All that are the foemen of the Holy Writ.
Our Holy Writ and Word
For ever shall be heard
In this most holy spot.
Each wears it on his heart,
Each wears it as a sword,
Our Holy Writ and Word.
Enter in here, you ladies of high lineage,
Here be frank and fearless, enter gaily in,
Flowers of all beauty, with heaven in your faces,
Upright in bearing, modest in behaviour,
Here you will find the dwelling-place of honour.
That noble gentleman who of this place was donor,
And gives rewards, has destined it for you.
He has provided gold sufficient for its upkeep.
Gold freely given,
A man's freely shriven,
In exchange for awards.
For it brings rewards
To all mortal men,
Gold freely given.

. . .

The Rules according to Which the Thélèmites Lived

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. So it was that Gargantua had established it. In their rules there was only one clause:

Do what you will

because 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 called honour. When these same men are depressed and enslaved by vile constraint and subjection, they use this noble quality which once impelled them freely towards virtue, to throw off and break this yoke of slavery. For we always strive after things forbidden and covet what is denied us.

Making use of this liberty, they most laudably rivalled one another in all of them doing what they saw pleased one. If some man or woman said, 'Let us drink,' they all drank; if he or she said, 'Let us play,' they all played; if it was 'Let us go and amuse ourselves in the fields,' everyone went there. If it were for hawking or hunting, the ladies, mounted on fine mares, with their grand palfreys[20] following, each carried on their daintily gloved wrists a sparrow-hawk, a lanneret,[21] or a merlin,[22] the men carrying the other birds.

So nobly were they instructed that there was not a man or woman among them who could not read, write, sing, play musical instruments, speak five or six languages, and compose in them both verse and prose. Never were seen such worthy knights, so valiant, so nimble both on foot and horse; knights more vigorous, more agile, handier with all weapons than they were. Never were seen ladies so good-looking, so dainty, less tiresome, more skilled with the fingers and the needle, and in every free and honest womanly pursuit than they were.

For that reason, when the time came that anyone in that abbey, either at his parents' request or for any other reason, wished to leave it, he took with him one of the ladies, the one who had accepted him as her admirer, and they were married to one another; and if at Thélème they had lived in devotion and friendship, they lived in still greater devotion and friendship when they were married. Indeed, they loved one another to the end of their days as much as they had done on their wedding day.

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[20] **palfrey** Saddle horse.
[21] **lanneret** Male falcon, used in the sport of falconry.
[22] **merlin** A type of falcon used in the sport of falconry.

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS

Selection from *The Praise of Folly*

Between 1470 and the onset of the Protestant Reformation in the 1520s, the Renaissance spread from Italy north across the Alps, where it fused with existing Christian thought to create northern humanism. As in Italy, humanists in the north looked to the Greco-Roman past for inspiration, thereby reviving widespread interest in Classicism. Unlike in Italy, however, scholars in

northern Europe were Christians first and humanists second; they used Classical learning to shed light on perceived religious problems, namely corruption in the clergy, the church's emphasis on ritual to the neglect of moral order, and the general breakdown in spiritual life. In this way, the northern humanists pointed the way to the Protestant Reformation and helped shape Mannerism, the dominant cultural style between 1520 and 1600.

The most influential voice of northern humanism was the Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus (ca. 1466–1536), who was called by his colleagues the Prince of Humanists. Though educated in traditional Classical studies, he planned a career in the church, joining a monastery and also becoming a priest. But his love of learning and his distate for monastic life combined to lead him to literature. His writings, beginning with the *Adagia* (1500), a collection of his commentaries on quotations from Classical authors, quickly made him a well-known scholar. He traveled across Europe as the guest of princes, kings, and church leaders, and his gentle manner brought a calm to the period's religious debates. But as the Protestant revolt divided Europe, Erasmus's plea for tolerance was swept away by both sides. Still, Erasmus's treatises, letters, and especially his Greek edition of the New Testament (based on the then latest sources) ensured his position as leader of northern humanism.

Reading the Selection

Erasmus is best remembered for *The Praise of Folly* (1516), a biting satire on human vanity that still rings true today. Written during one of his visits to England and dedicated to his friend and fellow humanist Sir Thomas More (see *Utopia*), it held up to ridicule his period's leaders (such as scholars, lawyers, monks, and cardinals) and exposed their hypocrisy and worldly appetites. Though Erasmus thought his book had little lasting merit, deeming it an intellectual joke tossed off to amuse his friends, *The Praise of Folly* nonetheless echoed the thoughts of many contemporaries, and subsequent generations have enjoyed its wicked satire. Today, it is the one work by Erasmus most likely to be known to educated readers.

