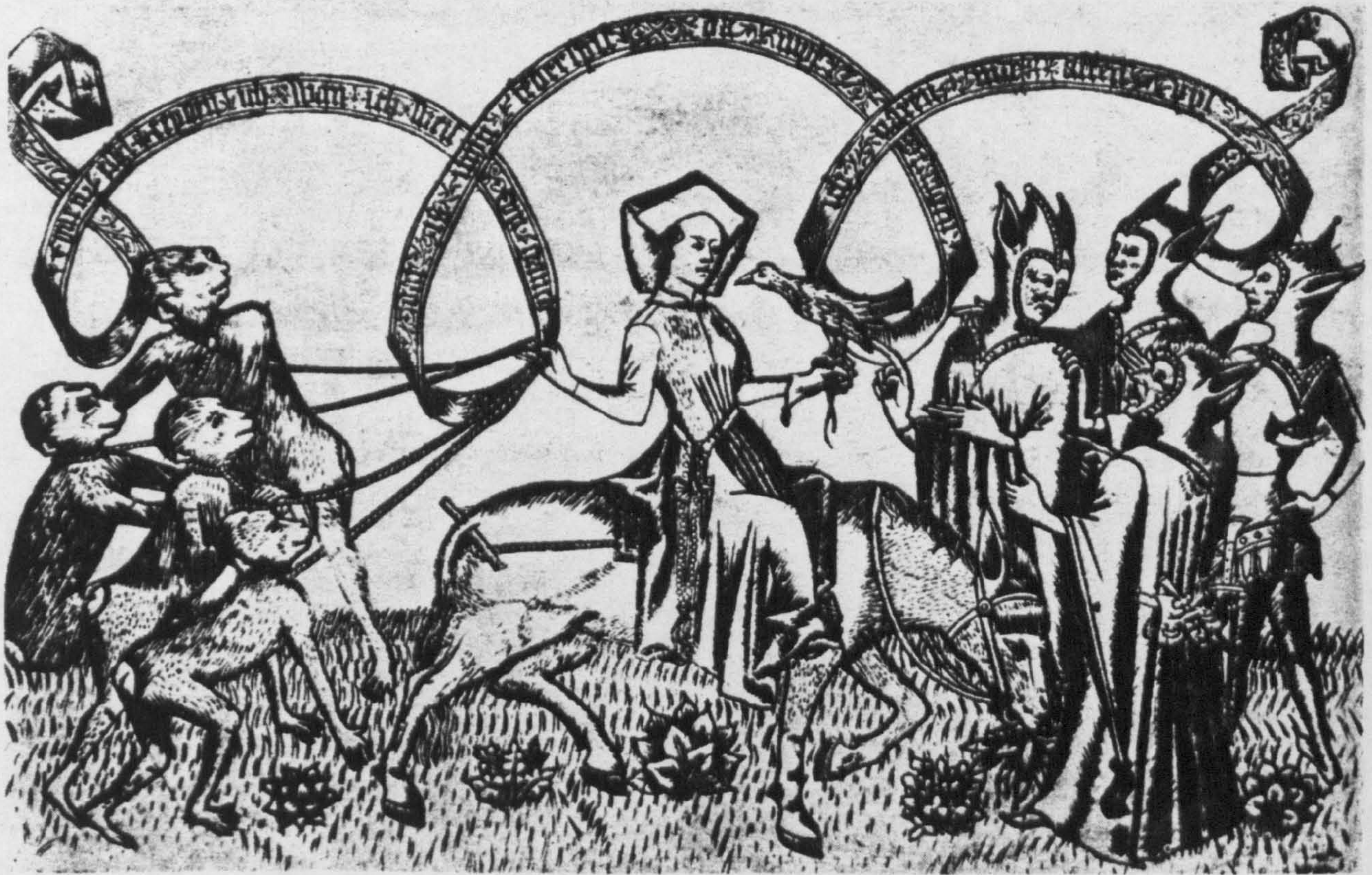


Fig 16. "Enchiridion", title page, in Erasmus von Rotterdam, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Ausstellungskataloge 20 (Parsavia, Passau, 1980).

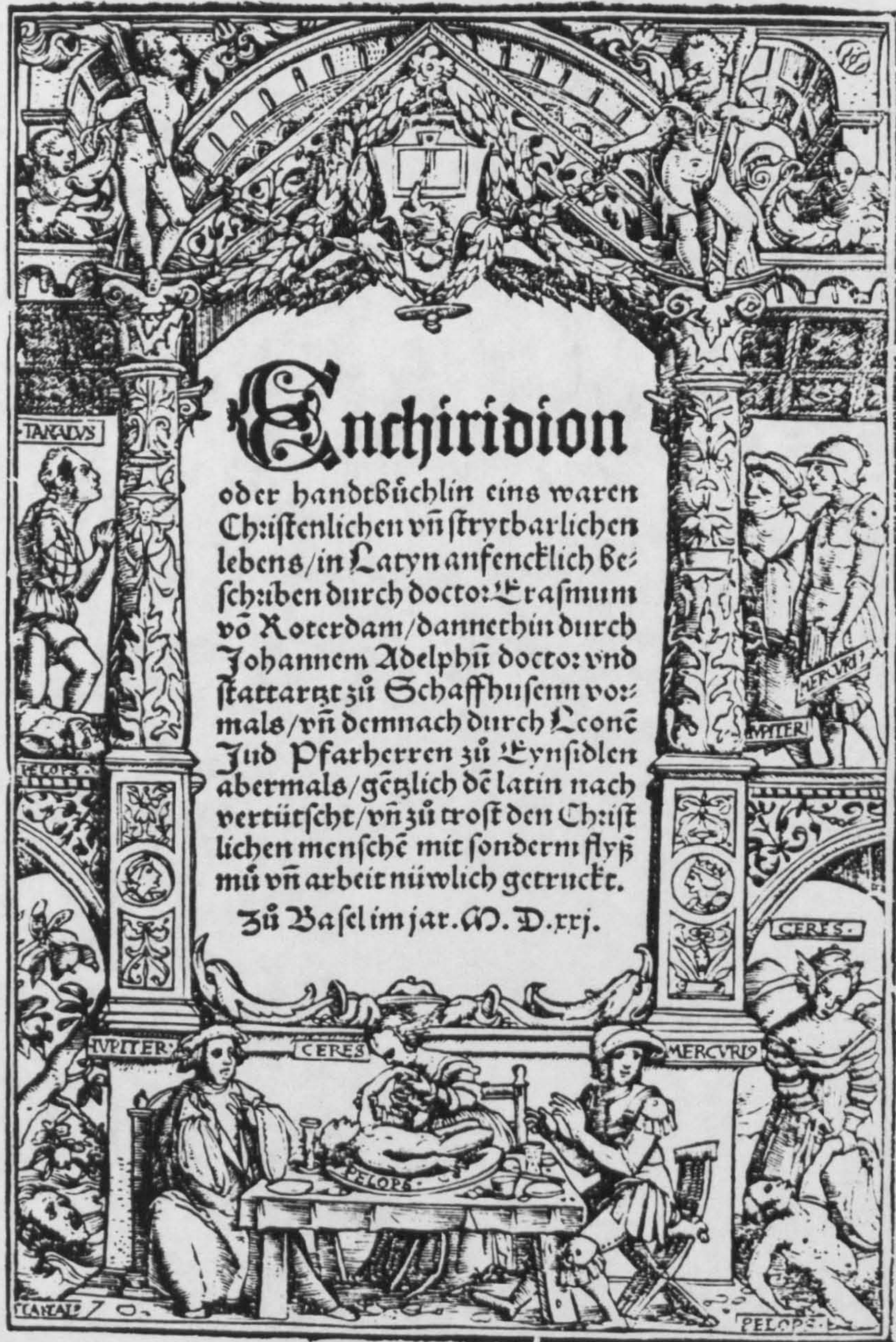


Fig 17. "Folly addressing her audience", from the *Moriae Encomium*, in Erika B.G. Michael, p.370.

ΜΟΡΙΑΣ ΕΥΚΛΩΝΙΟΝ.

uendum fuit. Sed quid ego hæc tibi, pa-
trono tam singulari, ut causas etiam nõ
optimas, optime tamẽ tueri possis? Va-
le disertissime More, & Moriã tuã gna-
uiter defende. Ex Rure, Quinto Idus Iu-
nias.

**ΜΟΡΙΑΣ ΕΥΚΛΩΜΙΔΝ.Ι. Stulticiæ laus
Erasmi Roterodami Dedamatio.
Stulticia loquitur.**



Vicq; de me uulgo
mortales loquuntur,
(neq; enim sum ne-
scia, q̃ male audiat
stulticia etiam apud
stultissimos) tamen

hanc esse, hanc inquam esse unam, quæ
meo numine deos atq; homines exhila-
ro, uel illud abunde magnũ est argumẽ-
tum, quod simul atq; in hunc cœtũ fre-
quentissimũ dictura prodij, sic repente
omniũ uultus noua quadam atq; inso-
lita hilaritate enituerũt, sic subito frõte
exporrexistis, sic lato quodã & amabi-
li applausistis risu, ut mihi pfecto quot
quot undiq; p̃setes itueor, pariter deo-
rum Home

redistis) Frontem exporrigimus, cũ hilarescimus. Contra moesti frontẽ cõ-
trahimus, quare in Chitadibus Erasmi. (Deorum Homericorum.) Facet
te uocat Homericos, qui cum non sint ulli in rerum natura, tamẽ ab Home-

est in dignitate rerum
& sermonũ, cuius præ-
cipua ratio habetur in
tragœdijs, comœdijs,
& dialogis. Quid
ego hæc tibi? & προσίω
πρὸς ἐστί. Patrono tã
singulari) Patrono hic
significat aduocatum
causarum. Nã aliquan-
do refertur ad libertũ.
Est autẽ Morus præter
egregiam optimarum
literarum cognitiõem,
inter Britannicarum le-
gum professores, præ-
cipui nominis.

DECLAMATIO



pte uo-
cauit
decla-
mati-
onem
ut in-

telligas rem exercendi
ingenij causa scriptam,
ad lusu, ac uoluptatẽ.
Porro Moriã fingit uel
terum more, ceu deam
quãdam, suas laudes
narrantem, idq; decore,
quod hoc stultis pe-
culiare sit, seipso ad-
mirari, deq; seipsis glo-
riose prædicare. (Tã-
men hanc esse.) Hanc
dextera accipiendũ,
ut seipsam digito ostẽ-
dat. Frontem expor-



Rifus stul-
torum
Frontem expor-

B ro fingũ

De Homericis

Fig 18. "Of the folisshe begynnyng of great bildynges without sufficient prouision", in Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, II, 184.

Of the folisshe begynnyng of great bildynges without sufficient prouision.



Of carde players and dysers.



Fig 20. "Two gambler fools playing at dice", from the *Moriae Encomium*, in Erika B.G. Michael, p.394.



In imagine et Tibulliana
 sumā. Conuincit, ubi qd
 maiora uerbis ponamus.
 rarnat si uis. Furor alea
 scopulū magnū. sorum.
 radum non fuit sang. in
 hoc ipse nouum laudem p
 uerborum, qui ueni pulchra
 roma tentauerit.

Chiragra.

Malcam isgens, et non
 intempore pueri rimus
 ligit et sermone negon
 suscipiendi uolens est
 uere. et aut non esse fa
 suscipienda. aut negligē
 danti uiam.

Pyrgus.

Conficta
 miracula

Malea) Malea pmo
 toriū est Laconia, cir
 ca qd̄ piculosissimā
 eē navigationē, autor
 est Strabo li. octauo,
 unde puerbiū hoc ce
 lebratum fuisse dicit,
 μάλα δὲ κάμψας ἐκε
 λάρθω Φοικαδῆι. Mal
 leam præternauigās
 domesticorū obliui /
 scere. Quosuis pot
 fraudant.) Id narrat
 Corneli⁹ tacit⁹, de po
 pulis ac morib⁹ Ger
 mania. Eos Hyber
 nis mensibus potissi
 mū oblectare se alea,
 & uictum aliquoties
 ad mortem, & seruis
 tutē, dedere sese, sum
 ma fide. Iusta chir
 gra.) Chiragra speci
 es est arthretica, quā
 iustam uocat, qd̄ ale
 atorū puniat inflā
 niam. Alludit autē ad
 illud Horatianum in
 sermōibus Verum
 nis, quotquot sūt nat
 tus iniquis, Scurra Vo
 lauerius postq̄ illi iu
 sta chiragra, Contul
 dit articulos, qui pro
 se tolleret, atq̄ Mitte
 ret in pyrgum talos
 mercede diurna, Cō
 ductū. Pyrgus tabu
 la est lusoria, quā alii
 fritellum dicūt, ut lu
 uenalis. Si damnata
 senem iuuat alea, lu
 dit & hæres Bullat⁹,
 paruoq̄ eadem moi
 uet arma fritello. No

ΜΑΡΙΑΣ ΕΥΚΛΑΜΙΟΝ

denuo fallant, sibiq; ipsis gratā faciāt im
 posturā, donec absumptis om̄ibus, nota
 si t quo iam fornaclā instruant. Nō de
 sinunt tamē iucunda somniare somnia,
 ceteros pro uiribus ad eandē felicitatē
 animātes. Cunq; iam prorsus omni spe
 destituūtur, supest tamen una sentētia,
 abunde magnū solatiū, in magnis & uo
 luisse sat est. Ac tum uitæ breuitatē incu
 sant, ut quæ magnitudini negocij nō suf
 fecerit. Porro aleatores nō nihil ad du
 bito, num in nostrum collegium sint ad
 mittendi. Sed tamē stultum om̄ino, ridi
 culumq; spectaculū est, quoties uidem⁹
 nonnullos usq; adeo addictos, ut simul
 atq; strepitū talorū audierint, ptinus illis
 cor saliat, palpitetq;. Deinde cū semp illi
 ciente uincēdi spe, oim facultatū naufra
 giū fecerint, in aleæ scopulum illisa na
 ue, nō paulo formidabiliore Malea, uix
 q; nudi emerferint, q̄ suis poti⁹ fraudāt,
 q̄ uictore, ne scilicet uiri parū graues ha
 beant. Quid cū senes iā & cæcutiētes, ui
 treis etiā oculis lusitāt. Postremo cū iā iu
 sta chiragra cōtudit articulos, uicariū etiā
 mercede cōducūt, q p se talos in pyrgū
 mittat. Suauis quidē res, nisi qd̄ hic lu
 dus plerūq; solet in rabiē euadere, iāq;
 ad furias nō ad me ptinere. Cæteꝝ illud
 hoim, gen⁹ haud dubie totū est nostræ
 farina

tunc infirmi, paulo post unus ex illis domo ostio magna vi impulsio. ferit. ut
 ingentem psequer. excurrenti aut nos obuiam fructus seruit gladius. percutiens
 in manu dextera sauciabar. post ab istibus rempantes in castris. his me uerbis
 clamabant. Ladimgrē pposito uoie, nōna hie uoie asyle defendamur. ul audient resti
 hie impromu sanguine manu uidi polluta. uulnereq; sensi. hie uoie ad chirurgū.
 solo piaga non uoie uoie domo. iud qd̄ domo actū. ... hie uoie ad fructū. hie uoie hie uoie
 ceter. Anni 1515. in festo dñi Thomæ. anno aetatis n. ue. ser. 27.

Of the vyce of slouth.



Fig 22. "An idle man sleeping", from the *Moriae Encomium*, in Erika B.G. Michael, p.404

STVETICIABLAVS
 frionibus, qui luctus fabulam peragant. Ille flet ad nouercae tumulum. Hic quicquid undecunq; potest corradere, id totum uentriculo donat, paulo post fortiter esuritur. Hic somno & ocio, nihil putat felicius. Sunt qui alienis obeundis negocijs, sedulo tumultuant, sua negligunt. Est qui uersuris, atq; are alieno, diuitem se esse putat, mox decocturus. Alius nihil arbitrat felicius, qm si ipse pauper, haeredem locupletet. Hic ob exiguum, idq; incertu lucellum, p omnia maria uolitat, undis ac uentis uita committens, nulla pecunia reparabile. Ille mauult bello diuitias quaerere, qm tutum ocium exigere domi. Sunt qui captandis orbis senibus, putat qm comodissime ad opes pueniri. Neq; desunt, qui idem malint de amandis beatis aniculis, aucupari. Quorum utriq; tum demu egregia de se uoluptate dijs spectatoribus prebent, cum ab ipsiis, quos captant, arte deludunt. Est oim stultissimu, ac sordidissimu, negociatorum genus, quippe qui rem omniu sordidissimu tractent, idq; sordidissimis negocijs. Quos captant.) Id Horatius narrat de Nasica & Corane. Lucianus item de non nullis, qm uerprois. Rem omniu sordidissimu.) Sordidum uocat illiberale, & magno animo indignum. Porro in bonorum ordine, etiam iuxta Peripateticos, nihil uilius pecunia. Quam solam captant negociatores. Nec Cicero probat hoc negociatorum genus, qui hic coemunt, ut alibi carius uendant. Et paucissimi sunt

Proverbium



nae.. Flet ad nouercae tumulu.) Prouerbio dictum est apud Graecos, *δ'αυρὸν ἡνῶς τὸν ἰ μὴ εὖναι τὰ φορ*.
 .i. Flere ad nouercae tumulum, de his, q fingeret dolorem, cu apud se gauderent.
 . Ventriculo.) Quu uulgus stomachum, Latini uentriculu uocant. Versuris.)
 Versura est, cu aes alienum are alieno dissoluit, & creditor mutatur, non liberat debitor, sed magis inuoluitur, hinc ducta uoce, ut auctor est Festus, quod creditor rem uerteret. Terentius in Phormione, In eodem luto haeritas, petas uorsuram solues.
 Decocturus.) De coxisse dicuntur, qui absumptis omnibus, cedunt bonis, ut loquuntur iureconsulti. Orbis senibus.) Orbi sunt, quibus liberi no sunt, hos potissimum captant.
 Beatis aniculis) Beatas uocat diuites. In uenalis, Optima sunt.
 Quos captant.) Id Horatius narrat de Nasica & Corane. Lucianus item de non nullis, qm uerprois.
 Rem omniu sordidissimu.) Sordidum uocat illiberale, & magno animo indignum. Porro in bonorum ordine, etiam iuxta Peripateticos, nihil uilius pecunia. Quam solam captant negociatores. Nec Cicero probat hoc negociatorum genus, qui hic coemunt, ut alibi carius uendant. Et paucissimi sunt

Ociosi
 Curiosi
 Continuis
 Corsura
 Auari
 Milites
 Hereditas
 Decoquere
 Orbi
 Negotiatores
 Barbas
 Satyra prima li. 2.
 Sordidum uocat illiberale.

M 3 imo nul

Fig 23. "Folly, her back to the audience, descending from the rostrum", from the *Moriae Encomium*, in Erika B.G. Michael, p.451.

STULTICIAE LAVS.

æ uelut umbra quædã, fit ut præmiij quoq; illi⁹ aliquñ gustũ.
 aut odorẽ aliquẽ sentiãt. Id tãetsi minutissima quædã stillu
 la est ad fontẽ illũ æternæ felicitatis, tñ longe supat uniuersas
 corpis uoluptates, etiã si oēs omniũ mortaliũ delitiæ in
 unũ cõferant. Vsq; adeo præstãt spiritalia corpilib⁹, inuisi
 bilia uisibilib⁹. Hoc nimirũ est, qd pollicet^r ppheta, oculus
 nõ uidit, nec auris audiuit, nec in cor hois ascẽdit, quæ præ
 parauit deus diligẽtib⁹ se. Atq; hæc est Moria pars, quæ
 nõ aufert cõmutatiõẽ uitæ, sed pficit. Hoc igit^r qbus sentire
 licuit (cõtingit aut p paucis) ij patiunt^r qdã demẽtiæ simili
 mũ, loquũtur quædã nõ satis cohærentia, nec humano mo
 re, sed dant sine mête sonũ, deinde subinde totã oris speciẽ
 uertũt, Nũc alacres, nũc deiecti, nũc lachrymãt, nũc rident,
 nũc suspirãt, in sũma uere toti extra se sunt. Mox ubi ad se
 se redierint, negãt se scire, ubi fuerint, utrũ in corpe, an extra
 corp⁹, uigilãtes, an dormiẽtes, qd audierint, qd uiderint, qd
 dixerint, qd fecerint, nõ meminerũt, nisi tãcũ p nebulam, ac
 somniũ, tantũ hoc sciunt, se felicissimos fuisse, dũ ita desipe
 rẽt. Itaq; plorãt sese resipuisse, nihilq; omniũ malint q; hoc
 insaniz genus ppetuo insanire. Atq; hæc est futuræ felicitatis
 tenuis quædã degustatiuncula. Verũ ego iãdudũ oblita
 mei *ὑπὲρ τὰ ἰσχυρότερα πικρῶν*. Quãcũq; siq; petulãtius aut loqua
 cius a me dictũ uidebit^r, cogitate & stulticiã, & mulierem di
 xisse. Sed interim tñ memineritis illius Græcanici puerbij,
ποδάκλιτοι καὶ μωροὶ ὑπὲρ κατὰ καίριον ἔπιμ. Nisi forte putatis hoc
 ad mulieres nihil attinere. Video uos epilogũ expectare,
 sed nimiũ desipitis, si qdẽ arbitramini me qd dixerim etiã
 dũ meminisse. Cũ tantã uerborũ farraginẽ effuderim. Ve
 tus illud, *μισὼ μνάμονα συμπόταμ*. Nouũ hoc, *μισὼ μνάμονα ἀκρα*
απίω. Quare ualete, plaudite, uiuite, bibite, Moria celeberrimi
 Mystæ. **MORIAE ENCOMION** Feliciter absolutum.

Alia supra transilio.
*Sicut etiam de stultis fuit
 appropria locutio.*
*Si memineris computare
 de memoris audire.*



Fig 24. "The four temperaments", Simon Vostre, *Book of Hours*, 1502, in Klibansky, Saxl and Panofsky, *Saturn and Melancholy* (London, 1964), plate 82.



Fig 25. "The Cure of Folly", Hieronymous Bosch, Madrid, Prado, in Karl Linfert, *Hieronymous Bosch*, plate 7.



Fig 26. "Crichel Brown Skull", thought to be of the second millenium B.C., in Basil Clarke, *Mental Disorder in Earlier Britain*, plate 9.

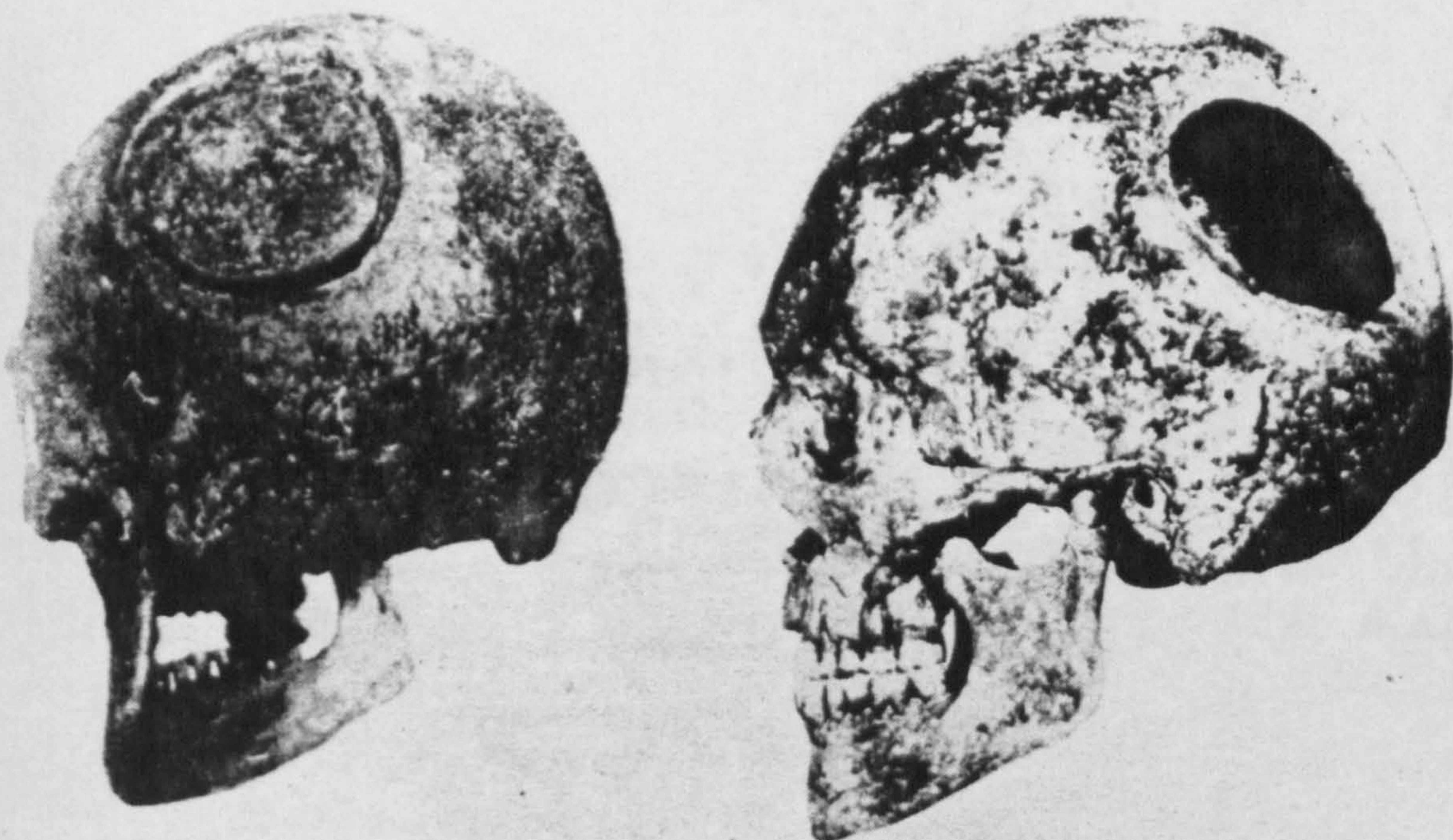
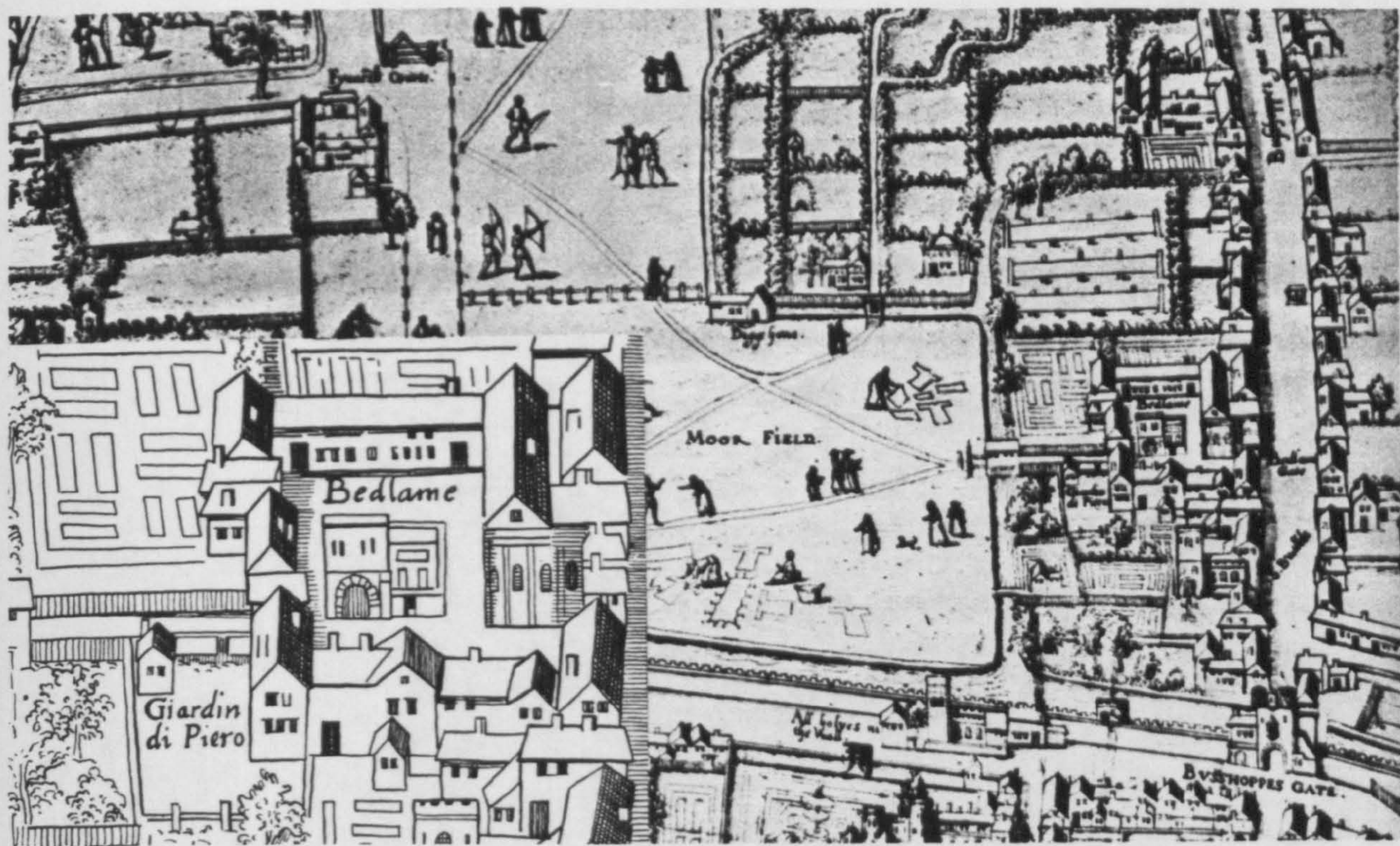


Fig 27. "Bethlem Hospital", mid-sixteenth century map, London Museum, Basil Clarke, plate 16.



PART TWO

CHAPTER FOUR

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST: ERASMIAN FOLLY

1. The folly of love

Love's Labour's Lost is Shakespeare's most Erasmian comedy and it is the purpose of this chapter to provide the evidence that such an assertion properly requires. Critics and editors of the play frequently point to the depth and quantity of topical allusion as a reason for complexity and difficulty in a modern reading: the historical allusions are dealt with comprehensively in the Arden editor's introduction to the play, but it is the doctrinal and theological allusion which is more crucial to our understanding of the play as a whole, and which is best addressed through a knowledge of contemporary humanism and Shakespeare's interest in the kind of Christian folly outlined in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*. *Love's Labour's Lost* contains an unusually large number of allusions to Christian doctrine, as well as echoes of Pauline and Neoplatonic thought; a contemporary theological debate over the translations of "love" and "charity" in Paul's writings is expanded on with interest, and the plot of the play emphasises a humbling process for the protagonists, a celebration of the low-life characters, and an investigation into comic grace through admission of folly. This latter parallels with theological argument over the attainment of saving grace by faith or by works.

In each of these areas, it is Shakespeare's interest in and development of a concept of folly which concerns us: folly which is wider than the mere antics and utterances of the fool figures, a concept, rather, which lies at the heart of the comic plot and which

is of particular significance in an analysis of the moral vision of *Love's Labour's Lost*. The issue of folly has considerable bearing too on the satire of the play, and the nature of its mockery and judgment of the characters. The tone of Shakespeare's satire in this play is markedly different to that of Ben Jonson, which will be discussed in a later chapter in more detail. In satiric comedies like Jonson's, the conclusion of the play usually celebrates the purging of folly and its bearer's punishment in comic retribution. The dramatis personae polarise on the stage into the wise and the fools, the perfect and the imperfect. There is a clear division between the judges and the judged, and the audience is expected to identify with the play's self-righteous wits in order to join in the conclusion. Here ridicule, punishment and expulsion take place for the general good and improvement of society.

By contrast, Shakespearean comedy, even in the satiric form of *Love's Labour's Lost*, frequently ends with a benevolent, or at least, an ambivalent conclusion. There is a perception of universal folly, alien to Jonson's satire, an acknowledgement of the imperfections of character and action which leads to a drawing together rather than polarising of the characters, and in most of the comedies, a festive union in marriage. The unconventional ending of *Love's Labour's Lost* will be considered later, but the crucial difference in its satire is still evident and links the play with a tradition of carnival laughter such as Mikhail Bakhtin describes in his analysis of Rabelais. Such laughter is communal, encompassing and often subverting all ranks; it is universal and directed at everyone, including the participants; and it is ambivalent, unwilling to condemn or extol unreservedly. Triumphant as well as mocking, "it

asserts and denies, it buries and revives."¹ Our analysis of folly will show how Shakespeare's satire differs in this respect from that of Jonson and the Jonsonian comic judgment which results from a far more negative view of folly. Bakhtin's description of the Rabelaisian carnival laughter could equally be applied to Shakespeare's comic vision, influenced by his positive concept of folly:

The satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it. The wholeness of the world's comic aspect is destroyed, and that which appears comic becomes a private reaction. The people's ambivalent laughter, on the other hand, expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it.²

Shakespeare's comedy similarly shows inevitably flawed characters who go through processes of humbling and exposure until they reach a point where they are able to see and admit their common folly, these enlightened characters then join together in a ritual and festive conclusion, a celebration of the wisdom of humility and the gaining of self-awareness. As R. Chris Hassel puts it, in his book, *Faith and Folly in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies*:

Such a treatment suggests that folly is not reprehensible but forgivable, not monstrous but universal. The bondage to be escaped in Shakespearean comedy is not folly, which is inescapable, but the refusal to acknowledge it. Acknowledging his folly liberates the wise fool from excessive reason, complete self-determination, and arrogant self-righteousness.³

Love's Labour's Lost is among the most formal of Shakespeare's comedies, along with *A Comedy of Errors* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, both of which are consciously patterned and structured. *Love's Labour's Lost* uses a self-conscious patterning of dance

1. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, translated by H. Iswolsky (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968), p.12.

2. *ibid*, p.12.

3. R. Chris Hassel, *Faith and Folly in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies* (Athens, Georgia, 1980), p.3.

imagery and the language of battle and warfare to give formality, and the play is carefully layered in such scenes as the eavesdropping of the lords on one another and the disguise of the Muscovites. Like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it also has a play within the play, in the Pageant of the Nine Worthies in the last Act. The two parties, of the lords on the one hand and the ladies on the other, meet only in formal settings and exchange, in the main, formalised speeches. Much of the play's effect lies in the exploitation of comic conventions and artificial frameworks for behaviour. Although Berowne is ready to deflate the artifice of the wooers in Act IV scene iii, characters are generally incapable of seeing their own artificial actions in the same way, and thus the situation is perfect for a little mockery and revelation of folly. Both the artificiality of the characters' address to each other, and the blindness most have with regard to their own folly are areas which are satirised in Shakespeare's play, and are, significantly, seminal to Erasmian satire as expressed in the *Moriae Encomium*.

As we would expect in a Shakespearean comedy entitled *Love's Labour's Lost*, the vehicle used for the mockery of artifice and blindness is love itself. Sentiments are expressed almost entirely in terms of stylised general statements, mostly taken from Elizabethan love rhetoric and sonnet convention. Commonplaces like this abound in Berowne's speeches:

So sweet a kiss the golden sun gives not
 To those fresh morning drops upon the rose,
 As thy eye-beams when their fresh rays have smote
 The night of dew that on my cheeks down flows: (IV.iii.25-8)

The other lords' speeches similarly discourse on goddesses, perjury, oaths and stylised pictures from nature. The personal aspect is singularly lacking, and rather, each exhibits his skill and artifice

in love-making. Neal A. Goldstein⁴ analyses the play in terms of the Renaissance vision of love, and shows how Shakespeare satirises Neoplatonism and Petrarchanism, the main components of that vision. The blend of these two components changed the ethereal and divinely unapproachable Petrarchan mistress, for whom the lover was permitted to feel only spiritual love, to a more accommodating ideal where sensual feeling for the mistress figure was permitted as a means to an end of spiritual, divine love. Human love can thus blend with divine love and be a step towards it, since love, of itself, incites men to good deeds.

