> This also has been answered by Sri Ramakrishna. He found that behind every human being is the Atman. Deep behind is Atman, whatever the superficial differences. ... So, whatever difference may be there between man and man, this ideal of Atman behind everyone is the only principle which can unite us into a nation by removing all the differences.
>
> Not only in India but all over the world, this ideal of Atman is the new revelation (163–4).

The ancient cynics were right: it is possible to revel in the oneness of humanity; but their methods were wrong. Only through renunciation of sense-objects and the rejection of identification with the mind and body can we have true cosmopolitanism. The members of the Swami Vireswarananda Smriti Committee deserve praise for publishing this elegant and well-researched book.

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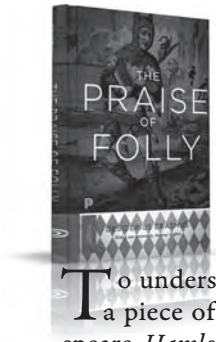

The Praise of Folly
Desiderius Erasmus

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540. USA. *www. press.princeton. edu*. 2015. 224 pp. PB. $16.95 ISBN 9780691165646.

To understand Hamlet's exclamation: What a piece of work is a man!" (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 2, Scene 2), for understanding 'the swerve' to modernity (see Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: W W Norton, 2011)) that men like Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98), Pico della Mirandola (1463–94), and Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) forced upon Europe, we need to watch first the movie *The Name of the Rose* (1986). This should be followed by watching the movie *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). From the darkness, literally *The Name of the Rose* is tinted forbiddingly subdued and dark throughout; of the Middle Ages we enter into the splendour of the Renaissance in the tortured world of psychopaths in *The Silence of the Lambs*. From degenerate cultic monastic learning of the Middle Ages we now enter into a world where everything is anthropocentric; the movement from Scholasticism to the Renaissance is best caught on camera when we find Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* listening to Renaissance music; Lecter even studies and teaches Renaissance art and re-enacts the murder of Girolamo Savonarola. The irony of understanding the Renaissance through *The Silence of the Lambs* will not be lost on the Renaissance scholar. Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) cannot anymore compete with the micro attention spans of scholars and students living their lives as 'Twitterati' and engaged social media addicts whose faces are open books for everyone to read. Movies at least demand lesser attention spans than Burckhardt's tome or Erwin Panofsky's ruminations on Renaissance and earlier art. Akin to this prescription of getting crash courses on the Middle Ages and on the Renaissance is the irony of knowing the Renaissance overreacher through studying the book under review. For according to Erasmus, epistemology is folly, as all manner of things are follies. Everything is just dust. Hamlet would conclude that man is but only a 'quintessence of dust' (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 2, Scene 2). Also, Ficino, Savonarola, and Pico della Mirandola, along with Erasmus erased religious fanaticism and xenophobia from Europe. Today we need these men more than ever since various ideological beasts slouch towards Bethlehem to be born, their hours come around at last (see W B Yeats, *The Second Coming*).

Erasmus's mockery of Thomism and the Vitruvian Man has become an uncategorisable classic indispensable for appreciating the Renaissance as simultaneously profoundly literary, a paradigm changing historical epoch, and also as a theological cusp where Martin Luther's angst regarding the Catholic Church was intellectually validated as at least permissible. It was Erasmus, who eventually shaped the Reformation. The discipline-transgressing nature of *The Praise of Folly* is clear when we have a professional historian writing a foreword to the book and the translation and commentary is the well-known English version of Hoyt Hopewell Hudson's (1893–1944). Hudson was a great Renaissance literary critic in his own

right and this book was originally published by Princeton University Press in 1941. Hudson remains a clear translator and mercifully does not engage in too much transcreation. Transcreation is not the aim of a good translator, notwithstanding P Lal's views. This reviewer attended classes by Professor Lal every Saturday during his graduate studies and found Professor Lal's views on translation similar to creation and thus generally of the nature of the imaginary. Professor Lal's rendering of the Mahabharata is thus good poetry, but bad translation. Later translators of Erasmus are better transcreators of Erasmus than Hoyt Hopewell Hudson. Princeton University Press has shown great wisdom in choosing Hudson's English over say, the English of Robert M Adams. Adam's Latin is strong even in his English and generations of Erasmus students have to be content with Adam's convoluted syntax and elisions.

Hudson's version of Erasmus's Latin text has been reviewed well by John Archer Gee in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, October 1942, pp. 544–6. This reviewer cannot hope to outdo Archer Gee in his appraisal of Hoyt Hopewell Hudson. Betty Radice's translation of the Latin text is good, but this reviewer finds Hopewell Hudson more precise. Radice's translation lacks the rigour of Latin—while Robert M Adam's version is too rigorous and often borders on transcreation as has been mentioned in the last paragraph—and is thus a little pale compared to Hudson's more cynical turn use of the English language. Princeton University Press has done a service to students and Renaissance scholars by reviving Hudson's edition along with copious notes. Mercifully the notes by Hudson are right at the end of the book and do not interrupt the reading of the text by being chunks of footnotes distractingly present at the end of each page as is the way with more student-friendly versions of this text. These latter editions are reductive and often mislead the neophyte reading Erasmus for the first time.