Erasmus, in *The Praise of Folly*, uses the literary device of personification, employed earlier by Boethius (see *The Consolation of Philosophy*) and Christine de Pizan (see *The Book of the City of Ladies*). He speaks through Dame Folly, a "goddess" who delights in her foolish followers. As this section opens, Dame Folly speaks, identifying herself, her parents, and her attendants: self-love, flattery, forgetfulness, pleasure, and sensuality. Ironically, she says human life would be unbearable without her (folly), for if people were always sensible, then everyone would be miserable.

Dame Folly then surveys the human comedy, laying out the foolish things in which each profession excels. Beneath the satire against the church, Erasmus's Christian humanism shines forth; for example, the work claims that points of theology and monkish pride have become more important than "mending a poor man's shoes"—a metaphor for the church's neglect of the needy.

[Folly is speaking.] In the same realm are those who are authors of books. All of them are highly indebted to me, especially those who blacken their pages with sheer triviality. For those who write learnedly to be criticized by a few scholars, not even ruling out a Persius[1] or a Laelius[2] as a judge, seem to be more pitiable than happy to me, simply because they are continuously torturing themselves. They add, they alter, they cross something out, they reinsert it, they recopy their work, they rearrange it, they show it to friends, and they keep it for nine years; yet they still are not satisfied with it. At such a price, they buy an empty reward, namely praise—and the praise of only a handful, at that. They buy this at the great expense of long

[1] Persius Uncertain; either a character in Cicero's *On Oratory* who represents a learned person, or Aulus Persius Flaccus (A.D. 34–62), Roman author of satires with a high moral tone.

[2] Laelius Uncertain; either a character in Cicero's *On Oratory* who represents a not-so-learned person, or a Roman official (fl. 150–140 B.C.) and friend of the Roman general Scipio the Younger (185/184–124 B.C.). Cicero admired the latter Laelius and used his name for the title of a book, namely *Laelius, or, on Friendship*.

hours, no sleep, so much sweat, and so many vexations. Add also the loss of health, the deterioration of their physical appearance, the possibility of blindness or partial loss of their sight, poverty, malice, premature old age, an early death, and if you can think of more, add them to this list. The scholar feels that he has been compensated for such ills when he wins the sanction of one or two other weakeyed scholars. But my author is crazy in a far happier way for he, without any hesitation, rapidly writes down anything that comes to mind, his pen, or even his dreams. There is little or no waste of paper, since he knows that if the trifles are trivial enough the majority of the readers, that is, the fools and ignoramuses, will approve of them. What is the difference if one should ignore two or three scholars, even though he may have read them? Or what weight will the censure of a few scholars carry, so long as the multitudes give it acclaim?

Actually, the wiser writers are those who put out the work of someone else as their own. By a few alterations they transfer someone else's glory to themselves, disregarding the other person's long labor and comforting themselves with the thought that even though they might be publicly convicted of plagiarism, meanwhile they shall have enjoyed the fruits and glory of authorship. It is worth one's while to observe how pleased authors are with their own works when they are popular and pointed out in a crowd—as celebrities! Their work is on display in bookstores, with three cryptic words in large type on the title page, something like a magician's spell. Ye gods! After all, what are they but words? Few people will ever hear of them, compared to the total world population, and far fewer will admire them, since people's tastes vary so, even among the common people. And why is it that the very names of the authors are often false, or stolen from the books of the ancients? One calls himself Telemachus,[3] another Stelenus[4] or Laertes,[5] still another Polycrates,[6] and another Thrasymachus.[7] As a result, nowadays it does not matter whether you dedicate your book to a chameleon or a gourd, or simply to alpha or beta, as the philosophers do.

The most touching event is when they compliment each other and turn around in an exchange of letters, verses, and superfluities.[8] They are fools praising fools and dunces praising dunces. The first, in the opinion of the second, is an Alcaeus,[9] and the second, in the opinion of the first, is a Callimachus.[10] One holds another in higher esteem than Cicero,[11] the other finds the one more learned than Plato.[12] Or sometimes they will choose a competitor and increase their reputation by rivaling themselves with him. As a result the public is split with opposing viewpoints, until finally, when the dispute is over, each reigns as victor and has a triumphal parade. Wise men deride this as being absolute nonsense, which is just what it is. Who will deny it? Meanwhile, our authors are leading a luxurious life because of my excellence, and they would not exchange their accomplishments for even those of Scipius.[13] And while the scholars most certainly derive a great deal of pleasure from laughing at them, relishing to the utmost the madnesses of others, they themselves owe me a great deal, which they cannot deny without being most ungrateful men.