The scope for mockery of such a love ethic is evident, and the lords are mocked in *Love's Labour's Lost* not merely for the artifice of their sonneteering but also for their clear sensual pursuit of the ladies, and the ability of their love to lead them into oath-breaking and deception rather than the expected good deeds. Love as an ennobling passion seems far from the truth in Shakespeare's play, and Folly's view on marriage in the *Moriae Encomium* seems closer to that truth, despite its heavily ironic edge:

Goodness me, what divorces or worse than divorces there would be everywhere if the domestic relations of man and wife were not propped up and sustained by the flattery, joking, complaisance, illusions, and deceptions provided by my followers! (p.97)

The formal structure of the play encourages a display of artifice and wit, but this is continually undermined by the behaviour of the characters. The King's ideal of a Platonic academy, celebrating asceticism and emphasising the contemplative life, is immediately overturned; the notion of Petrarchan semi-divine mistresses can hardly last once we meet the French ladies and hear their bawdy exchanges; the poetry of love is continually mocked, both

4. "Love's Labour's Lost and the Renaissance Vision of Love", *SQ*, 25 (1974), pp.335-350.

by Armado's inability to grasp its skills and by the effect of the sonnets written by the lords. Far from celebrating love and its effects, Goldstein writes:

The poems, by and large, are conventional Petrarchan complaints, comic because each (save Berowne's) is read, unknown to its author, before a hidden and hypocritical audience, and because the image of each had become by Shakespeare's day mere counters, mere comic slogans. More important, however, is the veiled attack which they convey upon the central principle of Renaissance love theory. Each of the smitten versifiers, after all, feels guilty at the prospect of being foresworn. Love, remember, is an ennobling passion - a spiritual essence to Petrarch, a way to God for the Neoplatonists. Here, however, it inspires only guilt and hypocrisy.⁵

Satire is not, therefore, aimed at love poetry or love per se, but rather at the refusal of the lords to admit to the artificiality of their denial of human affections in the first place, and their refusal to see the artifice of their wooing having once decided to bow to those affections. Thus they fall foul of Erasmus' Folly on both counts, since they would set up an academy to pursue earthly wisdom and reject the folly of love, and even when this notion fails, they refuse to admit the folly of the artifice in the very wooing of the ladies. In this way the satire of the formal nature of *Love's Labour's Lost* blends with a moral satire of its characters' refusal to acknowledge their imperfections and common folly. The lords thus try to conceal their humanity, and they ultimately fail in the way Leontes fails to conceal his discomfort concerning Hermione at the beginning of *The Winter's Tale*. Questioned about his distracted brow, Leontes blames the underlying folly of nature:

No, in good earnest.
How sometimes nature will betray its folly,
Its tenderness, and make itself a pastime
To harder bosoms! (I.ii.150-153)

5. *ibid*, p.344.

Cyrus Hoy⁶ sees *Love's Labour's Lost* in terms of dramatising such discrepancies between infinite and unachievable aspirations and finite, human possibilities, immortal longings and mortal life, rational purpose and irrational impulse, the ideal and the real, the intention and the deed:

It is concerned with undeceiving the self-deceived, thereby making clear the gulf which separates human intentions from deeds. In achieving so much - in enlightening the foolish without destroying them - it accomplishes the purpose which comic drama is uniquely capable of bringing to pass.⁷

The ways of enlightenment and self-discovery are central to the play, and the movement of the plot, although very different in formal structure, has basic similarities with the comic pattern of movement from the artificial to the natural more associated with Shakespeare's later pastoral comedies. As we saw above, the theme of self-knowledge and admission of folly is part of the problem of the last plays too. Leontes' jealousy in *The Winter's Tale* is such that he cannot completely conceal it, but laughs it off as folly in public. This folly has far more serious consequences than that which we encounter in the less troubled world of Navarre. In each, although to varying degrees, the object is self-knowledge, as Hoy puts it: "to find oneself is to escape from artificiality into the natural, to leave off deceiving oneself by setting about to know oneself."⁸

6. "Love's Labour's Lost and the Nature of Comedy", *SQ*, 13 (1962), pp.31-40.

7. *ibid*, p.31.

8. *ibid*, p.37.

2. Natural folly in Navarre

Having considered in a more general way the comic vision and satire of *Love's Labour's Lost*, we are in a position to proceed with a specific analysis of the text as more particular evidence to support the assertion that this play is Shakespeare's most Erasmian comedy. Act I opens with the King of Navarre's intention to set up an academic regime in which the life of contemplation and study will rule over the natural affections of the courtiers, in order that "Navarre shall be the wonder of the world" (I.i.12) and fame "grace us in the disgrace of death...And make us heirs of all eternity" (I.i.3,7). To such an edict the King and his three lords agree and they swear to abide by it. In these opening lines the King and his companions set out to do precisely what Erasmus' *Folly* warns against most strongly in the *Moriae Encomium*:

So amongst mortal men those who strive after wisdom are the furthest from happiness; they are in fact doubly stupid simply because they ignore the fact that they were born men, try to adopt the life of the immortal gods, and like the giants would rebel against Nature, with the sciences for their engines of war. (p.108-9)

The aspirations of the lords are precisely to strive after wisdom, to ignore their mortality by seeking to become immortalised through eternal fame, and to rebel against nature, their own affections, by a suppressive regime.

The aim of the King's academy here is directly opposed to that found in Rabelais' Abbey of Thélème in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Rabelais writes in the vein of the mock orders of monks we saw in Chapter 1, noting that in the rules of the Abbey there was only one clause: "DO WHAT YOU WILL". The emphasis in Rabelais' Abbey is on

pleasure and indulgence:

All their life was regulated not by laws, statutes, or rules, but according to their free will and pleasure. They rose from bed when they pleased, and drank, ate, worked, and slept when the fancy seized them. Nobody woke them; nobody compelled them either to eat or to drink, or to do anything else whatever.⁹

However, the reason for such laxity lies in an underlying humanist notion of the innate virtue of man, albeit one which Rabelais satirises. Justifying the single rule of the Abbey he writes:

people who are free, well-born, well-bred, and easy in honest company have a natural spur and instinct which drives them to virtuous deeds and deflects them from vice; and this they call honour.¹⁰

The theme of nature and law, instinct and artifice, is one commented on earlier and central to the play both in an Erasmian and theological sense. Folly states:

By far the happiest men are those who have no traffic at all with any kind of learning and follow Nature for their only guide. We shall never find her wanting unless we take it into our heads to overstep the limits of our mortal lot. Nature hates any counterfeit, and everything turns out much more happily when it's unspoil't by artifice. (p.108)

Again we can see that the note on which Shakespeare's play opens is immediately one at odds with the teachings of Folly, and the formal and artificial way in which the lords progress once they succumb to love is similarly condemned. Barbara L. Parker also comments on the artificiality of the contemplative, ascetic life that the King advocates, pointing out that historically there was an ascendancy in the considered worth of the active spiritual life as opposed to the contemplative, as Christianity became a guide to Christian living in the context of the world rather than a preparation for death in the

9. *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, translated by J.M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, 1955), p.159.

10. *ibid*, p.159.

cloister. She writes:

Particularly in England, religion becomes liberated from the cloister as the active life supplants the contemplative as the nobler. For the humanist, reason was bestowed on man not for private and hence selfish ends, but for the good of society.¹¹

Protestant England began to see the contemplative life as un-Christian and introverted, and the ascetic life of enforced chastity as similarly damaging. Parker refers to Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (pub.1621), commenting:

Burton views enforced chastity as unnatural and impious, occasioning, among other things, disease, masturbation, sodomy, adultery, theft and murder. He views the contemplative life as papist, as well as a violation of the mean; as libertinism is excess, so asceticism is defect, inducing phantasms, illusions and madness.¹²

Aside from the dangers of warring against one's natural affections and pursuing worldly knowledge for fame, the King's regime is one which falsely supposes bookish studies to be superior to learning by experience in the world, another favourite topic of Folly's in the *Moriae Encomium*. Not only does Folly condemn those who pursue worldly wisdom, but also those who shun the real world for the spheres of political, religious or academic studies which would elevate them above the common lot of humanity. Thus invectives are delivered against philosophers, schoolmasters, theologians and clergy, and precisely the kind of contemplative life which the King advocates. The *Moriae Encomium's* monks, though differing in their dictates in some respects from the King's proposals, live a solitary existence, and lay much emphasis on "doing everything to rule" (p.131). As was noted above, the King's academy contrasts strongly with Rabelais' Abbey of Thélème, where the governing maxim is the absolute opposite. Of particular interest here is the rejoinder with

11. *A Precious Seeing: Love and Reason in Shakespeare's Plays* (New York, 1987), p.45.

12. *ibid*, p.45.

which Folly answers such an obsession for rules, saying "they never think of the time to come when Christ will scorn all this and enforce his own rule, that of charity" (p.131). The importance of law and charity is evident in *Love's Labour's Lost* and is a theme to which we will return frequently. It is also a central tenet of the criticism by Folly of the self-deceivers who learn the rules of theology but lack its practical application to the world about them.

Berowne's objections to the King's academy themselves echo some very Erasmian sentiments as expressed by the goddess of Folly, on the pursuit of god-like knowledge:

BER:What is the end of study, let me know?

KING:Why, that to know which else we could not know.

BER:Things hid and barr'd, you mean, from common sense?

KING:Ay, that is study's god-like recompense.

BER:Come on, then; I will swear to study so,

To know the thing I am forbid to know. (I.i.55-60)

Folly extols the wisdom of common sense, and the foolishness of worldly knowledge which seeks to surpass mortal limits. Berowne's words here echo Genesis and the fall of man in their thirst for god-like intelligence and gaining the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge. Once again the folly of ignoring one's human limitations is what is at issue, and Berowne's subsequent criticisms of the King's regime blend Platonic terms concerning study, apprehending wisdom's light by close-reading, with an opposite philosophy of sensualist love by fixing "upon a fairer eye" (I.i.81). His reason against reasoning is reminiscent of Folly's clever arguments, and Berowne, who later will become the spokesman of Shakespeare's most Erasmian speech in Act IV scene iii, seems already to see the doomed state of the oath which the King would have him swear. Since the Princess's visit will mean the oath must be waived, we are inclined to agree with his assertion, "Necessity will make us all forsworn" (I.i.148), and even more so with his observation concerning the nature of man, "For every man with his affects is born, / Not by

might master'd, but by special grace" (I.i.150-1). In this Folly would agree too, but Berowne's fault is that even while voicing such enlightened sentiments he has still, a few lines earlier, signed his name to an oath which does attempt to master by might, and which he freely acknowledges he will break.

The mention of the word "grace", with all its theological significance, is the first of several allusions throughout *Love's Labour's Lost* to the controversy over love and charity, over man's achievements and God's grace. However, before investigating the more theological elements of folly involved in the play, the role of nature and instinct must be commented on further. We have already seen how Erasmus' Folly emulates nature and rejects laws which attempt to deny natural instinct and passion. The second half of Act I scene i juxtaposes nature in the form of Costard's behaviour, with law in the form of the King's edict. Immediately after the oaths are taken Costard is hauled before the company, accused of breaking the law by following his natural instincts. Costard has been taken with Jaquenetta, and reported by his jealous rival Armado to the authority of the King. The "obscene and most preposterous event" (I.i.237) related by Armado's letter (a mockery of human learning in itself) is nothing but nature, as Erasmus' Folly would describe it. Costard's own inimitable defence is in perfect agreement with Folly, merely answering, "It is the manner of a man to speak to a woman", and concluding, "such is the simplicity of man to hearken after the flesh" (I.i.206-7 & 214-5). The natural inhabitants of the King's park have already shown the futility of oaths and the common-sense wisdom of Folly's words.

Shakespeare is commenting here on a debate concerning natural law which was at the heart of humanist teaching, and rested on the distinction between a natural propensity in man to do good, and the

opposite view which saw man as essentially a fallen creature who would commit evil if left to his natural inclinations alone. Richard Hooker makes the connection between natural law and the rule of reason explicit in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594-7). This definition rests on an innate knowledge of good and evil, a kind of conscience which will naturally inform men of the right course of action:

Law rational therefore, which men commonly use to call the law of nature, meaning thereby the law which human nature knoweth itself in reason universally bound unto, which also for that cause may be termed most fitly the law of reason; this law, I say, comprehendeth all those things which men by the light of their natural understanding, evidently know, or at leastwise may know, to be beseeming or unbeseeming, virtuous or vicious, good or evil for them to do.¹³

These issues are also addressed in Aristotle's *Ethics*, where the whole question of virtue and vice is considered. Aristotle states:

- I. That Self-control and Endurance belong to the class of things good and praiseworthy, while imperfect Self-Control and Softness belong to that of things low and blameworthy.
- II. That the man of Self-Control is identical with the man who is apt to abide by his resolution, and the man of Imperfect Self-Control with him who is apt to depart from his resolution.
- III. That the man of Imperfect Self-Control does things at the instigation of his passions, knowing them to be wrong, while the man of Self-Control, knowing his lusts to be wrong, refuses, by the influence of reason, to follow their suggestions.¹⁴

The distinction between the man who follows his passion and he who is guided by reason is essentially the same distinction as that we discussed in Chapter 2, where the natural was described as passion. It is also the same debate we see in *Love's Labour's Lost*, but here the conflict is between nature and law. Regardless of the particular terms, there is an opposition, vital to our understanding of folly, between nature, passion or emotion, and reason, self-control or law.

13. *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (London, 1907), I, 182.

14. *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, translated by D.P. Chase (London, 1930), p.153.

In each, the underlying humanist point is the same, that man is able to master his passions or nature with the help of right reason, but that this can only be done when the existence of those passions is admitted, and their natural power recognised.

Erasmus' *Folly* makes no secret of the fact that her influence is over man's body and not his reason, and we can see the issues of reason and emotion enter the debate concerning law and nature in the *Moriae Encomium*. *Folly* claims to be the author of life, and to utilise emotion and nature for the propagation of man: "First of all, what can be sweeter or more precious than life itself? And to whom is it generally agreed life owes its beginning if not to me?" (p.90). Even the Stoics, she argues, must be "fond and foolish" if they ever want to propagate the human race: human life is, at its very start, a great play of folly. Walter Kaiser writes concerning the fool of nature:

If it is therefore natural to be a fool, to be a fool is also to be natural. From the Stoic point of view, nature is foolish; from *Stultitia's* [*Folly's*] point of view, stoicism is folly because it denies nature. *Stultitia* rejects the Stoics, as well as the philosophers, the metaphysicians, the scientists and the schoolmen, because they employ anti-natural means to understand nature.¹⁵

It would be misleading, however, to label Erasmus entirely as an Epicurean, despite the principles of pleasure which *Folly* advocates. (For a more detailed discussion on this issue, and the concepts of nature and law in the *Moriae Encomium* see Chapter 2.) Erasmus' view of nature was not Epicurean, although it was positive, believing nature to be created by God, and if correctly channelled, a force which could lead man to God and the Christian life. Erasmus' humanism led him to believe in the positive virtue of nature, attributing harm to any philosophy which denied nature (precisely as the King of Navarre seeks to), or which corrupted and restricted its

15. *Praisers of Folly* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963), p.95.

force by institutional and artificial laws of conduct. Folly's opposition of nature and reason also needs some clarification, since such advocating of nature does not mean anarchic anti-rationalism. Erasmus, when writing in the *Enchiridion*, extols right reason as the ruling power of man, under the authority of God. But it is Folly with whom we are specifically concerned, and her satire is aimed at wrong reason, at the false and artificial reason which men set up of themselves: "By Stoic definition wisdom means nothing else but being ruled by reason; and folly, by contrast, is being swayed by the dictates of the passions" (p.95). Natural reason should teach man how to act reasonably and should arise from an awareness of the force of nature and human limitations. It is not reason *per se* which is condemned, but the false worshippers of a reason that would deny man's imperfections even as it attempts to restrict his senses and affections.

Thus while Erasmus himself could never condone Costard's blithe statements about the flesh (indeed in the *Enchiridion* he states: "no one is weaker than he who is overcome by the desires of the flesh"¹⁶), still, through the ironical voice of Folly, an admission of fleshly weakness is far better than a human attempt to master nature, or a denial of its existence outright. Costard is a fool, but the point is that his folly is preferable to the hypocrisy of the lords. Scene ii of Act I introduces us to more of the low-life characters in the play and juxtaposes Armado, who has taken the King's oath but has already fallen for Jaquenetta, with Berowne, who expects to be similarly forsworn when he takes the oath himself. As is often the case in Shakespearean comedy, the lower characters mirror and comment upon the higher to some extent, and through

16. *Enchiridion*, p.46.

Armado we are given a more extreme and humorous portrait of the fool who will not admit his folly in falling in love.

Armado's love is of particular embarrassment to him, because he considers Jaquenetta such an unworthy object for his affections - a "base wench". Jaquenetta embodies a biblical quotation much favoured by carnival literature, from I Corinthians 1.28:

And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are.

This principle is satirically intensified in Armado's story, which itself is a parallel to the story of the lords, as we shall see when each of them falls in love. Jan Kott in *The Bottom Translation* isolates this text with two others from Paul's letter to the Corinthians as central to the concept of carnivalesque literature, where the values of the world are inverted and the proud are ridiculed by the base.¹⁷ Armado, however, is relatively quick to confess his love, and seeks comfort in historical precedent of those who have fallen in the folly of love before him. His grasping for comfort is amusing in its determination not to lose demeanour: "More authority, dear boy, name more; and, sweet my child, let them be men of good repute and carriage" (I.ii.63-5). When Costard is returned, duly judged, into the keeping of Armado for his punishment, the irony is clear as the self-confessed "natural" Costard meets the "artificial" Armado, who is desperately trying to save face. Despite the humbling he has already undergone, Armado moves from one life of artifice to another, since he reluctantly gives up his Spanish soldier image: "Adieu, valour! rust, rapier! be still, drum! for your manager is in love; yea he loveth". And immediately he takes on another artificial role, that of the poet-lover, a mockery of

17. *The Bottom Translation*, translated by Daniela Miedzyrzecka and Lillian Vallee (Evanston, Illinois, 1987), pp.41-2.

Petrarchanism par excellence, since he will write sonnets to the base wench Jaquenetta: "Assist me, some extemporal god of rhyme, for I am sure I shall turn sonnet. Devise, wit; write, pen; for I am whole volumes in folio" (I.ii.171-5).

If Armado is a fool because he falls in love with a base wench, the lords are no less fools to fall in love with the ladies of France. Although some critics elevate them to near-perfect paragons of virtue whose role is a semi-religious one of enlightening and teaching the lords, I think there is more evidence for a reading which shows their weaknesses and parodic role, parodying the Petrarchan ideals which their lords envisage in them. Thus, though Armado's plight is more severe and obviously comic, the lords' is not so far from it, in falling for women who are bawdy, catty and even promiscuous.

As was mentioned earlier, the satiric attack on Petrarchanism and Neoplatonic love is evident in the lords' attempts to spiritualise a love which is clearly sensual. Satiric attacks are also evident, however, in the presentation of the women, and their failure to be such goddess-like mistresses. By her dark colouring Rosaline embodies anti-Petrarchanism, despite all Berowne's attempts to cover this up, as in his comment: "And therefore is she born to make black fair, / Her favour turns the fashion of the days" (IV.iii.257-8). Similarly, the bawdy wordplay between Boyet and the French ladies can hardly be said to reveal demure or spiritual values, rather it is earthy, physical and, at times, base. Since the play relies so much on formality and styles, such exchanges of bawdy are at odds with the more polished social niceties exchanged with the lords, although even here there are some dubious jokes. A comparison could be drawn here with the bawdy exchanges between Desdemona and Iago in *Othello*, where in Act II scene i Iago playfully slanders

Desdemona on her arrival in Cyprus. His emphasis is on appearances being deceptive, and in the picture he gives of women he ironically plays on a crucial question of integrity:

Come on, come on; you are pictures out o'doors;
 Bells in your parlours; wild cats in your kitchens;
 Saints in your injuries; devils being offended;
 Players in your housewifery; and housewives in your beds.
 (II.i.109-112)

However, initially the women of *Love's Labour's Lost* appear more dignified than this, though perhaps rather inclined to fall in love, noticed, it seems with approval, by the Princess:

God bless my ladies! are they all in love,
 That every one her own hath garnished
 With such bedecking ornaments of praise?
 (II.i.77-9)

The introductions the lords gain of the ladies are mostly mediated through Boyet, who is inclined to tease the men as well as malign the women. He frustrates Longaville with witticisms:

LONG:I beseech you a word: what is she in the white?
 BOY:A woman sometimes, an you saw her in the light.
 LONG:Perchance light in the light. I desire her name.
 BOY:She hath but one for herself; to desire that were a shame.
 LONG:Pray you sir, whose daughter?
 BOY:Her mother's, I have heard. (II.i.196-201)

But his introductory comments concerning Rosaline imply promiscuity, perhaps even an affair with himself:

BER:What's her name in the cap?
 BOY:Rosaline, by good hap.
 BER:Is she wedded or no?
 BOY:To her will sir, or so.
 BER:O you are welcome, sir. Adieu.
 BOY:Farewell to me, sir, and welcome to you.
 (II.i.208-13)

Certainly later she is described as a "light wench" by Katharine (V.ii.25), although this could be malice, and by Berowne as "one that will do the deed" (III.i.193). Boyet's mediation seems voyeuristic at times, and, though scolded by the Princess as an "old love-monger" (II.i.253), his services seem generally to be welcomed. At this stage in the play it is perhaps unwise to judge too much, but we can

certainly agree with Erasmus' Folly, that compared to the men, "the feminine sex is artful, especially at covering up its own doings" (p.110). The juxtaposition between Armado and Berowne noticed earlier in Act I is elaborated upon in Act III as we see Armado entrusting his billet-doux to Costard, rapidly followed by Berowne entrusting his to the same messenger. The parallel situations are obvious, but significant differences are worthy of note. The most visible difference, clear on a stage, is that while Berowne is alone and surreptitious in his wooing and his letters, Armado, having now admitted his love, is attended by the faithful Moth. Ruth Nevo describes Armado and Moth, later echoed by Nathaniel and Holofernes, as pairs of "mutual admiration societies".¹⁸ There is a point here, in our concept of folly, since Erasmus' Folly promises just such happy friendships and alliances between fools, while those who are ashamed to admit their folly remain isolated and hypocritical.

Just think: winking at your friend's faults, passing over them, turning a blind eye, building up illusions, treating obvious faults as virtues which call for love and admiration - isn't all that related to folly? (p.97)

Folly's words are exemplified in the fools' praising of one another, shown preeminently in their efforts over the Pageant of the Nine Worthies. Her words are the opposite of what we see in the friendships between the ladies of the French court, whose cattiness we have already commented on (and which is even more obvious in Act V scene ii), and in the friendships between the lords, whose hypocrisy is so clear in the eavesdropping scene of Act IV.

Armado and Moth's banter in Act III picks up on the theme of the folly of learning as well as that of love, as they continue to joke and riddle. Again, the low-life characters are used to parallel the lords, and just as the King's academy with its emphasis on learning

18. *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare* (London, 1980), p.76.

is shown to be misguided, so the verbal wit of the minor characters makes similar comment on the misuse of learned language. The satiric attack on sonneteering and the artificial language of love is later aimed at the lords, but this is merely a refinement of the satire already aimed more obviously at pedants and schoolmasters like Armado and Holofernes who seek to impress by their language, not realising how ridiculous it makes them look. In Act III the wit is quite genuine though, and reminiscent of the fast-talking fools of Shakespeare's later comedies. For example, Moth's riddles are worthy of the fools to come:

MOTH:As swift as lead, sir.

ARM:The meaning, pretty ingenious?

Is not lead a metal heavy, dull and slow?

MOTH:*Minime*, honest master; or rather, master; no.

ARM:I say lead is slow.

MOTH:You are too swift, sir, to say so:

Is that lead slow which is fir'd from a gun?

ARM:Sweet smoke of rhetoric!

He reputes me a cannon, and the bullet, that's he.

(III.i.54-61)

Act III closes with Berowne's soliloquy on love, a significantly private admission of his passion for Rosaline. Just as Armado has found that his love led him to adore the basest wench, so Berowne admits the humiliation of love:

And among three, to love the worst of all;

A whitely wanton with a velvet brow,

With two pitch-balls stuck in her face for eyes.

(III.i.190-1)

Worse than this, Berowne is pained by the fact that he who so often scorned at lovers and their foolish ways, "a domineering pedant o'er the boy" [Cupid] (III.i.172), is now fallen, gone over to the other side to "wear the colours" of love. Thirdly, he realises that in loving he will be perjured, and break his oath for a mere "Joan". Berowne's analysis is that his plight is Cupid's repayment for his previous scorn, and in this way he distances the element of self-motivation. There is no question of his determining not to love, to

choose another more worthy, or to refuse to be perjured. Thus he cuts himself off from the aid of folly and from embarking on his journey of learning by experience. Since Berowne moves from the artifice of oaths which he knows he'll never keep, to the artifice of wooing without being prepared to admit love publicly, he refuses to acknowledge folly on either score. Berowne hides behind propriety when really he is perjured, and is afraid of admitting his love when really all around him are similarly fallen. He fails to comprehend what Folly warns against in the *Moriae Encomium*:

For the two main obstacles to learning by experience are a sense of propriety which clouds the judgment and fear which advises against an undertaking once danger is apparent. Folly offers a splendid liberation from both of them. (p.102)

The opening scene of Act IV adds to our picture of the Princess and her ladies. The Princess's exchange with the Forester while hunting seems unnecessarily proud and lacking in the dignity her office should command. She frequently praises herself, and is ungracious in criticising first the Forester's lack of praise for her, then in finding fault with his apologetic praise in reply to her criticism. Her speech which follows contains several allusions to the ideas of saving by merit or by grace - a theological debate to which we will return. Whatever the doctrinal issue, the Princess's behaviour seems oddly undignified, as does her concern with praise and fame, rewards which our Erasmian reading of the play has already discredited as empty.

Armado's letter to Jaquenetta, wrongly delivered by Costard to Rosaline, diverts us here and mocks the language and high-flown sentiment of the lovesick Spaniard. Topical allusions are found to the Renaissance debate about language, centring on the inkhornists. The letter is amusing in itself, but funnier still is Boyet's answer to the Princess's enquiry as to whose letter it is: "I am much deceiv'd, but I remember the style" (IV.i.97). Folly too knows the

style and denounces such incompetent rhetoricians in the *Moriae Encomium*, they:

think it a splendid feat if they can work a few silly little Greek words, like pieces of mosaic, into their Latin speeches, however out of place these are. Then, if they still need something out of the ordinary, they dig four or five obsolete words out of mouldy manuscripts with which to cloud the meaning for the reader. (p.88)

In dramatic terms, the letter has significance by preparing us for the following misreading of Berowne's, and his seemingly inevitable exposure. The witty repartee which takes place between Rosaline and Boyet after reading Armado's letter, only adds fuel to the fire of suspicion that they know one another particularly well, and that a new suitor stirs a little jealousy in the heart of the old. It also furthers the evidence that the ladies of France are less virtuous than we might expect. Their exchange forms a mere interlude from the satire on language though, and scene ii returns to this theme with Nathaniel and Holofernes in typical inkhornist discussion. Like Armado and Moth, the two compliment each other and themselves happily, celebrating their folly as "a gift that I have, simple, simple; a foolish extravagant spirit" (IV.ii.64-5).

The arrival of Jaquenetta and Costard with the other ill-fated letter is the first indication of the scene's dramatic importance in preparing for the eavesdropping scene to come. For the technique of discrepant awareness¹⁹ which Shakespeare uses in the next scene, to work properly, a careful preparation must be made. The low-life characters play their role here by bungling the delivery of the letters once more, as Nathaniel now reads Berowne's letter to Jaquenetta, and Holofernes insists on clearing the confusion by having the letter delivered to the King. The audience are well aware

19. A technique examined in Bertrand Evans, *Shakespeare's Comedies* (Oxford, 1960).

that this kind of disclosure is precisely what Berowne will not be able to bluff his way through, but the fools in their innocence see the plan as sensible. Shakespeare thus gets good mileage out of the unfortunate sonnet, both in terms of the comic characters' ineptitude and of their enjoyment of the sonnet itself. However, he also ensures that its significance and presence is in the audience's awareness throughout the coming scene, and its arrival always expected at the most apposite moment.

Act IV scene iii is the first dramatic high point where the folly of those who refuse to admit their folly is cleverly unveiled. A similar technique will be used in Act V scene ii, and both are tightly structured, gaining effect from the inevitability of their own action rather than from any subtlety. Act IV scene iii has a five-layered structure of awareness which is carefully built up, and equally carefully dismantled to exploit each stage fully. As the audience, we are in the most knowledgeable position, and each character reveals the truth of his folly to the audience, while deceiving his fellows. First Berowne enters, whom we have already seen succumbing to love. He admits his perjury and the confusion his secrecy has caused. The King enters and Berowne withdraws. Alone, the King reads a sonnet making it plain he too is a fool in love. Similarly, Longaville enters, the King withdraws and the situation repeats itself, down to the final confession of Dumain. As the audience, we know the other characters are simply hiding, but Shakespeare unbuilds the dramatic structure at the same speed as it was built, with Longaville beginning by coming forward to shame Dumain: "You may look pale, but I should blush, I know, / To be o'erheard and taken napping so" (IV.iii.126-7). With each chiding the next, Berowne finally emerges to crow about his fidelity: "I that

am honest; I, that hold it sin / To break the vow I am engaged in" (IV.iii.174-5). Of course, his crowing is doomed, and Costard and Jaquenetta rush in to deliver Berowne's ill-fated sonnet to the King.

The dramatic and structural techniques Shakespeare uses in Act IV scene iii highlight the isolation of the lords in their folly, as was noted above, when compared to the companionship the low-life characters experience in theirs. The difference is one of pride: the lords are not willing to admit their common folly to each other until they are exposed, and this point is made several times over due to the careful layering and unlayering of the dramatic irony. Pride and a refusal to admit to folly will become more central and will be investigated further in *Twelfth Night*, where Malvolio's chief failing is precisely this. In Berowne's words, the four are now united in folly: "you three fools lack'd me, fool, to make up the mess" (IV.iii.203). The mutual admission leads to a fellowship as Berowne urges them all to embrace and join together in their common humanity: "As true we are as flesh and blood can be" (IV.iii.211). Their truth, however, is compromised for the audience by Costard's comment as he leaves the stage, immediately before Berowne's speech: "Walk aside the true folk, and let the traitors stay" (IV.iii.209). His comment, in the truth-teller style of the later fools, implies that the lords, though admitting their folly in love, are still traitors - because of their perjury perhaps, but more significantly because their "truth" is only half the story. Berowne's being as "true as flesh and blood" is only a step in the direction of self-discovery, and the general admission of folly is not couched in humble terms but in proud: the lords have simply swung from the extreme of the folly of learning to a greater extreme of the folly of love, and they are equally misguided and blind in each.

Berowne's speech in Act IV scene iii from line 285 onwards forms a culmination of the Erasmian concept of folly in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Coming at the mid-point of the play, it both consolidates the preceding action and prepares us for the denouement of the long final act. As well as its dramatic function, the speech gathers together many of the threads, the objects of satire and elements of doctrine, which have been persistently alluded to up to this point in the action. Its understanding necessitates a digression into the theological debate which Shakespeare comments on through *Love's Labour's Lost*, and which is a central part of the Erasmian concept of folly.

3. Theological folly

The opposing theme to the debate concerning law in *Love's Labour's Lost* is the considerable play on the words "grace", "charity" and "merit", all words which have a direct connection with the teaching of St. Paul on salvation. Thomas M. Greene traces the uses of the word "grace" throughout the play and concludes:

the grace of entertainment, the grace of love, the grace of wit, the grace of civility - *Love's Labour's Lost* is about the pursuit of all these fragile goals. Its opening adumbrates the need of some ulterior, metaphysical principle to "grace us in the disgrace of death", though the principle of fame proposed there is quickly forgotten.²⁰

A similar use of the various meanings of grace in *Macbeth* comes at the news of Duncan's death. As Macbeth uses the word with reference to the king, and to the emptiness of fame, he also realises the

20. "Love's Labour's Lost: the Grace of Society", *SQ*, 22 (1971), pp.315-328 (p.328)

mortality of man:

Had I but died an hour before this chance,
I had liv'd a blessed time; for, from this instant,
There's nothing serious in mortality;
All is but toys; renown and grace, is dead;
The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
Is left this vault to brag of. (II.iii.91-96)

In *Love's Labour's Lost*, grace is mentioned in connection with each of the areas Greene isolates. It is what Berowne notices in Boyet's wit and mastery of the Princess:

He is wit's pedlar, and retails his wares
At wakes, and wassails, meetings, markets, fairs;
And we that sell by gross, the Lord doth know,
Have not the grace to grace it with such show. (V.ii.317-20)

It is what the wit gains from the audience: "that loose grace / Which shallow laughing hearers give to fools" (V.ii.851-2). It is used in connection with the lovers' desire for the ladies' "grace" (IV.iii.64), and the ladies use the word to refuse: "And not a man of them shall have the grace, / Despite of suit, to see a lady's face" (V.ii.128-9). The King's title is sometimes "your Grace", increasing the play on the word; and finally it is used with regard to folly:

Folly, in wisdom hatch'd,
Hath wisdom's warrant and the help of school
And wit's own grace to grace a learned fool. (V.ii.70-2)

Although Greene mentions the uses of grace with "more than a hint" of theological significance, he does not sufficiently pursue this connotation, and sees grace more in terms of its courtly attributes of decorum, poise, civility and taste. All these are significant too, emphasised by the formal and courtly atmosphere of the play as a whole, but it is the theological connotations of grace which are particularly important to the play and which oppose courtly attributes in the end: "For every man with his affects is born, / Not by might master'd, but by special grace" (I.i.150-1).

The ability of man to attain grace, the implication of what the King attempts to do through fame, and what Berowne denies is

possible, locates the play in the centre of an earlier theological debate. Grace, in a theological sense, refers to the saving love of God, undeserved by man and given freely to those who will admit their need of it. Wordplay on grace is thus linked with that on love and charity, since God's grace is broadly God's love or his charity to mankind. Both Shakespeare and Erasmus comment on and allude to this issue, as theologians debated the possible translations of the Greek word *agape* and its effect on the understanding of Paul's teaching on justification by faith, through grace, or by human effort and good works. R. Chris Hassel²¹ summarises the argument over translation clearly, and I shall refer to his argument here.

Thomas More and William Tyndale were central figures in a controversy during the 1530's over the translation of *agape*, More opting for "charity" in the English Bible, Tyndale preferring "love". More's objections were to the impure connotations of human love, arguing "for though charity be always love, yet is not, ye wot well, love alway charity".²² Tyndale answered this by seeing charity as a narrower concept, one of alms, patience and mercy, while love alone could connote the wider concept of God's gracious love for man. This disagreement over translation is not so pedantic as it might at first appear, since our understanding of the word *agape* is crucial to our interpretation of Paul's letter to the Romans, and particularly an important passage in Chapter 3, culminating in verse 28: "Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith, without the works of the law". This verse is alluded to in Berowne's speech quoted above (I.i.150-1) when he insists that human effort cannot procure mastery over man's nature, only special grace can. The doctrine of

21. *Faith and Folly in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies*, pp. 30-38.

22. *The Dialogue Concerning Tyndale* edited by W.E. Campbell, in *The English Works of Sir Thomas More*, (London, 1927), II, 208.

justification by faith and not works was at the centre of Luther's argument with Rome and sides with Tyndale's translation of *agape* as "love", avoiding any implication of good deeds on man's part. To More this was heretical, and his translation of *agape* as "charity" includes the advocacy of good works, implying that man can do more towards his own salvation than the Reformers would allow.

That Shakespeare alludes to the debate in his play is an easier statement to make than precisely where he locates the play within this controversy of theology. However, several references are made to the concept of buying grace or favour, aligning the lords, who seek to buy, with the doctrine of good works or the reward of merit. The King's academy is based on this principle as it aims to "buy" honour in fame through present efforts (I.i.5). Before the wooing of the French ladies Berowne's last words refer to buying treasure (IV.iii.382), and in the final act Rosaline unequivocally answers the King's question: "Price you yourselves: what buys your company?" with "Then cannot we be bought" (V.ii.224,226).

Barbara L. Parker comments on this principle in her book *A Precious Seeing: Love and Reason in Shakespeare's Plays*, where she discusses *Love's Labour's Lost* in the light of the Catholic doctrine of the treasure of merit. Basically this teaching allows for sin to be erased by the accruing of merit through good works or pilgrimage. Her analysis is very enlightening, but she goes too far in aligning the lords with Catholicism and the false doctrine of the treasure of merit, and the ladies with Reformation Protestantism and the doctrine of salvation through faith alone. To quote:

The King's concept of justice is comically analogous to that of the treasure of merit, and is the "heretical" counterpart to the Princess's "Protestant" concept of justice when, notwithstanding Costard's "unworthiness", she accords him her merciful and unmerited grace.²³

23. *A Precious Seeing*, p.94.

