Praise of Folly

and

Pope Julius Barred from Heaven

Desiderius Erasmus

Translated by Roger Clarke
Praise of Folly first published in 1511
This edition first published by Alma Classics Ltd (previously Oneworld Classics Ltd) in 2008
This new edition first published by Alma Classics in 2013
Translation, notes and extra material © Roger Clarke, 2008

Printed in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

ISBN: 978-1-84749-324-8

All the pictures in this volume are reprinted with permission or presumed to be in the public domain. Every effort has been made to ascertain and acknowledge their copyright status, but should there have been any unwitting oversight on our part, we would be happy to rectify the error in subsequent printings.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the publisher. This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be resold, lent, hired out or otherwise circulated without the express prior consent of the publisher.
Contents

Praise of Folly 1
Pope Julius Barred from Heaven 117
Epigram against Pope Julius II 165
Nine Adages 169
   Notes 181

Extra Material 245
   Erasmus’s Times 247
   Erasmus’s Life 250
   Erasmus’s Achievements and Works 263
   Notes on Extra Material 284
   Translator’s Note 285
   Select Bibliography 287

Appendix 289
   Key to the Deities 291
   Biography of Pope Julius II 295
An Encomium of Mōria
or
Praise of Folly

An address composed by
Erasmus of Rotterdam
Dedicatory Letter

Erasmus of Rotterdam, to his friend Thomas More,* greetings:

When I was returning to England recently from Italy, I had to spend a lot of time on horseback, and I didn’t want to waste it all on chatter that was trite and (as the Greeks would say) devoid of the Muses. I preferred sometimes to turn over in my mind subjects of common interest to us both, or to enjoy the memory of the friends that I had left behind here – friends whose great learning is matched only by their great charm. And among these friends it was you, my dear More, that were regularly in the forefront of my thoughts. The constant enjoyment I found in remembering you while we were apart matched the joy I’d just as constantly found in your company when we were together. In fact I’ll be damned if anything else has ever given me such happiness in all my life! Anyhow, I felt that I absolutely had to occupy myself with something, and as the circumstances seemed little suited to serious endeavour, I decided to amuse myself with an encomium of Môria,* a “praise of Folly”.

“But what in Wisdom’s name put that into your head?” you’ll ask. Well, first, your family name More suggested it to me, because it’s as close to the word “Môria” as you are remote from its meaning – indeed, by universal assent you couldn’t be remoter. Then I had a suspicion that this intellectual game of mine would appeal particularly to you, for the reason that you always get a great deal of pleasure from jests of this kind that contain both learning (if I’m not mistaken) and, here and there, some wit; you’re always, too, playing the role of a “laughing philosopher”** in everyday human life. Your exceptional mental discernment, it’s true, sets you utterly apart from the common run of humanity, but at the same time the legendary charm and good nature of your personality mean that you’re able, indeed delighted, to be for everyone “a man for all seasons”. * So please be willing not just
to accept this little dissertation as a “memento of your pal”,* but also
to take up its defence: it’s dedicated to you, and no longer mine now
but yours.

I ask this because there’ll surely be detractors who’ll allege that
these tomfooleries are either too frivolous to befit a theologian or have
too sharp a sting to accord with Christian humility. They’ll loudly
accuse us of reviving the old-style comedy of Athens* or composing
satires like a latter-day Lucian* – of sinking our teeth into everything,
that is, without discrimination.

People that are upset by the flippancy and playfulness of my subject
matter will bear in mind, I hope, that I’m not the first in this field:
what I’m doing is identical to what was done time and again by the
great authors of the past. Think how many centuries ago Homer had
fun with his ‘Battle of Frogs and Mice’,* Virgil with his ‘Gnat’ and his
‘Garlic Salad’,* Ovid with his ‘Nut Tree’.* Think how both Polycrates
and his critic Isocrates composed eulogies of Busiris;* how Glaucon* praised injustice; Favorinus,* Thersites and malaria; Synesius,* bald-
ness; and Lucian, a fly and a sponger.* Think how Seneca* amused
himself with the apotheōsis of Claudius, Plutarch* with his dialogue
between Gryllus and Odysseus, Lucian and Apuleius with their asses,*
and someone-or-other with their testament of Grunnius Corocotta the
piglet* (which even St Jerome recalls).