Among men of the learned professions, a most self-satisfied group of men, the lawyers may hold themselves in the highest esteem. For while they laboriously roll up the stone of Sisyphus[14] by the force of weaving six hundred laws together at the same time, by the stacking of commentary upon commentary and opinion upon opinion regardless of how far removed from the purpose, they contrive to make their profession seem to be most difficult of all. What is actually tedious they consider brilliant. Let us include with them the logicians and sophists,[15] a breed of men more loquacious than the famed brass kettles of Dodona.[16] Any one of them can outtalk any twenty women. They would be happier, though, if they were just talkative and not quarrelsome as well. In fact, they are so quarrelsome that they will argue and fight over a lock of a goat's wool, absurdly losing sight of the truth in the furor of their dispute. Their egotistical love keeps them happy, and manned with but three syllogisms, they will unflinchingly argue on any subject with any man. Their mere obstinacy affords them victory, even though you place Stentor[17] against them.

Next in line are the scientists, revered for their beards and the fur on their gowns. They feel that they are the only men with any wisdom, and all other men float about as shadows. How senilely they daydream, while they construct their countless worlds and shoot the distance to the sun, the moon, the stars, and spheres,[18] as with a thumb

[3] Telemachus Son of the legendary Greek hero Odysseus (see Homer, *Odyssey*).
[4] Stelenus Folly apparently makes a mistake; this is not a Classical name. Perhaps she meant to say Sthelenus, a fifth-century B.C. tragic poet.
[5] Laertes Father of the legendary hero Odysseus (see Homer, *Odyssey*).
[6] Polycrates (440–370 B.C.), Athenian orator and sophist, who wrote a (now lost) work denouncing Socrates in 394/393 B.C.
[7] Thrasymachus (fl. late fourth century), Greek sophist from Chalcedon (in modern Turkey), who quarreled with Socrates in Plato's Republic.
[8] superfluities Unnecessary things.
[9] Alcaeus (ca. 620–ca. 580 B.C.), Greek lyric poet (see Alcaeus, Poems).
[10] Callimachus (ca. 305–ca. 240 B.C.), Greek scholar at the Library in Alexandria.
[11] Cicero (106–43 B.C.), Roman orator, statesman, and philosopher (see Cicero, "The Dream of Scipio").
[12] Plato (ca. 428–348/347 B.C.), Greek philsopher (see Plato, *The Republic*).
[13] Scipius Another form of Scipio; either Publius Cornelius, called Scipio the Elder (236–184/183 B.C.), or Scipio Aemilianus, called the Younger (185/184–129 B.C.).
[14] Sisyphus Greek mortal who was condemned by the gods to roll a rock endlessly up a mountain, only to have it fall down again.
[15] sophists School of rhetoric, philosophy, and successful living, in fifth-century B.C. Athens. Because they seemingly would teach any point of view, so long as they were paid, the word *sophist* became synonymous with "faulty reasoner."
[16] Dodona Site of oracle of Zeus, the oldest oracle in Greece, located in the north, near the border with modern Albania; the oracle interpreted the rustling of oak leaves, the sounds of bronze vessels clanking in the trees, and the cooing of doves and other birds.
[17] Stentor In Homer's *Iliad*, the Greek warrior whose voice was as loud as fifty men.
[18] spheres Folly holds the medieval worldview that nine crystalline spheres, each set within the other and carrying the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars, encircle the earth and produce harmonious sounds as they move—the music of the spheres.

and line. They postulate causes for lightning, winds, eclipses, and other inexplicable things, never hesitating for a moment, as if they had exclusive knowledge about the secrets of nature, designer of elements, or as if they visited us directly from the council of the gods. Yet all this time nature is heartily laughing at them and their conjectures. It is a sufficient argument just proving that they have good intelligence for nothing. They can never explain why they always disagree with each other on every subject. In summation, knowing nothing in general they profess to know everything in particular. They are ignorant even to themselves, and at times they do not see the ditch or stone lying across their path, because many of them are day-dreamers and are absent-minded. Yet they proclaim that they perceive ideas, universals, forms without matter, primary substances, quiddities,[19] entities, and things so tenuous that I'm afraid that Lynceus[20] could not see them himself. The common people are especially disdained when they bring out their triangles, quadrangles, circles, and mathematical figures of the like. They place one on top of the other and arrange them into a maze. Then they deploy some letters precisely, as if in a battle formation, and finally they reverse them. And all of this is done only to confuse those who are ignorant of the field. These scientists do not like those who predict the future from the stars, and promise even more fantastic miracles. And these fortunate men find people who believe them.