To elevate the French ladies into a position of tutoring the lords and bestowing grace seems too much, even in comic analogy, since the ladies patently have much to learn themselves, and they administer the very "Catholic" penances at the end of the play. Additionally, the resounding final lines of Berowne's speech in Act IV scene iii certainly imply an interpretation with Tyndale's emphasis on faith in the charity of God, rather than the Catholic emphasis on man's works fulfilling his obligations under the law: "For charity itself fulfils the law / And who can sever love from charity?" (IV.iii.360-1).

The speech which culminates in these lines can be seen as Berowne's own praise of folly, and as such forms the most overtly Erasmian passage in the whole of Shakespeare. Like Erasmus', the theology is strongly Pauline and numerous verbal and conceptual parallels exist between it and the *Moriae Encomium*. In terms of delivery too, its equivocal manner and ambiguous tone ally it in style with Folly's own oration. In the first place, it is delivered in answer to a request for some "salve for perjury" (IV.iii.284). Secondly, Berowne, like Folly before him, adopts a mock-academic manner and his genial arguments include some similarly striking pseudo-logic such as that expressed: "Let us once lose our oaths to find ourselves / Or else we lose ourselves to keep our oaths" (IV.iii.357-8). The overtones are those of Christ's edict in Mark 8.35, "For whoever will save his life shall lose it; but whoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospel's, he shall save it", but the logic is faulty and the ethics misapplied.

Berowne's speech ties in with the theological issues of the play, however, and in his very misinterpretation of its concepts, Berowne points to the central Erasmian distinction between those who proudly seek to be wise and those who humbly admit their folly. This

in turn has bearing on the Christian folly with which Erasmus' argument concludes in the *Moriae Encomium*. That is, that to admit one's folly is tantamount to an admission of human limitation and fault, itself a necessary precursor to an acceptance of grace and salvation through God's love and in spite of one's deeds, not through the merit of them. Erasmus' Folly quotes Christ in the *Moriae Encomium*:

I recognize only one commandment as truly mine, but it is the only one not mentioned. Long ago in the sight of all, without wrapping up my words in parables, I promised my father's kingdom, not for wearing a cowl or chanting petty prayers or practising abstinence, but for performing the duties of faith and charity. (p.132)

Berowne's Erasman speech, though slippery and clever, concludes with precisely this assertion: that it is love, charity or grace through which we obtain our salvation and fulfil the law: it is not the result of our own efforts. Berowne's clever twist, however, is to do precisely what More was afraid of in the dispute over *agape*, that is to confuse the pure and gracious love of God, his charity to men, with the impure and self-seeking love of men, the lords' charity for the ladies. The final act of the play, with its opportunities for the lords to see their mistakes and to realise their inability to buy grace and favour, will attempt to correct this self-righteous error.

The opening scene of Act V again gives us a chance to contrast the argument and deception of the lords as they bow to the folly of love, with the honest simplicity of the low-life characters who, though caricatures of affected rhetoricians, live humbly and unashamedly. The play on language, by now thematic, in *Love's Labour's Lost* provides us with ample opportunity to see they are ridiculous, yet genuine in such folly. At the King's request to present a play, they set about their preparations with a humble

enthusiasm and a willingness to admit their own inadequacies, but make the best of them. Erasmus' Folly commends such an attitude:

It's a true sign of prudence not to want wisdom which extends beyond your share as an ordinary mortal, to be willing to overlook things along with the rest of the world or wear your illusions with good grace. People say that this is really a sign of folly, and I'm not setting out to deny it - so long as they'll admit on their side that this is the way to play the comedy of life. (p.103-4)

Notice Folly's use of the word "grace" here, and how it compares with Moth's comment concerning the problem of such a small man playing Hercules: an apology is suggested, to which Moth agrees, "that is the way to make an offence gracious, though few have the grace to do it" (V.i.130-1). The characters' lack of pride and their happiness to make the best of their lot are positive attributes of true fools and ironically stand them in good stead to really play the Worthies.

Scene ii forms a stark contrast to the comradely busyness of the fools, as we see the French ladies in conversation, with Katharine quipping about Rosaline's lack of chastity. The Princess nods approvingly, "Well bandied both; a set of wit well play'd" (V.ii.29), and the insults move on to spotty faces and jokes about dark skin. As their conversation turns to the favours they have received from the lords, there is an interesting exchange on the folly of those in love. Rosaline voices her opinion that the men are fools to lay themselves open to mockery by sending such artificial sonnets with their favours, and the Princess replies:

None are so surely caught, when they are catch'd,
As wit turn'd fool: folly, in wisdom hatch'd,
Hath wisdom's warrant and the help of school
And wit's own grace to grace a learned fool. (V.ii.69-72)

Her argument aligns with that of Erasmus' Folly, the point being that having once lost the innocence of a fool, the only option for those

with worldly wisdom is to be a "wit turn'd fool", and as Maria continues:

Folly in fools bears not so strong a note
 As foolery in the wise, when wit doth dote;
 Since all the power thereof it doth apply
 To prove, by wit, worth in simplicity. (V.ii.75-78)

The wit who turns fool must thus set about proving by his wisdom that folly is really more worthy. Unlike the fools we have just seen preparing the play of the Worthies, the would-be wise lords, now turned fools, we will shortly see desperately trying to prove their worthiness before the ladies.

This discussion heralds Boyet's announcement of the lords' intention to woo in the disguise of Muscovite Russians, and we can immediately see the outplaying of the ladies' words. The masked attempt to win favour and buy grace is perhaps the most obvious display of folly the lords have succumbed to yet. Like the other dramatic high-point of Act IV scene iii, this scene uses the technique of discrepancies in awareness to reveal the full situation by careful degrees. The action divides into two parts: from the entrance of the King and his companions to their departure; and from the second meeting with the ladies up to Berowne's discovery. So, although humour is derived from what is actually said, more is derived from the inevitability of exposure of the King's party, and the tightly structured action. The audience are in the know from the outset, and the ladies have an advantage over the lords. The Princess explicitly states her purpose in such a plan as they exchange favours:

The effect of my intent is to cross theirs:
 They do it but in mocking merriment,
 And mock for mock is only my intent. (V.ii.138-40)

At their entrance the King and the lords are twice-deceived: unaware that their purpose has been disclosed; and unaware that the ladies have exchanged favours to confuse them. In the second half of the

scene the situation is carefully dismantled, as the ladies decide to report to the lords what fools had been bothering them only minutes before:

Let us complain to them what fools were here,
Disguis'd like Muscovites in shapeless gear; (V.ii.302-3)

Of course the King and his men are shown up mercilessly and the situation unravelled, so as to exploit the comic deception to the full.

With all the talk of fools, we cannot but allow that the lords do confess their folly at this point, and admit the foolishness of their plan, but their humility is not complete, as even now they seek to save face and turn the embarrassment to their own advantage. Dumain explicitly suggests they confess, "and turn it to a jest" (V.ii.390). However, the situation is more complicated than this, because the ladies, who take on a priest-like role in hearing their confession, are deceivers themselves. The confessions in the garden are treated with levity and scorn, with the expectation of forgiveness but without any intention of amendment. When the disguises and masks are uncovered the lords are not aware of their faults, because they have distanced themselves from the mockery. They see the disguise ploy as the object of folly, and transfer the mockery to it, thereby deflecting the charge of fool from themselves.

The Pageant of the Nine Worthies brings to a head the parodic analogy running through the play between the characters of lower rank and the lords. J.J. Anderson, writing about the morality of *Love's Labour's Lost* comments:

The noblemen may treat them as a joke, but there is irony in this, for the commoners' imperfections are, in essence, cruder versions of their own characteristics. The noblemen's wit is

the commoners' misuse of language, the noblemen's competitiveness is the commoners' constant criticism of each other, the noblemen's pretension is the commoners' gross overreaching, and so on.²⁴

The technique of putting the major characters to shame by the minor is one which Shakespeare reuses in his later comedies (particularly in the Watch from *Much Ado about Nothing* and the mechanics in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), but here even the lords themselves seem to realise what will happen, since the King worries before the Pageant and has to be calmed by the ever self-confident Berowne:

KING: Berowne, they will shame us; let them not approach.
 BER: We are shame-proof, my lord; and 'tis some policy
 To have one show worse than the king's and his company.
 (V.ii.507-9)

The effect of the Pageant is to shame the lords, neither simply because it ironically echoes their Muscovite "pageant" of disguise, nor because the actors are ridiculous and parody the lords' own pretensions to high-sounding language, but primarily because of the response the Worthies' Pageant evokes from the lords as they watch. Moth, who had caused the players concern because of his diminutive size, escapes without mockery. Costard, who makes the unfortunate confusion between "great" and "big" is interrupted, but thanked, and retires relatively self-satisfied: "'tis not so much worth; but I hope I was perfect. / I made a little fault in 'Great'" (V.ii.554-5). Nathaniel has a worse time, teased because his nose is not in keeping with Alexander's, whom he is trying to represent: he is removed from the stage. The worst mockery is reserved, however, for the more pompous Holofernes and Armado, and here the lords' rudeness surpasses the limits of civility, certainly of charity. Neither character manages much of their part, although both try valiantly, and

24. "The Morality of *Love's Labour's Lost*", *Shak S*, 24 (1971), pp.55-62 (p.59).

Holofernes' complaint, "This is not generous, not gentle, not humble" (V.ii.623), is perfectly justified and a very Erasmian judgment on the lords' behaviour. Their treatment of Armado does not alter even after this warning, however, and his repeated polite but indignant protests to them are ignored, such that he finally bursts out:

The sweet war-man is dead and rotten; sweet chucks, beat not the bones of the buried; when he breathed, he was a man. But I will forward with my device. Sweet royalty, bestow on me the sense of hearing. (V.ii.652-6)

Anderson observes concerning the tradition of the Worthies' Pageant, a point which is particularly pertinent to our analysis of folly:

In Bishop Barclay's *Ship of Fools* (1570) translated from the German, several of the Worthies are mentioned along with other heroes in the chapter headed "Of the ende of worldly honour and power". So the Nine Worthies came to be a *topos* of mortality, an aspect which gives bite to the scene in *Love's Labour's Lost* in that the show of the Worthies becomes more than a mere entertainment, bringing out not only the inhumanity but also the blindness and folly of the noblemen's behaviour.²⁵

The implication of this interpretation is one which has been dramatised in Peter Brook's production of the play at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1947, where Marcade's entrance with the news of France's death was imperceptible, but as the laughter at Armado died away the lights gradually dimmed on Armado and the lords, and came up on the black figure of Marcade. The process was gradual and discomfoting, and when Marcade spoke he could well have been standing there for a long time, silently watching the Pageant and its mockery.²⁶ The important point here is the stressing of the power of death, and the fact that all men are equally levelled by it. In Barclay's chapter

25. *ibid.*, p.60.

26. Philip Edwards discusses this aspect of Brook's production in his book, *Shakespeare and the Confines of Art* (London, 1968), pp.33-48.

all, regardless of their worldly position, come under death's jurisdiction:

But at the ende all hath ben gone and spent
 Agaynst the same no man can make defence
 Deth all thyng drawyth, ferefull is his presence,
 It is last ende of euery thyng mundayne
 Thus manns fortune of cours is vncertayne.
 (I, 265)

The low-life characters portray men of heroic stature, and are watched by noblemen, but all are subject to the same levelling force of death. The lords are shown to be fools with more serious implications, since despite Armado's plea not to beat "the bones of the buried", they laugh at the Worthies' Pageant. Marcade's entrance is reminiscent of personified Death in a Morality play, and his unannounced entrance implies he may well have been observing the flippancy of the audience, a flippancy which thus becomes laughing, both symbolically and literally, in the face of death.

Marcade's announcement of death rests uneasily on the company who had been about to witness a fight over the honour of a pregnant wench. It seems no one's reaction is right: the Princess's is formal and risks appearing cold; the King's is positively out of place and does nothing for our already lessening opinion of him; and Berowne who can be counted upon to say something, tries "honest plain words" but finishes with what he knows is an inappropriate contortion of facts, to plead their case regardless of France's death.

The final minutes of the play have generated considerable critical disagreement, since as we have commented, the ending is not the festive communion of marriages, but another stage in the humbling process of the lords, and the administering of penances or tasks which they must perform in order to prove their love for the ladies. Significantly, although the ladies are elevated to an almost priestly role (mostly as a result of the lords being relatively denigrated),

they make no promises concerning their love or faithfulness to the lords in a year's time, and one critic comments:

There will be no marriages here, except for Armado's three-year contract with Jaquenetta, and unless Longaville and Dumain are more constant than we have reason to suppose. A year is too long to wait for a happy ending under the circumstances, and the ladies are as unlikely to relent as the King and Berowne to fulfil their penance.²⁷

On the other hand, the lords do accept their penances (Berowne asks for his to be made harder) and recognise the impossibility of what they are asked to do: "It cannot be; it is impossible" (V.ii.848). J.Chris Hassel sees this as an indication of Berowne having learned the lesson of his folly, that like theological grace, comic grace is not achievable without an admission of our own folly and an amendment of life:

Without an awareness of folly, without a sense of deprivation, comic celebration is no more than an empty form, and comic joy no more than shallow laughter.²⁸

An Erasmian reading of the conclusion of the play must record its deliberate ambiguity. The penances and postponement on the one hand are in keeping with the concept of humbling through an admission of folly, with the need to accept our human limitations and admit our inadequacies. At the same time, Erasmus' Folly is nothing if not a realist, and especially so in the areas of human love and attraction. The notion that enlightenment will necessarily lead to a happy human marriage is contrary to her statements concerning the deception and flattery needed to keep friendships and relationships sanguine. The ambiguity around the festive marriages in *Love's Labour's Lost* thus seems right. What the lords achieve by the conclusion of the play is

27. Kristian Smidt, "Shakespeare in Two Minds: Unconformities in *Love's Labour's Lost*", *ES*, 65 (1984), pp.205-219, (p.218).

28. *Faith and Folly in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies*, p.51.

a vision of happy, innocent folly from the low-life characters, where, in the words of Spring's song:

daisies pied and violets blue
 And lady-smocks all silver-white
 And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
 Do paint the meadows with delight. (V.ii.886-9)

In this world, however, married men are cuckolded and the warmth of Spring inevitably leads to the cold of Winter, and the reality of the little wife who may be a "greasy Joan". All this is one; innocent fools must live in the real world, it is just that their folly sees them through, as Erasmus' Folly comments: "This is the way to play the comedy of life" (p.104). At the same time the lords see that those who would be wise, learned and proud, must humble themselves before they too can live free from artifice and accept their own comic grace.

CHAPTER FIVE

TWELFTH NIGHT: FOLLY AND MADNESS

1. Varieties of folly

Seen alongside *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Twelfth Night* is both more and less concerned with folly. As C.L. Barber's study has shown,¹ it is the comedy most concerned with festival folly, and the character of Feste, embodying such folly in his name, is arguably the most developed Shakespearean fool in the comedies. The word "fool" occurs in the play over sixty times and less than a third are direct references to Feste; characters seem to be constantly labelling themselves and others as fools throughout the play. Madness is prevalent too, most notably in the characters of Malvolio and Sebastian, but also in Olivia and in others confused by the effects of love. On this level then, folly seems obvious, but folly of a rather different kind to that found in *Love's Labour's Lost*. The Erasmian folly outlined there was of a more theological nature, concerned with Christian and Neoplatonic thought, with doctrinal allusion and debate over love and charity, and preeminently with the concept of comic grace achieved through an admission of personal folly, a concept investigated through parallels with theological grace.

Twelfth Night does form a development of the pattern of humility and the need to admit personal folly, but this is done in a less

1. *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton, 1959). *Twelfth Night* is central to this classic exposition of festival folly in Shakespeare's comedy.

overtly theological way and is more assimilated into the general movement of comedy which Shakespeare had developed over the intervening plays. That is to say, the overall shift of emphasis is from more overt external themes to those embedded in character. Erasmian folly in *Twelfth Night* then, is located more in character and less in obvious verbal allusion, it is less an investigation into folly as a new and potentially useful concept and more of an outplaying of a theme by now established. Folly is seen in the enlightenment of the main characters of Olivia and Orsino, and in the festival fooling of the subplot; it is embodied in Feste and its qualities exemplified in Viola, and it forms the basis of the comedy as characters move from symbolic darkness to the light (a literal move in the case of Malvolio), in a play whose title aligns it with both secular and religious celebrations of folly.

The *Twelfth Night* as a religious celebration looks back to the joys of Christmas and is on the eve of Epiphany, the date chosen to mark the revelation of the birth of Christ to the Magi. Records of the performances of *Twelfth Night* show it was twice put on at Candlemas, once at the Middle Temple on 2nd February 1602 and later as part of the Candlemas celebrations at court.² R. Chris Hassel in *Renaissance Drama and the English Church Year*³ points to the similarities in religious theme of both Epiphany and Candlemas, sharing a particular emphasis on humility and benevolent correction, and associated with light and purification. Commenting on Candlemas sermons, he quotes Robert Nelson's *A Companion for the Festivals and*

2. See J.M. Lothian and T.W. Craik, editors of the Methuen *Twelfth Night* (London, 1975), p.lxxix, and G.E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 7 vols (Oxford, 1941-68), VII, 46.

3. *Renaissance Drama and the English Church Year* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1939), pp.94-111.

Fasts of the Church of England, where humility is considered of primary importance:

Our Saviour first taught it in its greatest Perfection; and indeed his whole life was but so many repeated Instances of *Humility* and wonderful *Condescension* for our Sakes: He begins his divine Sermon upon the Mount with this Precept, he lays it as the foundation of our spiritual Building, without which we cannot discharge our Duty to either God or man...the difficulty of this Virtue proceeds from that Self-love which is planted in our Natures, and when indulged will be too apt to deceive us in the Judgment we form concerning ourselves.⁴

In theological terms, this is precisely what we discovered to be at the heart of the Erasmian message of folly in the earlier analysis of *Love's Labour's Lost*, and the themes of humility and self-judgment will be central to the concept of folly as shown in *Twelfth Night*.

The secular side of the Twelfth Night celebrations, investigated by C.L. Barber and others, centre on the Saturnalian patterns of comedy appearing: "in many variations, all of which involve inversion, statement and counter-statement, and a basic movement which can be summarised in the formula, through release to clarification."⁵ Festival folly here plays on the inversion of order, the allowing of temporary privileges to the curates who, dressed as fools, could mock the established order and hierarchy of the church. Authoritative figures were removed for the festival, and the lower ranks were temporarily given their roles. The principle at work was one of tolerating misrule once a year at such feasts, and indulging the subversive elements in the hope of maintaining order for the rest of the year. Marion Bodwell-Smith describes the inversions of festival folly in her chapter on *Twelfth Night* in *Dualities in Shakespeare*:

4. *A Companion for the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England*, 19th edition (London, 1748), pp.148-9.

5. *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, p.4.

One method of control is provided by the "safety-valve" mechanism. Occasionally the lower classes of man's inner commonwealth must be provided with circuses as well as bread, must be indulged as well as dieted, for balances can be restored by purgation through excess as well as by restraint, and this is the purpose of all festivals.⁶

The metaphor of humoral medicine used here links with the discussion of folly and madness in chapter 3, and will also be investigated in more detail when Jonsonian folly is discussed in later chapters. It is particularly apposite to *Twelfth Night* where excess and purging are important elements of the enlightening processes of Orsino, Olivia and Malvolio, as we shall see.

Further elements of festival fooling noticeable in *Twelfth Night* are the figures of the Lord of Misrule whom Barber identifies as Sir Toby, and the Master of the Revels whose job was to set very liberal limits on the fooling, a role which loosely applies to Feste. The gulling of individuals by means of trickery, into making fools of themselves is exemplified throughout the play, but is particularly clear in the subplot scheming of Toby and Maria; and the admission of error by those who would oppose the reign of misrule by the end of the play is exemplified by Malvolio's obvious refusal to do so. In each of these elements *Twelfth Night* draws on the tradition of folly as it was maintained in feasts and festival; it is the purpose of this chapter to show how these dimensions link with the theological emphasis on humility in a reading of the play from the perspective of Erasmian folly.

2. Folly in character: Orsino and Olivia

Orsino and Olivia both begin the play in a state of self-absorption, proudly indulging in a facade: for Orsino that of the

6. *Dualities in Shakespeare* (Toronto, 1966), p. 111.

Petrarchan lover; for Olivia that of the bereaved sister. Orsino's opening words are those of proud eloquence, centring on himself. J. Westlund, in his psychoanalytic study of Orsino in *Shakespeare's Reparative Comedies*⁷, identifies classic narcissism in this character, an inability to love himself which leads to an inability to love others. The unhealthy self-absorption and the frustration of Orsino's behaviour certainly add credence to this view. Self-acceptance is something we found isolated in the regeneration of the lords in *Love's Labour's Lost* as very necessary, and it is plainly stated by Folly in the *Moriae Encomium*: "Now tell me: can a man love anyone who hates himself?" (p.98). It might be stretching the point to say Orsino hates himself, but it is clear that his frustrations arise from an inability to know himself and judge his own needs. (No sooner is music demanded than it becomes too much.) Westlund's overall view of the play is illuminating with regard to humble acceptance of one's own limitations when he writes: "the lovers in *Twelfth Night* - like the major characters in the problem comedies - long for, imagine and pursue excellence which is not there."⁸ This pursuit of perfection and refusal to acknowledge or admit human imperfection, will become increasingly obvious in our analysis of *Measure for Measure* to follow. Erasmus' Folly is, by contrast, inherently down to earth, seeing actuality and the need to live life, rather than philosophise about it. Act I scene i opens with pictures of Orsino and Olivia which patently refuse to live life as it is, and dwell in hopes and memories which are stultifying to themselves and to others. As Valentine comments concerning Olivia, she centres her whole day on a hopeless task, "A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh" (I.i.31).

7. *Shakespeare's Reparative Comedies* (Chicago, 1984), pp.93-119.

8. *ibid*, p.95.

Juxtaposed to the dreaming of Olivia and Orsino is the active acceptance of life by Viola. Scene ii immediately presents a contrast with Olivia's situation, since Viola too has (she thinks) lost a brother's love. Viola's reaction is the opposite, although she expresses a fellow-feeling with Olivia. Making the best of her own less secure situation she disguises as Cesario and finds work for the present, leaving the future to itself: "What else may hap, to time I will commit" (I.i.60). Such an attitude contrasts at several points with that of Orsino and Olivia. Firstly, it is pragmatic where they are falsely idealistic. Secondly, it is humble where they are proud, accepting what time will bring rather than dictating, as Orsino does concerning Olivia's future with him:

O, she that hath a heart of that fine frame
 To pay this debt of love but to a brother,
 How will she love, when the rich golden shaft
 Hath kill'd the flock of all affections else
 That live in her; when liver, brain, and heart,
 These sovereign thrones, are all supplied, and fill'd
 Her sweet perfections with one self king! (I.i.33-39)

Thirdly, Viola is accommodating and accepting of her situation, not by a passive giving in, but by active decision - she cannot be admitted to Olivia's house so she will serve the Duke instead; she cannot serve him as a woman so she will disguise as a man. Both Orsino and Olivia are, unlike Viola, unable to accept their situations, and symbolically separated from the world in their courts and rooms, unable to relate to others.

The fine line between self-acceptance and dissatisfaction is one which concerns Erasmus' Folly, whose sister, she informs us, is Self-love:

Is there any duty throughout life which you can perform gracefully as regards yourself or others (for the importance of decorum extends beyond mere skill and covers every action) unless you have Self-love at hand to help you, Self-love who is so prompt to take my place on all occasions that she is rightly called my sister? What is so foolish as self-satisfaction and self-admiration? But then what agreeable, pleasant, or graceful act can you perform if you aren't self-satisfied? (p.98)

Folly's ironic tones complicate analysis here, but the point is one which reveals a vital difference between the narcissistic "love" of Orsino, which manifests itself in pride and dissatisfaction, and the need for self-love which results in satisfaction and acceptance of yourself, and consequently of others. Folly sums the whole argument up in one simple statement: "for the most part happiness consists in being willing to be what you are" (p.99), a task in which Folly is aided by Self-love; and in accepting situations: "a man's conduct is misplaced if he doesn't adapt himself to things as they are" (p.103).

Scene iii of Act I introduces the subplot characters whose attitude, epitomised in Sir Toby, is the happy, carefree one of which Folly would approve. Toby is a gentleman of liberty, living off his wealthier niece, amused by his foolish friends Andrew and Fabian, and by the wit of Maria. His chief object is pleasure, to be achieved at any cost but to himself: he is drunk when he pleases, goes to bed when he pleases, and avoids anxiety about anything. His motto could be "I am sure care's an enemy to life" (I.iii.2-3) and as such he is a fool like those condemned by Barclay in the *Ship of Fools* as we saw in chapter 1. Sir Toby would certainly subscribe to Erasmus' Folly's views on pleasures and ease, "What would this life be, or would it seem worth calling life at all, if its pleasure was taken away?", and again, Folly's gift to men is to allow them to forget so that "the cares of the mind are gradually washed away and they recover their youth" (p.91). The revelry of the subplot avoids growing-up, since Sir Toby need not earn a living or work, and the objections of Olivia to his "ill hours" are rejected by him like a rebellious adolescent: "Confine? I'll confine myself no finer than I am" (I.iii.10).

The self-congratulation and mutual aid of the subplot characters as noticed in *Love's Labour's Lost* is repeated here, as Sir Toby and Sir Andrew praise one another merrily:

SIR AND: Sir Toby Belch! How now, Sir Toby Belch?

SIR TO: Sweet Sir Andrew!

SIR AND: Bless you, fair shrew.

SIR TO: And you too, sir. (I.iii.44-47)

The friendship they enjoy can hardly be said to be based on sincerity and truth, since Toby mercilessly uses and tricks Sir Andrew, but it is in keeping with Folly's descriptions of the friendships fools can make, seen in the analysis of *Love's Labour's Lost* and reemphasised here: "it is folly, and the same folly, which alone makes friendships and keeps friends together" (p.97). Toby, however, is no innocent in his folly. He is not like Sir Andrew, who is persistently referred to by Maria as "fool" and who is self-confessed in his witlessness: "I have no more wit than a Christian or an ordinary man has: but I am a great eater of beef, and I believe that does harm to my wit" (I.iii.82-5). Rather, Toby is in control of the misrule and manipulates the witless knight - but Folly's point concerning friendship remains true, and since Andrew never has wit enough to realise and complain, he is helped along by his folly, as Erasmus' Folly promises:

However, I am here, and with a mixture of ignorance and thoughtlessness, often with forgetfulness when things are bad, or sometimes hope of better things, with a sprinkling too of honeyed pleasures, I bring help in miseries like these. (p.105)

Viola's pragmatism in the face of adversity seems initially to pay off, since scene iv opens with an account of her favour in the Duke's eyes, but already the situation becomes more complicated as we learn, by way of an aside at the end of the short scene, that Viola has fallen in love with Orsino: "whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife" (I.iv.42). Once again, as we saw in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Shakespeare uses the folly of love to illuminate his characters, and ultimately to reveal the folly of extremism and cutting oneself off from reality. Orsino's insistence on cutting himself off from the world, in order to indulge his lovesickness, has similarities with

the attitude of the King and the lords in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Although the reason for detachment from the world is the opposite, (in the earlier play the academy is set up to prevent the inhabitants from being distracted by love, in the later one the contemplative solitude Orsino seeks is to enable him *not* to be distracted from thinking about his love), the fault, in terms of folly, seems to be the same. Neither situation admits reality, or gets on with living in the world, both revel in artificiality and represent extremes in reaction to human love which are wrong. By contrast, Viola is representative of common-sense and pragmatism. Her situation becomes progressively worse through the play, and her compromising position as a disguised heroine in a love-tangle makes her an apposite spokesperson for true folly, painfully aware as she is of her own inadequacies and weaknesses.

In scene v, the last of the opening Act, Viola joins forces with Feste in a role of catechising Olivia, a method Feste later uses on Malvolio with significantly different effect. Olivia's comic catharsis is undertaken first by Feste, and then continued, almost unwittingly, by Viola; her gradual development through the play forms a commentary on folly and wit, juxtaposed as they were in *Love's Labour's Lost*. The "remedy" and "proof" Feste offers concerning Olivia's mourning relies on her reenacting her folly for herself so that she comes to a position of realisation of herself and her behaviour as an excessive and indulgent luxury (one, we are aware by contrast, which is not afforded to the supposedly bereaved Viola). Feste initially aims at an awareness, in Olivia, of human imperfection, something we saw as vital to Erasmian folly in the last chapter, and exemplified in Feste's answer to the charge of dishonesty:

bid the dishonest man mend himself, if he mend, he is no longer dishonest; if he cannot, let the botcher mend him. Anything

that's mended is but patched: virtue that transgresses is but patched with sin, and sin that amends is but patched with virtue. (I.v.42-47)

The biblical language immediately strikes us, and the parallels with grace and redemption through outside intervention are also notable. Images of mending the broken are clearly visible in both Old and New Testaments,⁹ and are combined here with the image of the motley coat traditionally worn by the fool.

Reaction to the fool at this point is twofold: Olivia begins to warm to him, but Malvolio is increasingly irritated. It is significant to the message of folly in the play that the first time we see Malvolio he is at odds with the fool. While on the one hand, Malvolio speaks true when he maliciously comments "infirmity, that decays the wise, doth ever make the better fool", Feste's equally truthful answer strikes a more ironic note "God send you, sir, a speedy infirmity, for the better increasing your folly!" (I.v.74-76).

9. References in the Old Testament refer to the healing power of God, mending the broken-hearted (Psalm 147.3), and to the brokenness of people without God (Exodus 6.9). Job speaks of a broken spirit (Job 17.1), and David, in his repentance after sinning with Bathsheba, isolates a broken spirit as what God requires in order to forgive and refill him (Psalm 51.17). Proverbs has two references to the wicked being broken in God's judgment when stubbornness has led to persistent sin (Proverbs 6.15 & 29.1). In the New Testament, similar references are made by Christ in his healing ministry in the Gospels, for example in the healing of the official's son (John 4.52). "Mend" is also used in the sense of changing one's ways, as in 2 Corinthians 13.11, where Paul calls upon the church to live in a godly manner, and where Jesus heals the ten men suffering from leprosy and exhorts them to go and be examined by the priests so that they can then begin to live new lives (Luke 17.11-19).

Folly, we have seen, is learned by humbling and through all kinds of infirmity: Malvolio, however, though treated as a sufferer of the worst kind of infirmity, madness, never allows this to increase his humility or to teach him true folly.

Learning humility is central to the relationship between Olivia and Viola, which begins at the end of Act I and changes Olivia from being excessive in her mourning to being purged through love as she falls for the unfortunate Cesario. The series of mistakes that gradually humiliate Olivia and ultimately cause her to make a fool of herself, is an outplaying of the "proof" in which Feste showed how she must reenact her own folly. The first interview between Olivia and Viola reveals more of the initial pride of Olivia we had been led to expect from Valentine's introductory comments. Viola's humility is unmoved, but her boldness increases and her perception "I see you what you are, you are too proud" (I.v.254) doesn't seem to put Olivia off. Viola's own way of wooing, with the picture of a willow cabin, begins the weakening process in Olivia, and makes the chink in her proud facade. As M.P. Tilley puts it:

Olivia is only one of a number of examples that Shakespeare gives us in his plays, to show the futility of the aims of those who would be wiser than nature, and seek, in ruling out of life the emotions, to exalt the single standard of reason to supreme importance.¹⁰

The unnatural suppression of emotion is something Folly comments on extensively in the *Moriae Encomium*, and Olivia displays tendencies here which become considerably more obvious in Angelo, as we shall see in the following chapter on *Measure for Measure*. Folly's words again centre on the Stoics, but their sense is applicable here:

the Stoics segregate all passions from the wise man, as if they were diseases. But in fact these emotions not only act as guides to those hastening towards the haven of wisdom, but also

10. "The Organic Unity of *Twelfth Night*", *PMLA*, 29 (1914), pp.550-66 (p.561).

wherever virtue is put into practice they are always present to act like spurs and goads as incentives towards good deeds. Yet this is hotly denied by that double-dyed Stoic Seneca who strips his wise man of every emotion. In doing so he leaves nothing at all of the man, and has to fabricate in his place a new sort of god who never was and never will be in existence anywhere. Indeed, if I may be frank, what he created was a kind of marble statue of a man, devoid of sense and any sort of human feeling.
(p.104)

This kind of dehumanising is inherent in the imagery of the face as a picture and the features labelled as items in Olivia's speeches to Viola. Olivia is set up as a kind of statue, and denies any sort of human feeling. Olivia's segregation of her passions is put further into relief by the juxtaposition with Orsino's unbridled emotion, as one who loves: "With adorations, fertile tears, / With groans that thunder love, with sighs of fire" (I.v.259-60). By the end of the Act, Olivia has begun to admit to feeling, and the process of her gradual humiliation through misplaced love starts in earnest.

Viola's reaction to Olivia's love comes in Act II scene ii, and again the tone of her speech is a confused but humble acceptance, "what will become of this?", followed by a further handing of the situation over to time: "O time, thou must untangle this, not I, / It is too hard a knot for me t'untie" (II.ii.39-40). Of course, from the audience's point of view time will have the aid of Viola's brother, Sebastian, since the intervening scene has both shown us he is alive and told us he is heading for Orsino's court, where he is most likely to meet Viola. The heightened awareness of the audience at this point accentuates Viola's humble trust, as in her comparative ignorance she has no idea how time can untangle the knot. Scene iv pushes Viola's endurance even further in the exchange with Orsino concerning love. The whole scene is steeped in comic irony, and Orsino's contradictory notions about the passions of men and women are frequently cited as evidence of his inconstancy and inability to know his own mind.

Albert Gérard compares *Twelfth Night* to the *Ship of Fools*, "for Illyria is Shakespeare's *Narrenschiff* and Orsino is its captain" who has an "oceanic capacity for delusion."¹¹ Certainly delusion is a feature of folly emphasised in both the *Ship of Fools* and the *Moriae Encomium*. Although Erasmus' Folly ironically praises it as a quality which increases the enjoyment of life and reduces the difficulties, in Orsino the delusion is judged negatively, more in keeping with the *Ship of Fools'* concept of blind folly, which cannot see truth or reality. His delusion not only closes off the possibility that Olivia might not love him, but exalts his own emotions above all others in a false idea of love which reminds us of the Petrarchan sonnets composed by the lords in *Love's Labour's Lost*. In each case the folly of such posturing is highlighted most effectively by a parody of the main action in the subplot. In *Twelfth Night* Orsino's delusion is preceded by the gulling of Malvolio which is set up in this respect as a caricature of the Duke. We will turn to it now as a further example of the work of folly in the play.

3. The folly of madness: Malvolio

The characters of the subplot present a variation on the theme of the need to be humble, and at the same time, they celebrate the freedom of the carnival spirit. In both these areas we can see parallels with the *Moriae Encomium*, and morals drawn from it. Folly merges with madness in the gulling of Malvolio, and the humility which Malvolio ultimately fails to learn is taught far more cruelly than the lovers' plot allowed. Malvolio's role and attitude is in direct opposition to that of Sir Toby as the Lord of Misrule. The

11. "Shipload of Fools: A Note on *Twelfth Night*", *ES*, 45 (1964), pp.109-115 (p.110, 112).

blurring and inverting of social distinctions in rank which, as we have seen, is a part of the festival freedom, goes against all that Malvolio holds dear. Three characters in the play marry above their social rank (that is Maria, Sebastian and Viola), and two, the unfortunate victims of Sir Toby, namely Andrew and Malvolio, aspire to do so. The whole idea of social aspiration is portrayed in Malvolio with humorous but telling effect. Critics are divided as to the justice of Malvolio's treatment, but our interest in him is less in the area of the justice of his treatment, and more in the way in which he links two varieties of folly in the play. He is involved both in the festive fooling of the subplot and in the more serious Erasmian folly which concentrates on an admission of one's imperfections and is central and necessary for a final achievement of comic grace.