Would my critics rather imagine me to have amused myself by
playing draughts from time to time, or, if they prefer, by “galloping
around on a long stick”?* For it really is quite unreasonable to grant
every other of life’s professions its opportunities for fun, but to allow
no fun at all to scholars. What if the jokes bring with them some seri-
ous ideas? What if the absurdities are handled in such a way that the
not altogether undiscriminating reader gains rather more benefit from
them than from some people’s forbiddingly elaborate treatises? I’m
thinking of the sort that spend long hours stitching together a disc-
ourse in praise of public speaking or philosophy; or who compose a
eulogy of some head of state; or a speech urging war against the Turks;
or a prophecy of future events; or a discussion of every last argument
about goat’s wool.* Nothing’s more futile than to treat serious subjects
in a frivolous way – but at the same time nothing’s more entertaining
than to treat frivolities in such a way that you come across to others
as the opposite of frivolous. The verdict on me is for others to deliver;
nevertheless, (unless self-love* is duping me completely) though it’s Folly we’ve praised, it’s not altogether foolishly we’ve done it.

I’ll deal now with the taunt about sting. Intelligent critics have always been allowed the liberty of using irony to make fun of our shared humanity without fear of consequences, provided only that the freedom doesn’t express itself in rage. That’s why I’m so surprised at the tenderness of modern ears, which can barely now tolerate anything beyond conventional compliments: you’ll find some people so religiously correct, in a back-to-front way, that they’re readier to stomach the most harshly offensive language against Christ than to have a pope or head of state sullied by the gentlest of jokes, especially if it touches on what Aristophanes terms “pay and rations”. Anyhow, if one censures the way people live their lives without criticizing a single person by name, I question whether that should be regarded as administering a sting so much as offering information and advice. Or try totting up the counts on which I’m censuring myself. Besides, if critics exempt no class of people from reproof, then they’re not displaying animosity against any individual but against human shortcomings in general. So, if anyone should come forwards to complain that they’ve been libelled, they’ll be betraying their guilty conscience, or at least their unease. St Jerome* indulged in the same kind of ridicule as I have with much more bluntness and sting, often exposing identities. As for us, not only have we refrained completely from naming names; we’ve also regulated our manner of writing to ensure that the perceptive reader can readily comprehend that our aim is to entertain rather than to sting. Unlike Juvenal,* we’ve left unstirred the hidden cesspool of wickedness; we’ve made it our business to identify what’s laughable rather than what’s loathsome. If there are some that can’t be won round even by these arguments, let them at least remember this: to be rebuked by Folly is a compliment; since we’ve made Folly the speaker, it’s only right that she be true to character.

But why do I go on like this to you? Outstanding advocate that you are, it’s in upholding cases less than strong that you show your strength. So fare you well, my eloquent More, and defend your Môria with vigour!

From the country, 9th June*
Goddess Folly is the Speaker

Folly Introduces Herself

Humans may talk about me in public as they like – First Impressions

I realize how bad a name Folly has even among the biggest fools. But I’m the one, I tell you, yes the only one, to use my divine power to bring good cheer to all, gods and humankind alike. I’ve more than ample proof of it too: as soon as I stepped forwards to address this packed congregation, all your faces at once beamed out with a new and unaccustomed cheerfulness; you suddenly lost your frowns; you showed your delight; you gave me a friendly laugh and clapped your hands. As I look round at you on every side, you really seem, all of you, to be merry on the nectar that Homer’s gods drank, nectar laced with nepenthe\(^*\) to banish sorrow. Yet only just now you were sitting there glum and worried, just as if you’d freshly emerged from Trophonius’s cave\(^*\).

To put it another way, you know how it is when that beautiful golden sun first rises on the earth, or when after a harsh winter the new spring makes the balmy west winds blow: everything immediately takes on a new aspect again, a new colour, a new youth even. That’s the way your faces changed as soon as you caught sight of me. To dispel cares that vex the soul – that’s something great preachers can hardly manage with a lengthy, long-rehearsed sermon; but that’s what I’ve achieved in an instant, just by my appearance.

Why is it, though, that I’ve come before you today in such a bizarre costume?\(^*\) You’ll hear soon enough, provided you can bear to lend me your ears as I talk – I don’t mean the ears that you normally lend to those that rant at you here in church, but the ears you prick up for charlatans, jesters and fools outside – the donkeys’
ears that long ago our friend Midas* sprouted for Pan’s sake. The fact is, I’ve decided I want to spend a little time giving you the benefit of my doctorate – not, I hasten to add, a doctorate of the sort held by teachers that these days stuff schoolboys with unsettling nonsense and give them an argumentativeness worse than a woman’s. No: my model will be those clever men of long ago who, to avoid the discredited title of “doctor of philosophy”, preferred to be known as “spin doctors”. It was these “doctors” who busied themselves composing encomiums in praise of gods and mighty men. And it’s an encomium you’re now going to hear, not one of some demigod like Hercules or lawgiver like Solon,* but my encomium of myself, Folly.