Charlie Hebdo has been trolled for mocking death. But when Jonathan Swift advised us to eat little children during famines only fools protested. Literature is the only domain of knowledge which revels in sustained mockery—of everything on earth and beyond—and systematically transforms all sublimity into farce. Humour, irony, and raucous laughter leer out of the literary object. That which is like a gargoyle is literature. Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly* is literature in this sense of being akin to a gargoyle. In these times when theologians often think too much of their own utterances we need Erasmus. As I type in my word processor sitting in semi-rural India; a beast is rampaging the Middle East in the name of God: 'I [Erasmus] have heard of a certain notable fool ... who was about to explain the mystery of Holy Trinity before a very distinguished audience. In order that he might at once make a display of his uncommon learning and give special satisfaction to the divines who were listening, he entered upon his matter in a completely new way—that is, from letters, syllables, and words; then from the agreement of noun and verb, of adjective and noun; while everybody was lost in wonder and some were murmuring to themselves that phrase from Horace, "What is all this stink about?"' (89).

Certainly Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) was referring to Erasmus when he wrote of Yahoos and Houyhnhnms. A certain system of theology, an insidious perversion of Semitic ideology, is killing people throughout the world fuelled by the rhetoric of mad people based mainly in the Levant in the Middle East, not to speak anything of their crazy online kinsfolk. Erasmus shows us that 'the best response to evil is ridicule' (Elle Griffiths, 'ISIS Leader's Call to Arms Mocked by Muslims in Hilarious Excuses as to Why They Can't Join Group', *Mirror*, 27 December 2015 <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/isis-leaders-call-arms-mocked-7077666> accessed 25 February 2016). Those who are prudes and generally evil also need to think about their living spaces—Hitler's *lebensraum* immediately comes to mind—as many reprobates continue doing: 'They draw exact pictures of every part of hell as if they had spent many years in that commonwealth. ... I [Erasmus] often get a good laugh myself when these theologians that loom up so vast in their own eyes begin speaking in their slovenly and barbarous idiom and jabber so that no one except a jabberer can understand them' (84).

This reviewer too is astonished at the fecundity of those who cannot imagine God and God's majesty, but can write eloquently about sin and the effects of sin. Joseph in *Wuthering Heights* (1845–6) by Emily Brontë, Arthur Dimmesdale in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), and Margaret White in Stephen King's *Carrie* (1974) are some who would have done well to have studied Erasmus. These fictional characters would not have been mentioned here unless they are just types for a large number of real, living people who dream hellfire for others during the course of their boring days. Erasmus is an antidote to morbid self-aggrandisement and apocalyptic thinking.

Anthony Grafton's foreword is clear and situates Erasmus within the lineage of Lucian of Samosata. Grafton's write-up proves the historically important role which Erasmus played in affecting Greenblatt's 'swerve', but Grafton's foreword also necessitates the substitution of the normative Renaissance for the more accurate Early Modernism. When men began guffawing at their own absurd ideas about the cosmos and realised the extent of their own psychoses; their insights into their own selves made them realise the split between the one, imaginary, integrated person into a persona or mask which was public, and a lie, and their own schizoid interior world of the grotesque and freakery, which is the reality (see *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University, 1996)); then Modernism truly began. The Reformation is the beginning of the Modernist turn within the history of ideas. Erasmus was the first of the Modernists and this reprint under review, will urge new readers to savour the wit of a man who bandied words in friendliness with Saint Thomas More (1478–1535). Is it not an irony that Erasmus has to be contended with by Catholics when they scrutinise the life of one of their greatest Renaissance men of letters? Saint More and Erasmus are signs of contradiction, but together they *are* the best early Moderns. Both of them overreached their mandates.

It is passé in Erasmus scholarship that folly is a sanctifying trope and Christianity is folly too. The Russian holy fools are all exemplars of foolishness in as much as the ancient Hindu king Jadabharata is a fool. Shakespeare's sages are all fools; for instance, the wisest in *King Lear* is the fool. Without the fool or folly, there can be no self-recognition in Shakespeare's dramas. These ideas are so common that this reviewer did not enter into the ambiguities inherent in the choice of folly as Erasmus's protagonist, if we can at all call folly the protagonist here. It seems that the word which is Brahman qua wisdom is the main presence in this text. Erasmus's concern in this book is the techné of *becoming* a saint, like his friend Thomas More. It is entirely wrong to presume that Erasmus would have ever bothered with dunces.

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Pilate and Jesus
Giorgio Agamben. Trans.
Adam Kotsko

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The Supreme Court of India has asked Indian parliamentarians to consider whether chemical castration of those who rape minors should be allowed under Indian law. The film *Dead Man Walking* (1995) advocates life over the death penalty. It is within these contexts of jurisprudence, literature (see Jainendra Kumar, *The Resignation: Tyagpatra*, trans. Rohini Choudhury (New Delhi: Penguin, 2012) and Vijay Tendulkar, *Silence! The Court Is in Session*, trans. Priya Adarkar (Oxford: Oxford University, 1979)), and religion that Giorgio Agamben's latest book *Pilate and Jesus* becomes important for Indians. Jesus, the 'Ecce homo', the archetypal Suffering Servant mentioned separately, but with different connotations in the *Qumran Caves Scrolls* or *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, the *Gospels*, and even within Hinduism becomes important. This is because to be human is to be abject (see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University, 1980)). The Suffering Servant both as a trope and as God incarnate has to endure pain