Malvolio's introduction can hardly be said to be a positive one. His name is variously interpreted as "ill-will" or "evil desire", and almost the first comment we hear of him is Olivia's judgment "you are sick of self-love, Malvolio" (I.v.89). This remark immediately links with our earlier analysis of Orsino, in which self-love was prominent, and the distinction was made between a healthy self-acceptance and a hollow self-aggrandisement, the one praised, the other condemned by Erasmus' Folly. Secondly, Feste's clear dislike of Malvolio, and the latter's contempt for the fool places him in a negative relation to Folly's spokesman in motley, from the outset. Both these observations affect our judgment of Malvolio at his entrance part-way through Act II scene iii when he interrupts the caterwauling of the Twelfth Night party. Since even Maria has described the party as such, only moments before Malvolio's entrance, there are grounds for sympathising with Malvolio in his thankless task of controlling the ebullient Sir Toby and carrying out Olivia's

orders as he is bid: "Sir Toby, I must be round with you. My lady bade me tell you, that though she harbours you as her kinsman, she's nothing allied to your disorders" (II.iii.95-97). The indirect speech here gives what is said an air of authority from Olivia, and contrasts with the way in which we see Malvolio would like to deal with Sir Toby when he fantasises in scene v: "Cousin Toby, my fortunes having cast me on your niece give me this prerogative of speech" (II.v.70-71).

However, even this degree of restraint is undermined when it is immediately followed by Sir Toby's assessment of Malvolio's attitude, which pushes the argument of superiority home: "Art any more than a steward? Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" (II.iii.113-5). Paul Mueschke and Jeanette Fleisher's analysis of Malvolio considers the superiority and self-love as a brand of humour comedy similar to that in Jonson's comedies, a trait which must be purged:

His humour distempers his appetite because his acceptance of his own superiority leads him to condemn others, in whom he cannot perceive the qualities he considers himself to possess, as his inferiors. He is respectful to practically nobody in the play except Olivia, because she is his mistress and he hopes may become his wife; when his self-love is wounded, as he thinks by her connivance, he rails at her as he has previously at everyone else with whom he has come into contact.¹²

This humoral defect, they contend, is primarily noticed by Maria, and it lies at the heart of her whole gulling plot, exploiting Malvolio's amorous and misguided aspirations.

Maria's gulling plot has associations with both elements of folly in the play. On the one hand, it is a traditional fooling, authorised by the Lord of Misrule, upon a senior member of Olivia's household in order to "make him an ass". On the other hand, it links

12. "Jonsonian Elements in the comic underplot of *Twelfth Night*", *PMLA*, 48 (1933), pp.722-40 (p.735).

with a more general theme of folly in the play, through a purging, fooling process to attain humility and self-awareness. The gulling of Malvolio thus comments on the confusion of mistaken identity in the main plot, making fools out of Olivia and Orsino, but it comments by contrast with the main characters' deeper perception of folly at the close of the play, since the lesson of humility is one Malvolio significantly fails to learn.

Structurally, the plot has similarities with the eavesdropping and masking scenes of *Love's Labour's Lost*. The humour is derived from a similar instance of a character being watched by an audience on a higher level of awareness, waiting for the inevitable climax of discovery. Maria's plot takes the trickery even further, since she knows Malvolio's weakness is such that he will fall headlong into the trap and make no effort to hide his folly, as Berowne and the lords had. However, the performance of Malvolio in Act II scene v is one which draws the audience, both that in the box tree and beyond, into an encounter with folly. Karen Grief writes:

It is a glass more like a funhouse mirror than the symmetry of a "natural perspective", but in Malvolio's absurd performance the pranksters are presented with a comically distorted image of their own follies and delusions. Malvolio's folly is made more ludicrous by the charade that openly exposes the overweening ambition and conceit normally held within respectable bounds by the sanctimonious steward, but the difference between the performer and his audience is simply one of degree.¹³

In fairness, Maria's plot against Malvolio is hardly designed to educate him, since it so clearly is a festive revenge on his insufferable pride and superiority. The plot makes a fool out of Malvolio, but his ultimate refusal to accept his own folly debars him from happiness: he is the worst of the Erasmian proud, who are self-satisfied and blind. Malvolio comes perilously close to the pseudo-

13. "Plays and Playing in *Twelfth Night*", *Sh S*, 34 (1981), pp.121-130 (p.127).

academics and theologians Erasmus satirises most vehemently in the *Moriae Encomium*. A direct parallel can be drawn between Folly's description of the theologian who set out to explain the mystery of the name "Jesus", and Malvolio's interpretation of the letters "M O A I" in Maria's letter. Folly scornfully records how:

He proved with remarkable subtlety how anything that could be said about this lay hidden in the actual letters of his name. For the fact that it is declinable in three different cases is clearly symbolic of the threefold nature of the divine. Thus, in the first case (*Jesus*) ends in *s*, the second (*Jesum*) ends in *m*, the third (*Jesu*) in *u*, and herein lies an inexpressible mystery; for the three letters indicate that he is the sum, the middle, and the ultimate. (p.133)

Folly's description carries on into a mathematical analysis of the word, but the mood is not far removed from Malvolio's subtle analysis of "M O A I": "If I could make that resemble something in me!". He continues, with asides from his audience:

MAL:"M" - Malvolio! "M"! Why, that begins my name!

FAB:Did not I say he would work it out? the cur
is excellent at faults.

MAL:"M"- But then there is no consonancy in the
sequel; that suffers under probation: "A" should
follow, but "O" does. (II.v.120; 126-132)

Undaunted however, Malvolio pushes his analysis to a convenient end:

"M. O. A. I.". This simulation is not as the former: and yet,
to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of
these letters are in my name. (II.v.139-40)

The pseudo-logic proves Malvolio a fool in the negative sense, like those satirised in the *Moriae Encomium*, but his inability to see this fault in himself means he never enters into the true folly, that of humble admission of one's own inadequacies, which is praised in Erasmus' work.

Malvolio's infatuation with Olivia and her supposed response to him, is a comic variation on the theme of unrequited love in the main plot. The exchange with Olivia in Act III scene iv could not be a better comment on the need to escape from self-delusion, as Alexander Leggatt comments: "the egotism of Malvolio's 'love' is nowhere better

demonstrated, and beside him the figures of the love plot, for all their self-absorption, appear quite sensitive to each other."¹⁴ This contrast is particularly emphasised by the intervening scenes and their comments on folly. Act III scene i contains the important exchange between Viola and Feste on folly and wit, pertinent both to Malvolio's fate, and to that of the other lovers. As we saw in *Love's Labour's Lost*, there is an emphasis on words and wit and their slippery nature, "words are very rascals" and "words are grown so false", something of which we are well aware after Malvolio easily falls victim to the flattering words of Maria's letter. Just as words come into everything (both the sister's name and the vehicle of reason, to name but two areas from their discussion), so the ambiguity of folly is stated here by Feste, as it is by Folly in the *Moriae Encomium*. Feste's statement "foolery, sir, does walk about the orb like the sun, it shines everywhere" (III.i.39-40) compares with Folly's ironic complaint about men's lack of proper recognition of her presence everywhere:

I can't help wondering at the ingratitude (if I may say so) or the dilatoriness of mankind. Everyone is only too anxious to cultivate me and freely acknowledges the benefits I bring, yet throughout all the ages nobody has ever come forward to deliver a speech of thanks in praise of Folly. (p.87)

Viola's description of Feste which follows forms a praise of folly, traditional to the festive activities, and in keeping with the sentiment of the Erasmian paradox of wisdom and folly we saw in *Love's Labour's Lost* as well as in the *Moriae Encomium*:

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,
 And to do that well, craves a kind of wit:
 He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
 The quality of persons, and the time,
 And like the haggard, check at every feather
 That comes before his eye. This is a practice
 As full of labour as a wise man's art:
 For folly that he wisely shows is fit;
 But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit. (III.i.61-9)

14. *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (London, 1973), p.242.

Viola is an apposite mouthpiece for such Erasmian sentiment, since her own compromising position as disguised heroine and the object of another woman's affections, while being in love with her master, never lets her forget her own human weakness and her foolish role. The folly she speaks of here is significantly expressed as something which must be handled with care, and the image from hawking which she uses adds a dimension of precision and correct timing, if the jests played by the fool are to have ultimate good effect.

4. Educative folly and festival folly

There follow two outworkings of folly, firstly of the educative type, as Viola continues in her role of bringing Olivia to a greater awareness of herself in humbly admitting her love for Cesario; and secondly, of the festive gulling type, as Sir Toby and Fabian gull Sir Andrew into a duel with Cesario as his adversary, in the supposed winning of Olivia's heart.

Viola plays the fool to Olivia in taking on Feste's role and allowing her to see her own folly in the second part of scene i. Olivia is humiliated by Viola, in admitting her rashness in sending the ring, and consequently admitting her own folly in love:

Have you not set mine honour at the stake...
 Enough is shown; a cypress, not a bosom,
 Hides my heart. (III.i.120, 122-3)

Viola's answer to Olivia's request to know what she thinks of her is illuminating and speaks of self-deception being gradually removed: "I prithee tell me what thou think'st of me. / That you do think you are not what you are." (III.i.140-1). The rejection of Olivia's love by Viola is the crux of her education in folly: learning humility is central to the relationship she has with Viola and the series of mistakes, not least that of mistaken identity, in falling in love

with another woman, gradually humiliate Olivia and cause her to make a fool of herself.

Fooling Sir Andrew proves to be equally straightforward, and the same aim, to "make an ass" of him, is present here as it was with Malvolio's gulling. However, Sir Andrew is a pure fool even before his gulling, and as such he strikingly resembles the victims of Jonsonian comedy. As we saw earlier, he confesses his witlessness openly, he blindly follows the advice of Sir Toby and keeps his victimiser financially: "Some two thousand strong, or so" (III.ii.52-3). He is also described in humoral terms concerning his cowardice, the element at the centre of his gulling into a duel with Viola. Sir Toby states: "For Andrew, if he were opened and you find so much blood in his liver as will clog the foot of a flea, I'll eat the rest of th'anatomy" (III.ii.58-61). His gulling will lead, in terms of plot, to an unravelling of the identities of the twins, and to a neat out-working of a degree of poetic revenge on Sir Toby when he receives a bloody coxcomb at the hands of Sebastian.

The gulling of Malvolio has far more serious consequences and shows folly merging with madness when the unfortunate steward is locked up as insane. The situation, though dramatically simple, has great comic effect, since Malvolio follows the instructions of the forged letter to every ludicrous detail, as we might expect from such a meticulous character. Madness is mentioned quite regularly in *Twelfth Night*, chiefly by Feste, but also by Olivia, Orsino, and later on by Sebastian. C.L. Barber isolates it as a key word when he writes about *Twelfth Night* in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*,¹⁵ and Malvolio's treatment when proclaimed mad is an interesting example of the blurring of the distinctions between folly and madness in the play. Malvolio has already made a fool of himself by his antics, but

15. *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, pp.240-61.

Olivia despairs not of folly but of his "midsummer madness", and Fabian comments that if the trick on him is continued "we shall make him mad indeed" (III.iv.134). Maria describes him as "possessed", as does Sir Toby, and Fabian suggests a diagnosis of his condition by carrying "his water to th'wise woman" (III.iv.103). Toby's plan is thus to take advantage of all this talk of madness:

Come, we'll have him in a dark room and bound. My niece is already in the belief that he's mad: we may carry it thus for our pleasure, and his penance, till our very pastime, tired out of breath, prompt us to have mercy on him; at which time we will bring the device to the bar, and crown thee for a finder of madmen. (III.iv.136-42)

The treatment of Malvolio in the dark room is suspended in the action until Act IV, the intervening scenes dealing with the gulling of Andrew and the challenge to the unfortunate Viola, and further complications in the theme of mistaken identities when Antonio rescues her, thinking she is Sebastian. The confusions add to the air of madness, and Antonio is specifically accused of madness, like Malvolio, and hauled off to prison. It is unsurprising to hear Sebastian's comment (having been mistaken for Viola) "are all the people mad?" (IV.i.26). We will come to the particular madness of Sebastian himself later, but Shakespeare exploits the same atmosphere of madness which he had first used in *A Comedy of Errors*, based on mistaken identity. In the earlier play the confusions of the identical twins lead to Dromio of Syracuse exclaiming:

This is the fairy land; O! spite of spites,
 We talk with goblins, elves and sprites;
 If we obey them not, this will ensue-
 They'll suck our breath, or pinch us black and blue.
 (II.ii.189-91)

The same reaction comes a few lines later, from the equally confused Antipholus of Syracuse (whose words are very similar to those of Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*). Antipholus asks:

Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell?
 Sleeping or waking? mad or well-advised?

Known unto these, and to myself disguis'd.
(II.ii.215-7)

Sebastian exclaims, as we shall see later: "Or am I mad, or else this is a dream" (IV.i.60). In *Twelfth Night* the treatment of madness reaches a climax, however, in the treatment of the "madly-used" Malvolio, and it is this which we will consider first.

Feste's playing of Sir Topas the curate reverses the traditional Feast of Fools privilege of the curates to play the fool for one day in the year, usually on the Twelfth Night (Epiphany) feast. R. Chris Hassel points out that "Homiletic tradition locates the curate as the mediator of grace through enlightenment",¹⁶ and Feste, in playing the curate, neatly links Homiletic teaching with Erasmian paradox, that of the wisdom of the fool (as observed by Viola in III.i.61-9). The darkness of Malvolio's environment is clearly important as a religious symbol, as well as adding to the dramatic impact of the scene. John Astington,¹⁷ in a discussion of the staging of "Malvolio Within", suggests it was originally played with Malvolio in a tiring house, offstage, and heard only in the distance. The later traditional Victorian model was a cage on the stage, modified by the use of a trap-door to the understage in most recent productions. However it is done, it is clear that the darkness and isolation which Malvolio complains of must be represented, and the scene works towards a symbolic enlightening through Feste's dialogue with the supposed madman. As we noticed in his catechising of Olivia, Feste's method is to lead the individual to an acknowledgement of their own folly, thereby leading them towards finding the truth out for themselves. The argument about the light works on several thematic, symbolic and

16. Quoted in *Faith and Folly in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies* (Georgia, 1980), p.164.

17. "Malvolio and the Dark House", *Sh S*, 41 (1988), pp.55-62.

dramatic levels, but it primarily points out Malvolio's unwillingness to admit the possibility of being wrong: "I say this house is as dark as ignorance, though ignorance were as dark as Hell" (IV.ii.46-7). But even as he contradicts the curate, Malvolio has stumbled on the crux of the argument: there is no worse darkness than his ignorance of himself. He also discovers the hard way, the truth about words; as Feste had commented earlier, Malvolio finds out what "very rascals" words are. As Terry Eagleton puts it:

whatever answers he advances will be absorbed, neutralised and turned against themselves by the rules of the illusion. It is his word against the Clown's and because the Clown controls the conventions of the game Malvolio will always lose.¹⁸

In the verbal fooling, Malvolio encounters what the lovers have had to face, being at the mercy of someone else, and relying on them. In other words, he sees the reverse side of the humility and admission of personal inadequacy we saw as a central tenet of Erasmian folly in *Love's Labour's Lost* and in other parts of *Twelfth Night*.

Nevertheless, this is a lesson Malvolio fails to take in, as he refuses to accept the notion of his own folly. The essential humility which he lacks, is paralleled in the religious symbolism of this Epiphany play. R. Chris Hassel notes several interesting parallels in contemporary sermons; to quote Lancelot Andrews: "Humility then: we shall find Him by that sign, where we find humility, and not fail; and where that is not, be sure we shall never find him."¹⁹ The humility of Christ, shown to perfection in the incarnation, is explicitly linked to folly in the *Moriae Encomium*: "Christ too, though he is the wisdom of the Father, was made something of a fool himself in order to help the folly of mankind,

18. "Language and Reality in *Twelfth Night*", *CQ*, 9 (1967), pp.217-228 (p.224).

19. *Faith and Folly in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies*, p.152.

when he assumed the nature of man and was seen in man's form" (p.149). And again: "It is quite clear that the Christian religion has a kind of kinship with folly in some form, though it has none at all with wisdom" (p.148).

Feste's catechising of Malvolio fails to teach him humility, and the letter and final entrance of Malvolio seal this failure. Ralph Berry considers that Malvolio's experience teaches him a new sense of dignity and self-worth, a gentlemanliness which comes through in his verse lines in Act V. Berry contends that it is the audience who is shamed through its complicity with the festive gulling, and Malvolio resumes his dignity thus: "It is his ultimate irony, that in the moment of humiliation and disgrace he speaks in the tongue of social elevation and human dignity".²⁰ The threat of revenge spoils the mood of comedy, but this is intentional and necessary since Berry concludes: "I surmise that the ultimate effect of *Twelfth Night* is to make the audience ashamed of itself".²¹ This view is in opposition to C.L. Barber's conclusion, which sees the spirit of comedy prevail and Malvolio excluded from the otherwise festive ending. Similarly, Marion Bodwell-Smith excludes Malvolio from the final communion of the other characters who share in a realisation of their folly;

The other fools admit their errors and are pardoned or given prizes at the end of the play. But since he cannot love anyone but himself, Malvolio is out of tune with the spirit of comedy as much as with the spirit of festival, and he cannot, therefore, share in the final redemption of folly through love, nor in its clarification through self-knowledge. He knows only that he has been made a fool of, not that he has been a fool, and goes out unrepentant and unforgiving. There is no compromise in this self-righteous exponent of the single vision of righteousness.²²

20. "*Twelfth Night: the Experience of the Audience*", *Sh S*, 34 (1981), pp.111-19 (p.117).

21. *ibid*, p.119.

22. *Dualities in Shakespeare*, pp.118-19.

Barbara Lewalski in "Thematic Patterns in *Twelfth Night*"²³ agrees, contending that the treatment of Malvolio as a madman points to the real lunacy of his values and to his self-delusion. Certainly it seems consistent with Malvolio's obstinacy that he should be unrepentant to the end, an example of a fool who will never admit his folly. Erasmus' Folly makes the distinction between the true fool and the false wise man towards the end of her oration, over the issue of forgiveness:

Then perhaps we shouldn't overlook the argument that Folly finds favour in heaven because she alone is granted forgiveness of sins, whereas the wise man receives no pardon. (p.149)

Ultimately there is nothing that Folly can do for those who will not ask for help, and the presence of Malvolio in the midst of the other enlightened fools at the end of the play illustrates this point more forcibly than an unconvincing conversion would.

The charge of unconvincing conversion is one which might be levelled at the dramatic changes in Orsino towards the end of the play. Unlike Olivia, Orsino is not gradually altered and allowed to reinact his own folly through a steady process. He is blind to the point of Viola's exchange with him in Act II scene iv, and doesn't even notice Feste's insult concerning his supposed love, "I would have men of such constancy put to sea" (II.iv.75-6). It is not until the final act that Orsino really alters, and Feste faces him with the concept of universal folly. To Orsino, Feste's riddle is incomprehensible, inverting the roles of friends and enemies in a biblical allusion, thereby highlighting the need for honesty and self-knowledge, not flattery, since, he implies, we all need to be told we are "asses" - that is, fools: "Now my foes tell me plainly I am an ass: so that by my foes, sir, I profit in the knowledge of myself, and by my friends I am abused" (V.i.17-9). Orsino misses the

23. *Shak S*, 1 (1965), p.168-181.

point, and when faced with the love of Olivia for his minion, his anger threatens violence:

Come, boy, with me; my thoughts are ripe in mischief:
I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love,
To spite a raven's heart within a dove. (V.i.127-9)

For Orsino, final realisation of himself is brought about by the mechanics of the plot, since it is not until he realises Viola is a woman that he can recognise the truth of her love for him and the root of his jealousy. All the same, there is no real repentance, Orsino rapidly transfers his love from Olivia to Viola, revealing how unconstant it really was, and comic grace is achieved in their union. For Orsino the lesson of folly is one of self-understanding, and the reward of grace is accepted, undeserved; but this is the point, that grace has been available for some time, a free gift, but receivable only by those who will admit their need of it by seeing themselves properly.

5. Platonic madness in Sebastian

Sebastian's role in the play is significant not only as the aid to unravelling the mistaken identities and setting right the love plot tangles, but also as a contrast to Malvolio in being another kind of madman. While Malvolio persistently protests he is not mad, Sebastian readily admits he must be; while Malvolio is convinced of Olivia's love by the letter - a spark which lights the fire of his existing delusions - Sebastian has never even met Olivia and within minutes is being whisked off to marry her. His reaction to the situation (as we remarked upon earlier) when he first is mistaken for Olivia is the exclamation: "Are all the people mad?" (IV.i.26). Up to this point the audience have been waiting for such a mistake to occur, since Sebastian's presence has been known since Act II scene

i. However, after defending himself from attack, he is suddenly invited to Olivia's house because of a more pleasant mistake concerning his identity. His reaction now is to transfer the charge of madness onto himself:

What relish is in this? How runs the stream?
Or am I mad, or else this is a dream:
Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep;
If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep! (IV.i.59-62)

Malvolio's madness is in direct juxtaposition to this - since the scenes alternate, and Malvolio's dark chamber is followed by Sebastian's "This is the air, that is the glorious sun" (IV.iii.1), a speech in which he oscillates between self-confessed madness and distrust, and assertions that his state cannot be madness.

Some interesting parallels can be drawn between Sebastian's confusion and the religious ecstasy described in the *Moriae Encomium*, another comment on madness. Sebastian distrusts his senses:

I am ready to distrust mine eyes
And wrangle with my reason that persuades me
To any other trust but that I am mad,
Or else the lady's mad. (IV.iii.13-16)

He cannot comprehend his madness, but thinks it is the greatest thing he has ever known and is loth to dispel it. Likewise the holy madness of the religious ecstatic in Folly's speech:

All they know is that they were happiest when they were out of their senses in this way, and they lament their return to reason, for all they want is to be mad for ever with this kind of madness. (p.153)

The link is not really between Sebastian and the religious ecstatic, but between Sebastian and the Platonic higher love of which Folly is speaking, a love which is folly because of its utter selflessness and abandonment to the object of love:

The madness of lovers is the highest form of happiness. For anyone who loves intensely lives not in himself but in the object of his love, and the further he can move out of himself into his love, the happier he is. (p.152)

It seems fitting that Sebastian, the other part of Viola's person, should be connected with the selfless love which she displays throughout the play. Barbara Lewalski links the twins together as a joint symbol of the nature of divine love, and a reflection of "the dual nature and role of the incarnate Divine Love, Christ, in accordance with the Christmastide theme implied in the play's title".²⁴ This, I think, may carry the sense too far, but it is certainly true that the essentially Christian message of self-forgetfulness is conveyed by both: in Viola's folly of humble suffering in love, and in Sebastian's madness of abandonment to love and his revelatory role which enables the comic conclusion to proceed.

At the close of *Twelfth Night* the atmosphere is very different to that at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost*, which as we saw earlier, is a play which ends in ambiguity and not in a conventionally closed conclusion. *Twelfth Night*, by contrast, promises happiness, marriages and even the hopes of reconciliation with the "madly-used" Malvolio. Folly in this play is embraced wholeheartedly, and the illusion of comedy, paradoxically gained by the self-knowledge taught throughout the play, is endorsed. Folly has enlightened Olivia and Orsino out of their false personae into an acceptance of inadequacy, and it is with a suitably foolish naivety that they both slip into marriage with what seem to be two halves of the same person. Following the instincts of love is something we saw as a feature of the folly of the "natural" Costard in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and something praised by Folly in the *Moriae Encomium*. The conclusion of *Twelfth Night* mixes the artificiality of comic resolution with this artlessness of following natural instinct. To quote D.J. Palmer, it reveals the paradox of romance and comedy: the plot,

24. *ibid*, p.176.

produces a paradoxical effect of both artifice and artlessness. Highly artificial in its extravagant improbabilities, it is for the same reasons curiously naive. The impression of a loosely-knit, apparently random sequence of events, following no natural laws of causality or necessity, is a basic feature of romance and Shakespearian comedy.²⁵

To embrace the folly of Illyria is to live in an artificial world, where coincidences are convenient and metamorphoses abound. But as Palmer says, the metamorphoses are at once artificial and natural: the characters' changes through self-knowledge and acceptance of folly are paralleled with the bodily changes of Viola to Cesario to two people, in a convenient provision for the altered lovers. In each type of change, true nature is the ultimate result:

The Ovidian metamorphosis is a magical rather than a natural change, a transformation to a more enduring plane of existence, removed from the vicissitudes of time and fortune. As the Elizabethans interpreted it, metamorphosis was a symbolic change which altered the form in order to express its true nature.²⁶

The lovers' true nature is not a worldly reality, as Feste reminds us in his final song; theirs is the happy marriage of comedy, whereas his song recalls the "wind and the rain" in relationships which Illyrian romance knows nothing of. However, even within the comic world, where the clowns "strive to please" us, by means of folly Shakespeare addresses important issues of humility, human imperfection and the need for self-knowledge to admit the ultimate folly of being human.

25. "Art and Nature in *Twelfth Night*", *CQ*, 9 (1967), pp.201-212 (p.201-2).

26. *ibid*, pp.210-211.

CHAPTER SIX

MEASURE FOR MEASURE: FOLLY AND THE LAW

1. Folly and natural law

Measure for Measure, like *Love's Labour's Lost*, has an unusually high proportion of religious language and content. Analysis of the play often begins with a location of its title within the Sermon on the Mount: "Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you againe" (Matthew 7.1-2. This passage is paralleled with one in Luke 6.37-38). Similarly, the play's emphasis on religious life in the monastic and contemplative area is frequently commented on, since both Isabella and the Duke are associated with religious orders, and in many productions they wear habits during the play. It hardly needs to be mentioned that the central tenet of the plot is a very obviously moral dilemma, involving the characters in a reassessment of their duties and obligations to one another and to God, in both a moral and legal sense.

After *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Twelfth Night*, *Measure for Measure* is clearly a more troubled play. It is usually grouped as a "dark" comedy or "problem" play, and it belongs to a later period than the other two plays considered, dated as around the summer of 1604.¹ All three plays were written well after the dissolution of

1. J.W. Lever draws this conclusion in his introduction to the Arden edition of the play. The first recorded performance is in December of the same year, introduction p.xxxi.

the monasteries in Britain, when the Reformation had largely taken effect, but at a time when religious debate and controversy was still highly topical and contentious. As in *Love's Labour's Lost*, it is the religious issues which form the most important link with Erasmian folly, and *Measure for Measure* follows the earlier play in an emphasis on the spirit as opposed to the letter of the law, the degeneration and corruption of institutionalised religion, and on the issues of nature and law, grace and works.

The conflict between nature and law in *Love's Labour's Lost* centred on the denial or falsification of the love the lords felt for the ladies, as contrasted with the following of natural instinct displayed by the low life characters. The love ethics of the Renaissance were the chief butt of the mockery, and the folly of the lords was broadly seen to be in their denial of their own "affections" or humanity. In *Measure for Measure*, nature and law are once more in conflict, but here the issues are far more polarised. Nature becomes sexuality, pitted against the authority of state law. As Marilyn French writes:

sexual behavior is the only act considered in this play: Claudio, Juliet, Pompey, Overdone, Froth, Angelo, Lucio, and even the Duke are accused of such acts. And *accused* is the word: sexuality itself is a crime, right from the opening of the play.²

Keith Thomas notes the contemporary significance of such an emphasis for Shakespeare's audience, with the rise of Puritanism in Britain. The essential question of whether sexual misdemeanours should be brought within the jurisdiction of state law or left to the ecclesiastical authorities culminated in legislation in 1650:

If any single measure epitomises the triumph of Puritanism in England, it must surely be the Commonwealth's act of 10 May 1650 "for suppressing the detestable sins of incest, adultery and fornication". This was an attempt, unique in English history,

2. *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (London, 1982), p.187.

to put the full machinery of the state behind the enforcement of sexual morality.³

Shakespeare's particular response to this social factor seems to have been an expansion of the subplot characters and their role in creating an atmosphere of conflict between "instinctive" sexual behaviour and the authority of the state law. The subplot element is found in one of the sources of the play, George Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), but Shakespeare seems deliberately to expand upon this element.

However, although one can see the point in Marilyn French isolating sexual behaviour as the only act considered in the play, this seems a little too drastic, since clearly the play also dwells on responsibility and morality which, though linked to matters of sexual behaviour, still stand as issues in themselves. Here again there are parallels with Erasmian concepts, particularly in this case, concepts of good government, of a ruler's responsibilities to his subjects, and with the dangers of self-reliance in such philosophies as Stoicism, or over-indulgence and libertinism in the opposing teachings of uncurbed Epicureanism. As we saw in Chapter 2, Erasmus advocates a moral programme of humanism, emphasising the need to appeal to the individual's *humanitas* and *virtus*. To this end, Erasmus recommends the study and imitation of Plato, Plutarch, Cicero's *De Officiis*, and the *Ethics* and *Poetics* of Aristotle. His humanism rests on an imitation of virtue in the secular models of conduct and government, although as was pointed out earlier, Erasmus' emphasis is always on the individual and becomes vague when these

3. "The Puritans and Adultery: The Act of 1650 Reconsidered", in *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth Century History*, edited by Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas (Oxford, 1978), p.280

principles are expanded into broader concepts of the government of society at large.

The aim of this chapter will be to investigate the role of Erasmian folly in *Measure for Measure*, and to show how the conflict between an acknowledgement of man's humanity and immorality on the one hand, and the extolling of a humanist notion of virtue and moral codes of behaviour on the other, is central to an understanding of this play.

Shakespeare, in writing *Measure for Measure*, was commenting on the issues of government in general, and especially on the debate concerning natural law and the authority and role of the state. These issues, which we saw in *Love's Labour's Lost*, are part of a far larger question about the natural inclinations of man, and how far they can be relied upon to guide men, under the faculty of the reason, into civil and virtuous behaviour. To quote Thomas Starkey here will illustrate one traditional humanist definition of natural law:

There is a certain wit and policy by nature given to men in every place and country, whereby he is inclined to live in civil order according to the dignity of his nature.

Starkey goes on to explain how such a theory works, and outlines the crucial concept of innate virtue, implanted by nature:

Wherefore plainly it appeareth that these virtues stand not in the opinion of man, but by the benefit and power of nature in his heart are rooted and planted, inclining him ever to civil life, according to the excellent dignity of his nature -. And this inclination and rule of living, by these virtues stabled and confirmed, is called, as I said, the law of nature, which, though all men follow not, yet all men approve.⁴

This theory of natural law is traditional in several ways. Firstly, it extends to all nations and periods of time, transcending customs

4. *Dialogue Between Reginald Pole and Thomas Lupset*, edited by K.M. Burton (London, 1948), pp.30-1.

of culture and political opinions. Secondly, the law, as Starkey conceived of it, is implanted in man's individual nature, thus giving him a natural propensity for order and civilisation. This universality is likened to that of right reason, an issue relevant to Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, as discussed earlier. Finally, Starkey maintains that civil law must, therefore, be in accordance with the law of nature to have any chance of effectiveness:

Whereas the law of nature is ever one, in all countries, firm and stable, and never for the time varieth; it is never changeable; the consent of man doth nothing thereto; it hangeth nothing of time nor place, but according as right reason is ever one, so is this law, and never varieth after the fancy of man...For civil ordinance is but as a mean to bring man to observe this law of nature, insomuch that if there be any civil law ordained which cannot be resolved thereto, it is of no value.⁵

The concept of the natural dignity of man, the innate ability to tell good from evil and to opt for good, lay behind the problems in Chapter 4 where there was a basic contrast between the natural behaviour of Costard and the denial of "affections" and nature by the lords. The problem was seen there, of allowing men to follow nature, uncurbed, since as Costard maintains: "It is the simplicity of man to hearken after the flesh" (*Love's Labour's Lost* I.i.214-5). It was on basically these grounds that the concept of natural law and the goodness or dignity of man was attacked from the early sixteenth century onwards, the other side of the debate emphasising the innate sinfulness of man, his need for God's power to overcome evil, and his inability to do good by following nature. To quote John Calvin will help to show the opposite view to that expressed above in Starkey:

But whatsoever such commendation there be of man's excellence that teaches a man to rest in himself, it does nothing but delight with that her sweetness, and indeed so deceives, that it brings to most wretched destruction all them that assent unto it. For what purpose avails it for us, standing upon all vain confidence to devise, appoint, attempt and go about those things that we think to be for our behalf, and in our first beginning

5. *ibid*, pp.31-2.

of enterprise to be forsaken and destitute of sound understanding and true strength, and yet to go on boldly till we fall down into destruction? But it cannot otherwise happen to them that have affiance [faith] that they can do any thing by their own power. Therefore if any man give heed to such teachers that hold us in considering only our own good things, he shall not profit in learning to know himself, but shall be carried violently away into the worst kind of ignorance.⁶

On the other side of the question, opposing Hooker, but disagreeing also with the concept of the depravity of man without God, were thinkers like Donne and Montaigne, who took a more sceptical view of the concept of natural law. As we saw, universality was one feature of natural law, a guarantee of its "naturalness" was the fact that such law had existed independently of time and cultural custom, an unchangeable certainty, as Plato says:

True law is right reason in agreement with nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting; it summons to duty by its commands, and averts from wrong doing by its prohibitions...And there will not be different laws at Rome and at Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and all times, and there will be one master and ruler, that is, God, over us all, for he is the author of this law, its promulgator, and its enforcing judge.⁷

However, with the climate of change in the Renaissance, and the increasing knowledge and awareness of other cultures and customs, the security of the guarantee of universality was shaken. John Donne, writing in the *Biathanatos* complains:

This terme, the law of Nature is so variously and unconstantly deliver'd, as I confesse I read it a hundred times before I understand it once, or can conclude it to signifie that which the author should at that time meane.⁸

6. *The Institution of Christian Religion II*, viii, 1, folio 58. Calvin originally wrote this in 1535, and it was translated into English by Thomas Norton (1561).

7. *The Republic*, translated by C.W. Kees (London, 1928), p.211.

8. *John Donne - Selected Prose*, edited by Neil Rhodes (Harmondsworth, 1987), p.64.

Both Donne and Montaigne measured the viability of natural law by its real applicability to the moral codes they observed, and demanded an independent, empirical validation of the concept. They differ in this from Hooker, whom we quoted in Chapter 4 as a traditional humanist exponent of natural law, reliant on an underlying certainty of the authority of God in establishing natural law. Like the Libertine poets, they denied that nature defines unchangeable and categorical imperatives, but, unlike other Libertines, they did subscribe to the concept of reason as a necessary governing force. This reason, however, is subject to change according to the circumstances, as Donne states in the *Biathanatos* again:

No law is so primary and simple, but it foreimagines a reason upon which it was founded: and scarce any reason is so constant, but that circumstances alter it.⁹

Thus some sentiments in Donne's poetry similarly object to the traditional humanist concept of natural law, and in *The Relique* we read an opposing of nature and institutional law:

First, we lov'd well and faithfully,
Yet knew not what we lov'd, nor why,
Difference of sex no more wee knew,
Than our Guardian Angells doe;
Comming and going, wee
Perchance might kisse, but not betweene those meales;
Our hands ne'r toucht the seales¹⁰
Which nature, injur'd by late law, sets free:¹¹
(lines 23-30)

Although he never attacks natural law like other Libertine poets, Donne does assert that the only real commandment of nature is that of unrestrained pleasure. Donne's opposition between natural behaviour and man-made law, is again reminiscent of the arguments of Folly in

9. *ibid.*, pp.65-66.

10. "seales" used here has a sexual connotation, linking it to the idea of unrestrained pleasure.

11. *Donne, Poetical Works*, edited by H.J.C. Grierson (Oxford, 1948), p.56.

the *Moriae Encomium*, and shows the topicality and relevance of the concept of folly as Erasmus conceived of it.

The context and setting in which Shakespeare investigates these issues in *Measure for Measure* is one of polarised extremes, far away from the innocence of Donne's *Relique*. French, quoted above, sees the whole play as set:

in an atmosphere of sin and filth. The Vienna of the background seems to be a city of brothels and bawds; the outlaw characters revel in sexuality, yet not freely - their speeches contain a note of prurience and lip-licking lasciviousness (like those of Pandarus). The other characters suffer to varying degrees from a sense of the sinfulness of sex: that there is something utterly disgusting and loathsome inherent in this dimension of life is a *donné* of the play.¹²

Characters on either side of the mean are therefore portrayed with little middle ground, and French sees them as arranged hierarchically according to their attitudes to sex. Indeed, she isolates Lucio's position with Isabella as the central or normal position, and every other one as tainted in some way. Marion Bodwell-Smith similarly sees a polarity in the context of the play, but her analysis is based on location, with the seat of government as the representative middle ground, set between two forms of extremism:

In the opening scene the court, as the seat of government, represents the area of moderation which should properly lie between the extremes of laxity and severity, licence and restraint. In the scenes which follow, the extremes on opposite sides of this mean are represented by the brothel and the cloister, though in both areas certain degrees of excess and defect are indicated.¹³

Bodwell-Smith goes on to point out that the vices of the brothel are never, in fact, condemned as unnatural, but the implication is that if they are left to run riot such excess will ruin Vienna. (It is perhaps worth mentioning here that the fear of an epidemic of Venereal Disease was a real one in such situations, and undoubtedly

12. *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*, p.185.