Now I don’t care a finger snap for those educated people who call it the height of foolishness and bad taste for someone to boast of their own merits: it can be as foolish as they want, but let them at least admit that it’s fitting. What’s more apt than for Möria herself to blow her own trumpet – “pipe herself on the flute”, * as the Greeks say? Who can talk about me better than I can? – unless there’s anyone who knows me better than I know myself!

Actually I consider praising myself a good deal less pretentious than what the well-bred, well-educated crowd do all the time: through a twisted sense of modesty they prevail on some ingratiating speechwriter or windbag of a poet (and pay them, what’s more) to tell them how good they are – and it’s all lies, pure lies! Yet the bashful subject lifts his tail like a peacock and raises the feathers of his crest, while his bare-faced flatterer equates a paltry human being with the gods: he declares the man perfectly attuned to every virtue, though the fellow knows himself to be more than “two octaves distant”* (as the Greeks express it); he dresses the pathetic crow in another bird’s plumage; and (more Greek sayings) he “whitens the African” and “makes an elephant out of a fly”.* Well, I go along with this

An Encomium of Myself?
well-worn proverb: “you can fairly praise yourself if there’s no one else to praise you”.

How extraordinary, by the way, is human ingratitude – or should I call it inertia? Humans all worship me devotedly; they all gladly acknowledge the good I do them; but not one has come forwards in all these centuries to celebrate Folly’s merits in an appreciative speech. And yet there’s never been a shortage of people to extol tyrants like Busiris and Phalaris, malarial fevers, flies, bald heads* and similar afflictions in eulogies crafted late at night at great cost of oil and sleep.

This speech of mine you’re about to hear will be impromptu and unworked, but truer for all that. I wouldn’t want you to think it’s been put together to show off my cleverness, as happens with the mass of public speakers. They, as you know, publish a speech they’ve worked on for all of thirty years – or may sometimes have borrowed from someone else – and then swear on oath that they’ve written it, or even dictated it, in three days for fun. As for me, I’ve always taken the greatest pleasure in speaking (as the Greeks say) “whatever comes to my unready tongue”.*

No one, what’s more, should now expect me to proceed, as those run-of-the-mill public speakers of yours do, by subjecting myself to definition or – still less – to analysis.* Drawing a boundary round someone whose divine power is so vast, or dissecting someone whose worship unites the universe – either would invite heaven’s disfavour. In any case, what possible point is there in presenting a shadow or outline of myself by way of definition, when you and I are here together in the same place and you can behold me for myself.

So I am, as you see, the great dispenser of blessings* that they call in Latin “Stultitia” and in Greek “Môria” – that is, “Folly”. Why did I need say even this, though? Don’t I display who I am adequately on my person – “on countenance and brow”, as they say? If anyone claimed I was the incarnation of Wisdom, whether pagan or
Christian, wouldn’t they be set right at once just by the sight of me, even without my giving voice (that least deceptive mirror* of the personality)? Rouging cheeks* is not for me: I don’t profess one thing on my face and hide another deep within. I resemble myself exactly from every angle – so much so that I can’t be mistaken even in people who are the keenest to claim for themselves the mask and title of Wisdom and who parade about, as in those Greek fables, like “baboons in fine robes” and “donkeys in lion skins”.* But, for all their careful pretences, the long ears sprouting from somewhere or other betray the foolish Midas. Oh, the ingratitude of people like this: they’re leading members of our troupe, but are so ashamed of our name in public that they use it as a major insult to throw indiscriminately in other people’s faces. These people, who are in reality the greatest morons but want to be regarded as intellectuals and philosophers* – surely we’ve an excellent right to call them “morosophers”.*

You see, we’ve decided to copy today’s public speakers in one respect: they evidently consider themselves gods if they show themselves two-tongued, like leeches,* and they think it a splendid achievement if they can keep embroidering a few little decorative Greek-sounding words onto their Latin speeches, even if out of place. What’s more, if foreign material fails, they dig four or five archaic words out of some mouldering manuscript to darken the reader’s mind. The purpose, of course, is this: those who understand become more and more pleased with themselves, and those who don’t are the more impressed the less they understand. It’s really rather charming, the pleasure our people find in looking up to things the more foreign they are. It allows the vainer sort to laugh and applaud, and (as in the Greek saying) “twitch their ears like donkeys”,* to show the company how excellently they comprehend.