Perhaps it would be better to pass silently over the theologians. Dealing with them, since they are hot-tempered, is like crossing Lake Camarina[21] or eating poisonous beans. They may attack me with six hundred arguments and force me to retract what I hold; for if I refuse, they will immediately declare me a heretic. By this blitz action they show a desire to terrify anyone to whom they are ill-disposed. No other people are so adverse to acknowledge my favors to them, yet the divines are bound to me by extraordinary obligations. These theologians are happy in their self-love, and as if they were presently inhabiting a third heaven, they look down on all men as though they were animals that crawled along the ground, coming near to pity them. They are protected by a wall of scholastic definitions, arguments, corollaries, and implicit and explicit propositions.[22] They have so many hideouts that not even the net of Vulcan[23] would be able to catch them; for they back down from their distinctions, by which they also cut through the knots of an argument, as if with a double-blade ax from Tenedos[24]; and they come forth with newly invented terms and monstrous-sounding words. Furthermore, they explain the most mysterious matters to suit themselves, for instance, the method by which the world was set in order and began, through what channels original sin has come down to us through generations, by what means, in what measure, and how long the Omnipotent Christ was in the Virgin's womb, and how accidents subsist in the Eucharist without their substance.[25]

But those have been beaten to death down through the ages. Here are some questions that are worthy of great (and some call them) illuminated theologians, questions that will really make them think, if they should ever encounter them. Did divine generation take place at a particular time? Are there several sonships in Christ? Whether this is a possible proposition: Does God the Father hate the Son? Could God the Father have taken upon Himself the likeness of a woman, a devil, an ass, a gourd, or a piece of flint? Then how would that gourd have preached, performed miracles, or been crucified? Also, what would Peter[26] have consecrated, if he had administered the Eucharist, while Christ's body hung on the cross? Another thought: could Christ have been said to be a man at that very moment? Will we be forbidden to eat and drink after the resurrection? (Now, while there is time, they are providing against hunger and thirst!) These intricate subtleties are infinite, and there are others that are even more subtle, concerning instances of time, notions, relations, accidents, quiddities, and entities, which no one can perceive unless, like Lynceus, he can see in the blackest darkness things that aren't there.

We must insert those maxims, rather contradictions, that, compared to the Stoic paradoxes,[27] appear to be the most common simplicity. For instance: it is a lesser crime to cut the throats of a thousand men than to sew a stitch on a poor man's shoe on the sabbath; it is better to want the earth to perish, body, boots, and breeches (as the saying goes), than to tell a single lie, however inconsequential. The methods that our scholastics follow only render more subtle the subtlest of subtleties; for you will more easily escape from a labyrinth than from the snares of the Realists,[28] Nominalists,[29] Thomists,[30] Albertists,[31] Occamists,[32] and Scotists.[33] I have not named them all, only a few of the major ones. But there is so much learning and difficulty in all of these sects that I should think the apostles themselves must have the need of some help from some other's spirit if they were to try to argue these topics with our new generation of theologians. . . .

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[19] **quiddity** Essence.

[20] **Lynceus** In Greek mythology, one of the Argonauts; he had supernatural sight, which even enabled him to see things below ground.

[21] **Camarina** Lake in Sicily, fabled for its pestilential stench during drought periods.

[22] **scholastic . . . propositions** Folly catalogs the varied types of reasoning used by scholastic thinkers, who are generally portrayed as disinterested in truth.

[23] **Vulcan** Roman god of metalworking, comparable to the Greek Hephaestus.

[24] **Tenedos** Island in Aegean, today called Bozcaada (in modern Turkey).

[25] **accidents . . . substance** *Accidents* and *substance* were terms from Aristotle, used by medieval philosophers to explain the miracle of the Eucharist; the "accidents" of the wine and bread were transformed into the "substance" of Christ's blood and flesh.