13. *Dualities in Shakespeare* (Toronto, 1966), p.133.

this had as much of an effect as the moral desire to "clean up" the behaviour of the urban populations.)

The notion of following natural inclinations and seeking pleasure is one which is important to Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Here the principles of natural law are once again espoused, in the simple and idyllic humanist country which More creates. The governing factor for the pleasure of the Utopians, however, is the general good, and their behaviour must always be moderated by an awareness of how it might affect other people:

Pleasure they define as any state or activity, physical or mental, which is naturally enjoyable. The operative word is *naturally*. According to them, we're impelled by reason as well as an instinct to enjoy ourselves in any natural way which doesn't hurt other people, interfere with greater pleasures, or cause unpleasant after-effects. But human beings have entered into an idiotic conspiracy to call some things enjoyable which are naturally nothing of the kind - as though facts were as easily changed as definitions.¹⁴

More, like Richard Hooker, whose definition of natural law was quoted above in Chapter 4, considers reason to be the primary force in such a system. The influence of right reason (as we saw in Erasmus' humanism in Chapter 2) guards against the pursuit of personal gratification at the expense of others. More's Utopians are explicitly Christian in their understanding of right reason and the following of natural impulse under its guidance:

And reason also teaches us, first to love and reverence Almighty God, to Whom we owe our existence and our potentiality for happiness, and secondly to get through life as comfortably and cheerfully as we can, and help all other members of our species to do so too.¹⁵

However we may view the low life characters of the earlier comedies discussed, the following of natural inclination in *Measure for Measure* seems to have surpassed the bounds of right reason in the

14. Translated with an introduction by Paul Turner (Harmondsworth, 1965), p.93.

15. *ibid.*, pp.91-2.

definition above, and be against the general good. Unlike the behaviour of Costard in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the sexual looseness of the lowlife in *Measure for Measure* does affect the society, and where Costard was reprimanded while his honesty in admitting natural desires was praised, the situation in the later play is a more categorical condemnation of the consequences of following natural desires without any restraint whatsoever. Critics of the play, though differing in their views on the presentation of sexuality (for French Isabella expresses "her creator's hatred of sex" (p.190), a far more negative view than most would ascribe to), are united in the view that ultimately the low life attitudes are seen as anarchic and subversive. Whatever the association or disassociation with Angelo's own case, critics of varying persuasions seem ready to accept that sexual behaviour in *Measure for Measure* is a social force of disorder, an example of natural desire run riot and pitted against the authority of the state in a conflict which it is the ruler's task to resolve. In his article "Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*", Jonathan Dollimore notes this cohesion of critical opinion and continues:

With the considerable attention recently devoted to Bakhtin and his truly important analysis of the subversive carnivalesque, the time is right for a radical reading of *Measure for Measure*, one which insists on the oppressiveness of the Viennese State and which interprets low-life transgression as *positively* anarchic, ludic, carnivalesque - a subversion from below of a repressive official ideology of order.

Such a reading, however, is not what Dollimore's article provides, since he continues:

Such a reading, if executed within the parameters of some recent appropriations of Bakhtin, would simply remain within the same problematic, only reversing the the polarities of the binary opposition which structures it (order/chaos).¹⁶

16. In *Political Shakespeare*, edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester, 1985), p.73.

As Dollimore suggests, any reading of the play which polarises too much becomes liable to extremism on either hand, and a reading which attempts to align the problems of *Measure for Measure* with the Christian humanism of Erasmian folly as we saw it in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Twelfth Night* must be wary of over-simplification. In constructing a reading of the play through Erasmian folly and drawing parallels with the *Moriae Encomium*, I hope to show that both works reveal the complexities of human motivation and behaviour, and that the ironic blurring of Folly's judgments on men, with her common-sense acknowledgement of nature, can illuminate our understanding of the play, which tries to be morally absolute on the one hand, while admitting the inadequacies and imperfections of man on the other.

Vincentio, Angelo and Isabella all show, in various ways, the dangers of trying to live "out of this world". (Here they link with the initial vows of the lords in *Love's Labour's Lost*.) This tendency is most obvious in the adoption of religious orders, whether ostensible or literal, and for Angelo it comes in the form of a self-imposed code of Stoicism. All three reveal degrees of idealism and disjunction from the world around them. The Duke seems to divide critical opinion so that for some he is a god-like figure, carrying-out Shakespeare's commands as a surrogate dramatist, manipulating the second part of the play in plot and structure, and indulging in a morality which seems speculative and suspect. For others, he is god-like in a paternal sense, a forerunner of Prospero, a disguised ruler with high standards and genuine motives of improving his society by his own actions. J.W. Lever surveys many versions of the "disguised ruler" in contemporary literature and concludes that Vincentio exemplifies "what most of Shakespeare's contemporaries would regard as the model of Christian Polity".¹⁷ The

17. Introduction to the Arden edition of *Measure for Measure*, p.li.

basis on which the Duke hands his power over to Angelo is an idealistic one, and the emphasis is on personal morality as a prerequisite to virtuous government:

Thyself and thy belongings
 Are not thine own so proper as to waste
 Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee.
 Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
 Not light them for ourselves; for if our virtues
 Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
 As if we had them not. (I.i.29-35)

When this concept is compared to the sources of *Measure for Measure*, it is clear that Shakespeare has idealised and refined the notion of government over and above that which he found. In Gherardo Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* (1565), the other major source apart from Whetstone, the ideal aimed for is to be just. Emperor Maximian declares: "I can forgive you all other failings, due either to ignorance or negligence, but any deed which is contrary to justice, shall receive no pardon from me".¹⁸ Of course, what is "contrary to justice" is open to question, but certainly the standards seem impossibly high. Vincentio's speech quoted above echoes many commonplaces of humanism, linking it to the writings of Starkey and Hooker, and their concepts of natural law already discussed. The relationship of individual to state here is one of dutiful giving, like that Viola cautions Olivia with in *Twelfth Night*: "for what is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve" (I.v.189-90). It is the same argument which pervades Sonnets 1-18, where the poet tries to convince the young man to leave a part of himself to the world, by having an heir: "Nature's bequest gives nothing, but doth lend" (sonnet IV.3), and

when Nature calls thee to be gone,
 What acceptable audit canst thou leave?
 Thy unus'd beauty must be tomb'd with thee,
 Which, used, lives th' executor to be. (IV.11-14)

18. Quoted in J. Westlund, *Shakespeare's Reparative Comedies*, p.151.

The duty of the individual to share personal merit or talent for the good of society, is clearly one which runs throughout Erasmus' *Enchiridion*, his *Instituto Principis Christiani* and humanist thought in general as we saw in Chapter 2.

The authority and role of the state in humanist thought goes back to Aristotle's concepts of good government, and his view of the state as a natural institution. According to the *Politics*, the impulse to political association is innate in all men, and man acts most responsibly when within the state. Nevertheless, Aristotle also recognises the dangers of corruption which he admits will occur when justice is neglected:

For man, as in his condition of complete development, *i.e. in the state*, he is the noblest of animals, so apart from law and justice he is the vilest of all. For injustice is always most formidable when it is armed; and Nature has endowed Man with arms which are intended to subserve the purposes of prudence and virtue but are capable of being wholly turned to contrary ends.¹⁹

The exercise of law and justice is thus imperative, and the consequences of an unjust ruler can be disastrous. For Aristotle the definition of justice is as simple in essence as it is difficult to achieve, and in its simple definition, reminiscent of the words of Emperor Maximian in *Cinthio*, quoted above. Aristotle writes:

Hence if man be devoid of virtue, no animal is so unscrupulous or savage, none so sensual, none so gluttonous. Just action on the other hand is bound up with the existence of a state; for the administration of justice is an ordinance of political association and the administration of justice is nothing else than the decision of what is just.²⁰

19. Translated with an analysis and critical notes by J.E.C. Welldon (London, 1883), p.7.

20. *ibid.*, p.7.

N.W. Bawcutt²¹, analysing the Duke's speech at the end of Act III scene iv, and the Duke's general notion of justice exemplified in it, concludes that the view is a reflexive one. As judge, the Duke expects Angelo to look to himself, and if he has repudiated the sin for which he is judging, then he is qualified to punish the offender. The concept, if we translated it into Aristotelian terms, relies on the ruler to exercise the self-mastery and right reason which Aristotle outlines in the *Ethics*, and which we saw in Chapter 4 as a prerequisite to justice. In this way, the Duke defends Angelo against the Provost's charge of tyranny in the judgment of Claudio:

Not so, not so...

were he meal'd with that
Which he corrects, then were he tyrannous;
But this being so, he's just. (IV.ii.77; 81-3)

Likewise, just such a reflexive concept is what prevents the Duke (he argues) from being able to administer the rod to the people of Vienna himself:

Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope,
'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them
For what I bid them do. (I.iii.35-7)

The basis of the Duke's justice is an ideal, which, paradoxically, is biblical. He appears to be espousing the policy of removing the beam from his own eye rather than first pointing to the speck in his brother's. However, the title of the play espouses another biblical concept of justice, that of "judge not that ye be not judged". Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that, as ruler, the Duke has apparently not encouraged self-mastery and right reason in his execution of justice. He therefore feels unable to administer justice now, after laxity, and turns to one whom he thinks is more worthy, to help save Vienna from vice. At the same time, Angelo is

21. "He who the sword of Heaven will bear: The Duke versus Angelo in *Measure for Measure*", *Sh S*, 37 (1984), pp.89-97 (p.94).

clearly not perfect himself, although apparently untainted in the area of sexual morality (which the Duke implies is his own weakness and thus would render his judgment of it in others as tyranny). This is further complicated by the Duke's speech to the Friar, concerning Angelo, where he gives us reason to think that part of the plan is to observe just how far Angelo's self-mastery and apparent reason can go:

Lord Angelo is precise;
 Stands at a guard with Envy; scarce confesses
 That his blood flows; or that his appetite
 Is more to bread than stone. Hence we shall see
 If power change purpose, what our seemers be.
(I.iii.50-4)

Both men find to their cost, the responsibilities of office which Folly comments on at some length in the *Moriae Encomium*, and which stand in the way of their administration of justice:

No one would think power worth gaining, at the cost even of perjury or parricide, if he seriously considered the burden that has to be shouldered by the man who wants to exercise true sovereignty. Once he is at the helm of government he has to devote himself to public instead of his personal affairs, and must think only of the well-being of his people. He can't deviate by so much as a hair's breadth from the laws he has promulgated and set up himself, and he has to guarantee personally the integrity of every magistrate and official.
(p.135)

This is applicable to both Angelo and the Duke, although neither succeed in keeping the laws they would judge others by, (if we are to believe even half of what Lucio says about the Duke's conduct). Erasmus, as a humanist, was concerned with the responsibilities of the individual to the state, as we have seen, and was particularly clear about the responsibilities of those in power. As we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, the folly of desiring a place above that allotted to you in the social order was condemned, but at the same time, the species of noblesse oblige which Erasmus held put a significant burden on those at the top of this scale, who had power and influence

over others. Folly's words take on a prophetic tone in relation to *Measure for Measure*, as she continues:

Every eye is trained on him alone, and he can either be a beneficial star, should his character be blameless, and the greatest salvation to mankind, or a fatal comet leaving a trail of disaster in his wake. Other men's vices are neither so well-known nor so far-reaching in their effects, but a sovereign's position is such that if he falls short of honesty in the slightest degree, corruption spreads through his people like a plague. (p.135)

The Duke's laxity is self-confessed as the reason for the vice in Vienna, but it is this final comment of Folly on the subject of kings and rulers which is particularly interesting. Speaking of their ultimate judgment before God, she says that this true king will demand a reckoning of all transgressions "with severity proportionate to the degree of power he held" (p.136). Here then, Folly would apparently agree that judgment is reflexive and relative, not entirely absolute, and would thus perhaps come down against Angelo more heavily than Claudio because of their relative positions. We shall return to this later, but for present purposes it is enough to see that the responsibilities and standards of morality required by a ruler are, in Folly's opinion, frighteningly high.

In between these two scenes in which the Duke hands over power to Angelo and explains his purposes to the Friar, we see something of the street-life of Vienna which Vincentio is hoping to change and which has followed his laxity in government. The scene also makes repeated allusions to biblical concepts and the pattern in its verse is reminiscent first of the litany: "Heaven grant us its peace" (I.ii.4); and then of the Apostles' Creed: "come to ...judge" (I.ii.42, 44). Mention is made of the Ten Commandments, and the issue of grace, central to our discussion of *Love's Labour's Lost*, comes up again. Lucio's words are as slippery as Berowne's in the earlier play: "Grace is grace, despite of all controversy; as for

example, thou thyself art a wicked villain, despite of all grace" (I.ii.24-6). He evades the major issue (despite all controversy, which as we have seen was significant), and plays on the word in its various meanings as thanks, decorum and divine mercy - all of which will be expanded upon later. The banter, innuendo and gossip of the characters is interrupted by the entrance of Claudio and Juliet, the first victims of the new crack-down on immorality.

The juxtaposition of Lucio and Claudio at this point can be seen as the beginning of a contrast between Lucio as an example of the Aristotelian intemperate man, and Claudio as the incontinent man. These two types are described by Aristotle as individuals who fail in self-mastery or control, but have a significant difference in their attitudes to that failure. For Lucio, Claudio's activity is, above all, natural, and therefore, good. Claudio's self-assessment is severe and critical, painfully aware of a lapse in behaviour. His use of the image of poisoned rats and his criticism of immoderateness is strong and severe in the face of the "crime" he has committed. Lucio praises this wisdom, but with the undertone that he would never see things in this way himself: "If I could speak so wisely under an arrest, I would send for certain of my creditors" (I.ii.123-4). The difference between the two men lies in their attitude to and control by reason, an issue discussed at some length in Chapters 2 and 3, and one which has recurred under the various guises of nature, passion, affections and emotions against reason and law. The definition of the two Aristotelian terms "incontinence" and "intemperance" is made particularly clearly by Bodwell-Smith:

Incontinency is a less serious departure from the mean than intemperance, since it is an occasional lapse to which the reason does not assent. It arises from a temporary ascendance of appetite over reason, a lust of the blood and permission of the will of which the reason does not approve. Intemperance proper, on the other hand, is not only incurable but is an excess which is so much a part of the individual's natural composition as to be largely an unconscious habit. The

intemperate man's reason does not tell him that licence is wrong, and therefore he feels no guilt and has no incentive to mend his ways.²²

The reference to the individual's natural composition here takes us back to the humoral theory (outlined in Chapter 3) and the notion of the reason ruling over a balance of humours which might naturally err towards a melancholy, choleric, phlegmatic or sanguine disposition. It will be remembered that Folly had much to say concerning the battle between reason and passion, and the role of natural instinct in controlling man. Quoting the Stoics she says:

wisdom means nothing else but being ruled by reason; and folly, by contrast, is being swayed by the dictates of the passions. So Jupiter, not wanting man's life to be wholly gloomy and grim, has bestowed far more passion than reason - you could reckon the ratio as twenty-four to one. (p.95)

This juxtaposition of passion and reason again reminds us of the issues of natural law, mentioned above. The Aristotelian view of passion and nature is similarly positive, so long as passion is held in proper check by reason, and educated correctly. Since, for Aristotle, the *summum bonum* is to live according to nature, all uncorrupted men will, by natural instinct, choose to live according to natural law, or the general principles of good social justice. In the *Politics* we read: "For the special characteristic which distinguishes Man from all other animals is that he alone enjoys perception of good and evil, justice and injustice and the like".²³

Lucio becomes a spokesman for natural passion when he later defends his trade against the authorities, but as we saw in Chapter 4, Erasmus' Folly may well celebrate abandonment to the passions, but Erasmus himself, writing elsewhere, condemns in the strongest biblical terms the desires of the flesh (particularly see the *Enchiridion*, where a strong emphasis is placed on personal morality).

22. *Dualities in Shakespeare*, pp.130-1.

23. *Politics*, p.6.

The ambiguity over folly begins again, and we need to distinguish between the fool of lechery, whom Barclay's *Ship of Fools* and the Medieval folly tradition condemns outright - a Lucio type, with no care for his actions - and the Stoical fool, who denies the existence of passion and tries to live by reason alone. Erasmus' Folly is keen for us to see the difference, and to condemn the latter equally. In so doing, she ironically praises the former as happy and honest in his pursuit of natural gratification in order to redress the balance. It is interesting to note also, that one of the worst kinds of folly according to the Medieval tradition was dissembling, or trying to appear what you are not, and in this sense Erasmus' Folly is in line with the earlier tradition, since she praises those who are at least honest about their fleshly desires. Thus we can see a contrast being made between Claudio's "fall" into passion, and the later fall of Angelo, whom, as we shall see, exemplifies almost all the characteristics of Folly's stoical and hypocritical fool, who believes above all in the power of his own reason.

Lucio further displays the qualities of some of Folly's followers when he promises to help Claudio in his plight, and remains unwaveringly convinced that Claudio should be saved. Folly promises happy alliances between fools, and a bond is created between Claudio and Lucio when Claudio falls into the "folly" of his "lechery". In contrast to his refusal to take responsibility for the child he fathers, Lucio willingly agrees to help Claudio and feels an affinity with him in the cause "which else would stand under grievous imposition, as for the enjoying of thy life, who I would be sorry should be thus foolishly lost at a game of tick-tack" (I.ii.178-181). Visiting Isabella, Lucio describes Claudio's crime in natural and organic terms, so convincingly that when Isabella realizes it is Juliet who is pregnant she immediately exclaims "O, let him marry

her!" (I.iv.48), apparently waiving the immorality aside. It is Angelo's behaviour which is seen in an unnatural light, and significantly he is described in the humoral terms we considered above:

A man whose blood
Is very snow-broth; one who never feels
The wanton stings and motions of the sense;
But doth rebate and blunt his natural edge
With profits of the mind, study and fast.
(I.iv.57-61)

The irony lies in the fact that this conversation is held in the nunnery of St. Clare, following an exchange in which Isabella wishes a "more strict restraint" on the already ascetic life-style of the votarists. The link between Angelo, Isabella and the stoical life devoid of passion is made, and will be played upon later, in contrast to the images of natural husbandry Isabella accepts from Lucio.

Act II opens at the law courts, and a further insight is gained into the Vienna which the Duke was so anxious to reform. The low life characters are crucial to our interpretation of the play, and especially to our concept of folly here, being juxtaposed throughout to the main characters, in a similar pattern to that which we saw in the earlier comedies discussed. In this play, the low life roles are more problematic. Not only do they form a commentary on the main action and highlight the differences between the pride of the major roles and their own down-to-earth openness, but their display of human nature in the raw is less easy to take in this play, as the humorously, amoral Costard becomes the darker, immoral Lucio. In this scene, however, the low life plot forms a comic interruption to the main action, and the bungling Elbow enters to break the austerity and legalism of the discussion of Claudio's case by Angelo and Escalus. The abstractions of justice they discuss range from Angelo's fear of the law losing its potency and deterrent value, as the "scarecrow" of the law becomes the people's "perch, and not their

terror" (II.i.1-3), to Escalus' more tempered view, where crime is seen in context: "Alas, this gentleman...had a most noble father" (II.i.6-7). Angelo's hard line, reliant on the reflexive morality which the Duke praised, wins through, and Claudio's sentence holds:

"When I that censure him do so offend, / Let mine own judgement pattern out my death" (II.i.29-30). In this Angelo is consistent, (he does ask for death when his own offence is finally exposed), but the hard line fails when faced with the exigencies of human nature in the form of Froth and Pompey Bum. The trial, commented on by J.H.

Summers:

splendidly demonstrates the paralysis of legal or other judgment before a shower of irrelevantly circumstantial evidence and a prosecution lost in linguistic confusion. Vaguely obscene suggestions dissolve attempts at justice in laughter.²⁴

Significantly, Angelo abandons the hearing to Escalus! Escalus properly links the two plots, identifying with the low life characters, dealing more patiently with their offences in a way which reveals a more positive attitude towards nature and law. The metaphor from horticulture seems entirely appropriate: "Let us be keen, and rather cut a little, / Than fall and bruise to death" (II.i.5-6). This attitude is reinforced by the logic of the characters whom Escalus must try, and goes part way to an admission of nature being irrepressible, a point which the law must take into account if it is ever to be effective. Pompey and Mistress Overdone both consider their business will continue, regardless of the law's efforts to stop it. Pompey's suggestion is that the law should reinforce nature: "If your worship will take order for the drabs and the knaves, you need not to fear the bawds" (II.i.231-2). The logic is certainly self-interested, but Pompey's point is telling; asked if

24. *Dreams of Love and Power* (Oxford, 1984), p.76.

his trade is lawful, he replies: "if the law would allow it, sir" (II.i.224). Nature, shown in its lowest form in the sexual immorality of the city, is accepted by the low life characters as a fact of life. Their attitude to the law takes this into account, and The Trade will go on regardless of the institutional changes. Severity in the law will thus only mean more work for the courts (and, as we have seen, the policing of the city is hardly efficient in the hands of such as Elbow), unless, as Pompey suggests, you "geld and splay all the youth of the city" (II.i.227-8). The regime Angelo institutes attempts to quash sexual immorality by quashing nature itself; in Pompey's view it is therefore doomed to failure from the outset.

Like Lucio, Pompey espouses in his worldly wisdom some of Folly's own truths. Here again it is their attitude to nature which connects them, and they are both fools of the kind Folly ironically praises in the *Moriae Encomium*. They behave as Folly's own, entirely concerned with pleasures of the flesh and making the most of their seedy life, they survive off one another's weaknesses - the weaknesses of human nature. Thus their baseness is at times amusingly engaging, but their lack of concern over each other is exhibited by the casual jokes and tale-telling. Our sympathy can be drawn, to some extent, because of their ironic openness and honesty in the midst of telling tales, and their refreshing acceptance of life coupled with their refusal to complicate issues with grandiose abstractions. They exemplify the same characteristics of folly as that we saw in Costard, and Folly's words can be equally applied to them as to him: "by far the happiest men are those who have no traffic at all with any kind of learning and follow Nature for their only guide" (p.108). As we mentioned above, however, the immorality

in the low life of Vienna seems to have become more sour and less amusing than the fleshly weaknesses we saw in Navarre.

2. The folly of Stoicism: Angelo

The conflict between nature and law is investigated in a very different light in the second scene of Act II, as Isabella pleads for Claudio's life in her first meeting with Angelo. Here the issues already discussed come to a head as the concept of law and morality in judgment and its relation to individual morality and human nature. In Angelo we see the opposite of the fools ironically praised by Folly for their following of nature, and we see another kind of fool, that of the Stoic who relies on his reason to quell the passions, while pretending to the world that he feels nothing. This type of fool is categorically condemned in the *Moriae Encomium*, as we saw in Chapter 2, and as we will see later in this chapter also. First, however, the parallels and contrasts between the Duke when in power, and Angelo to whom he hands this power over, and between Angelo and the morality of Isabella will be investigated. As we noticed earlier, the three characters all seem to have rather idealistic views of the world, in contrast to the pragmatic approach of the low life characters. The Duke's notions of justice and morality in ruling are idealistic and reflexive; he abdicates his rule temporarily in favour of a man he considers stronger and more worthy to judge than he. There is a problem here, of course, since the Duke has some reason to doubt the depth of Angelo's Stoicism, but at least he feels confident that Angelo will not fall victim to the paternalistic lenience which has been the Duke's error. The approachability and sense of humour of the Duke are reflected in the

description he gives of the free-for-all in Vienna, and it is this which he clearly hopes Angelo's unbending morality will rectify:

Now, as fond fathers,
 Having bound up the threatening twigs of birch,
 Only to stick it in their children's sight
 Foe terror, not to use, in time the rod
 Becomes more mock'd than fear'd: so our decrees,
 Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead,
 And Liberty plucks Justice by the nose,
 The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
 Goes all decorum. (I.iii.23-31)

Such similes and metaphors could be those of Folly herself, and the picture of the breakdown in social order is portrayed in a light-hearted manner, reminiscent of the mockery of order in the Feast of Fools. The imagery is the same, of turning the world upside-down, the central motif of the Feast. The benevolence towards human nature and adoption of some of the maxims of Folly, separates the Duke's role from that of Angelo. Though the Duke would agree with Erasmus' Folly and her representatives in the streets of Vienna: "What would this life be, or would it seem worth calling life at all, if its pleasure was taken away?" (p.91), we cannot imagine Angelo agreeing.

Angelo does not possess any such traits of sympathy with folly in either himself or his subjects. He is the fool whom Folly condemns in the *Moriae Encomium* as one who ignores the passions and emotions as if they did not exist, and who mistakenly believes he can master his life with will and reason. This unbending attitude is applied to others too, and we immediately saw it under strain when Angelo presided over the likes of Pompey Bum and Froth. Later, it comes more disastrously unstuck, on a personal level, in the two interviews with Isabella.

Initially, in his dealings with Isabella, Angelo is perfunctory, but seems fair. He is right, on a general level, that Isabella's request to him to "condemn the fault,...And let go by the actor" (II.ii.37-41), is patently wrong in terms of the duties of any legal

system; in this Isabella seems to agree: "O just but severe law!" (II.ii.42). It is when Isabella, urged on by Lucio, appeals to the inner, personal judgment of Angelo that the issue becomes more difficult. Her appeal to his mercy, to place himself in Claudio's position and judge from there, brings in a conflict between the outer and inner realms of conduct and their governing principles. Isabella draws the contrast thus:

No ceremony that to great ones longs,
 Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,
 The marshal's truncheon, nor the judges' robe,
 Become them with one half so good a grace
 As mercy does. (II.ii.59-63)

As we saw in the wordplay on "grace" in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the sense varies from an outer decorum to an inner state, and Isabella strikes here at precisely what the Duke had alerted us to in Angelo, that the outer "seeming" might not reflect the inner state. "Seeming" implies the possibility of variance between the outer and inner man, and Isabella infers that while the robes of office endue Angelo with outer grace, mercy would reveal a gracious heart within. R. Southall in an article entitled "*Measure for Measure* and the Protestant Ethic" maintains that the Medieval doctrine of grace emphasised a need for the integration of outer, social grace with inner control:

As man's reason strengthened by grace controlled the appetites, so the reasonable state was strengthened by the grace of the church in its control of the social means by which men satisfied their wants, their appetites. Again we see how central the doctrine of Grace was, to emphasise this it need only be remarked that it was believed that Reason without the aid of Grace fell captive to evil.²⁵

Angelo asks Isabella to leave at this point, and Lucio perceives she has touched the vein that will help their cause. The move she makes, in comparing Angelo's judgment to that of God takes the discussion onto a more general level again however, and Angelo maintains his

25. *EC*, 11 (1961), pp.10-33 (p.21).

ground, insisting on Claudio's execution. The appeals to pity get nowhere, and are unsuccessful in moving Angelo as he insists pity is shown most through justice. Isabella is not content with this, and unleashes a torrent of caustic images on the Deputy concerning the complacent pride of those in authority. An interesting parallel can be made for our Erasmian analysis here, as Isabella uses an image of earthly rulers as apes, playing "fantastic tricks before high heaven" (II.ii.122). Erasmus' *Folly* refers to apes several times in her oration: referring to those who would be wise "who lay special claim to be called the personification of wisdom, even though they strut about like apes in purple" (p.87), and talking about false seemers and those who wear masks she quotes the Greek proverb "an ape is always an ape even if clad in purple" (p.95). H.W. Janson²⁶ investigates the links between fools and apes in iconography through the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and observes many instances where the two are pictured together. (It may be remembered that the woodcut of *Venus* analysed in Chapter 1 [fig.13] contained apes in this connection.) Isabella attacks the ironic pride and false seeming of the Deputy in a similar way to Folly's attack on rulers in the *Moriae Encomium*, and at the same time, she questions his authority to judge, by an assault on his own inner state. She calls on Angelo to look inward and see if he is qualified (by inner grace) to exercise judgment and authority over others.

Go to your bosom,
 Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
 That's like my brother's fault. If it confess
 A natural guiltiness, such as is his,
 Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
 Against my brother's life. (II.ii.137-142)

26. *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London, 1952).

The principle is the same reflexive one which the Duke had used, and which had convinced him of his unworthiness and inability to reform the people of Vienna himself.

Isabella's appeal to nature, and her categorisation of Claudio's sin as a "natural" one brings us back to the essential dichotomy between nature and law. Angelo remarks aside that Isabella's "sense" causes his own to breed, again using the terminology of humours and physical description. He is apparently moved, so that he jumps at the mention of Isabella "bribing" him, albeit an apparently innocent comment on her part. Putting off his answer to the following day, Angelo is left to brood on the "senses" within him, and the irony of the arousal of his passions resulting from his meeting with a "saint". The beginning of Angelo's moral collapse is strongly reminiscent of Folly's description of the battle between man's reason and will, and the concepts of reason, passion and emotion as understood by the humoral theory. Angelo fits the role of Folly's would-be wise man, who subscribes only to reason, and refuses to acknowledge passions, seeking to deny, or at least to quell any such semblance of nature within him. Folly is unequivocal in her condemnation of such behaviour, and points out its misguidedness on two counts. Firstly, she argues, man is endowed with a ratio of passion to reason in respect of "twenty-four to one" (p.95), but Jupiter's plan in such a ratio has a motive:

Moreover, he confined reason to a cramped corner of the head and left all the rest of the body to the passions. Then he set up two raging tyrants in opposition to reason's solitary power: anger, which holds sway in the breast and so controls the heart, the very source of life, and lust, whose empire spreads far and wide, right down to the genitals. How far reason can prevail against the combined forces of these two the common life of man makes quite clear. She does the only thing she can, and shouts herself hoarse repeating formulas of virtue, while the other two bid her go hang herself and are increasingly noisy and offensive until at last their ruler is exhausted, gives up, and surrenders. (p.95)

Angelo's closing soliloquy reveals just such a take-over by the passions. He desires Isabella "fouly" and sees the temptation in terms of virtue, a virtue to which he is attracted in Isabella, but one which appeals to the tyrant of lust, over the power of reason which he has always previously relied on:

Never could the strumpet
 With all her double vigour, art and nature,
 Once stir my temper: but this virtuous maid
 Subdues me quite. Ever till now
 When men were fond, I smil'd, and wonder'd how.
(II.ii.183-187)

The description of Angelo in I.iv.57-61 quoted earlier, when his blood was described as "snow-broth" and his body untroubled by "motions of the sense" is recalled here. The study and fasting which seem to protect Angelo from his nature again link him to the Stoic and the would-be wise man, of whom Folly has so much to say.

Certainly, in the opening soliloquy of scene iv, after a brief intervening scene, Angelo's thoughts centre on his inability to pray or think straight, his lack of interest in the law and study, and his intense awareness of his emotions and senses previously unfelt. The speech reverberates with medical-humoral terminology, and the powerlessness of reason and will to govern his "invention" (or fancy, imagination), or uphold his proud "gravity" any longer. The speech reveals the tenets of his Stoic and ascetic lifestyle, in efforts to study the state, the cultivation of rigid notions of propriety and justice, and overwhelmingly, the attempt to live entirely under the control of reason. His confusion now reflects a surge of idle desires for pleasure and gratification, a change which manifests itself not only in grand concepts of evil overcoming good, but also in the mundanity of wishing to change "boot" for "an idle plume" (II.iv.11).

Folly's second point in describing the effects of denying passion and seeking to be ruled by reason, is that such a lifestyle

will lead to pride. Angelo has previously taken pride, he says, in his knowledge of the law, and in his position of authority. Folly's warnings, however, point to a more serious fault which arises through excessive pride, that is a lack of self-knowledge and a blindness to inadequacies or personal failings. Continuing in her criticism of Stoics, she says:

Of course they're blind to their own faults and simply don't see the packs hanging from their backs. It's in man's nature for every sort of character to be prone to serious faults. In addition, there are wide variations of temperament and interests, as well as all the lapses and mistakes and accidents of mortal life. (p.97)

Angelo forms a more pronounced example of characteristics noted in the earlier comedies, in his tendency to pride and inability to see his personal weakness. Like Malvolio, he values his position and sense of decorum above all else; like the lords of Navarre, he would deny any passion or emotion. However, whereas in the plots of these comedies such a lack of self-knowledge resulted in humorous exposure for the most part, in *Measure for Measure* the consequences are far more serious. Angelo's pride and worship of worldly wisdom is seen to have a bearing on the images of "false seeming" mentioned already by the Duke and Isabella, as a possible fault in this seemingly upright man. The difference between the wise and the fools, according to Erasmus' Folly, is bound up with their honesty or hypocrisy, and it is this which Angelo recognises when he exclaims:

O place, O form,
How often dost thou with thy case, thy habit,
Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls
To thy false seeming. (II.iv.12-15)

False seeming characterises the second meeting with Isabella in Act II scene iv, as Angelo maintains the persona of justice of the law and yet constantly gives vent to his true feelings in asides to the audience. The facade is thus all the more false, and the desires of nature are placed in direct opposition to the requirements of the

law. Exchanges between Angelo and Isabella seem to be constantly at odds, and his covert way of introducing the plan to save Claudio by losing her chastity is lost on Isabella. She misunderstands his point that such a sin would itself be charity, thinking the sin he speaks of is his own, in waiving the death penalty. The talk of charity, of grace, and of redemption by a proxy death to satisfy the law, remind us again of the theological emphasis of the play, and of the intention of Isabella to become a nun. Her reaction, once Angelo speaks "gross", is, therefore, not surprisingly one of horror and disgust, but her violent physical imagining of her "death" is frequently isolated as disturbingly sexual and seen as indicative of her repression. Marilyn French explains her behaviour as a genuine abhorrence of sex which is "dramatically necessary. She represents and maintains the chastity Angelo only pretends to".²⁷ Isabella's idealism and morality seem to be based on ignorance and inexperience of herself, in a parallel to Angelo's lack of self-knowledge; but the scene is deliberately equivocal. Shakespeare complicates his sources and brings in discussion over the status of chastity and the additional need for charity towards others. Isabella herself is unequivocal in her clear understanding of her primary answerability for her own sins before God, over and above those of others. It is noticeable that she does not condemn Claudio herself when Lucio initially tells her of his sin, and she willingly agrees to leave the confines of the nunnery to plead for him. In this she shows an awareness and acceptance of human weakness which is lacking in Angelo (her appeals to him on the basis of common humanity have no apparent effect). It thus seems unfair to accuse her of priggish morality or heartless self-interestedness: her words are rather a repetition of

27. *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*, pp.190-1.

what she has been taught:

Ignomy in ransom and free pardon
 Are of two houses: lawful mercy
 Is nothing kin to foul redemption. (II.iv.111-113)

She reads like a text book in theology, and the perilous position she finds herself in results in this curious combination of speeches of wild disgust, and desperate repetitions of the Christian law she has learned and would keep. Angelo has cornered her into facing the legal dilemma which the Arden editor glosses thus:

Isabella still clings to the notion that this is a lawyer's trap: if she pleads that fornication must be punished, she accepts Claudio's sentence; if she pleads for leniency in such matters, she can hardly refuse Angelo's proposal.²⁸

But the conclusion seems illogical, since there is no reason, morally, why Isabella should be bound to agree to what amounts to little short of rape, simply because she pleads for mercy in her brother's case. However priggish we may find Isabella, it is Angelo who is in the position of justice, and who clearly abuses his role as judge.