Well, καὶ ταῦτα δὴ μὲν ταῦτα* (as the Greeks say!). Now I’ll return to my theme.
You have a name for yourselves: “gentlemen” – but what adjective should I attach? It has to be “most foolish”. What more honorific title than this could goddess Folly employ to bring her votaries together?

Well, since not so many people know my family history, I’ll next try to explain it, if the goddesses of the arts will kindly help me. My father wasn’t Chaos, or Orcus, or Saturn, or Iapetus,* or any other of those dated and decrepit deities. He was none other than Plutus* (to give the god of riches his Greek name), sole “father of men and gods”* (if I may challenge both Homer and Hesiod, and Jupiter himself indeed).

It’s the same now as long ago: at a nod from Plutus (and no one else)* everything, sacred and secular, is turned upside down and thrown into confusion. Plutus’s decisions govern wars, ceasefires, empires, council chambers, courtrooms, parliaments, marriages, contracts, treaties, governments, economies, leisure, work – I’m running out of breath – in short, all human activity, public and private. Without Plutus’s support the whole host of mythical divinities and, let it be said, even the major gods themselves would either not exist at all or would be living exceedingly cheerless lives dining at home. If Plutus is angry with anyone, they’re beyond even Pallas’s assistance*; but if Plutus favours someone, they could tell great Jupiter to get hanged,* thunderbolt and all. So (in Homer’s words):

It’s of him that I boast as my father.*

Now Plutus didn’t give birth to me from his brain, as Jupiter did to that severe and cross-grained Pallas;* he had me by the Greek nymph Youthfulness, quite the loveliest and liveliest of them all. And it wasn’t done within the grim ties of matrimony, the way that lame blacksmith* was born, but – much more agreeably – “after mingling in love”,* as our Homer puts it. But don’t misunderstand: when he got me, he wasn’t the
half-dead, half-blind Plutus of Aristophanes’s play; he still had his faculties then and was flushed with youth – and not only with youth: far more with nectar, the strong nectar that he’d gulped down too generously and too neat when bingeing with the gods.

My Birthplace  You may also be wondering where I was born: people today consider it the principal indicator of high birth where you utter your first howls. Well, it wasn’t on floating Delos, or in the foam-flecked sea, or “in hollows of caves”* (to use another phrase of Homer’s) that I was brought into the world, but in the Blessed Isles* themselves, where everything grows “unsown and unploughed”* (Homer again). In those islands there’s no toil, no infirmity, no illness of any kind, and in the countryside you’ll not see asphodel, mallow, squill, lupin, vetch* or any other weeds like that. Everywhere eyes and nostrils are pampered by moly, panace, nepenthe, marjoram, ambrosia, lotus,* rose, violet and iris – veritable gardens of Adonis.*

My Infancy  Born in these delightful surroundings, I certainly didn’t enter life crying: I immediately gave my mother a sweet smile. I’m far from envying Jupiter, that “high son of Cronos”,* for the she-goat that wet-nursed him. I had two of the most charming nymphs to feed me their milk – Tipsiness, offspring of Bacchus the wine god, and Indiscipline, disorderly Pan’s daughter. You can see the two of them here among my attendants and maidservants.

My Retinue  If you want to know my servants’ names, I’ll tell you – but it’ll have to be in Greek.* This one that you observe with the raised eyebrows is, of course, Philautia* (Self-love). That one whose eyes seem to smile approvingly – look, she’s clapping her hands – is called Kolakia (Flattery). This sleepy one – I think she’s actually dropping off: her name is Lēthē (Oblivion). The one leaning on her elbows with clasped hands is known as Misoponia (Indolence). That one wearing a garland of roses and smothered in perfumes is Hēdonē
(Gratification). The one with the unsteady and restless eyes is Anoia (Mindlessness). She with the sleek complexion and gorgeously plump figure has the name Tryphē (Self-indulgence). You can see two male gods, as well, among the girls: one of them’s called Kōmos (Rowdiness), the other one Négres Ηypnos (Sound Sleep). I’m telling you, with the help of this loyal band of retainers I hold the whole world under my control; indeed, I’m sovereign over sovereigns.

You’ve had an account, then, of my family, my upbringing and my retinue.