[26] **Peter** (d. ca. 64), one of the twelve original Apostles of Jesus. Traditionally, the church regarded Peter as the first pope, the successor to Jesus Christ on earth.

[27] **Stoic paradoxes** A feature of ancient Stoic thought that recognized the complex way that seemingly good and bad are woven into human existence. Examples are "The wise man is happy on the rack," and "Only the wise man is king, and all fools are slaves."

[28] **Realists** Those who believed universal concepts exist independently of physical objects and the human mind.

[29] **Nominalists** Those who claimed that only particular objects and events are real.

[30] **Thomists** Followers of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274).

[31] **Albertists** Followers of Albertus Magnus (ca. 1200–1280).

[32] **Occamists** Followers of William of Occam or Ockham (ca. 1285–ca. 1349).

[33] **Scotists** Followers of Duns Scotus (ca. 1266–1308).

Those who are the closest to these in happiness are generally called "the religious" or "monks," both of which are deceiving names, since for the most part they stay as far away from religion as possible and frequent every sort of place. I cannot, however, see how any life could be more gloomy than the life of these monks if I did not assist them in many ways. Though most people detest these men so much that accidentally meeting one is considered to be bad luck,[34] the monks themselves believe that they are magnificent creatures. One of the chief beliefs is that to be illiterate is to be of a high state of sanctity, and so they make sure that they are not able to read. Another is that when braying out their gospels in church they are making themselves very pleasing and satisfying to God, when in fact they are uttering these psalms as a matter of repetition rather than from their hearts. Indeed, some of these men make a good living through their uncleanliness and beggary by bellowing their petitions for food from door to door; there is not an inn, an announcement board, or a ship into which they are not accessible, here having a great advantage over other common beggars. According to them, though, they are setting an apostolic example for us by their filthiness, their ignorance, their bawdiness, and their insolence. . . .

[34] **bad luck** Personal reference to Erasmus, who took monastic vows and lived in a monastery from 1485 until he was ordained a priest in 1492.

SIR THOMAS MORE

Selection from *Utopia*

Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) is the first work of utopian literature in modern times. It is also the source of this genre's name, *utopia* (from Greek, "not-place") being a pun on *eutopia* (from Greek, "well-place," or "place [where all is] well"). Written in Latin, it was printed both abroad and in England and soon became the talk of Europe. Since Thomas More (1478–1535) wrote it, more than one hundred books have appeared on this idea.

The idea of a perfect place grew as Western history unfolded. It was first glimpsed by the immortal Utnapishtim, the Babylonian Noah, in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (ca. 2500 B.C.). In the *Odyssey*, Homer named it the Elysian Fields. Another version was the Isles of the Blessed, as described by Horace. In Christianity it became paradise, called by St. Augustine (see *Confessions*) the Heavenly City. For the next thousand years, the celestial paradise (in contrast to the Earthly City) held sway in Europe. The Renaissance and the rise of secularism opened the way for More's earthly utopia.

More's *Utopia*, inspired by Plato's *The Republic*, was in tune with Christian humanism (1500–1550), the literary movement (see Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly*) that used both Classical texts and the Bible as guides. To effect his goal—a critique of Europe—More presented an ideal society in the New World. This disguise was necessary, for rash opinions could and did lead to prison or death in this age. More, a Catholic, was eventually beheaded for his beliefs, at the command of Henry VIII, the founder of the Protestant sect called Anglicanism.

The inhabitants of More's Utopia are portrayed as having solved the problems plaguing Europe at the time. Utopia was a welfare state run on communistic lines, with no private property and no money. There was universal free education, six hours' labor daily, uniforms for citizens, free medical treatment, communal meals (with musical and reading accompaniment) in civic restaurants. Tolerance was granted to all religions. The penal code was simple, and parties to legal suits were expected to plead their own cases, as no lawyers were allowed. The law was harsh in sexual matters; adultery could result in slavery, repeated offenses in death. Divorce, however, was allowed by mutual consent. Gold was not to be used as currency but for useful objects such as chamberpots. Common storehouses of grains were maintained as reserves against famine. Completing More's dreamworld was a Utopian alphabet and language.

When first published, this work was so convincing that some readers, unable to decode More's intellectual puzzles (such as his made-up Greek names), downgraded its literary value, thinking it merely a translation of a travel book to the New World.