The Stoic figure of the Deputy has always insisted on the upholding of reason, and denying of passion, as we have seen. We have also seen that Folly firmly states that such an attitude is doomed, because it admits no humanity, and denies weakness or folly in man. Angelo is thus vulnerable to passion in a catastrophic sense, falling entirely into its camp and his reason is unable to restrain him. His embarrassed false seeming gives way to a ruthless declaration of his decision to throw off all restraint:

I have begun,
 And now I give my sensual race the rein:
 Fit thy consent to my sharp appetite;
 Lay by all nicety and prolixious blushes
 That banish what they sue for. Redeem thy brother
 By yielding up thy body to my will;
 Or else he must not only die the death,

28. Note to the Arden edition, p.62, lines 145-6.

But thy unkindness shall his death draw out
To ling'ring sufferance. (II.iv.158-166)

The ringing tones of Angelo's complete abandonment to corruption have their effect on Isabella's soliloquy as Angelo leaves. Her rhetorical questions point again to her lack of experience, and to the fear of a citizen who sees the guardian of the law is corrupt. Her reaction is unsurprising, she will explain to her brother the awfulness of what has happened; and, she reasons, he will be her champion. Somehow the shock of Angelo's corruption increases her faith in her brother's honour, and her confidence is firmly placed in him. The security Isabella finds in this decision is worrying from the audience's point of view, since we realise immediately how differently the logic may appear from Claudio's perspective in the condemned cell. Nonetheless, Isabella seems unshakeable:

Then, Isabel live chaste, and brother, die:
More than our brother is our chastity.
I'll tell him yet of Angelo's request,
And fit his mind to death, for his soul's rest.
(II.iv.183-186)

3. Theological folly and the *contemptus mundi*

The Duke, Angelo and Isabella all reveal, to some extent, the dangers of idealism, and the desire for a strict moral code to govern individual behaviour. As such, they contrast with the looseness of the low life characters, and with Claudio and Juliet. Arthur Kirsch²⁹ considers that Claudio and Juliet represent nature. They are natural and loving in their relationship, and they form the opposite pole to that of Angelo and Isabella. From the Erasmian analysis to date, Claudio and Juliet seem to straddle the debate between nature and law. On one side of them are the low life

29. *Shakespeare and the Experience of Love* (Cambridge, 1981), pp.72-106.

characters: nature run riot, and the unpleasant consequences of living with no apparent restraint; on the other, there is the clear failure of Angelo to live by reason and law, and the equally disastrous consequences when his system of propriety fails. Claudio and Juliet's sin is one of fleshly weakness too, but it is intrinsically healthier than either the lawlessness of Lucio, or the hypocrisy of Angelo. It is ironic, of course, that they should be the first to fall victim to the new morality in Vienna, and to be judged so severely under laws which are intended to curb blatant sexual immorality. Kirsch sees Claudio as the character in the play who undergoes the deepest education in humility: a study of the whole Pauline realm of the flesh and mortality. The Duke's visit to Claudio gives an interesting parallel to the issues of natural law discussed above as central to the play, since the whole of the Duke's argument relies on the opposing tradition of the *contemptus mundi*. This tradition holds that the contempt of man's fallen state will result in an exaltation of the after-life, and posits that such a contempt of life is in fact the basis of religion.³⁰

In the Duke's "comforting" of Claudio, we see the ambiguities of folly once again. In urging Claudio to look on life as "a thing / That none but fools would keep" (III.i.7-8), he argues from the *contemptus mundi* standpoint. In doing so, he represents the converse of Folly's argument in the *Moriae Encomium*, that Folly is the author of life, and helps the dying to recover their youth and happiness: "the further anyone withdraws from me the less and less he's alive, until painful age comes on, that is, old age with its troubles, unwelcome not only to others but just as much to itself" (p.91). The Duke argues that love of life is, indeed, folly, and that to run away from the inevitable end is to be "Death's fool". The resonances

30. *ibid*, pp.89-92.

of the ever-present reality of death, the failure to prepare for which was considered the worst kind of folly in the *Ship of Fools*, and the figure of Death being closely connected with fools, both pervade the speech and align the Duke's concept of folly with the Medieval, negative concept we saw in Chapter 1 [fig.4, 5 & 6]. It has none of the Christian hope contained in the closing passages of the *Moriae Encomium*, but echoes the old order and the notion of man's inexorable journey towards death. Shakespeare's use of the negative "Death's fool" here reminds us of the implicit ambiguity of the terms "fool" and "folly", and the way in which Shakespeare follows Erasmus' precedent in using irony to slip between the positive and negative aspects of being a fool.

It is in this context that Isabella's visit to her brother takes place, and the emptiness of the *contemptus mundi* tradition is exposed. If death is simply seen as an escape from life, then the inevitable result seems to be that man will seize hold of life because there is no concomitant love of God to give the after-life any appeal. Claudio's empty statement of his schooling in the contempt of life by the Duke, is a misplaced allusion to Matthew 16.25: "To sue to live, I find I seek to die, / And seeking death, find life" (III.i.43-44). The crucial ingredient is missing, since Claudio has no understanding of Christ's context in speaking of right priorities, which emphasises the vital point that man must love God more than the world. Claudio has no concept of hope in Christian redemption, and when Isabella mentions the hope of reprieve, this earthly hope causes the whole ethical system the Duke had built to crumble. Claudio's desperate speech sums up the worst of death's emptiness and fear for those without Christ, and his plea to Isabella reveals a very natural human weakness.

As the weakness and humanity of Claudio, the representative of "nature" and natural man, come to the fore, so the weaknesses and humanity of his sister also break through. The irony is that Isabella's human weakness results in a full-scale fear for herself, and a consequent hatred of her brother whom she had relied upon to protect her. Where Claudio's desperation means he loses his shaky faith in the *contemptus mundi*, and returns to his natural self, Isabella's desperation has the reverse effect, and she loses all natural love of her brother and returns to the security of her faith. Her violent anger betrays the same fear we saw in her meetings with Angelo, and her words become a frighteningly inhuman pronouncement of moral truths. Ultimately she cannot be faulted on her allegiance to doctrine, as it is not her responsibility to sin for the sake of others. Isabella cannot make up for Claudio's inadequacies, and neither can she achieve for him the grace which he ultimately lacks. Claudio's situation paralyses Isabella into an unbending morality which simply condemns her brother: "I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death; / No word to save thee" (III.i.145-6). Isabella reverts to a morality which cannot be faulted in terms of law, but which is completely lacking in any form of Christian charity. A.P. Rossiter summarises her character in *Angel with Horns*, thus

Isabella is a dramatic parallel to Angelo untempted. In both the higher nature (of a Christian kind: Pauline Christianity) is taken too high; and by being too far from instinctive sympathy, approaches the unnatural. Lucio's very remarkable "fertility" speech (I.iv.39-44) is "implied criticism" (F.R. Leavis) of Christian tradition. The apparent intention was to show Isabella as the nun-elect (Johnson); then as exemplifying Langland's "Chastity without Charity is chained in Hell"; and finally, as released - by a real conversion - to magnanimity.³¹

Rossiter's mention of nature is particularly interesting, since it seems Isabella's chief fault, in terms of our analysis of folly, is her denial of nature and her reliance on a strict moral code to

31. *Angel with Horns* (London, 1961), pp.159-60.

fulfil the requirements of the law. As Berowne flippantly remarked in *Love's Labour's Lost*, "Charity itself fulfils the law", and as Rossiter suggests, it seems that this is what Isabella lacks. However, the problem of *Measure for Measure* is not solved, but made worse when such a statement is applied to the play, since neither the status of charity nor that of the law is unequivocal at this point. The dilemma remains that Isabella's charity, her willingness to lay down her chastity for her brother, can never fulfil the law, since the law, in the hands of the Deputy, is corrupt. (It is significant, in this connection, to note that in fact "the law" is not satisfied even when Angelo has, as far as he is aware, been paid with the chastity he demands as ransom.) Additionally, as we saw in the debate between Tyndale and More over the translation of "charity" in Chapter 4 (pp.131-142), to define Isabella's love for her brother as "charity" in this sense would be wholly wrong, since the only charity which can fulfil the law, is that of God's gracious love. To apply such a maxim as "charity fulfils the law" to *Measure for Measure* begs the question of what charity means, and elevates Isabella's responsibility to one of being able to save or damn her brother. Theological grace can only be achieved through redemption (as Isabella herself points out to Angelo, the kind of ransom he suggests is patently wrong: "lawful mercy / Is nothing kin to foul redemption" (II.iv.112-4)), and in this play, as in those we have already considered, comic grace parallels theological grace.

4. Comic grace? the conclusions of *Measure for Measure*

The behaviour of the Duke and Isabella at the end of Act III scene i introduces a new dimension to the problems of *Measure for Measure*. N.W. Bawcutt, in an analysis of the Duke's concepts of

justice and morality, asserts that our judgment on his behaviour will depend on when we think his decision to intervene in events was made. That is to say, was he, in fact, ignorant of Angelo's hypocrisy until after eavesdropping on Claudio and Isabella? However we may view his intervention, Bawcutt concludes, we cannot put the second part of the play down to bad planning on the dramatist's part:

Those who dislike the second half of *Measure for Measure* will not be made to change their minds by any analysis, however subtle, of the Duke's meditation at the end of act 3. But if the evidence suggests, to a degree unusual in Shakespeare, that he deliberately and consciously altered the mode of his play, we ought to be cautious before passing judgement on it. Whatever artistic flaws there may be in *Measure for Measure*, they are not the result of carelessness or inadvertence on Shakespeare's part.³²

The Duke's behaviour in resorting to "craft" and "vice" would certainly not bring him condemnation from Erasmus' Folly, who herself advocates deceit in domestic relations, along with "flattery, joking, complaisance, illusions", and lying concerning the "prudent inquiries about the tricks that little virgin who now seems so chaste and innocent was up to long before the wedding" (p.97). The difficulty lies in aligning the Duke's devices, which are primarily those of comedy, with a play which is so clearly troubled, and straddles the comic and tragic modes of Shakespeare's writing. Folly is particularly pertinent to such a situation, because of the blend of truth and humour inherent within the concept. Interpretative problems are similar in the *Moriae Encomium* and this play, in that both attempt to address serious issues within what is an essentially comic framework. Shakespeare's use of comic devices in the denouement of the play seems to jar with the darker overall tone, and his Duke is as complex as Erasmus' goddess. A.D. Nuttall speaks for many critics when he writes of the Duke: "we can approve of his behaviour at the end of the play only at the cost of condemning his

32. "He Who the Sword of Heaven Will Bear", p.97.

behaviour at the outset."³³ A similar kind of criticism could be levelled at the goddess Folly, whose celebration of the pleasures of life at the outset is peculiarly modulated into a forceful presentation of Christian doctrines at the end of her oration. The difference lies in the fact that *Measure for Measure* does not have the ironical framework we have seen exploited to the full in the *Moriae Encomium*, and Shakespeare's play remains equivocal to the end.

In the earlier analyses of *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Twelfth Night*, we traced a progression through the play of major characters coming to some kind of self-awareness and knowledge, as a result of their exposure of their own folly. In *Measure for Measure*, as we have seen, this is more problematic. However, some conclusions can be drawn at this stage. The severity of Angelo's rule is worked through the play to two apparent ends: firstly, Angelo himself proves to be unable to control his behaviour by reason, just as Folly predicts; and secondly, the low life characters, who are mostly transferred wholesale from their brothels to the prison, prove the inadequacies of external laws. As Lucio says:

I am as well acquainted here as I was in our house of profession: one would think it were Mistress Overdone's own house, for here be many of her old customers. (IV.iii.1-4)

Angelo's rule is "text-book" according to strict morality (Graham Bradshaw in his chapter on *Measure for Measure* compares Angelo's principles to those of Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531), and concludes they represent a correct mode of justice while the Duke and Escalus would seem to be negligent). However, it results in his own moral collapse, and a long waiting-list in death row. From Folly's point of view, the remedy would be to realise the weakness of human nature and act within this

33. "Measure for Measure: Quid pro Quo?", *Shak S*, 4 (1968), pp.231-51 (p.239).

knowledge. Yet, after the Duke has apparently taken a long look at human nature through the play whilst relieved of his office, he simply returns, as Bradshaw complains, having apparently learned nothing:

Instead he plays God, pardoning Barnadine along with Angelo and Claudio, and only punishing the man who offended him personally. The sentencing of Lucio is (as we shall see later), as densely and damagingly ironic as the pardoning of Barnadine.³⁴

To discern whether we think the Duke has learned anything in regard to his awareness of human folly, we will consider some of the major events which lead up to his judgments at the end of the play. These are: firstly, his shriving of Juliet; secondly, his encounters with Lucio; and thirdly, his attitude to Mariana and Isabella in dictating their behaviour.

In Act II scene iii the Duke, playing his role of Friar, visits Juliet to prepare her for Claudio's death. His approach to her "falling in the flaws of her own youth" (II.iii.11), is to seek her repentance of the action, which he ascertains was mutually committed. Juliet's response to this is ambiguous: she repents of the sin, but makes it clear that the result - the child she bears - she in no way regrets. The Duke's line concerning the shame "which sorrow is always to ourselves" thus rings rather empty, since it is clear that Juliet regrets most that she and Claudio have been brought to trial for their deeds, and that this will result in separation:

O injurious love,
That respites me a life, whose very comfort
Is still a dying horror! (II.iii.40-42)

In his encounter with Juliet, the Duke sees the positive side of the "nature" which the low life characters of the play display. He remains apparently blind to Juliet's veiled attack on his attempt to convince her of her sin. In the encounters the Duke has with Lucio,

34. *Shakespeare's Scepticism* (Brighton, 1987), p.174.

however, he has a far more emphatic message. Lucio, another representative of "nature", but of a very different kind to Juliet, educates the Duke in the negative side of human nature. By means of the disguise the Duke has adopted (which, incidentally, allowed him to pronounce judgment on Juliet's sin), the ruler is enabled to hear the views of the public on his own morality. The situation parallels that of the lords in *Love's Labour's Lost*, who find their disguise ploy merely leads them into ridicule by those they sought to impress. Since he cannot resist the temptation to ask Lucio what news he has heard of the absent Duke, rather than answering Lucio's own inquiry, the unfortunate "Friar" is treated to a detailed portrait of the popular view of the Duke and of his Deputy.

The exchange is telling, both in terms of the Duke's covert efforts to defend himself: "I have never heard the absent Duke much detected for women; he was not inclined that way" (III.ii.118-9); and in his admonition of Lucio when his report disagrees: "Either this is envy in you, folly, or mistaking" (III.ii.137). Aside from the truth or otherwise of what Lucio says, the fact remains that this is the way in which the Duke has apparently been seen by the populace. Unsurprisingly, Lucio's "folly" unnerves the Duke and brings home the serious consequences of his self-confessed leniency in government. The Duke asks Escalus' opinion, in an effort to rebuild his confidence, and receives a more diplomatic answer; he describes the Duke as a man, "Rather rejoicing to see another merry, than merry at anything which professed to make him rejoice. A gentleman of all temperance" (III.ii.229-31). If we are to believe Escalus (arguably a more reliable judge than Lucio, but still an employee of the Duke), it is still the tragedy of the Duke that in appearing to enjoy the pleasure of others he has lost the respect of the people he rules. By the time the Duke encounters Lucio again (in Act IV scene iii), he

has determined to intervene in events by means of "craft" and "vice", and evidently intends to bring Lucio to answer for his tales, in the staged return of the absent ruler.

The atmosphere of the final outworking of the plot is thus one of apparent intention on the Duke's part, to rectify the evils of his lenient rule and the results of Angelo's harsh one. The Duke takes on the role of manipulator from the comic tradition, employing all means to achieve his end, in a blatant demonstration of the maxim that the ends will justify the means. In his dealings with Mariana and Isabella, he assures each of the propriety and decorum of the plan, demonstrating a very relative view of morality indeed. His position cannot really be defended, whatever we may think of the rights and wrongs of the contracts involved, and he blesses the dubious arrangements with a benediction he is not qualified to give:

Nor, gentle daughter, fear you not at all.
 He is your husband on a pre-contract:
 To bring you thus together 'tis no sin,
 Sith that the justice of your title to him
 Doth flourish the deceit. (IV.i.71-5)

Can we say from this analysis of the Duke's dealings that he has altered since handing-over his rule to Angelo, and as a result of his observations as Friar? Clearly it matters whether he has, for our judgment of the final scene of the play, and for our analysis of the significance of folly in *Measure for Measure*. It is obvious that this play cannot simply celebrate the folly of the low life characters as being true to their nature, and point to the major characters as lacking humility in the first instance and subsequently learning it through the course of events of the plot. This was a pattern discernible in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Twelfth Night*, with some variations, but the "folly of life" statement which we could apply to them seems inadequate for the later play. Folly states in the *Moriae Encomium* that the way to live life is :

To be willing to overlook things along with the rest of the world or to wear your illusions with a good grace. People say that this is really a sign of folly, and I'm not setting out to deny it - so long as they'll admit on their side that this is the way to play the comedy of life. (pp.103-4)

In the world of *Measure for Measure* it seems the innocent fools have become seedy lechers, and the education of the proud is not so straightforward as a good dose of personal awareness of human folly.

By the time Shakespeare wrote *Measure for Measure* the role of the fool figure and interpretation of foolish antics are more problematic, as is the progression from lack of self-knowledge to some kind of enlightenment. There is a sense of change in many of the characters, and by the end of the play we have observed apparent humility in the contrite Angelo, a portrayal of apparent forgiveness in Isabella, as well as a happy union of her strictness with the Duke's leniency; Lucio and the other low life characters are meted out their customary punishments (in line, that is, with the comic conclusions of the earlier plays), and the Duke returns to rule, apparently wiser for his experiences. However, none of these conclusions are unambiguous: Angelo may not be contrite but simply see when he is beaten; Isabella reflects forgiveness but there is ambiguity in her response to the Duke's proposal (and it is he who keeps her in the dark about Claudio's reprieve); the pardons for the low life characters, all except Lucio, seem to display more than a hint of personal retribution on the Duke's part, throwing doubt on the amount he has learned through his observations of human nature, and on his future ability to rule with just morality. Critics are divided over the ending of the play, many feeling that the judgments and pardons are inadequate to satisfy the problems raised by the preceding action. In terms of learning through an awareness of folly, the major difficulty remains, that for the Duke to pardon almost all the characters and overturn the moral strictness of

Angelo's rule, is tantamount to a return to precisely the "sparing the rod" tactics of his original rule, which began Vienna's moral decline and the substance of the plot of the play in the first place.

The theological undertones of the final act are similarly confusing. Throughout, the Duke is referred to as "your Grace", and the parallels between the Duke and a figure of divine justice are clear. The Duke seems to exude omniscience since he manipulates the entrances and exits of significant witnesses, and withholds certain pieces of information until the final denouement. Yet despite these weighty parallels, it is clear that the Duke is not God, and his justice is marred by more inconsistency, the kind of which Angelo could not have been accused. The three cases of relationships, namely Claudio and Juliet's, Angelo and Mariana's, and Lucio and Kate's are all treated differently. It is unclear which punishment alludes to which sin, and where the role of mercy and forgiveness can properly come in. As Bradshaw comments:

The point is not that the Duke's various sentences are wrong because alternative sentences are obviously right, but that the Duke cannot see why it is so very difficult to know what sentences would be right or wrong, according to the incompatible demands of legal, ethical and divine justice.³⁵

To answer our question, as to whether the Duke has altered from his experiences, it seems fair to say that he has. However, his behaviour is still human, and remains so to the last. In fact, so does the behaviour of all the characters. Folly has played her part in the play, embedded rather than as overt as in the earlier, less complex comedies, but the final result is the same realism as was hinted at in the Songs of Spring and Winter which concluded *Love's Labour's Lost*, as was reiterated in the Illyrian romance world of which Feste sings, and which is patently unreal at the end of *Twelfth Night*, and as is exposed most completely here, when the Duke's

35. *ibid.*, p.191.

imperfections are with us throughout the whole of the final judgment. *Measure for Measure* comes at the end of a dramatic investigation into folly in Shakespeare's comedies, and restates most radically the differences between the world of innocent folly and the harsh human inadequacies it makes bearable, but with which it cannot do away.

PART THREE

CHAPTER SEVEN

FROM MADNESS TO FOLLY IN THE COMEDIES OF BEN JONSON

1. Elizabethan Verse Satire

To open the discussion of folly in Ben Jonson's comedies, this chapter will begin with a brief analysis of Elizabethan verse satire, picking up the threads of chapter 1 with its consideration of Tudor satires and their negative presentation of folly. As we observed there, folly is chiefly conceived of as a sin, a defect in behaviour stemming from an incorrect assessment of the individual's role towards God and his fellow man, and manifesting itself in a variety of foolish acts, varying from the seven deadly sins to going out in the rain without a coat. The butts of this kind of satire are representative figures from each walk of life, in the manner of estates satire, from servants and tradesmen to nobles and churchmen. Elizabethan verse satire, as seen in such writers as Joseph Hall (1574-1656), John Marston (baptised 1576-1634), and Everard Guilpin (?1572- ?), continues a satiric tradition begun in Barclay's *Ship of Fools* and the anonymous *Cocke Lorrel's Bote*, which we considered at the beginning of this thesis. The Elizabethan verse satirists, however, considered themselves the first writers of this kind, and are certainly more ferocious and severe in their condemnation of society than those we saw in the early Tudor period. Nevertheless, similarities do exist in the subject matters, if not in the severity of tone, and each point to and condemn follies as they saw them, ranging throughout society. To this extent there is a common concept of folly, seen as a sinful and negative element to be purged or cut away.

The metaphors of purging or cutting away also link such satire to the medical and quasi-medical documents considered in chapter 3, where the metaphors of curing folly, popular with the satirists, were seen to be in some way related to the actual treatment of the mad and the belief in the curability of folly. Since medical theory centred on the notion of bodily humours, and most cures were effected by a purging or blood-letting process, the satirists' most common literary pose was that of the barber-surgeon or scourger, and folly or vice was seen as the manifestation of a malignant growth or humoral imbalance. The persona of Marston's *Scourge of Villainy*, Kinsayder, has been linked by one commentator with the Dutch word "keisnijder" meaning "stonecutter", suggesting a connection in medical metaphor between Marston's scourger and the barber-surgeon of such paintings as Hieronymous Bosch's *The Cure of Folly*.¹ Certainly, Marston's poetry contains a considerable amount of medical imagery with such words as "frenzy", "Bedlam mad" and "lunaticke" recurring through *The Scourge of Villainy* and *Certain Satires*, and other terms, like "frantick" (*Certain Satires* III, 43), "senceless" (*Scourge* VII, 38), "brain-sicke foolerie" (*Scourge* VIII, 214), "dull-pated" (*Scourge* VII, 88) and "thin-brained Ideots" (*Scourge* X, 16). The speaker of *The Scourge of Villainy* presents himself as a barber-surgeon at the end of satire V, setting himself up against the "Apish age" thus:

Infectious blood, yee goutie humors quake
 Whilst my sharp Razor doth incision make.
 (*Scourge* V, 117-8)

A similar emphasis can be seen in Samuel Rowlands' *The Letting of Humour's Blood in the Head Vein* (1600). Clearly the title aligns

1. See Matthew Little "Marston's Kinsayder and the Cure of Folly", *ELV*, 15 (1978), pp.271-274 for a fuller discussion of the barber-surgeon figure and its role as metaphor in satire. See also fig.25 .

the satirist's task to that of a surgeon, and the poem contains substantial medical terminology in the reasoning of the conclusion:

Well, happy is the man doth rightly know,
 The vertue of three cuppes of *Charnico*,
 Being taken fasting, th'only cure for Flegme,
 It worketh wonders on the braine, extreame.
 A pottle of wine at morning, or at night,
 Drunke with an Apple, is imployed right,
 To rince the Liuer, and to purifie
 A dead sicke Hart from all infirmitie.²

Rowlands links the kind of satire we saw in Skelton's *Bowge of Courte* and Lydgate's *Order of Fools*, with the medical emphasis we saw in the breviaries and health manuals in chapter 3. In the former the seven deadly sins were used as a structure for the poem (Rowlands similarly uses characters such as "Epicurisme", "Disdain", "Selfe-loue", "Pride" and "Vaunting" in his opening section entitled "To the Gentlemen Readers"), and in the latter there is a similar emphasis on the humoral theory as an explanation for health and behaviour.³ In the epigram section of Rowlands' poem, epigram 27 depicts a character called "Humors" who indulges in fashion-following, whoring, is usually penniless, and is generally unwell. For each of his follies, the same explanation is proffered - it is his humour. Humour is seen here as an affectation, a convenient term used to excuse faddish

2. *The Letting of Humour's Blood in the Head Vein*, in *The Complete Works of Samuel Rowlands*, vol 1, printed for the Hunterian Club (Glasgow, 1880), p.79.

3. Other connections with early Tudor and Medieval satire are the stock pictures of the two-faced dissimulator, the device of dressing a character in a costume suitable to their nature, and in the lists of particular vices. Included in the epigrams here are: drunkenness (1, 2, 11); whoring (9, 10); idleness (5, 19); marrying older women (14); fashion-following (26) and astronomy (31). The last four of the above list have close parallels in Barclay's *Ship of Fools*.

behaviour, and the implication of Humors' stance is that his humour is equal to a whim, a pseudo-medical explanation for his particular bent. Clearly Rowlands is satirising not only the stock vices of the Tudor and Medieval moralists, but also the more modern predilection for blaming them all on a humoral imbalance:

Aske *Humors* why a Feather he doth weare?
 It is his humor (by the Lord) heele sweare.
 Or what he doth with such a Horse-taile locke?
 Or why vpon a Whoore he spends his stocke?
 He hath a Humor doth determine so...
 It commeth of a Humor, to be drunke,
 When you behould his lookes pale, thin and poore,
 Th'occsion is, his Humor, and a Whore:
 And euery thing that he doth vndertake,
 It is a vaine, for senclesse Humors sake.⁴

A reading of almost any Elizabethan (and, indeed, most later) satire will show how many terms which are used are, in fact, originally from a medical source, although by the satires of the eighteenth century such words have almost lost their immediate physical connotations and become purely metaphorical. In Elizabethan satire much use is made of cutting, barbed, blistering, vitriolic, searing and stinging images; and further, any modern description of the satires frequently employs these words as metaphors in a now critical vocabulary.⁵ Rowlands is particularly interesting to us here, however, because he links the stock types of satire with medical vocabulary and the humoral theory, and this is something which we later see to be crucial to Jonson's comical satires and to his overall concept of folly.

Joseph Hall's *Virgidemiae* (1597-8) parallels Rowlands in its objects of satire, and thus also has links with Barclay's *Ship of*

4. *The Letting of Humour's Blood*, p.33.

5. For more information on the use of medical imagery in this context see Mary C. Randolph, "The Medical Concept in English Renaissance Satiric Theory", *SP*, 38 (1941), pp.125-157.

Fools and the follies outlined there. A cursory glance at the contents page of *Virgidemiae*⁶ is enough to establish this, immediately revealing similar topics and figures of society as were satirised in Barclay. In particular, the figures of academics, lawyers, doctors and writers in Book II of Hall's poem alternate with the practice of writing bad poetry in all its various forms, which is the object of the satire in Book I. The ostentation of the modern age, satirised in Book III, similarly parallels with Barclay's condemnation of those who reject the social forces of a traditional hierarchical society. There are parallels too in the kinds of behaviour which are satirised: for example, gluttony, fashion-following and false gallantry are common to both writers. Finally, similarities lie in the alternation between the descriptions of the representational figures, and their various foolish acts (along the lines of the seven deadly sins, with lighter variations on vice and folly). In the last three books these two elements, the persons and the vices, are merged together more obviously to form personifications of folly, and again we can detect parallels with Barclay. A strong example here is the upstart gentleman who tries to improve his place in society. This character is condemned in several places by Barclay (see chapter 1, pp. 5-7), but most forcibly in "Of the mutabylyte of Fortune":

That man whiche hopyth hie vp to ascende
On fortunes whele, and come to state royall
If the whele turne, may doute sore to descende
If he be hie the sorer is his fall. (I, 186)

Hall's complaint is couched in different terms, drawing on the particular evils of his age such as the poor distribution of wealth, exorbitant rents and the economic conditions which were forcing the

6. In *The Collected Poems of Joseph Hall*, edited by A. Davenport (Liverpool, 1949) pp.5-99.

rural population into beggary, he forms a character through whom the vices and follies are exposed. Thus Hall satirises Lolio for his social aspirations, ostentation and greed:

Old driueling *Lolio* drudges all he can,
To make his eldest sonne a Gentleman. (IV.ii.1-2)

His son is duly maintained at the Inns of Court or Chancery by Lolio's economies at home, in order to transform him:

There soone as he can kisse his hand in gree,
And with good grace bow it below the knee,
Or make a *Spanish* face with fauning cheere,
With th'Iland Conge like a Cauallier,
And shake his head, and cringe his necke and side,
Home hyes he in his fathers Farme to bide.
The Tenants wonder at their land-Lords Sonne,
And blesse them at so sudden comming on. (IV.ii.85-92)

This upward movement benefits none, according to the satirist, since on Lolio's demise his son will seek to find an alternative, greater pedigree, and the result for the tenants will be trebled rents such that they will "wish old *Lolio* were aliue againe, / And praise his gentle soule and wish it well" (IV.ii.130-1). Hall's satire concentrates on similar areas of folly in society and personal behaviour as that seen in Barclay, as well as the criticism of literary styles and tastes of his day. O.J. Campbell traces a common source for the satirists in his section on Renaissance theories of satire, writing: "satire, they taught, was in origin a rude form of ridicule designed to purge simple men of their faults and was composed to serve as the characteristic utterance of crude sylvan gods - hence its harshness and license".⁷ Campbell notes Barclay's early conception of the genre, using the word "satyr" apparently for

7. *Comicall Satyre and Shakespeare's 'Troilus and Cressida'* (San Marino, California, 1938), p.29.

the first time in English,⁸ and stressing his interpretation of it as a means of reprehending folly in order to reprove sin and illness, and to that end, to represent folly as if in a mirror of common man:

This present Boke myght have ben callyd nat inconueniently the Satyr (that is to say) the reprehencion of foulysshnes, but the neweltye of the name was more plesant unto the fyrst actour to call it the Shyp of foles: For in lyke wyse as olde Poetes Satyriens in dyuers Poesyes conioyned repreued the synnes and ylnes of the peple at that tyme lyuyng: so and in lyke wyse this our Boke representeth vnto the iyen of the redars the states and condicions of men: so that euery man may behold within the same the cours of his lyfe and his misgouerned maners, as he sholde beholde the shadowe of the fygure of his visage within a bright Myrrour.⁹

Likewise, Marston, Hall and Guilpin considered themselves social reformers, adapting severe literary techniques from Juvenal's *saeva indignatio*. They attacked current issues in particular, including enclosure, grain-hoarding, rent increases and the abuse of tenants. The severity of their attack is summarised by Hall in *Virgidemiae* as:

The Satyre should be like the *Porcupine*,
That shoots sharpe quills out in each angry line.
(V.iii.1-2)

This criticism is motivated by a dissatisfaction with what the satirists saw around them and further, by a desire to represent it, like Barclay's mirror: Guilpin subtitled *Skialethia* (1598), "A Shadowe of Truth".

Guilpin's satire is, like that of Hall and Marston, bitter and outraged in tone much of the time. The muse of *Skialethia* is a prostitute, attacking vice and folly of all kinds, but particularly concerned with the folly of lust and the sexual perversions which stem from it. Like Lydgate and Skelton, Guilpin uses a structure of the seven deadly sins, personifying dissimulation, describing pride,

8. See also Bernard Harris "Men like Satyrs" in *Elizabethan Poetry*, Stratford-on-Avon Studies, edited by J.R. Brown and B. Harris (London, 1960).

9. Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, "The Argument", p.17.

isolating jealousy as a Medieval beast, and using the stock character of the goddess Fortuna. These and other stock figures are located in a London setting as topical and alive as that of *Cocke Lorrel's Bote*, but the allegorical precedent is clear throughout. Each satirist we have considered shares a native English tradition in this respect, one which J.B. Leishman points out in the introduction to his edition of *The Three Parnassus Plays*:

If anyone will make the experiment of reading, one after the other, a few pages of, let us say, Nashe's *Pierce Penilesse*, Lodge's *Wit's Miserie*, Rowlands' *Letting of Humour's Blood*, Hall's *Satires*, Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*, and almost any of the prose characters from Overbury to Earle, he will, I think, perceive a fundamental resemblance, and will feel that the form chosen - prose satire, verse satire, "humour" comedy, prose character - is, in a sense, almost accidental. Behind them all he will feel, far more powerfully than that of Horace or Juvenal or Persius, or Plautus or Terence or Theophrastus, the presence of that allegorical and realistic representation of the Seven Deadly Sins and their followers which is as old as the medieval pulpit and the medieval homily.¹⁰

Guilpin's invective, like that of the other satirists discussed, is directed at the evils of the society he perceived around him, but it is most remarkable to us here for its use of types and representational figures to put over that social message. Like Hall's picture of Lolio, Guilpin caricatures certain vices and follies within a single dramatic persona, often with the closeness of lampoon (for which he and the other major Elizabethan satirists were condemned by the Bishop's Ban in 1599).¹¹ This technique is particularly relevant to a study of folly in Jonson's comedies, because it in some way heralds the movement from the vividly drawn but almost allegorical figures of the satires, to Jonson's early comic characters. The criticisms often levelled at these early

10. *The Three Parnassus Plays* (London, 1949), pp.46-7.

11. The Bishop's Ban, 1 June 1599, prohibited the printing of Hall, Marston and Davies, ordered the existing copies of Davies and Nashe to be burned and that no satires or epigrams be printed thereafter.

characters are that they are too obviously types, caricatures, and verging on the allegorical¹², a criticism which illustrates their origin in verse satire. Guilpin's Gnatho from *Skialetheia* is worth quoting here, as an example of the character traits and follies which were later put on the stage in comical satire:

My Lord most court-like lyes in bed till noone,
 Then, all high-stomackt riseth to his dinner,
 Falls straight to Dice, before his meate be downe,
 Or to digest, walks to some femall sinner.
 Perhaps fore-tyrde he gets him to a play,
 Comes home to supper, and then falls to dice,
 There his deuotion wakes till it be day,
 And so to bed, where vntill noon he lies.

This is a Lords life, simple folke will sing.
 A Lords life? what, to trot so foule a ring?
 Yet thus he liues, and what's the greatest
 griefe,
 Gnatho still sweares he leads true vertues
 life.¹³

Before going on to look at precisely how Jonson uses the medical-humoral and allegorical elements from Elizabethan satire, it is necessary first to locate this chapter in the philosophical and theological framework of folly to date. In chapter 1 we linked the primarily negative concept of folly to a view of the fool rejecting God and neglecting the eternal in favour of the temporal. The fool basically sought the pleasures of this world, and this sort of folly was categorically condemned. We did, however, also see in Barclay elements of the proto-humanist in some of his changes from Brant's *Narrenschiff*: here Barclay placed a new emphasis on the need for man to seek external assistance to attain his salvation (*Ship of Fools*, II, 337). The humanist emphasis we heard voiced more overtly in chapter 2. The positive acceptance of folly in Erasmus' *Moriae*

12. See C.R. Baskerville, *English Elements in Jonson's Early Comedy* (Austin, Texas, 1911).

13. *Skialetheia*, edited by D. Allen Carroll (Chapel Hill, 1974), p.46.

Encomium was seen as an espousal of Neoplatonic thought and a recognition of the Pauline concept of the need to embrace human folly in this world, as a necessary precursor to accepting the wisdom of the next. Erasmus thus stressed the need for humility and honesty in recognising folly, but moved away from a wholly negative and condemnatory attitude. The conflicts set up in the *Moriae Encomium* between nature and law, passion and reason, we then traced through the three Shakespearean comedies discussed, observing a predominantly Erasmian concept of folly, with an emphasis on the need for achieving comic grace through an admission of weakness.