_Folly – Bringer of Happiness_

I don’t want anyone to imagine that I’m taking the title of goddess for myself without justification. So prick up your ears, and I’ll tell you what great advantages I bestow on both gods and men and how widely my divine power extends. Someone has wisely written that to be a god means to help humankind; now if those who introduced humans to wine or corn or any single commodity of this kind deserve to be enlisted in the council of the gods, then surely by rights I should be named “alpha” of all gods and treated accordingly, since I single-handedly lavish everything on everyone.

In the first place, what can be more agreeable or more precious than life itself? Who is it, though, that’s generally credited with originating life? Isn’t it me?

It’s not the spear of “mighty-fathered” Pallas nor the shield of “cloud-gathering” Jupiter (to use Homer’s epithets) that bring the human race into being or cause it to multiply. Indeed, the Father of Deities and King of Humankind himself, who makes all Olympus tremble at his nod, needs first to put down that three-forked thunderbolt of his and the monstrous head he uses when he wants to terrify the gods; then, just like an actor, the poor chap has to take up a strange mask.
whenever he wants to do what he’s always doing (the Greeks had a word for it – “child-making”).

The Stoics* insist that they are closest to the gods, but give me a Stoic three or four times over, or as many times as you like: he can keep his beard – that badge of wisdom* that he shares with he-goats! – but he’ll have to relax his eyebrows, unknot his forehead, jettison all those inflexible principles and act silly, act wild, just for a little. In brief, if the philosopher should want to be a father, it’s me he needs to call for – yes me.

Why don’t I talk to you more bluntly, as I usually do? Let me ask you: what organ is it that brings gods and man to birth? Is it the head, or the face, or the heart, or the hand, or the ear – all parts of the body regarded as presentable? I think not: the reproducer of the human race is the organ that’s so foolish and laughable that it can’t be mentioned without a guffaw: that is the sacred spring from which all things draw life, that and not Pythagoras’s set of four numbers.*

Think about it: what man would willingly offer up his face to the muzzle of matrimony if, following the example of those philosophers, he had first weighed the inconveniences of that state? Or what woman, I ask you, would be ready to grant access to a man if she’d experienced or even imagined the perilous labours of childbirth or the troubles of child-rearing? Well then, if you owe life to marriage, and marriage to my maidservant Mindlessness, you’ll understand what it is you owe to me. And is there any woman who’s once undergone these experiences who’d want to repeat them anew, unless my Oblivion’s influence were in play? Venus herself must admit that without our divine aid her power is crippled and ineffective, whatever Lucretius* might say to the contrary.

So it’s our heady and stupid bit of fun that’s brought into being all these fastidious philosophers (whose successors folk today call monks) and purple-robed kings and sanctimonious priests and thrice-most-holy pontiffs – and finally all that company of mythical deities, who
are so prolific that Olympus itself, for all its immensity, can scarcely contain the throng of them any more.

But it would be a paltry thing for me to take credit for the seedbed and wellspring of life unless I can also show that any benefit there is in life comes, in its entirety, as a gift from me. What then is this life – surely not worth the name “life” – if you take away its pleasure? Your applause shows you agree. I knew that none of you had such wisdom, or rather such stupidity – no, I mean such wisdom – as to take the contrary view. Not even your Stoics shun pleasure, even if they’re at pains to pretend otherwise and lambaste it in public with a thousand cen-sures: no doubt they’re trying to frighten others off so that they can enjoy themselves the better. But, in Jupiter’s name, let them tell me what part of life is not dreary and unamusing and unattractive and unsavoury and vexa-tious if you don’t add in pleasure – pleasure, the spice that Folly supplies. There’s one man on whose testimony to this I could quite fairly rely, and that’s the inestimable Sophocles; there’s a splendid saying of his about us:

Life gives most pleasure when we take no thought.*

But let’s get on and open the subject up point by point.

In the first place, we all know, don’t we, that the first age of humankind is much the happiest, and much the most enjoyable for everyone. What is it in babies that we kiss and cuddle and make a fuss of, to the extent that even an enemy will give them help? Surely it’s their beguiling folly, which a thoughtful Nature takes the trouble to bestow on the newly born; this enables them, by a kind of pleasurable recompense, to alleviate the fatigue of those who bring them up and coax their car-ers into indulging them.