The philosophical stance behind Elizabethan verse satire, and especially behind the satire of John Marston, is open to some debate. Elements of Calvinism have frequently been pointed out, probably most obviously visible in a passage like this from *The Scourge of Villainy*¹⁴:

*Sure Grace is infus'd
By diuine fauour, not by actions vs'd.
Which is as permanent as heauens blisse
To them that haue it, then no habite is.*
(IV.117-120)

To Marston's Scourger, vice and folly have permeated through human nature making it unable to achieve virtue by human effort alone. As a variation on this view, A.D. Cousins isolates the image of Proteus - a central humanist motif - and argues that in *Certain Satires* human mutability and the unique ability of man to move upwards, towards God, is crucial. In this sense he argues for a Neoplatonic understanding of Marston's Christianity and attitude to man, something closer to that which we saw in Erasmus, and in contrast to a more deterministic, Calvinist view. Cousins admits that *The*

14. In *The Poems of John Marston* edited by A. Davenport (Liverpool, 1961) pp.93-174.

Scourge of Villainy shows forcibly that man's imperfection drags him down into brutish behaviour, but he still maintains that:

From the start of *The Scourge of Villainy* we are clearly shown two things: first, that egotism characteristically motivates people; second, that the truest understanding of this will be gained by perceiving its expression in man's distinctive ability to transform himself.¹⁵

Cousins argues that the underlying philosophy of Marston's satires is thus Neoplatonism and not Calvinism, despite the "strong likelihood of Marston himself being a Calvinist".¹⁶ Rather than negating the humanist notion of man's excellence by ignoring it, Cousins argues that:

Marston takes the idea that lay at the heart of the most established sixteenth century doctrine on the peculiar excellence of man, and utterly confounds the view of humanity it implies.¹⁷

Thus the reading of the end of *The Scourge of Villainy* upholds the negative view of man's cutting himself off from God, and further adds to the despair in the image of the blocked pipes, where God's influence is prevented from having any effect:

Sure I nere thinke those axioms to be true,
That soules of men, from that greate soule ensue,
And of his essence doe participate
As't were by pypes, when so degenerate,
So aduerse is our natures motion,
To his immaculate condition:
That such foule filth, from such faire puritie,
Such sensuall acts from such a Deitie,
Can nere proceed. But if that dreame were so,
Then sure the slime that from our soules doe flow,
Haue stopt those pipes by which it was conuai'd,
And now no humane creatures, once disrai'd
Of that fayre iem. (VII.188-200)

However, Cousins' argument cannot stand when faced with such clearly Calvinistic language. Marston's view is certainly one of

15. "The Protean Nature of Man in Marston's Verse Satires", *JEGP*, 79 (1980), pp.517-529 (p.526).

16. *ibid*, p.528.

17. *ibid*, p.529.

negativity, and folly is represented as hopeless and disgusting vice. There is nowhere to be found the positive, Erasmian notions of folly, and its role in bringing man to an understanding of grace. The tenor of Hall and Guilpin is similarly negative where folly is concerned, and there are far more parallels to be drawn between the Elizabethan verse satirists' concept of folly and that of the Tudor satirists discussed earlier, than with any positive, humanist concept of folly. In moving on to discuss Jonson's humour plays, we will consider if and how a synthesis is achieved between the negative folly of the verse satirists, and the positive folly of Erasmus and Shakespeare.

2. The Madness of Folly in Jonson's Humour Plays

It is particularly relevant to preface a discussion of Jonson's humour plays with an overview of Elizabethan verse satire, since Jonson produced *Every Man Out of His Humour* only months after the Bishop's' ban on the publication of verse satire. He seems deliberately provocative in labelling the play a "comicall satyre", drawing attention to the contemporary arguments and encouraging the reading public into the theatres instead. The satiric persona of verse attacks on folly which we saw in Guilpin, Hall and Marston, has significant similarities with what we see created in Jonson's early humour plays, and the relationship between Jonson and the Inns of Court poets is a close one from the start. The satiric persona in Guilpin's *Skialetheia* in particular, is gradually revealed to be corruptible and corrupted by the world around him, even as he satirises it. A direct result of his initial pointing to moral issues is thus a realisation of his own hypocrisy:

Me thinks already I applaud my selfe,
 For nettle-stinging thus this fayery elfe;
 And though my conscience sayes I merit not
 Such deere rewarde, dissembling yet (God wot)

I hunt for praise, and doe the same expect:
 Hence (crafty enchaunter) welcome base neglect,
 Scoffes make me know my selfe, I must not erre,
 Better a wretch then a dissembler. (I.163-170)

A commentary and contrast on the vices of the world is therefore provided by an increasing awareness for the audience of the vice which is invading the satiric persona himself. Conversely however, in satirising the follies of others, the satiric persona becomes ironically less aware of his own imperfections and folly. Frank Kerins comments on this aspect of the satire thus:

In this connection these Inns of Court ironists might well have seized on Joseph Hall's own fanciful etymology for satire - "*Satirae*" ("full of ire"). In the process of writing satires, the satirist fills himself to repletion with immoderate passion - leading himself into a state of psychological and moral turmoil at least as grave as any of his victims.¹⁸

A parallel can be drawn here with the ironic, distancing effect which the mask of Dame Folly in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* produces, where a deliberate blurring of voices forces the audience to think twice before making any judgment. The crucial difference, of course, is that Dame Folly is always ready to admit her own folly as well as that of her followers, and the confusion comes through the various definitions of folly which the book offers. Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* similarly exploits this kind of ironic distance between author, satiric persona and audience, and likewise confuses any judgment of the action by the audience.

The development of this technique can be seen in part as a desire to move on from the theory of the first comical satire, *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), where there is a lack of such distancing, and a consequent limitation on perspective. Significantly, the first

18. "The Crafty Enchaunter: Ironic Satires and Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*", *Ren D*, 14 (1983), pp.125-150 (p.132-3). Kerins notes that Hall's etymology comes in "*De suis Satyris*" *Virgidemiae* I.i.

humour play was a success, the second was not; but what Jonson attempts to change by introducing such distancing also enables him to change both the presentation and depiction of human folly, and most significantly its judgment by the audience. This move marks the change from the mechanical and schematic drama of *Every Man in His Humour* to the fluency of the later plays.

The follies of the characters in *Every Man in His Humour* are standard, and the characters themselves are stock. The play is heavily based on Roman comedy and works on a theme of the effects and necessary purging of jealousy. The jealousy of the older generation, represented by Kitely, is ridiculed and played on by the younger generation, primarily via Wellbred, assisted by the witty servant-figure, Brainworm. Side issues of folly are the affectation and foolishness of the gulls Stephen and Matthew, the apoplectic Downright, and the braggart soldier type in Bobadill. Jonson altered the play from quarto to folio version in between the writing of *Volpone* and *Bartholomew Fair* (a date between 1606 and 1613), but little is changed in terms of the presentation of folly. Most of the revisions relate to the relocation of the play from Venice to London, and to a general tightening-up of dramatic structure and plot. Folly is represented in the characters as a humoral defect, made manifest in their behaviour which consistently exposes them to ridicule, both in front of the *dramatis personae* and in front of the audience. All the complications produced through the workings of plot are, however, eventually resolved and judged by the figure of all sound morals, Justice Clement.

The root cause of the foolish behaviour in *Every Man in His Humour* is the ignorance of reason and its controlling powers. Kno'well opposes reason with the love of poetry in his opening lines:

My selfe was once a student; and, indeed,
Fed with the selfe-same humour, he is now,

Dreaming on nought but idle *poetrie*,
 That fruitlesse, and vnprofitable art,
 Good vnto none, but least to the professors,
 Which, then, I thought the mistresse of all
 knowledge:
 But, since, time and the truth have wak'd my
 iudgement,
 And reason taught me better to distinguish,
 The vaine, from th'vsefull learnings. (I.i.15-23)

Reason, a central element opposed to folly in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, is set up here as the yardstick of judgment; and the ignoring or bypassing of reason - here seen in terms of following the arts - is the downfall or folly of man. The root of folly in the major characters is thus made manifest in a basic virtue allowed, through the ignoring of reason, to grow out of all proportion. Here Kno'well rightly wants to protect his son from vice and wanton behaviour, but irrationally allows this desire to overwhelm him, and ridiculously tries to protect him from the ordinary business of youth. Similarly, Kately's jealous guarding of his wife's honour stems from a basically good character trait, but without the controlling force of reason it takes him over completely and manifests itself in ridiculous folly and dangerous jealousy. Matthew's situation clearly illustrates the pattern, more closely along the lines of Kno'well's speech. He takes art and poetry beyond all reasonable limits, to be his ruling passion; in so doing he denigrates the craft of a poet through the resulting folly of his behaviour.

The mention of passion at this point reminds us of the opposition of reason and passion discussed earlier with reference to the *Moriae Encomium* (see chapter 2), and the linking of folly to a medical or quasi-medical defect in humoral terms. In Kno'well's speech quoted above, the passion for poetry is put down to a "humour" - one which Kno'well thinks he remembers from the heat of his youth. Jonson's plays concentrate on the medical and humoral roots of folly

more, in general, than Shakespeare's, and we shall see a greater interest in explaining the physical mechanics of foolish behaviour throughout Jonson's comedies. The fullest exposition of this in *Every Man in His Humour* is probably Kitley's own description of his particular malady - folly manifest in jealousy:

A new disease? I know not, new, or old,
 But it may well be call'd poore mortalls plague:
 For, like a pestilence, it doth infect
 The houses of the braine. First, it begins
 Solely to work vpon the phantasie,
 Filling her seat with such pestiferous aire,
 And soone corrupts the iudgement; and from thence
 Sends like contagion to the memorie;
 Still each to other giuing the infection.
 Which, as a subtle vapor, spreads it selfe,
 Confusedly, through euery sensiuie part,
 Till not a thought, or motion, in the mind,
 Be free from the blacke poyson of suspect.
 Ah, but what miserie is it, to know this?
 Or, knowing it, to want the mindes erection,
 In such extremes? Well, I will once more striue,
 (In spight of this black cloud) my selfe to be,
 And shake the feauer off, that thus shakes me.
 (II.iii.57-74)

The terminology and theory here relate back to the humoral theory outlined in chapter 3. The division of the brain into chambers similarly ties Jonson's play to the concepts of humoral imbalance brought about through adust melancholy gradually infiltrating the brain.¹⁹ The dilemma and malady described so articulately by Kitley is, however, not helped by his awareness of it, since he protests it is a fever, a physical defect, and he cannot "shake [it] off". Here again is a contrast with folly as we have traced it through the *Moriae Encomium* and in three of Shakespeare's plays, since in these, the awareness of humanity and self-acknowledgement of folly, are generally all it takes for the cure to be effected. Shakespeare follows Erasmus more closely in a process of enlightening fools, and

19. See Philip Barrough, *The Methode of Physicke* (London, 1583), and Andrew Boorde, *The Breviary of Healthe* (London, 1547), quoted in chapter 3.

sees them step out of their folly once it is admitted. There is little emphasis in Erasmus or Shakespeare on folly as a self-confessed malady from which the fool is unable to free himself, nor on folly as a disease in quite such a medical sense as we see here.

Since the concept of folly in *Every Man in His Humour* is of a more medical and schematic nature, folly is purged and judged by more mechanical means. The humoral imbalance of the characters who are able to temper their behaviour with reason is corrected either by gulling or by being gulled. The over-emphasis on reason in Kno'well, Downright and Kitely goes as far as to be a parody of true reason, in the same way as the over-passionate Matthew, Stephen and Bobadil mimic the poet, gentleman and soldier to no end but ridicule of themselves and their heroic status. The judgment of these characters is almost emblematic, as Matthew is ordered to stand in sackcloth with his poetry as ashes, and Bobadil to wear fool's motley with a rod at his girdle. These two are excluded from an otherwise festive conclusion to which Kno'well, Downright, Cob and Kitely with his wife are admitted, after each has been purged of their imbalance and obsessive illusions. The possibility of grace is offered to the braggart and poet, however, in Justice Clement's words:

while we are at supper, you two shall penitently fast it out in my court, without; and, if you will, you may pray there, that we may be so merrie within, as to forgiue, or forget you, when we come out. (V.v.51-54)

The perspective on folly in *Every Man in His Humour* is thus relatively straightforward: folly is conceived of as a malady to be purged, and the play's business is to show such a purging, recognised and praised by a figure of justice, who comes in almost as a *deus ex machina* to conclude the plot. There is none of the ironic distance or the malady of the satirist in this play, and consequently the concept of folly suffers from a certain two-dimensional limitation, both in its presentation through stock characters, and in its purging

and mechanical judgment. The change from the techniques of this play to those of *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599) is quite remarkable. The tone and techniques of the latter play are much closer to those of Marston and the verse satirists, and the play was not a success on the stage largely because it had sacrificed theatricality to a new style in imitation of the "vetus commoedia". As such, it represents a significant move in the direction of the complexity and multi-faceted nature of folly which we saw in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*.

Complexity is first begun in the Induction to *Every Man Out of His Humour* when the satiric persona, as discussed above, is established in Asper, the image of a Juvenalian satirist. His impatience and violent language compares with the earlier verse satires of Marston, Hall and Guilpin:

Who is so patient of this impious world,
 That he can checke his spirit, or reine his tongue?
 Or who hath such a dead vnfeeling sense,
 That heauens horrid thunders cannot wake?
 To see the earth, crackt with the weight of sinne,
 Hell gaping vnder vs, and o're our heads
 Blacke rau'nous ruine, with her saile-strecht wings,
 Ready to sinke vs downe, and couer vs.
 Who can behold such prodigies as these,
 And haue his lips seal'd vp? Not I.
 (After the Second Sounding, 4-13)

By having the additional perspective of the play within a play, we have an ironic distance which allows us to see folly on both levels, in character and in the contrasting, juxtaposed judgments of the satiric persona and the Chorus. The theme of humours is begun in the Induction (interestingly it comes about by Mitis' fear that Asper's humour will "come to some ill" - an opportunity for Asper to outline his aim of revealing the abuses of humour which we saw illustrated in Guilpin's Gnatho from *Skialethia*). The definition of humour given here is the fullest found in Jonson, including both the medical humour, and the abuse of the term to excuse actions of affectation and whim:

Why, Humour (as 'tis *ens*) we thus define it
 To be a quality of aire or water,
 And in it selfe holds these two properties,
 Moisture, and fluxure: As, for demonstration,
 Powre water on this floore, 'twill wet and runne:
 Likewise the aire (forc't through a horne, or trumpet)
 Flowes instantly away, and leaues behind
 A kind of dew; and hence we doe conclude,
 That what soe're hath fluxure, and humiditie
 As wanting power to containe it selfe,
 Is Humour. So in euery humane body
 The choller, melancholy, flegme, and bloud,
 By reason that they flow continually
 In some one part, and are not continent,
 Receiue the name of Humours. Now thus farre
 It may, by *Metaphore*, apply it selfe
 Vnto the generall disposition:
 As when some one peculiar quality
 Doth so possesse a man, that it doth draw
 All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,
 In their confluctions, all to runne one way,
 This may truly be said to be a Humour.
 But that a rooke, in wearing a pyed feather,
 The cable hat-band, or the three-pild ruffe,
 A yard of shooe-tye, or the *Switzers* knot
 On his *French* garters, should affect a Humour!
 O, 'tis more then most ridiculous.
 (After the Second Sounding, 88-114)

An important distinction is made here between the fool who is such because of his humoral imbalance, and the fool who exonerates his behaviour falsely by this excuse. Both types of character are represented in the play, the chief irony being that Asper himself changes when within the play as Macilente, and easily becomes the most vivid example of the former. He is the only character who has reached a state of total imbalance: all the others have the mental capacity to recognise their folly as an affectation, and thus can be purged of it.²⁰

20. A distinction needs to be drawn here between Asper and Macilente. It is Macilente, as an example of humoral folly, who is apparently incurable and may be compared to Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* (see chapter 5 above), and to the incurable fools in *Volpone*, discussed below, and Morose in *Epicoene*, also discussed below.

A further dimension is added to folly in the play, by the character of Carlo Buffone, a contrast to, but co-worker with Macilente. He is described in "The Names of the Actors" as:

A Publicke, scurrilous, and prophane Iester; that (more swift then *Circe*) with absurd *simile's* will transforme any person into deformity. (lines 25-27)

Carlo Buffone is unimpressed by any social graces of those around him, and thus he has a clearer vision than the envious Macilente. Together they address the questions of folly and affectation in the other characters, while both being examples themselves of two different types of fool. The wider perspective on folly and the greater centralisation of the humoral theory have a negative effect on the play in terms of plot, however. Basing itself on the need to expose and explode the humours of the *dramatis personae*, the plot suffers from incoherencies and looseness not usually seen in Jonson's neatly structured comedies. Despite this rather ungainly structure, *Every Man Out of His Humour* sets up a prototype by suggestively juxtaposing humours one against the other, and moving away from the need for a series of gulling incidents to deal with each individual. In so altering the plot, the ground is prepared for the later comedies, particularly in this respect, for *Bartholomew Fair*, where the looseness is controlled by a central symbol of the fair itself, thereby achieving the necessary unity which in earlier plays the plot had provided.²¹ Alan Dessen describes *Every Man Out of His Humour* as a "heroic failure" in this sense:

Having left behind the tidy traditional structure of *Every Man In*, Jonson as yet lacks a suitable dramatic container in which to package his new tone and scope, one which would allow him to

21. A connection is made between *Every Man Out of His Humour* and *Bartholomew Fair* by Neil Rhodes in *Elizabethan Grotesque* (London, 1980), where the two plays are discussed together, pp.131-55.

combine conventional comedy with analysis of social evils and demonstration of their effects.²²

Jonson's aim in *Every Man Out of His Humour* to move away from a plot-centred drama and emphasise the characters, does help to isolate their follies in a series of recognisable types. However, the abstraction (epitomised in the central scene where characters literally wander in an aisle of St. Paul's Cathedral!) does not represent the challenge of folly in a real enough sense, and the audience's response is interrupted too much by the insistent commentary of Cordatus and Mitis. It is as if ultimately we join in the desperation of Carlo Buffone, who overturns the table at the end of the increasingly inebriated puppet show. The show parallels symbolically the increasing inebriation of the satirists - on one level Carlo and Macilente/Asper, on another the audience, as implied satirists and judges of the folly of humours. The Commentators question:

MIT: Whom should he personate in this, signior?
COR: Faith, I know not, sir, obserue, obserue him.
(V.iv.67-68)

And Carlo's own commentary on the puppets is deliberately inclusive:

Nay, I beseech you, gentlemen, what meanes this? nay, looke, for shame respect your reputations. (V.iv.89-90)

The achievements of *Every Man Out of His Humour* in terms of the presentation of folly are thus two-fold. In the first instance, Jonson has established an ironic distance not present in the earlier humour play, by the use of a satiric persona, Induction and Chorus.²³ All these add power to the notion of the weaknesses of human morality and the inability of man to judge his fellow man quite so easily as a

22. *Jonson's Moral Comedy* (Evanston, Illinois, 1971), p.54.

23. Satiric persona, Induction and Chorus are elements of the "vetus comoedia" discussed in O. J. Campbell, *Comical Satyre and Shakespeare's 'Troilus and Cressida'*, pp. 4-8.

"Justice Clement" could. Secondly, Jonson moves away from the tight plot structure and commits himself more wholly to the concept of folly shown in humoral and blatantly typological characters, less bound by the exigencies of plot. These moves, we will see, prove to be vital in achieving a synthesis between a purely negative lashing and purging of folly (the result of a negative concept of folly), and a recognition of the positive effects of learning through humility, which we saw as an important element in Shakespeare's more Erasmian concept of folly. At this point, however, they strain the credibility of the play too much, as Russ McDonald puts it:

After five very long acts that concentrate on pride, greed, lust, stupidity, vanity, meanness, triviality, envy and witlessness, we suddenly see the evaporation of these errors. The air is cleared; fools have learned their lessons; art works wonders. We are asked to exchange doubt for faith, despair for hope, contempt for charity.²⁴

It is this freedom which Jonson exploits to the full in *Bartholomew Fair*, where his concept of folly takes on a more Shakespearean air and the positive elements of folly are, for the first time, successfully integrated. Before such a transition is made, however, Jonson first addresses the problems of plot highlighted by *Every Man Out of His Humour*; and secondly, takes on board some of the festival folly which ultimately becomes a significant part of his overall concept of folly in *Bartholomew Fair*. We shall trace these two issues as they are shown in the chronological development of Jonson's drama through *Volpone* and *Epicoene*.

24. *Shakespeare & Jonson, Jonson & Shakespeare* (Brighton, 1988), pp.73-4.

3. *Volpone* and *Epicoene*: incurable fools and the purging of folly

It is in *Volpone* (1606) that this synthesis between the purging of negative folly and the learning through positive folly begins. The play has been noted for its allusions to Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, and the influence of an Erasmian concept of folly within its range of characters.²⁵ A hierarchy of fools is established, from Sir Politic Would-be's absurdities at the lowest level, through the versions of folly caricatured in the legacy-hunters, to the folly of *Volpone* and *Mosca* themselves in being deceived by their own schemes, and finally in a version of Erasmus' other-worldly fool represented in *Celia* (and to some extent in *Bonario* also). The attempt of *Every Man Out of His Humour*, outlined above, to introduce an ironic distance and double-edged quality in the satire of human weakness is perfected here. *Volpone* and *Mosca* at once point to the folly of others in their exploitative plans while at the same time falling victim to a sister version of the folly of delusion. In addition, the problem of plot which we saw in the earlier play is certainly resolved here, since not only is *Volpone* tightly-structured and fast-moving, but the characters are finely-drawn types with an allegorical emphasis brought out by the underlying beast fable after which they are all named. The concept of folly in the play is thus a wide one, encompassing many versions of the false estimation of things and delusion, and providing the plot with a variety of moral perversions which are all ultimately judged.

The most prevalent false estimation or delusion in the play is the folly of the worldling, again a broad term, but revealed most

25. Borrowings from the *Moriae Encomium* are best addressed in John D. Rea's edition of *Volpone* (New Haven, 1919).

potently in the vice of avarice with which Jonson opens the play.²⁶ Avarice, as we saw, was a popular theme in Elizabethan verse satire, particularising the economic injustices of the latter part of Elizabeth's reign in portraits of grain-hoarders, unjust landlords and pretentious courtiers. Avarice is, of course, one of the seven deadly sins, seen as an elevation of money into a God-like position (contravening the first commandment), and condoning the practice of gathering interest and multiplying money, which itself was considered sinful.²⁷ The avaricious type was also well established from Medieval moralities as a stingy, cruel and villainous man, one who is blinded to the needs of others in his relentless pursuit of money. Dekker describes an avaricious man as "a dog, that to meet profit, would to the very eyelids wade in blood of his own children."²⁸ Jonson's portrayal of this type is not limited to *Volpone*, although it is in this play that avarice is centralised as a major theme, outplayed by six variations of greed. Sordido in *Every Man Out of His Humour* is a clear representative of the conventional avaricious man, gloating over the money which he has, and wishing others ill: "Why let 'hem starue, what's that to me" (I.iii.103). Jacques de Prie in *The Case is Altered* is similarly conventional, comically dominated by the thoughts of his gold and - in another stock device - suspecting his own daughter of theft. In later plays like *The*

26. See G. K. Hunter, "English Folly and Italian Vice: the moral Landscape of John Marston", in *Jacobean Theatre*, edited by J.R. Brown and B. Harris (London, 1960).

27. The latter aspect of the sin of avarice is featured in many other plays of the period, most obviously Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.

28. *The Honest Whore in The Dramatic Works Of Thomas Dekker*, edited by Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, 1953), II, 1-227 (p.99).

Alchemist and *Bartholomew Fair* avarice is seen as a major motivating force behind the schemes of the Londoners who exploit a parallel greed in their visitors to house and fair.

Volpone's folly is more than simple avarice, however, and Volpone's opening speech involving the worship of his gold uses such religious language that we can see that the folly of delusion or the false estimation of things begins with a basis of blasphemy.²⁹ Addressing his gold Volpone concludes:

Thou art vertue, fame,
Honour, and all things else! Who can get thee,
He shall be noble, valiant, honest, wise-.
(I.i.25-27)

Money is the beginning of his folly, but its influence spreads further than mere avarice. An interesting parallel for our purposes is noticed by Robert Ornstein in Nicholas Coeffeteau's *A Table of Humane Passions*, linking Volpone's other follies to the stem of his riches:

Rich men are also voluptuous, effeminate and full of ostentation and vanity, that makes them to glory of their treasures; they are voluptuous and effeminate by reason of the continuall delights wherein they plunge themselves; they are vaine, and glory of their wealth, for that their thoughts are perpetually employed in the imagination of their abundance, whereof they are rather slaves and Idolaters, then true possessors and masters.³⁰

The folly of the worldling, of one who strives after ephemeral pleasures, is illustrated by the plot of *Volpone* in each of the characters: none has wisdom enough to see beyond immediate gain, and the blindness they depict finds parallels in all the folly literature

29. The folly of avarice can thus be linked with the concept of folly as sin because it ignores or supplants the position of God: "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (quoted and discussed above, chapter 1).

30. Translated by Edward Grimeston (London, 1621), p.679. Quoted in "Volpone and Renaissance Psychology", *N & Q*, 201 (1956), pp.471-2.

we have considered. For Barclay, it will be remembered, the worst of all follies was that of neglecting to prepare for the next life. In "Of them that dyspyse euerlastynge ioye, and setteth thynges transytory before thynges eternall and euerlastynge" Barclay writes:

He is a foule that weyeth in one balaunce
 The heven and erth to know the heuyest
 And by his foly and cursed ignoraunce
 He thynketh that this wretchyd erth is best
 And thoughe that here be neyther ioy nor rest
 Yet had some leuer here styll to remayne
 Than to depart to heuen voyde of al payne.
 (I, 215)

Volpone is also scornful of death and the after-life when he pretends to be a corpse to aid his cause. Dicing with death in this way can only be regarded as folly by Barclay, who lays great emphasis on fools who despise death. In a chapter entitled "Of folys that despyse deth makynge no provision therfore" we read:

O cruell deth, o fury fauorles
 So fyers art thou of loke and countenaunce
 That thou nought sparest vertue nor ryches
 Beauty nor byrth, strength nor valyaunce
 Eche creature thou bryngest to vttraunce
 Thou shewest none his season nor his tyde
 So is he vnwyse that wyll the nat prouyde.
 (II, 113)

In Erasmian terms, Volpone's folly is a case of the perverted wise man or the proud fool. The play consistently upholds Volpone and Mosca's superiority to the rest of the dramatis personae, but the irony of a speech like Volpone's on old age and avarice is clear: asserting standards by which he (and the audience) judges Corbaccio, we see instantly who is really the fool:

So many cares, so many maladies,
 So many feares attending on old age,
 Yea, death so often call'd on, as no wish
 Can be more frequent with 'hem, their limbs faint,
 Their senses dull, their seeing, hearing, going,
 All dead before them; yea, their very teeth,
 Their instruments of eating, fayling them:
 Yet this is reckon'd life! Nay, here was one,
 Is now gone home, that wishes to liue longer!
 Feeles not his gout, nor palsie, faines himselfe
 Yonger, by scores of yeeres, flatters his age,
 With confident belying it, hopes he may

With charms, like AESON, haue his youth restor'd:
 And with these thoughts so battens, as if fate
 Would be as easily cheated on, as he.

(I.iv.144-158)

The language itself has similarities with Erasmus' Folly's description of old age, and the same irony is there, that it is through folly that we are offered a second childhood in old age, and a blissful ignorance of our real fate. Folly states in the *Moriae Encomium*: "It's a fact that as soon as the young grow up and develop the sort of mature sense which comes through experience and education, the bloom of youthful beauty begins to fade at once, enthusiasm wanes, gaiety cools down, and energy slackens" (p.91). It is precisely this fate which Volpone tries to avoid himself, and the irony of his judging it in others is multiplied when the attempted rape of Celia exemplifies Volpone acting out the fading of age while maintaining the heat of youth. Folly promises that she alone can save man from the inevitable slackening of age, but her "witless" old man is the type of true fool, living in the blissful ignorance which is reserved for those who will admit their folly. It is clear in Jonson's play, that Volpone is both too proud and too full of worldly wisdom to qualify for such a metamorphosis.

Volpone sees the first of Jonson's grotesque fools, using the word in the sense of abnormal characters. Nano "a dwarfe", Castrone "an eunuch" and Androgyno "a hermaphrodite" are introduced in the second scene of the play to entertain Volpone. They conclude their antics with a song full of Erasman tones:

Fooles, they are the onely nation
 Worth mens enuy, or admiration;
 Free from care, or sorrow-taking,
 Selues, and others merry-making:
 All they speake, or doe, is sterling.
 Your Foole, he is your great mans dearling,
 And your ladies sport, and pleasure;
 Tongue, and bable are his treasure.
 Eene his face begetteth laughter,
 And he speakes truth, free from slaughter;
 Hee's the grace of euery feast,

And, sometimes, the chiefest guest. (I.ii.66-76)

The carefree attitude, bringing joy to themselves and others and gracing every feast - all these are qualities Erasmus' Folly promises her true followers, and they are the substance of the fool-figure which Shakespeare developed to its fullest extent in his major comedies. Jonson takes the same tradition, but the representation of his fools mixes carefree folly with grotesque perversion. The three fools here stand for unnaturalness (in a way which contrasts with Costard and his defence for the "natural" in *Love's Labour's Lost*). However, at the same time as being unnatural in their perverted sexuality and physical appearance, they maintain a kind of naturalness not altogether alien from Costard's plea. They are self-aware and humble in a way not seen elsewhere in the dramatic personae; they are innocent of the avarice and ambition which motivates the other characters and marks them out as foolish; and ultimately they soften the harshness of judgments at the close of the play. The fools are exempted from the punishments and sent off by Mosca with the charge "Goe, recreate your selues, abroad; goe, sport" (V.v.11); Mosca divides them off from the folly of the other characters which is judged at the close of the play with severity.

The implication of the three fools being sent off before the final scenes, is that folly such as theirs is not subject to purging: it is not vicious, and neither is it curable. This distinction is repeated again at the end of the play, in the orders of the Avocatori that Volpone must give his gold to the Hospital of the *Incurabili*, and emphasises a theme of incurable disease in the play commented on by Harriet Hawkins:

Volpone's line "to bee a foole borne, is a disease incurable," stresses the relationship between folly and incurable disease which Jonson establishes throughout his comedy. The characterization and action involve numerous feigned or real diseases, while "cures" prescribed for these "incurable"

maladies include gold, Celia, Scoto's oil, and Lady Would-be's medicines.³¹

It is fitting, therefore, that Volpone's gold, the root cause of the folly of the play, should be dedicated to caring for the innocent fools at the Hospital of the *Incurabili*, and Volpone to be made to taste real sickness:

thy substance all be straight confiscate
 To the hospitall, of the *Incurabili*:
 And, since the most was gotten by imposture,
 By faining lame, gout, palsey, and such diseases,
 Thou art to lie in prison, cramp't with irons,
 Till thou bee'st sicke, and lame indeed.
 (V.xii.119-124)

The Hospitall of Incurable Fooles was, in fact, a book written in Italian by Tomaso Garzoni and translated into English in 1600. A follower of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, the author sets out to praise folly by dedicating the book to "the Good old Gentlewoman and her special benefactress, Madame Fortune, Dame Folly", and prefacing it with his reasons for writing it:

the principallest cause that I being amazed and astonished at this their so great folly, after my Theatre of sundrie humors and inclinations, have taken upon me to build this most famous Hospitall, where the renowned folly of these men may be seene and discerned.³²

The author sets out his plan to build a separate cell for each fool, and to recommend each to the protection of a particular god. The hospital is run on the grounds of a public attraction, a charge of "at least a peece of twenty" being made for admission, and the show includes a monster with many heads, followed by chambers of unreasonable people and sottish folk. The text itself is divided into thirty discourses with titles like "Of follie in General", "Of

31. "Folly, Incurable Disease and Volpone", *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 8 (1968), pp.335-348 (p.335).

32. *The Hospitall of Incurable Fooles* (London, 1600), "Prologue of the Author".

solitarie and melancholike fooles", "Of drunken fooles", and "Of stupide, forlorne and exoticall fooles". After some of the discourses are specific petitions to gods, "A Prayer to the Goddess Minerva", "An Orizon to Apollo", "A Supplication to Caron".

The style of the writing is witty throughout, and the format similar to Barclay's classification of fools. Like Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* there is a stream of classical allusions both in the text and in marginalia. The humour of the text comes primarily from its content, including cases of a man who thought he was a shoe piece, another a mustard seed. A separate section is included for natural fools, as distinct from the other types, and here are found the seasonal fools and the fools in love. Similarly there is a separate discourse on female fools: "concerning that part of the Hospitall which appertaineth to Women, wherein he wittily setteth down all the former kindes of folly to be likewise resident in them".³³ The spectators are guided, cell by cell, on a tour through this section of the hospital, while the author describes in detail the causes, symptoms and effects of madness (the inmates are regarded as mad, as well as fools) in each case.

The intention of the author is not to show happy fools, rather it is to portray the "miserie of these unhappie and infortunate", and to show to his paying guests that the strange and unusual fools are, in fact, counterfeits: "nothing, but Kings of Crickets, doctor doddipowles, grout-headed Gracians, or cockscombelike Merlins, as in truth they are". From this fantastical display it is hoped that "by meane whereof, discovering other mens follies, you may shew your selues the wiser".³⁴ *The Hospitall of Incurable Fooles* maintains, therefore, the ambiguities we saw in chapter 3 concerning whether the

33. *ibid*, p.140ff.

34. *ibid*, "Prologue of the Author".

inmates are actually madmen or merely aping madness. Jonson's *Volpone* ends on a similar note, pointing to the distinction made in the humour plays between those who are driven by a humour, in a medical sense, and those who merely affect to be so.

The comedy of *Epicoene* or *The Silent Woman* (1610) centres on the purging of a misanthrope who genuinely seems to be an example of monstrous humour. Morose's humoral folly also seems to be incurable, although of a very different kind to the carefree folly of *Volpone's* grotesques. Morose's hatred of noise is the primary motivation of the plot, and the disinheriting of Dauphine is simply one example of the irrational conduct into which Morose's humoral folly leads him. Similarly, the subplots of the play add to this major theme and reveal the absurd isolation of Morose by occurring in his house as repeated invasions of his cherished peace and privacy. Morose is thus taunted and his folly repeatedly exposed, but he is never purged or cured and remains as intractable as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, unwilling or unable to admit his irrational conduct is folly, and therefore excluded from the festivities and feasting of the rest of the characters.

The play also marks the beginning of Jonson's explicit use of festival motifs, something which by the time he came to write *Bartholomew Fair*, was an important and integral part of his overall concept of folly. In this play Morose has a particular hatred of festival and celebration, and the festival days are isolated as a major source of anguish for him. Clerimont describes the lengths Morose will go to in order to escape the bell-ringing of holidays:

he was wont to goe out of towne euery satterday at ten a clock, or on holy-day-eues. But now, by reason of the sicknesse, the perpetuitie of ringing has made him deuise a roome, with double walls, and treble seelings; the windores close shut, and calk'd: and there he liues by candle-light. (I.i.181-186)

Truewits' first plan to antagonise Morose is similarly concerned with festival, in giving him a false almanac in order to upset his calculations of when to take such precautions. Festive images of disruption of order³⁵ are also common in the play: the domination of husbands by their wives, which inverts the image of the taming of the shrew, is made explicit by Haughty's approving words concerning Centaure's success: "Here's Centaure has immortaliz'd her selfe, with taming of her wilde male" (IV.iii.27-28). The marriage relationships of this play are the complete inversion of a biblical submission of wife to husband, and Mrs. Otter's words parody the marriage ceremony: "That I would bee Princesse, and raigne in mine owne house: and you would be my subiect and obay me" (III.i.33-5). Morose's seeking for a silent wife is similarly an inversion of the traditional order, as is the final discovery that Epicoene is, after all, a boy.

The folly of the male counterparts to the rampant ladies of the college is exposed by their outrageous boasting, which is similar to the lords' behaviour we saw in *Love's Labour's Lost*. This exposure reaches its height in *Epicoene* in the disagreement over who enjoyed the favours of the Silent Woman first; a disagreement which is, of course, exploded once we discover that Epicoene is not a woman at all. Perversity runs through the play at each level of characters, and the gulling leaves little which is not ridiculed. It is as if there is a scale of folly from the proud anti-festive stance of Morose at one end, down to the ridiculous behaviour of the fools, John Daw and Sir Amorous La Foole at the other. While neither is allowed to go without ridicule, neither can represent an ideal which the satirist wants to uphold. The three wits, though dominant in the

35. See Ian Donaldson, *The World Upside Down* (Oxford, 1970), pp.31-32.

play to a certain extent, are themselves subject to satire.³⁶ The technique of involving them in the plot as gulls and wits is important in its not allowing the audience to rely on a single viewpoint, or to deem any of the dramatis personae above the criticism of satire.

The fooling and gulling which is used to expose folly in *Epicoene* is closer to the technique we saw used in the three Shakespearean plays studied above, where the plot is more integral to the exposure of the characters' folly, and exposure rests on the premise that, once admitted, the folly can be purged. Jonson still has a strongly Medieval and allegorical basis in his depiction of Morose, his character dominated by one humour, and his behaviour exemplifying it in crude caricature: but Jonson's methods are less caustic and his agents of satire closer to the rest of the dramatis personae than was the case in the humour plays. Folly has begun to be more integral to the plays in a covert, embedded sense, and in the later comedies of *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair* we will see how its potential is exploited ever more powerfully.

36. Critics disagree as to which wit is least subject to satire. For example, Truewit is supported by Jonas Barish in *Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960), p.179. Robert Knoll, however, in *Ben Jonson's Plays: An Introduction* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1964), p.114, supports Dauphine.

4. *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair*: Erasmian folly?

The Alchemist (1610) has been described as Jonson's "estates play"³⁷, due to its hierarchy of representative figures forming a cross-section or microcosm of society. The pattern of satiric personae which sets up the three wits in *Clerimont*, *Truewit* and *Duaphine* is mirrored by the three dupers in *The Alchemist*, but here the satiric personae are closer to those in *Volpone*, being conspirators who exploit the weaknesses of the other characters, and who are all ultimately exposed as victims of their own schemes. The gulls in *The Alchemist* are all representative figures: *Dapper* a young lawyer, *Abel Drugger* a young merchant, a knight in the form of *Sir Epicure Mammon* who considers himself an agent of social reform, religious men *Ananias* and *Tribulation Wholesome*, and a young country heir, *Kastril*. The characters thus make up a wide range of gulls through which to exemplify and satirise follies of various kinds. The estates tradition which we saw originally in *Barclay's Ship of Fools*, (and used by Jonson in *Volpone*), lends to the concept of folly a breadth and universal quality, showing it to be permeated throughout all levels of society.

As in *Volpone*, the principal root of folly in the play is the vice of avarice, and it is the magnetism of the properties of the philosopher's stone which draws the dupes to *Lovewit's* house and leads them to be exposed. Jonson is explicit in the prologue as to the "wholesome" nature of his satire, and the exposure of each representative has a moral purpose behind it:

37. Alan C. Dessen, "*The Alchemist: Jonson's Estates Play*", *Ren D*, 7 (1964), pp.35-54.

Our Scene is London, 'cause we would make knowne,
 No countries mirth is better than our owne.
 No clime breeds better matter, for your whore,
 Bawd, squire, imposter, many persons more,
 Whose manners, now call'd humors, feed the stage:
 And which haue still beene subiect, for the rage
 Or spleene of *comick*-writers. Though this pen
 Did neuer aime to grieue, but better men;
 How e'er the age, he liues in, doth endure
 The vices that she breeds, aboue their cure.
 But, when the wholsome remedies are sweet,
 And, in their working, gaine, and profit meet,
 He hopes to find no spirit so much diseas'd,
 But will, with such faire correctiues, be pleas'd.
 (Prologue 5-18)

The tone is markedly different from that in which Asper promised to "strip the ragged follies of the time, / Naked, as at their birth" (*Every Man Out of His Humour*, After the Second Sounding, 17-18). The use of "humours" has also changed since the early plays, and here it is broadened to "manners", rather than a more purely medical or psychological definition. It is true, of course, that it is the author who speaks in the prologue, and not the agents of satire from the play itself: we can imagine their motives to be less morally educative certainly, but they are firmly contained within the structure of the play proper, and will likewise be judged within that structure themselves. Folly is thus clearly present in all the characters, and the role of the satiric persona has been amalgamated far more into the "common humanity" of the estates represented.

Sir Epicure Mammon is probably the most evident creature of folly in the play, and his aims and ambitions (which he seeks to fulfill with the aid of the stone) provide a brilliant summary of the folly of the worldling mentioned earlier in connection with *Volpone*. Sir Epicure's faith in the power of money covers all things desirable in this life: the promise of youth to the aging, and safety from disease; topically, for Jonson's audience, he wildly promises: "I'll vndertake, withall, to fright the plague / Out o' the kingdome, in three months" (II.i.69-70). Sir Epicure's picture of life with the

stone's financing is reminiscent of the pictures of Cockayne in Medieval folly literature; both emphasise the exemption from normal rules of living and from the unpleasant physical constraints of the real world.³⁸ Further connections can be made concerning the power of the stone to overcome and invert the natural world, and the supernatural power of religion. As the Orders of Fools in Medieval folly literature based themselves on a parody of a religious order, so the regime Sir Epicure seeks to create is based on a parody of religion in the worship of the philosopher's stone through the doctrines of alchemy. E.B. Partridge notices such a relation in *The Broken Compass*:

the alchemist (Subtle or gold) becomes a parody of the Creator. To sincere alchemists, who were mystical idealists, alchemy was a religion or quasi-religion. To Jonson, a moral idealist and a dogmatic Christian who approached alchemy with no sympathy for the religious impulse in its heart, it seemed only an obscene fraud, and alchemic terms only a parody of the Word.³⁹

Certainly, the exchange between Subtle and Face in Act II scene v uses institutional language in a mock-catechism which seems to underline the folly of this accomplished swindle:

SUB:Sirah, my varlet, stand you forth and speake
to him,
Like a *Philosopher*: Answer, i'the language.
Name the vexations, and the martyrizations
Of mettalls, in the worke.
FAC:Sir, *Putrefaction,*
Solution, Ablution, Sublimation,
Cohobation, Calcination, Ceration, and
Fixation. (II.v.18-24)

The series of tricks and gulling incidents flow smoothly in the play, and ultimately our judgment as audience comes more from within than in the earlier comedies. Subtle, Face and Dol involve the audience in a way that Asper/Macilente could not, and the revelation

38. A link can also be made here with Erasmus' Folly who cites her place of birth as the "Isles of the Blest", *Moriae Encomium*, p.89.

39. *The Broken Compass* (London, 1958), p.127.

of folly in *The Alchemist* thus is able to have a more powerful cathartic effect than that of the humour plays. That is to say, the concept of folly in this play has moved on, towards the more inclusive folly seen in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* where all are, to some extent, united in folly by virtue of being human, and the audience is aware of its own inclusion in the general judgments on behaviour. This technique of drawing the audience into a mutual awareness of folly is vital to *The Alchemist*, and the judgment scene at the end of the play is more successful because of it. As we observed in Shakespeare, the concept of folly has become gradually more embedded, and its effectiveness increased. It is not until *Bartholomew Fair* that Jonson fully embraces the positive effects of folly and uses it in as wide a range of meanings as Erasmus and the later Shakespearean comedies do. Nevertheless, the development of Jonson's concept of folly can be seen to be changing as we move chronologically through the comedies. It moves from a schematic and negative folly in the humour plays, through the intermediate stages outlined above, and ultimately to the synthesis of both negative and positive understandings of folly in *Bartholomew Fair*.

In *The Alchemist* a further indication of the changing attitude to folly lies in the more positive attitude to Face. The comedy rests on the folly of self-gratification being shown up, both in the misplaced enthusiasm of the victims, and in the exposure of the victimisers. Surly and Lovewit, who aspire to oppose Face's vice and uncover his deceptions, never really achieve a sufficient degree of insight to become the heroes, and Face's resourcefulness in the light of his master's unexpected return leaves him not outside our judgment, but intact: his folly is paid for in part by his wit, and the fortuitous marriage he arranges for Lovewit with the rich Dame

Pliant is another ploy which earns a certain amount of our admiration.

The conclusion of *The Alchemist* thus exposes folly on all levels. Although the tricks are discovered, Subtle and Dol go free and Face saves himself, as we have seen. The victimisers are not condemned in the manner that we saw at the end of *Volpone*, and their vice is viewed rather as opportunist folly. The exposure of each of the victims rests on their basic folly of covering up secret avarice, and their fate at the hands of the victimisers seems fair indication that they are not much better than the so-called rogues, in the play's estimation. Lovewit's concluding speech emphasises festive goodwill rather than condemnation: age is transformed to youth, marriage and riches celebrated, and Face promises new guests and feasting:

LOV: Whiffe in with your sister, brother Boy. That master
 That had receiu'd such happinesse by a seruant,
 In such a widdow, and with so much wealth,
 Were very vngratefull, if he would not be
 A little indulgent to that seruants wit,
 And helpe his fortune, though with some small straine
 Of his owne candor. Therefore, gentlemen,
 And kind Spectators, if I haue out-stript
 An old man's grauitie, or strict canon, thinke
 What a yong wife, and a good braine may doe:
 Stretch ages truth sometimes, and crack it too.
 (V.v.146-156)

The tone of this ending verges on the wit and humour of Erasmus' Folly, and the caustic edge of the satirist we observed earlier castigating folly has given way to a lighter, more festive tone⁴⁰ in a celebration of man's wit which was unthinkable in the humour plays, but will go on to be explored in *Bartholomew Fair*.

Bartholomew Fair (1614) moves the action of the plot into an overtly festive setting, that of the Smithfield Fair in London. Its

40. See J.A. Barish, "Feasting and Judging in Jonsonian Comedy", *Ren D*, 3 (1972), pp.3-35

characters, like those in *The Alchemist*, follow the pattern of estates literature both in the wide range of figures through society, and in the caricaturing, emphasised in the matching of appropriate names to character in, for example, Zeal-of-the-Land Busy and Winwife. There is the same interplay between victims and victimisers as we have seen developing in the last few comedies, and the figure of justice is reminiscent of Clement in *Every Man In His Humour*, but with the significant difference that he is present, in disguise, throughout the action. In several noticeable ways the play looks back to *Every Man Out of His Humour*, not least in the size of the cast (thirty-three speaking parts), and in the looser plot structure when compared to *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*. The return to writing an Induction is also interesting, since this technique of framing is absent from the intervening plays, where an "argument" section is used instead to explain the outline of the action. The "articles of agreement" which preface *Bartholomew Fair* include the audience from the start, and the feeling of festivity is furthered as the groundlings are set up as judges for "two houres and a halfe, and somewhat more". Within the action of the play itself are three festive occasions: St. Bartholomew's Day; the day of the marriage between Bartholomew Cokes and Grace Wellborn; and the day of freeing Cokes from his tutor, Wasp, and Grace from her guardian, Overdo. Other festive images of inversion are seen in the figure of the justice in the stocks⁴¹, the emphasis on chance in Grace's choice of a husband, the game of vapours, and frequent images of chance and

41. See T. W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude* (Leicester, 1958), pp.93-5, and I. Donaldson, *The World Upside Down*, p.65, for more on this familiar image.

game.⁴² Similarly, the final puppet show motif is one of gaming and the disruption of order in parallel with the action of the plot: Busy's objections to the puppet show are opposed to the final point when he is triumphantly humiliated as the Puppet "takes up his garment" in defiance:

It is your old stale argument against the Players, but it will not hold against the Puppets; for we have neyther Male nor female amongst vs. And that thou may'st see, if thou wilt, like a malicious purblinde zeale as thou art! (V.v.103-106)

The putting down of Busy's hypocritical authority forms a precedent which is repeated to greater effect in the final judgment scenes when the authority of Justice Overdo is similarly undermined, as we shall see.

Folly in *Bartholomew Fair* is thus set within an atmosphere of festivity, and the folly of the characters is hedged around with images and metaphors of disorder and inversion in the plot itself. As Levin⁴³ has shown, however, the structuring of the play is very careful and tight, and the large cast is broken down into groups which interact, divide and regroup throughout the course of the action. The disorder is therefore displayed within a framework of order, the images of festival folly and disruption being used as a context for the various gulling incidents. The characters are gradually matched up with their opposite numbers in the other groups, and suggestive juxtaposition of characters with each other, and with the context of festival folly, leads to a greater illumination of each representative facet of folly within the play as a whole.

42. For example "leap-frogge chance" (I.i.9); "sport call'd *Dorring the Dottrell*" (IV.ii.21); "an' euer any *Bartholomew* had that lucke in't, that I haue had, I'le be martyr'd for him" (IV.ii.71-2).

43. Richard Levin, "The Structure of *Bartholomew Fair*", *PMLA*, 80 (1956), pp.172-179.

Bartholomew Cokes and John Littlewit are both denoted as fools by their very names ("Cokes" is another word for "dolt"), and both exemplify behaviour of the naturally witless. In Cokes' case this witlessness is unguarded - he is repeatedly the victim of theft at the hands of the fair, and yet maintains a wide-eyed, childlike enthusiasm. For example, at the first loss of his purse he plans a ruse, with ill-timed glee that we know must end in disaster:

I would ha' him come againe, now, and but offer at it. Sister, will you take notice of a good iest? I will put it iust where th'other was, and if we ha' good lucke, you shall see a delicate fine trap to catch the cutpurse, nibbling. (II.vi.128-132)

John Littlewit's folly is not so naive, since as his name suggests, though he too has little wit, he nonetheless has pretensions to great wit. Littlewit is not a natural fool like Cokes, but is rather one who is fooled by his own pride and made ridiculous by his blindness, both to himself and to others' opinions of his "pretty conceits" and tiresome wordplay. Win-the-Fight, his wife, is similarly steeped in hypocrisy, this time of a moral kind, a folly which aligns her to Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, though in Win-the-Fight it is less firmly rooted. When the temptation of becoming a lady in green is proffered, Win's scruples fade conveniently away. Her mother, Dame Purecraft, is likewise hypocritical in her Puritan stance, but has a more calculated aim of bringing in money. In this she contrasts with her opposite in the Cokes' party, Dame Overdo, who though foolish in her conduct, is not fundamentally crooked and has none of Dame Purecraft's calculating spirit. (A spirit emphasised in the irony of her name.)

Grace Wellborn's name is also not without significance. It provides an interesting contrast to the wordplay on "grace" we discussed in *Love's Labour's Lost* (see chapter 4), particularly in the theological sense of grace meaning undeserved redemption and forgiveness. Grace is consistently referred to as a match far above

Cokes' deserving: Quarlous and Winwife vocalise what the audience begin to feel in Act I scene v:

QUAR:What pittie 'tis yonder wench should marry
such a Cokes?

WIN-W:'tis true.

QUAR:Shee seemes to be discreete, and as sober as
shee is handsome.

WIN-W:I, and if you marke her, what a restrain'd
scorne she casts vpon all his behauour, and
speeches? (I.v.52-58)

Guy Hamel discusses the rather negative critical response to Grace and argues that her behaviour has, in fact, been generally misunderstood. He puts particular emphasis on her acknowledgment of chance, and acceptance of it in the world of the fair:

She puts a decisive end to the quarrel [between Quarlous and Winwife] in a manner that makes her the only sensible peace-maker at the Fair. Her opposite number in the other fights are those muddle-headed incompetents, Haggis and Bristle. Instead of the battle she substitutes a contest based completely on chance. She therefore becomes the first person in the play to recognise the place of chance within the environment of the Fair and to employ the scope it affords. Her conduct is on the persuasive testimony of her own explanation reasonable, even sage.⁴⁴

Certainly the explanation of her conduct gives high mention of reason:

If you both loue mee, as you pretend, your owne reason will tell you, but one can enioy me...

Sure you thinke me a woman of an extreme leuity, Gentlemen, or a strange fancy, that (meeting you by chance in such a place, as this, both at one instant, and not yet of two hours acquaintance, neither of you deseruing afore the other, of me) I should so forsake my modesty (though I might affect one more particularly) as to say, This is he, and name him...

If you would not giue it to my modesty, allow it yet to my wit; giue me so much of a woman, and cunning, as not to betray my selfe impertinently. How can I iudge of you, so farre as to choyse, without knowing you more?
(IV.iii.7-8, 21-26, 29-32)

Grace's position, as she explains, is not one which allows for rational decision, and her turning the decision over to fate,

44. "Order and Judgement in *Bartholomew Fair*", *UTQ*, 43 (1973), pp.48-67 (p.53).

prepared to make the best of it, is a pragmatic move on her part: "And if fate send me an vnderstanding husband, I haue no fear at all, but mine owne manners shall make him a good one" (IV.iii.36-8). In leaving the choice to a lottery, and that at the hands of the madman, Trouble-all, Grace symbolically aligns herself with the Fair and its emphasis on chance, and exemplifies the humility we saw praised in Shakespeare's comedies. This itself stems from Erasmus' Folly, and her advice on how to play the "comedy of life" in the *Moriae Encomium*: "a man's conduct is misplaced if he doesn't adapt himself to things as they are, has no eye for the main chance...and asks for the play to stop being a play" (p.103). Grace displays a salutary facet of folly in her rejection of worldly wisdom which parallels Folly's advice in the *Moriae Encomium*, and represents a positive version of wisdom in contrast to the lack of it displayed in Bartholomew Cokes. Each variety of folly thus comments on the next, and gradually we are able to see how *Bartholomew Fair* achieves the synthesis we posited earlier, between the negative folly of Jonson's early plays, and the positive elements which become more visible in the mature comedies. *Bartholomew Fair*, at the end of this chronological line of development, is most remarkable for its range and inclusiveness in the overall concept of folly, a range which we observed first in the *Moriae Encomium*, and saw exploited gradually by Shakespeare in his comedies studied earlier.

Having seen witless folly in Cokes, pretentious witlessness in Littlewit, a hierarchy of moral and religious hypocrites in Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, Dame Purecraft and Win-the-Fight, and now a type of positive folly in Grace, we can see such a range, and its noticeable parallels to the all-encompassing vision of Erasmus' concept of folly. Two more types of folly will conclude our discussion, and these are located in the native inhabitants of the Fair itself.

We have already seen Trouble-all the madman's role in choosing Grace a husband, and his purity from bias or tainture of worldly wisdom is contrasted to those in the play who rely on themselves. His mad irrationality is juxtaposed with others' pretensions to rationality on several occasions, notably Adam Overdo's pride and vanity are reflected in his judgment of the madman: "What should hee be, that doth so esteeme, and advance my warrant? He seemes a sober and discreet person" (IV.i.26-28). Likewise Trouble-all's part in delivering Busy and Wasp from the stocks is highly charged with a positive view of madness and commented on in paradoxical terms by Dame Purecraft:

Mad doe they call him! The world is mad in error, but hee is mad in truth: I loue him o'the sudden (the cunnyng man sayd all true) and shall loue him more, and more. How well it becomes a man to be mad in truth! O, that I might be his yoake-fellow, and be mad with him, what a many should wee draw to madnesse in truth, with vs! (IV.vi.169-174)

Dame Purecraft's words amount to a praise of madness, and the irony in her wishing to be similarly mad and campaign thus for the truth, is clear and sharp.

Pure madness in Trouble-all is contrasted with the folly of pure appetite in many of the other Smithfield natives. It is significant that appetite brings the Littlewits to the Fair (drawn by the smell of roasting pig), and the Cokes come to satisfy a longing for fruit. However, the most obvious statement on appetite in the play is Ursula in her pig-booth. Folly, in the *Moriae Encomium*, endorses appetite and gratification in drink and drunkenness, pleasure at banquets and parties, sexual gratification and freedom for the passions over the reason, by setting up:

two raging tyrants in opposition to reason's solitary power: anger, which holds sway in the breast and so controls the heart, the very source of life, and lust, whose empire spreads far and wide, right down to the genitals. (p.95)

Ursula's pig-booth emanates both anger and lust, and her presiding figure combines the two in imagery and characterisation. The effect of her booth on other characters is striking: even Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, who seeks it out (significantly by the smell), emerges with passionate anger which leads him to overturn the gingerbread stand. Similarly, Win-the-Fight and Dame Overdo are led to the pig-booth to use Ursula's "common pot" (after indulging one kind of appetite) and end up as whores, satisfying another kind. Anger and lust are also combined in the violence between the whores vying for custom:

URS:Yonder is your *Punque* of Turnbull, ramping
 Ales, has falne vpon the poore Gentlewoman
 within, and pull'd her hood ouer her eares, and
 her hayre through it...

ALE:The poore common whores can ha' no traffique
 for the priuy rich ones, your caps and hoods of
 veluet, call away our customers, and lick the
 fat from vs. (IV.v.61-3, 69-71)

Ales' metaphor of licking the fat again reminds us of the context of the pig-booth, and neatly links together the various outplayings of the folly of appetite.

Erasmus' Folly's words on appetite have already been considered, in chapter 6, in relation to *Measure for Measure*. There Angelo falls victim to the overpowering forces of lust for Isabella, and his reliance on human reason alone is seen to be insufficient to control his passions. We concluded that Angelo could be compared to the portrait of a Stoic fool in the *Moriae Encomium*, one who refuses to admit the presence of human weakness or folly. Lust, as a form of appetite, can also be linked to avarice, an overwhelming appetite for money. Both come from the list of the seven deadly sins, and are vices used by Jonson as the root of the folly shown in his characters in *Volpone* and *Bartholomew Fair* in particular. The point made in each case is the same one as we saw in *Measure for Measure*, that a vice like this must be admitted and acknowledged in order to be

overcome; it is the greatest folly to refuse to admit to human weakness and incontinence. However, the way in which the vice is judged relates to Jonson's gradual change of perspective on folly, and where avarice was unequivocally put down at the end of *Volpone*, the appetites of the fair-goers in the latter play are judged from a more enlightened perspective. The vice is not considered any less, but the attitude to it is tempered by an awareness of a similar weakness in the judge, Justice Overdo, and by a lightening of the author's tone as human folly and weakness are admitted as being universal. As we saw in the development of Shakespeare's concept of folly through the three comedies studied, Jonson's attitude also becomes more positive, and there is a greater willingness to see the complexities when it comes to making judgments.

An analysis of the final scene of *Bartholomew Fair* will show how it is markedly different in the tone and measure of its judgment when compared to the conclusions of Jonson's earlier comedies. This is due, in part, to the figure of authority, Justice Overdo. It is a careful irony that Overdo disguises himself initially in fool's motley, and his words make the contrast explicit: "They may haue seene many a foole in the habite of a Justice; but never till now, a Justice in the habite of a foole" (II.i.7-9). This inversion is one of many throughout the play, as we have seen, but it is emphatically Erasmian in its opposition of worldly judgment and the insight of a fool. Overdo thus comes into the category of those who think themselves wise, and will not admit their debt to folly. He uses the role and person of the fool, but without any notion of its true significance. The irony of disguise and the refusal to admit to folly is one of Erasmus' Folly's earliest complaints:

I am myself wherever I am, and no one can pretend I'm not - especially those who lay special claim to be called the personification of wisdom, even though they strut about like apes in purple and asses in Lion skins. However hard they try

to keep up the illusion, their ears stick-up and betray the Midas in them. There's an ungrateful lot of folk for you - members of my party if anyone is, and yet so ashamed of my name in public that they cast it freely at others as a term of strong abuse. (pp.87-8)

Overdo pledges himself that he will temper his severity with understanding in judgment after he hears the watch discussing his attitudes: "I will be more tender hereafter. I see compassion may become a *Iustice*, though it be a weaknesse, I confesse; and nearer a vice, then a virtue" (IV.i.82-84). Although this change of heart is gradual and it takes Overdo's experiences in the stocks to cement it at all, the final scene forces a change in his vision of others, and in place of the harshly satiric endings of the earlier plays, his branding of Enormity's forehead is itself harshly satirised. The gathering of fools and recounting of enormities is brought to an abrupt halt by the sickness of Dame Overdo, and her husband is silenced. Quarlous quickly takes up on this: "Sir, why doe you not goe on with the enormity? are you opprest with it?" (V.vi.73-4). Quarlous' reminder to Overdo (significantly "Adam" - the representative man) that he is but flesh and blood, could come from the lips of Folly herself; and his suggestion that Overdo invite them all back for dinner instead of lording over them in hypocritical judgment, completes the final picture with a festive image of common humanity and positive folly.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of folly in Shakespeare has been limited to the close analysis of three of his comedies. Their choice initially related to a desire to trace a developmental line through the chronology of the comedies, to show how the concept of folly in the plays also develops and changes. To this end, *Love's Labour's Lost* was chosen as an early comedy, one in which the references to fools are overt (although, suprisingly the word "folly" does not in fact appear), and the subjects which link Shakespeare and humanist folly, as seen in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* are clearly visible. The play is constructed around a series of themes, particularly academia, religion and love, all of which are investigated with a light-hearted emphasis on the folly of human nature in the characters' attempts to deny their limitations and inadequacies in each of these areas of life. The similarities between these themes and those found in Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* are immediately obvious, and more careful study has revealed parallels in thought between the two writers, which allow us to posit that Shakespeare is primarily humanist in his concept of folly. This claim is a central tenet of the thesis in each chapter, and the debates concerning natural law, right reason, and the attainment of theological grace are isolated as being particularly important to both writers. Each of these is investigated in the folly of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

By the time Shakespeare came to write *Twelfth Night*, he had considerably developed the fool figure through the intervening comedies (in *Touchstone* in *As You Like It*, in particular). In *Twelfth Night* folly is presented in a wider variety of ways, not all specifically humanist. The whole play is bound up with the notion of festival fooling, (even within its title), gulling and trickery link

the main and sub plots, and the folly of love investigated in *Love's Labour's Lost* becomes central as Shakespeare concentrates on the need for honesty and realism in human relationships. As well as these varieties of folly, there is an additional and related interest in madness, in the role of the unfortunate Malvolio, and in the surprised but fortunate Sebastian, who experiences a kind of Platonic madness similar to that seen in the final section of the *Moriae Encomium*. The folly in this play has widened in emphasis since *Love's Labour's Lost*, and there are parallels not only with the *Moriae Encomium* and the positive humanist concepts of folly, but also with the earlier tradition of folly emphasising the social order (a central theme of the folly in the *Ship of Fools*) and controlled disruption of the order which is a major theme of the festival. There is a continued emphasis on the need for humility, a part of the self-knowledge Shakespeare pushes his major characters towards, and ironically displays in the ignorance of their low life companions. Shakespeare uses a similar technique to Erasmus in this, since Folly praises humility by conversely condemning pride in her oration. In *Twelfth Night* the highlighting of the need for humility links with the more overtly religious themes of a play which is steeped in the symbolism of the Twelfth Night and Epiphany.

To a certain extent, the folly espoused in the last and chronologically latest play considered, *Measure for Measure*, returns in emphasis to the themes of *Love's Labour's Lost*. In both plays the controversy about law and nature is addressed, but in the darker *Measure for Measure*, almost all the humour of the earlier play has gone. Vienna's problem of immorality is linked to the pleasure-seeking behaviour of the fools of nature, those whom, like Costard, Erasmus ironically praises through the mouth of Folly as being honest about their humanity, but who show the dangerous effects of taking

that freedom too lightly. The situations of *Love's Labour's Lost* are polarised in *Measure for Measure*, and here the folly of love becomes tainted on the one side by sexual immorality in the low life characters, and on the other by Angelo and Isabella who seek to deny the existence of passion altogether and rely on their own efforts to master themselves. This latter position is one which is categorically condemned in *Love's Labour's Lost* as doomed to failure, and it is further linked to a kind of spiritual pride and blindness which has more serious theological implications.

The development of folly in Shakespeare's comedies thus centres on key issues of nature, law, reason, and grace. In each of the plays considered these areas play the major role in the exposition of folly, although the particular emphasis varies, and the general pattern is of folly becoming a vehicle for more serious moral failure as the comedies become darker in tone. In addition to the humanist element of folly, Shakespeare makes use of the wealth of imagery and symbolism surrounding both folly and madness as it was popularly conceived. For this he draws not only on the folly of the *Moriae Encomium* but also on the flourishing folly tradition which we saw in chapter 1 with its associated festivals and light-hearted gulling. Thus though we can say Shakespeare's folly is Erasmian in emphasis (and this is undoubtedly the most interesting and important point), we can also see that he made full use of the variety of the tradition of folly literature, and the more Medieval trapping of motley.

In folly it seems Shakespeare found a concept with multiple possibilities, one which he was able to take on board with its own wealth of existing symbols, and one in which he was able to develop his particular emphasis of humanism, following the lead of Erasmus. The ironical stance Erasmus created for Folly (from the mock encomium

tradition) is one which opened up the possibilities of the ironical mask for Shakespeare too, and which causes interesting problems in analysis. Frequently both writers slip between using the label "fool" in a positive and negative sense, blurring the distinctions at one point, making them obvious at another. Thus fools are praised because they are honest, follow nature and lack pretensions, but other fools are condemned because they are proud, hide behind artifice and rely on their own efforts. Shakespeare, like Erasmus, makes us think when he describes characters as fools, or puts their actions down to the effects of folly; he utilises the positive and negative aspects of the term with all their connotations. A significant part of the importance of Shakespearean folly lies in this ambivalence, in the multi-coloured motley of praise and condemnation of the human condition.

Folly in Jonson's comedies has been considered in a single chapter, encompassing the six major comedies and treating each as a stage in an overall development of a concept of folly. Unlike Shakespeare, who moves from the lighter, more humorous aspects of folly in his earlier comedy and moves towards a darker more troubled view of folly in *Measure for Measure*, Jonson changes from a dark and almost mad folly espoused in his early comedies to a lighter Erasmian folly in *Bartholomew Fair*. The development in Jonson is not as gradual as we see in Shakespeare, nor is it really a similar building up of a concept, rather it represents a much more radical change from negative folly to a synthesis of condemnatory folly with positive folly. The study of folly in Jonson begins with a brief analysis of Elizabethan verse satire, which is itself linked back to chapter 1 and its analysis of Tudor verse satire, and particularly Barclay's *Ship of Fools*. The same emphasis which we saw there, on the concept of folly as primarily a sin, an ignoring of moral values, and

ultimately an inattention to God and his future judgment, is a central theme of the Elizabethan satirists' complaint, albeit a complaint made in lascivious, almost indulgent tones. Themes of the seven deadly sins are common to both periods of satire, as is the particular attention given to sexual sin: the linking of folly to cuckoldry and marrying older women in the *Ship of Fools*, and to whoring and adultery in the Elizabethan satires discussed.

Folly in these satires is also linked to the subject of chapter 3, humoral definitions of folly, and its closeness in certain situations to madness. The medical imagery of the Elizabethan satires is particularly striking, and the repeated regarding of folly as a disease or malignant growth leads to a plethora of images of a medical or quasi-medical nature. The same notions as we saw in the medical treatises of chapter 3, of purging or cutting away folly, result in an entirely negative concept of folly, which contrasts markedly with the positive concept we saw in Shakespeare's plays. This primarily negative concept, treating folly as a form of madness and seeing its cure only in terms of harsh physical measures forms the starting point of Jonson's folly, as the scourge of the satirists' poems is transmuted into his early drama.

The six comedies of Jonson which are considered here were arranged in pairs: the two humour plays, *Volpone* and *Epicoene*, and *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair*. This was done to draw attention to the development of Jonson's overall concept of folly, and to show how the concept at its fullest representation in *Bartholomew Fair* is, in fact, a representation of Erasmanian folly which was not present in the negative folly of the early comedies.

The folly of the humour plays begins this process of development. Jonson's *Every Man In His Humour* still relies

essentially on the typological characters and representational folly through the social orders which we saw as a feature of the *Ship of Fools*. The play is heavily plot-based and fools are clearly defined and seen as cases to be dealt with, by the various means of gulling and purging. By contrast, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, seen in the context of the Elizabethan satires, is much less theatrical than its predecessor (a factor behind its lack of success on the stage), and proved to be too experimental to retain proper dramatic coherence. Nevertheless, its importance to the development of Jonson's concept of folly cannot be overestimated, freeing him from the emphasis of a gulling plot, and concentrating far more on the individuals involved within the play. The attitude towards folly is still closer to that of the Elizabethan satirists, and their concern that folly is really a kind of madness is reflected in the emphasis on humoral theory and medical diagnosis of the follies of the characters, where each is seen as a variety of malady to be ruthlessly driven out.

This attitude has begun to soften once we reach *Volpone* and *Epicoene*. Folly in *Volpone* is treated in a far more thematic way, with several facets being investigated through a balance of plot and character. The sin of avarice, a theme frequently pointed out as central to the play, links the concept of folly to that of sin, and Volpone's punishment is to become as ill as he had affected to his own ends during the play. However, the lighter tones of folly are represented in the foolish offspring of Volpone, and in the important distinction between them and the greedy victims of Volpone's schemes. For the first time we see an implication that not all fools are bad, nor is all folly reprehensible. Jonson has not yet moved on to a positive concept of folly, but the gap between it and his mad folly of the earlier plays is closing.

Epicoene is important to the development of Jonson's folly in two main ways. Carrying on from *Volpone* it moves another stage towards a notion of curing and enlightening the characters. The emphasis on humility which we saw as central to the Erasmian concept of folly in Shakespeare's plays is present here. Morose is humiliated with an ultimate purpose of bettering him through the means of exposing his folly, although he retains similarities with *Volpone* as an incurable fool. The ladies of the college add to the festival folly of the play. They are a humorous representation of inverted nature, and combine festival liberties with a comment on the folly of human nature in a lighter vein than we have so far encountered. Festival folly forms an important part of the overall concept, and in Jonson it proves to be the element which ultimately attracts the playwright, forming the context of his triumphant play about folly, *Bartholomew Fair*.

The Alchemist is the last link in the chain of development before this final play, and it reinstates the agility of plot and skill of drama which had been lacking in *Every Man Out Of His Humour* and *Epicoene*. Like *Volpone*, the central theme of the folly is avarice, but the attitude has shifted even further in favour of the skill and tenacity of the wits, and the condemnation of the hypocrisy of the citizens they gull. This division moves Jonson further towards the premises of Erasmian folly, where the fools who are most condemned are the hypocritical and proud. The black and white morality of the earlier plays gives way to a more complex situation in which even the audience is pulled up for making judgments on others' behaviour because they too are made to recognise their own folly and weakness through what they see. The madness of the earlier plays thus becomes more correctly folly, and the final scenes tempered from punishments to feasting.

Bartholomew Fair completes this development which we have been tracing, and of all Jonson's plays is both the most Erasmian in its concepts of folly, and the most successful in its blending of this with elements of festival folly. Like Shakespeare, Jonson has arrived at a multi-faceted view of folly by this stage in his writing, and the play resonates with a fullness and complexity in its concept of folly which is missing in the earlier comedies. There is variety in the types of fools represented; there is an element of the humoral aspect of folly in the themes of appetite which links the play with the avarice of *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, as well as with the Erasmian emphasis on fleshly desires; there is a comment on the role of madness as related to folly in *Trouble-all*; the element of festival folly is more completely assimilated into the whole; and there is an overall symbol in the fair itself which holds the play together structurally while allowing a greater freedom from the constraints of a more complicated plot. *Bartholomew Fair* thus achieves the fusion of the negative and positive elements of folly which we isolated earlier during the analysis of individual plays, and reaches an understanding of folly which does justice to its potential as a dramatic concept.

As we stated at the beginning of the thesis, the positive, Erasmian concept of folly relies on the negative overtones of the words "fool" and "folly" for its effectiveness of contrast. This contrast was first exploited by Paul in his Epistles to the Corinthians, relying on the previous negative concepts of folly to highlight the paradoxical and, to this extent, shocking nature of the gospel message he was seeking to put across. It is the juxtaposition of things which the world considers wise and worthy with those it considers foolish and unworthy which is the thrust of the oration of Erasmus' *Folly*, and the concept which Shakespeare and Jonson both

adopt in their comedies. The analysis of folly in this thesis has shown its wide-ranging emphases, from the negative view of the fool as madman or reprobate, through numerous intermediate versions of the fool as harmless buffoon and the protagonist of festival, to the positive version of the fool as, paradoxically, the wisest of men, able to see because of his humility, and able to act because of his indifference to the opinions of others.

Although the thesis shows that Shakespeare and Jonson arrive at this fullest use of the concept of folly by very different routes, the final plays in each of the developmental lines traced have some significant parallels and contrasts. If we compare *Measure for Measure* with *Bartholomew Fair* we can see a similarity in the ideas of the folly of enormity in Jonson's play to that of incontinence in Shakespeare's. Shakespeare condemns Angelo for denying his flesh, in the manner of a Stoic, and his failure to maintain this artificial self-restraint is seen as a positive in the sense of its opening his eyes to the folly of his actions, and in awakening humility in Angelo which is necessary to the final judgment scene. Angelo's incontinence relates to the idea of enormity in *Bartholomew Fair*, where characters are condemned for excess in their appetites, epitomised by Ursula's pig booth, and where Justice Overdo is finally unable to brand the forehead of Enormity without being abruptly stopped to be told his own wife is sick. As with Angelo, the central emphasis is on self-awareness, and whether the folly be manifest in the outwardly respectable though inwardly corrupt, like Angelo, or in the outwardly fleshly, like Lucio or Ursula; the judgment is still the same. The message remains that of Matthew 7.1-2: "Judge not that ye be not judged". Throughout these comedies we see positive and negative versions of the same thing, one praised, the other condemned; we are never allowed to rest in a cosy definition of folly

and draw simple lines between the enlightened and the unenlightened. The message of folly, like Paul's message, is one which is shockingly inverting, turning on their heads notions of respectability and worldly values. Like Paul's gospel message it seeks to address all in a common congregation of fools, through the mouthpiece of folly itself.

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The bibliography is divided into three sections

- (i) primary sources i.e. material published before 1700
- (ii) secondary sources i.e. material published after 1700
- (iii) unpublished sources

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