Then follows adolescence – everyone likes the young, sincerely befriends them, eagerly supports them, gallantly extends them a helping hand. But tell me, what’s the source of this goodwill towards the young? I am, of
course. I see to it that they have a minimum of sense, and so a minimum of ill temper. The fact is that before long, as soon as they mature and gain something of a grown man’s intelligence through experience and education, the glow of their bodies starts to fade, their alertness slackens, their spontaneity cools, and their energy ebbs away. The further they withdraw from me, the less and less alive they become, till the arrival of what Homer calls “wearisome old age”, hateful alike to others and to the old.

Old age would be unendurable to any human being if I were not to take pity on so much misery and return to give a hand. Just as gods in poetry come to the aid of the dying by transforming them into something else, in the same way I try to summon those near death back to being children again. That’s why people commonly talk of such folk as being in their “second childhood” – and rightly too.

In case anyone wants to know the manner of this transformation, I’ll gladly share it with you. I bring old folk to the source of our river Lēthē (it rises in the Blessed Isles, you see, even though it flows as a sluggish little stream through the underworld). My purpose is that, as soon as they get there and imbibe long draughts of forgetfulness, their mental preoccupations slowly evaporate and they become young again. People say that they’ve lost control of themselves, that their mental faculties have gone. Very well, so be it. But that’s the essence of becoming a child again.

Surely childishness is precisely a lack of control, an undeveloped mind. Isn’t that what’s most attractive about childhood, that the mind is undeveloped? Everyone abominates a boy with the mentality of a grown man and shuns him like a monstrosity. The popular saying serves to confirm this:

I shun a youngster wise beyond his years.
Who could bear having business or social dealings with an old man who combined his long experience of affairs with a corresponding agility of mind and acuity of judgement?

It’s my gift to an old man that he should lose his faculties. The mental deterioration frees him from the wretched anxieties that torment the thinker. For the moment he’s a not un congenial drinking partner: he’s unconscious of life’s irritations, which are so hard for those of sounder years to tolerate. Sometimes, like the old man of Plautus’s play, he reverts to those two words “I love” – how unhappy he’d be if he still understood! But, thanks to me, for the moment he’s content ed, for the moment he gets a welcome from his friends, indeed he’s good company at parties. See what Homer has to say: when old Nestor speaks, his fluent words are “sweeter than honey”, while Achilles’s words are full of bitterness; and in talking of old men sitting on the city walls Homer uses the Greek word “lily-like” to describe the sound of their voices. On this score old age actually does better than childhood: childhood is charming of course, but inarticulate, and lacking life’s chief source of entertainment – gossip.

Consider this too: old men especially enjoy the company of children, and children in return get on well with old folk. As Homer put it:

God always brings like to like.

And what is not alike between children and old folk, except that one has more wrinkles and can count more birthdays? In other respects – pale hair, toothless mouth, smaller stature, fondness for milk, poor enunciation, loquacity, fatuity, forgetfulness, thoughtlessness – in all else they correspond perfectly. The nearer people come to old age, the closer they return to a childlike state till, lacking like children any impatience with life or awareness of death, they depart this world.
Anyone is welcome to come and compare my gift with the transformations performed by the rest of the gods. I don’t care to repeat what these gods do when they’re angry; even the humans they’re fondest of they have a habit of turning into trees, birds, cicadas or even snakes – as if becoming something else was not equivalent to dying. What I do is return an individual to life’s best and happiest time.

If humans were to abstain completely from all intellectual exchange and were to spend their whole lives in my company, there wouldn’t be any deterioration; they would happily enjoy perpetual youth. Don’t you see? – those sour people who make themselves slaves to philosophical studies or to serious and laborious pursuits have generally grown old before they’ve got the most from being young; evidently the worry and incessant mental turmoil progressively drain their inner resources and the very essence of their being. My fools, on the other hand, are plump, sleek and well groomed – “the sweetest piglets in Greece”! They’ll never face any of the troubles of old age, unless, as sometimes happens, they’ve caught a touch of the intellectuals’ malaise – humans, alas, never manage a life that’s wholly blissful.

There’s also the testimony, never to be discounted, of a popular proverb; as the saying goes:

Youth is fast-fleeting, Folly alone can detain it; old age is pressing, Folly alone can deter it.

That serves to confirm the vernacular saying about the folk of Brabant – that to others years bring prudence, but they grow more foolish the nearer they come to old age. Certainly there’s no nation so jovial in ordinary social intercourse or less conscious of the tragedy of growing old. Closest to them, both in geography and in outlook on life, are my Hollanders. And why shouldn’t I call them “my Hollanders” seeing that they’re such